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Sahil Gilani   April 16, 2014

Succession to Muhammad and its Sectarian Ramifications

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Abstract

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One may ask: What is the purpose of reading early Islamic history, especially in relation to the succession of Prophet Muhammad? The answer to this question is quite simple compared to the actual topic itself. Around our world today, we see a lot of sectarian differences and conflicts between the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam. These sects have developed out of the issues and events surrounding the death and succession of Prophet Muhammad. The question of succession is arguably the single-most, essential difference between Shias and Sunnis. In fact, Wilferd Madelung, in his book *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*, has stated that "no event in history has divided Islam more profoundly and durably than the succession to Muhammad." He goes on to claim that, "the right to occupy the Prophet's place at the head of the Muslim community after his death became a question of great religious weight which has separated Sunnites and Shi'ites until the present." The issue of succession has gone on to impact the beliefs, practices, rituals, and theologies of the two sects.

This thesis will explain how sectarianism within Islam needs to be understood through the binary of religion and politics. Through the Syrian case study, I will demonstrate how sociopolitical tensions take on the form of and are exacerbated as theological sectarianism. I will also show that these sectarian issues are not just a result of sociopolitical circumstances, but are deeply rooted in theological and hermeneutical differences in the interpretations of the issues and events surrounding the succession to Muhammad. This will be done by analyzing Shia and Sunni internet chat rooms and forums.

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Literature Review:

This thesis will rely most heavily on Wilferd Madelung's *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. The reason for this is because of my lack of proficiency in the Arabic vernacular. Madelung's work serves to give an English translation of many primary sources, pertaining to the succession to Muhammad, that are in Arabic.

Because this thesis relies extensively on Madelung's work, I deem it necessary to give a little background information regarding the author and his work. Wilferd Madelung is a retired Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford University (Newman 403). He is also a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of *Ismaili* Studies in London, England, who specializes in Islamic studies, and more specifically Shia Islam (Newman 403). Madelung's reason for writing this book is to make people aware of the fact that there was immediate tension revolving around the Prophet's death, succession, and the Shia-Sunni split. He mentions that most people and scholars have a common misconception that "the conflict between Sunni and Shia, although revolving around the question of the succession, in reality arose only in later age" (Madelung 1). Madelung attributes this lack of knowledge to the lack of western study of the background and circumstances surrounding the succession. Therefore, he wishes to spread light on the source of this important conflict for the history of Islam and the Shia and Sunni split. Madelung also defends Ali's rightful succession to Muhammad by going analyzing many historical theories, events, and texts that pertain to the question of succession.

Madelung's work on the succession to Muhammad is groundbreaking in Western literature because it is arguably the first, extensively detailed work on the subject in the English language. I use Madelung's work in order to give a historical background of the events and

issues surrounding the succession to Muhammad. I will also critique and complement

Madelung's theories of succession by comparing his work to that of other scholars.

Introduction:

In his book, *The Sect and the Sectarian*, Ellsworth Faris describes how religious sects originate. He says: "The sect arises in a period of disorganization and is a phase of the reintegration of the community as whole" (Faris 75). In the history of the religion of Islam, there were many such disorganized phases, out of which there was a push to reunite the *ummah* (Muslim community), or at least segments of it. Arguably, the most disorganized phase occurred as a result of the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. The death of the Prophet created a sense of discomfort which arose from the fact that the community was left without a leader and guide. "Following the death of Muhammad, the communities that he had [once] united began to falter" (Berry 57). The community began searching for some sort of guidance from amongst themselves so that Islam would continue to prosper and guide its followers.

Reza Aslan, in *No God but God*, claims that the Prophet designated no successor upon his death. Therefore, Aslan says, that a "part of the reason for the community's anxiety over Muhammad's death was that he had done so little to prepare them for it" (Aslan 110). This point is highly controversial between the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. The Shias believe that Prophet Muhammad did prepare the community for his death by appointing his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, as the former's successor at the event called *Ghadir Khumm*. The Sunni sect, however, does not believe the Prophet appointed any successor and that the event was misconstrued by Shias. Therefore, Sunnis believe that the community had the right to select the most able man from the Prophet's companions (*sahabah)* to succeed him.

The Sunni and Shia sects were arguably crystallized in Islam as time progressed because of differing interpretations of the event of *Ghadir Khumm*, the events surrounding the death of

the Prophet, as well as those of the caliphates of the first four caliphs in Islam (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali). Through the critique of various authors and their works, this thesis will serve to demonstrate how the events surrounding the Prophet's succession and the interpretations of these events led to rifts, differences, and even sectarian violence between the peoples who were once united, at least theologically, by Muhammad.

The thesis will also serve to show how sectarianism plays out in the contemporary world. This will be done through a case study of Syria and analyzing Shia-Sunni internet chat rooms and forums. The Syrian case study will show how sociopolitical and economic issues are passed off and exacerbated as sectarian ones, through theological and emotional appeals, in order to mobilize supporters to one camp or the other. By analyzing internet chat rooms, this thesis will try to show how the interpretations of the events surrounding the succession to Prophet Muhammad plays an instrumental role in contemporary Shia-Sunni discursive dialogue and debate. Juxtaposed with the Syrian case, the chat room analysis will explain that sectarianism is not simply a product of sociopolitical and economic strife. It will demonstrate that sectarianism is also deeply rooted in theological questions relating to the succession to Muhammad.

Chapter One:

Ghadir Khumm: A Shia-Sunni Interpretative Split

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account of the event called *Ghadir Khumm,* which occurred on the tenth of March 632. This event pertains to the succession of Muhammad and has been highly debated between Shias and Sunnis from the death of Prophet Muhammad to the present day. The Shia sect of Islam believes that Prophet Muhammad appointed Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, as his successor through the speech at the event of *Ghadir Khumm*. This is now known as the *hadith* of *Ghadir Khumm*. A *hadith* is a saying of Prophet Muhammad which acts as a source of moral and legislative guidance (Ernst 80). It is reported that Prophet Muhammad stopped at the pond of Khumm on his return from the Farwell Pilgrimage and raised Ali's hand and said: "*man kantu mawlahu fa-'Ali mawlahu,*" which translates into English as: "Whoever's master (*mawla*) I am, 'Ali is his master (*mawla*)" (Sanders 87-88).

The Shia sect of Islam is formally known as Shi'at 'Ali, which means the followers or the faction of Ali. The Shia developed their own interpretation of the Qur'anic verse to justify that Ali's appointment by Prophet Muhammad at *Ghadir Khumm* was legitimate and did actually occur. They believe that this verse shows that the appointment of Ali was divinely inspired and that God had instructed His Prophet to choose Ali as the *Imam* (leader, guide) of His followers. According to Shias, the revelation of this *hadith* was so important that God said to the Prophet: "O Messenger, announce that which has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you have not conveyed His message. And God will protect you from the people. Indeed, God does not guide the disbelieving people" (Q5:67). According to Maria Dakake, Shia Muslims justified the significance of the *hadith* at *Ghadir Khumm* and their belief in Ali as

successor to Prophet Muhammad through a Qur'anic verse. They did this following Prophet Muhammad's death as the question of succession arose. The Qur'anic verse reads: "This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed my favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion, Islam" (Q5:3). Dakake remarks, "The Shi'ites interpret the reported revelation of this Qur'anic verse, immediately after the Prophet's statement, as confirmation that *walayah* [authority/guardianship] of Ali was the final piece that perfected the religion of Islam, that it represented the completion of God's favor toward the Muslim community and the final commandment of the religion" (Dakake 46). The Sunni perspective on this verse is that it refers to Islamic pilgrimage rights and not the appointment of Ali as *mawla.* The Shias also believe that the word *mawla* in "*man kantu mawlahu fa- 'Ali mawlahu*" means lord or master. This varies from the Sunni interpretation of *mawla*, which they see as meaning friend in this connotation. Immediately following Muhammad's proclamation, Umar, the second caliph, is said to have congratulated Ali on his appointment. Umar said to Ali: "Bravo, bravo Ali, you have become my master [*mawla*] and the master [*mawla*] of every believing man and woman" (Mufid 125).

Shia Muslims also eventually took part in the development of the office of the Imamate under the Abbasid Empire when the fifth and sixth Imams, Muhammad al-Baqir and Ja'far al-Sadiq, unified the sundry pro-'Alid groups into the Imami sect (Arjomand 491). This shows that the office of Imamate was not fully developed right after the death of the Prophet, but rather emerged gradually after his death. It is also argued that the office of Imamate was established as a result of the *hadith* that Prophet Muhammad had given at *Ghadir Khumm* since Shias use the terms Imam and *mawla* synonymously. Shias believe that obedience is due to the Imams in the same way as it was due to Prophet Muhammad since the Imams and Ali are the successors of

Prophet Muhammad through genealogical descent. They say that Prophet Muhammad, after all, compared Ali to himself when he used the word *mawla* with regards to himself and Ali. Shias believe that their observance of this belief is backed by supporting evidence from within the Qur'an. Shias justify the *Imamate* of Ali and his succession to Muhammad through the verse: "O you who believe, obey God and obey His Messenger and those in authority among you" (Q4:59). They interpret that the phrase 'holders of authority from amongst you' refers to Ali and the line of Imams which follows him. Sunnis, however, say that 'holders of authority' refers to the caliphs.

The Shias believe that the role of the Imamate is to guide the followers of Islam to *al-sirat al-mustaqim* (the right path). They believe that the Prophet Muhammad had chosen as his successor someone who had the divine right and knowledge to interpret the Qur'an's esoteric meanings. Shias believe that the Qur'an contains underlying meanings, outside of its literal ones, that the Imam has divine knowledge to interpret for his *murids* (followers). Donald Berry defines what Imamate, including that of Ali's, means to the Shia community in the following sentence: "Shi'ites trust in the decisions of the Imams because they believe Imams are sinless [*ma'sum*] and their authority is beyond question [because] the Imam serves as the Divine Light (*nur*) or the shadow of God in the world" (Berry 64). The Shia community believes that the Imams, starting from Ali, through the divine knowledge vested within them, interpret the Qur'an in a rightful and esoteric manner and guide the followers of Islam continuously in regards to changing times. They do this by interpreting the Qur'an and bringing it into the historical context of the present day. Therefore, Shias believe that God has always bestowed on mankind the blessing of a spiritual guide through the "Rope of Imamate," which is the continuous hereditary line of Imamate descended from Prophet Muhammad and Ali.

Shias believe that the Imams, starting from Ali are designated through a concept called *nass*. *Nass* means 'text' in Arabic. This concept lays out the foundation for succession because it is through authoritative texts that Imams are appointed as successors. Therefore, *nass* can be interpreted as a designating precedent. The *hadith* at *Ghadir Khumm* acts as *nass* for the succession of Ali to Muhammad. It is through this concept that Shias believe that the successors of Imams are chosen and appointed by their predecessors. *Nass* adds an authoritative element and proof of succession and appointment. The concept of *nass* has also resulted in discrepancies with regards to succession of Imams in later Shia history. There have been various interpretations of which son was the rightful successor to the preceding Imam at certain times in Shia history. An example of this is evident in the succession to the Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq, which resulted in a schism in Shia Islam. There are conflicting reports of *nass* [designating text] as to which of Jafar al-Sadiq's sons, Ismail or Musa al-Kazim, was designated by his father to succeed him. Whereas, the *Ismaili* subsect of Shia Islam believed that it was Ismail who was rightfully designated as successor through *nass* by his father, Jafar al-Sadiq, the *itna'asharia* subsect of Shia Islam believed that it was Musa al-Kazim.

Shias also justify their belief in Ali as *mawla* and the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad later in time by using *Hadith al-Thaqalayn*. After appointing Ali as *mawla* at *Ghadir Khumm*, Prophet Muhammad had reportedly said: "I leave you two weighty things: the first is the Book of God, in which there is guidance and light. Take the book of God and cling to it … and the [second are the] people of my house (*ahl al-bayt*) … [and] if you keep yourselves attached to these two, you will never go astray." (Dakake 39-40). Sunnis, however have a different interpretation of this *hadith*. They believe that the two weighty things that the Prophet mentions are the Qur'an and the *sunna* (Prophetic example).

The second major sect in Islam is called Sunni Islam, which derives its name from the Arabic word *sunna* (Ernst 169). Like Shias, Sunnis also acknowledge the fact that there is no God, but Allah and that the Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of God. Both sects also adhere to the five pillars of Islam. However, Sunnis do not acknowledge that the Prophet Muhammad had appointed a successor during his lifetime. What about the event at *Ghadir Khumm*? Sunnis interpret that the word "*mawla*", in "*man kantu mawlahu fa-'Ali mawlahu*," actually means friend. So they believe that the phrase means: "he whose friend I am, Ali is his friend.

Sunnis argue that Prophet Muhammad had given the *hadith* of *Ghadir Khumm* because he wished to settle a dispute in which some people had grown disgruntled with Ali following a war where he did not collect the spoils of war after winning and redistribute them amongst the army (Berry 60). Therefore, they believe Prophet Muhammad wished the people to befriend Ali and not be upset with him as Ali was his cousin and son-in-law.

Arguably, Sunnis do not believe that anyone other than the Prophet himself was knowledgeable enough or spiritual enough to interpret the Qur'an because it was revealed onto him and he was the final messenger of God. "Sunni Muslims [also] hold that the Qur'an teaches that no one can intercede or mediate between God and human beings" (Berry 61). This reference is to Shia Muslims who believe that the Imams are intermediaries between God and the people. *Ismaili* Islam, which is a branch of Shia Muslims, teaches that the Imams were granted divine knowledge and authority to interpret the Qur'an in the context of changing times so that the followers of Islam would never be left without guidance. However, Sunnis also rely on authoritative figures who interpret the Qur'an called the *ulema* (jurists). "The Sunni also believed that the divine revelation ended with Muhammad; thus the role of the religious leaders

was to secure that members of the Islamic community followed the revelations of the Qur'an that were revealed through Muhammad" (Berry 60-61). Thus, "they trusted the community's judgment in selecting Abu Bakr to serve as the first leader of the community after Muhammad's death" (Berry 60). This is because Abu Bakr was one of the eldest companions of the Prophet, as well as his father in-law. This argument is a little weak, however, because Abu Bakr came to power through a designation by a small group called the Ansar, rather than being selected by the community. Although it can be argued otherwise, some would say that the caliphates of Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman had more of a political role, consisting mainly of spreading Islam. This is because of the fact that they were not required to formulate any nuanced interpretations of the faith, but simply make sure that the *ummah* abided by the Qur'an and the *sunna*.

Others may argue against this by pointing out that the caliphates did in fact have a dual role of political order and religious guidance. They would claim that the maintenance of the *sunna* is proof of the religious role of the caliphs. Berry mentions that people "often refer to the first four Caliphs as the Rightly Guided Caliphs because they served as both political and religious leaders of the community" (Berry 60). Those who claim that the caliphates simply had a political role say that the first four caliphs are referred to as 'rightly guided' because they were chosen from the *sahabah* (the companions of the Prophet Muhammad). This changed, however, after the first four caliphs when the Umayyad Dynasty took control. The caliphs did not consist of *sahabahs* and the caliphs and the caliphate was merely a political office. Therefore, Sunnis had to appoint religious leaders from the community called *Imams* (not to be mistaken for the hereditary Shia Imams from Ali). Shias argue that this lack of religious guidance and the need to appoint religious leaders was exactly why Prophet Muhammad had appointed Ali as his rightful successor and religious and spiritual guide to his followers. They argue that neither the Prophet

nor God had wished the people to be without religious guidance and support as Islam was a fairly new religion and still developing and spreading. It is important to remember that the first four caliphs in Islam were not referred to as 'rightly guided' within their lifetimes. This title was given to them by the Umayyad Dynasty in 661 CE. Therefore, these arguments are rather contemporary.

These were the Shia and Sunni interpretations of the speech that the Prophet Muhammad had made at the event of *Ghadir Khumm* and the Qur'anic verse*s* in relation to succession, which led to the sectarian divides between Shias and Sunnis within Islam. This chapter showed the single-most debated event regarding the succession of Muhammad. It is essential to remember the significant impact that interpretations can have on the creation of differing viewpoints, theologies, and beliefs. These differences can then result in rifts and schisms in religious traditions, as exemplified by the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam. The following chapter will focus on Madelung's argument for Ali's rightful succession to Muhammad.

Chapter Two:

Ali: The Rightful Successor?

This thesis relies heavily on Wilferd Madelung's *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate*. Although Madelung seems to be giving a historical account surrounding the events of the Prophet's death and critiquing primary sources, one may argue that Madelung has an implicit Shia bias. This potential bias is evident in Madelung's defense of Ali's right to rule over the other three caliphs that preceded him. Regardless, Madelung is a reliable source who uses many authentic Sunni and Shia sources and accounts. As mentioned above, this thesis will be heavily dependent on Madelung's extensive research because of the lack of scholarly, English translations of the Arabic primary sources regarding the Prophet's death and the events surrounding his succession.

In his introduction, Madelung makes the claim that hereditary succession was the norm of the Arabian Peninsula around seventh century CE, especially with the *Quraysh* (the tribe of the Prophet). Madelung also points out that there are major justifications within the Qur'an for Ali's rightful succession. These Qur'anic instances signify the importance of kinship among earlier prophets as well as kinship in general in regards to inheritance rights.

> The Qur'an places great emphasis on the duty of all Muslims to maintain the bonds of blood relationship. In numerous passages the faithful are enjoined to act kindly towards their close kin, to assist them, and to provide for their sustenance: 'Surely, God commands justice, doing of good, and providing for the close kin, and forbids the abominable, the reprehensible, and transgression' (XVI 90). The fact that they are regularly enumerated … seems to indicate their primary right before any other

beneficiaries: 'And give to the close kin his due, to the indigent, and the wayfarer …'

(XVII 26) (Madelung 6).

The quote above is reflective of Madelung's justification of Ali's rightful succession to the Prophet through the Qur'anic emphasis on kinship when it comes to inheritance rights. The following quote exemplifies Madelung's defense for Ali's rightful succession through the Qur'anic norm of Prophets' closest kin succeeding them.

> In the story of the past prophets, as it is related in the Qur'an, their families play a prominent role. The families generally provide vital assistance to the prophets against the adversaries among their people. After the death of the prophets, their descendants become their spiritual and material heirs. The prophets of the Banu Isra'il were in fact all descendants of a single family from Adam and Noah down to Jesus: 'Truly, God chose Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of 'Imran above all the worlds, as off-spring one of the other' (III 33-4). The Qur'an adds: 'Those were the prophets on whom God bestowed his blessings of the off-spring of Adam and of those whom We carried [in the ark] with Noah, and of the off-spring of Abraham and Israel, of those whom We guided and chose' (XIX 58) (Madelung 8).

Although, the example of the earlier prophets holds objective value, the example of inheritance rights does not provide for a strong enough, direct, and unambiguous tie to the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad. This is because succession is not necessarily a question of proprietorial inheritance. Some may argue against this critique in saying that there is a direct link to the inheritance of succession, but I would counter that these verses, at least on their face, refer to proprietorial inheritance rather than succession. The reason for dismissing this

justification is the fact that the connection between proprietary inheritance and succession is not explicit and calls for subjective interpretation. Madelung is accurate, however, in claiming that hereditary inheritance was the norm in seventh century Arabia, especially among the Quraysh. Therefore, it is argued that Ali was the rightful successor to Muhammad given how kinship ties worked at that time. Ali was not only the Prophet's closest companion, but also his closest of kin. Muhammad and Ali grew up together under the care of Abu Talib (Ali's father). The Prophet acted as a guardian of Ali from a very young age. Ali was not only the cousin of the Prophet, but also his son-in-law through the Prophet's daughter, Fatima.

The Qur'anic stories of the prophets and their succession is also a sound defense for Ali since there is explicit mentioning of the significance of kinship and familial ties in Qur'anic stories of the prophets. Although Madelung's kinship defense can be justified through stories such as the children of Abraham being granted nations, it is much weaker than the evidence of kinship succession to prophets. This is because there are many implicit connections made between the Qur'an's stance on inheritance rights of property for kin and the *ahl al-bayt* being the rightful successors to Prophet Muhammad. The justification of prophetic examples of succession, such as that of David and Solomon, seem to be much more direct connection because there would not be many subjective or implicit connections made as we are talking about succession of the Prophet Muhammad.

Madelung's justification for Ali's succession, by looking at prophetic successions in the Qur'an, is defended by the *hadith* of *Manzilat Harun*. This hadith goes as follows: "Are you [Ali] not content to be with respect to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that after me there shall be no other Prophet" (Bukhari 56). This hadith is present in both Shia and Sunni hadith collections. Shias use this hadith in order to defend Ali's right to succeed the Prophet as his own

kin and brother. Momen mentions that "the implication was that Ali was to be Muhammad's chief assistant in his lifetime and his successor after him" (Momen 13). Sunnis, however, say that this *hadith* simply defends Ali's position of trustee only during the Prophet's lifetime.

Another instance that Madelung and Momen both point to in order to defend Ali's succession is the event of *Mubahala* (mutual cursing). This was an event that took place when a Christian delegation from the town of Najran came to the Prophet. It is recounted that the Christians of Najran were displeased with the Qur'anic and Islamic doctrine about Jesus and a debate ensued. After both sides could not reach a consensus, they broke for the night. The next morning, Muhammad transmitted the Qur'anic verse: "Then whoever argues with you about it after [this] knowledge has come to you – say, 'Come, let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate earnestly [together] and invoke the curse of God on the liars [among us]'" (Q3:61). He, Muhammad, urged the Christians to bring out their kin and leave it to the curse of God to see who is speaking the truth. Muhammad then brought out a cloak, under which stood Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Hussein. Shias use this event to show that Ali and the *ahl al-bayt* are the rightful successors of the Prophet since he did not bring anyone else out with him. Sunnis, however, "do not identify the members of the family of Muhammad who were expected to participate" (Madelung 16). They also claim that this point is moot as the *mubahala* did not actually take place because the Christians excused themselves (Madelung 16).

So does Islamic Law (*Sharia*) state anything in regards to the succession of the Prophet? Lucy Carroll elaborately explains what Islamic law says in regards to succession and how the Shia and Sunni interpretations regarding this law once again differs. She states: "One point at which the differences between Shi'i and Sunni law may dramatically and immediately impact on

the affairs of a Muslim family is on the occasion of the death of one of its members" (Carroll 24). This was then used as a justification for Prophet Muhammad's successor by both Shias and Sunnis later in time. This jurisdiction was paralleled to the death of the Prophet and the question of his succession. It served to justify how the difference in the interpretation of the *Sharia*, through Shia and Sunni perspectives, altered the justification as to who was the rightful successor to the Prophet. Carroll goes on to elaborate that: "While the Sunnis view the Qur'anic verses concerning succession as merely … [favoring] the male agnate … [this is] in contrast to the Shi'i emphasis on the nuclear emphasis on the family and direct descendants" (Carroll 24). The Shia view on Sharia and succession is parallel to Madelung's defense of Ali's succession through inheritance rights. This passage shows the key difference between the viewpoint of Shias and Sunnis on succession. Whereas Sunnis only place emphasis on the fact that the successor be a male, Shias emphasize that the successor must be of the same genial and hereditary bloodline of the diseased.

It is crucial to understand that the *Sharia* developed over a long period of time after the death of the Prophet. Therefore, these interpretations regarding the succession of Prophet Muhammad were developed much later in history and they were not available to use as evidence at the time of the initial dispute over the succession of Prophet Muhammad. The *Sharia* was used later in order to defend the Shia and Sunni perspectives on succession to Muhammad in hindsight. The Sunni interpretation of the *Sharia* lead them to conclude that the community should choose the best male from the community that is fitted to lead the community, as was done by choosing Abu Bakr, whereas the Shias interpret the *Sharia* to mean that the successor to the Prophet should have been someone of genial bloodline, meaning Ali.

Sunnis counter Madelung's support for Ali by pointing out that Abu Bakr was the most fitting successor to Muhammad because of the circumstances of the time. Abu Bakr was experienced, wise, knowledge, and well respected by the Quraysh and other groups. "Abu Bakr and Umar justified Ali's exclusion on the grounds that he was too young to lead the *Umma* … thus Abu Bakr was the obvious choice for successor" (Aslan 116). This argument is also used by contemporary Sunnis that point out that Ali was much too young and was not as strong of a leader nor as highly revered as Abu Bakr. They point out that people feared that political unrest and wars would arise once again between the clashing and rival tribes of Arabia. It is thought that Abu Bakr would have been the best political ambassador for the community because he could prevent such an upheaval through his position in society. Shias counter Reza Aslan's claim by pointing out all of Ali's military success and leadership experience.

These were some of Madelung's defenses for Ali's rightful succession to Muhammad and some of their counters arguments. Through my analysis of internet chat rooms on the subject of succession and sectarianism, I have found that contemporary internet chatters use much of these same arguments, sources, and justifications for the succession to Muhammad. There is a lack of nuanced claims, defenses, and sources. This will be elaborated further in chapter six. The following chapter will serve to show what occurred at the death of the Prophet and thus why the succession of Muhammad is such an ambiguous topic in Islam.

Chapter Three:

Death of the Prophet

I would like to revisit a quote that I used in the introduction of this thesis. Ellsworth

Faris states that a religious sect "arises in a period of disorganization and is a phase of the

reintegration of the community as whole" (Faris 75). In the case of Islam, the most disorganized

phase occurred at the death of Prophet Muhammad on the eighth of June 632 CE. The death of

the Prophet created a sense of discomfort which arose from the fact that the *ummah* was left

without a leader and guide. "Following the death of Muhammad, the communities that he had

[once] united began to falter" (Berry 57). The community began searching for some sort of

guidance from amongst themselves so that Islam would continue to prosper and guide its

followers and not simply vanquish from the face of the earth as a short-lived religion. In this

chapter, I will visit the immediate situations, circumstances, and events surrounding the

Prophet's death. Specifically, it will focus on the event at the *Saqifa* (portico) of the Banu

Sa'ida, a branch of the Khazraj tribe of Medina, where Abu Bakr became the first caliph and

successor to the Prophet Muhammad (Momen 18).

The *Ansar* (Medinans) had gathered at the *Saqifa* of the Banu Sa'ida in order to discuss

choosing a potential successor to the Prophet to pledge loyalty to. Abu Bakr and Umar had

gotten word of this and went over to the *Saqifa* in order to suppress this movement. There are

two contradictory reports as to the argument that Abu Bakr used to convince the *Ansar* to have

the successor be from the Quraysh. Leone Caetani, in his work, *Annali dell' Islam*, argued that

Abu Bakr claimed legitimacy for the Quraysh by stressing the need to elect a successor who

would closely follow in the Prophet's footsteps, spread his teachings, and maintain the unity of

the Muslim community (Caetani 523). To Abu Bakr, this could only be done by a member of the

Quraysh. Abu Bakr claimed that it was only Qurayshi rule which all Arabs would obey. Moojan Momen, in his work, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*, argues that Abu Bakr laid claims for Qurayshi succession on the fact that they were the first to accept Islam and closer in kinship to the prophet (Momen 18). Like Madelung, I agree that Caetani's account of Abu Bakr's claim was more likely. This is because justification on the basis of kinship would have invited the Banu Hashim and the *ahl al-bayt*, houses of the Prophet, to lay claim to succession as they were closer kin to the Prophet. Justifying Qurayshi succession along Momen's lines would have opened up the possibility for Ali to lay claim to succeed his cousin and father-in-law, Muhammad. Ali would also have the added benefit of being the first male to accept Islam and the second person to accept it, being preceded only by Khadija (the Prophet's wife).

Abu Bakr went on to put forward Umar and Abu Ubayda's names in front of the *Ansar* at *Saqifa* and asked them to pledge allegiance to one of these men. However, Umar deferred and pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr on account of the latter's righteousness and high standing with the Prophet. Then, one by one, the *Ansar* gave allegiance to Abu Bakr making him the first caliph at *Saqifa* (Momen 18).

So where was Ali; and was Ali's name ever brought up at *Saqifa*? Momen claims that a pro-Shia historian, Ya'qubi, had recorded that Ali's claim was briefly advanced by the *Ansar*, but even Momen says that there was no serious discussion of this claim. Ali and the *ahl al-bayt* were busy preparing the body of the Prophet for his funeral and burial at the time that the *Saqifa* event occurred and thus Ali was left out of the *shura* (consultation), which appointed Abu Bakr as the first caliph and successor to the Prophet, on that day. Some Shias dismiss Abu Bakr's caliphate and claim that it was illegitimate and deprived Ali of his legitimate succession as neither he nor the house of the Prophet was present for the *shura*. They are quick to point out

that even Umar called the *shura* a *falta*, meaning that it was an affair conducted in haste and without careful reflection. Sunnis claim that the circumstances called for quick action, if the *ummah* was to be kept united.

Why did Ali not put forth his claim if he believed that he was Prophet Muhammad's rightful successor? The answer to this question is somewhat muddled. Scholars such as Madelung and Momen claim that "Ali refused to split the community, particularly when, shortly after Abu Bakr assumed the Caliphate, a large number of the Arabs apostatized from Islam and a campaign had to be waged against them (also known as the *Ridda* wars)" (Momen 20). This is said to have been expressed by Ali in a speech when he had the losing side pledge allegiance to him after he won the first civil war in Islam in 656 CE. Ali "reminded them that they had turned away from him to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr; not wishing to split the ranks of the Muslim community, he had refrained from opposing their choice; he had done the same when Abu Bakr appointed Umar to succeed him, even though he knew that he was most entitled to the position of the Messenger of God" (Madelung 180, 181).

Henri Lammens proposes a conspiracy theory called the Theory of the Triumvirate, to explain situation of succession at *Saqifa*. According to the theory, the three men, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Abu Ubayda, had co-operated and planned succession from before the event of *Saqifa* to usurp the succession. Lammens defends his theory, not only by the results of the event of *Saqifa*, but also on the fact that Abu Bakr appointed Umar as his successor and that Umar would have appointed Abu Ubayda as his successor had he not died (Lammens 113). Caetani, although at first critical of Lammens' theory, accepts and endorses it in the later volumes of his work. Madelung, however, rejects Lammens' theory on the grounds that there were reports of Umar being publically in denial of the Prophet's death. He claims that Umar could not have

"envisaged the consequences of Muhammad's death, not to mention having agreed on plans for the succession" (Madelung 39). Lammen's argument, therefore, seems to be weak. Madelung, instead, holds Abu Bakr accountable for having deliberated about and pre-deciding to lay claim to the Prophet's succession (Madelung 39). Lammens' theory is also defensible because of Ibn al-Abbas' (Prophet Muhammad's cousin) account that Umar had stopped the Prophet from writing a will on his death bed, presumably appointing his successor. Umar, however, told the people to go away as the Messenger of God was in pain (Madelung 24). One may say that Prophet Muhammad could have wished to designate any of the three men to succeed him in his will, but this does not seem to be the case to Madelung. The reason is that, according to Aisha's and Ibn al-Abbas' accounts, the Prophet had asked her to summon Ali, but she also summoned her father, Abu Bakr (Madelung 24). Umar's daughter followed Aisha's lead and went ahead and summoned Umar as well. On having the three men present, the prophet dismissed them and said that he would call for them if need be.

As mentioned above, Madelung holds Abu Bakr accountable for having deliberated about and pre-deciding to lay claim to the Prophet's succession. This can be seen in chapter one of Madelung's book, in which he focuses on the succession and caliphate of Abu Bakr.

> [Madelung refers to Abu Bakr] as a consummate, coolly calculating Mekkan businessman and politician [who] had decided, no doubt well before Muhammad's death, that he was the man. He also recognized that, without a nomination by the Prophet, he would have to neutralize potentially strong opposition in order to realize his ambition. Most obviously Muhammad's own *ahl al-bayt,* who had been accorded a rank above the rest of the Muslims by the Qur'an, would have to be prevented from putting forward their claim (Madelung 39).

Abu Bakr having decided that he was the rightful successor well before the death of the Prophet seems to be largely an opinionated speculation. However, it is argued because the other hypotheses of succession are contradictory. Madelung's claim that Abu Bakr would have had to "neutralize [the] potentially strong opposition … [of the *ahl al-bayt*], who had been accorded a rank above the rest of the Muslims by the Qur'an" (Madelung 39) seems only partially valid. The reasoning for this has already been shown in chapter two. It is because Madelung defends the right of the *ahl al-bayt*'s succession through Qur'anic precedents of kinship inheritance and prophetic succession. Whereas there are many implicit connections being made between the Qur'an's stance on inheritance rights of property for kin and the *ahl al-bayt* being the rightful successors to Prophet Muhammad, the justification through prophetic examples of succession, such as that of David and Solomon, seem to be much more direct connections.

Abu Bakr's role at the event of *Saqifa* works partially to defend Madelung's claim that he was trying to suppress the right of the *ahl al-bayt*. The reason I say partially is that Abu Bakr may have genuinely wished to keep the *ummah* from splintering at *Saqifa* and therefore acted swiftly to reassure the *Ansar* (Medinans). However, as was shown, there is also defense for the claim that he had acted cunningly to assure his succession. There is no way of knowing for sure, really.

These were some of the immediate events surrounding the death of Muhammad. They served to show how and why the question of succession is so muddled, ambiguous, and highly debated between Shias and Sunnis. Whereas the former accuses Abu Bakr and Umar of usurping Ali's right to rule, the latter point to Abu Bakr as being the most experienced of successors. Shias and Sunnis also differ on the role of Ali during the caliphates of the three preceding caliphs

before his rule. Therefore, the following chapter will visit the Ali's role in the caliphates of Abu

Bakr, Umar, and Uthman.

Chapter Four:

Ali during the Caliphates

This thesis will now turn its attention to Ali's role during each of the four caliphates as it is also highly debated between Shias and Sunnis with regard to succession to Muhammad. The reason for this is that Shias claim that Ali was disappointed, hurt, and angry about being passed over for succession. Sunnis, however, counter this and point to Ali's prominent role of being counsel to and military leader of the three caliphs who preceded him as showing his acceptance of their rule. However, by explicating Ali's roles in the caliphates, this chapter will demonstrate how Ali's role in the three caliphates was quite nominal. Not just that, but he was still upset about being thrice passed over for succession.

Abu Bakr is infamously known for not granting Fatima her inheritance right to property in *Fadak*. Abu Bakr claimed that he had once heard the Prophet say that "We [the prophets] do not have heirs. Whatever we leave is alms. The family of Muhammad can eat from that property" (Madelung 50). This was very upsetting to Fatima. The episode of inheritance could be paralleled to the succession of Ali based on inheritance rights that Madelung espoused (seen in the previous chapter). It would make sense for Abu Bakr to exclude the Hashim (house of the Prophet) from inheritance rights by pointing to the hadith above because if he were to grant inheritance to Fatima, Ali could have possibly laid claim to caliphate based on the same inheritance rights. Shias point to discrepancies in the distribution of inheritance after the Prophet's death because Abu Bakr allowed significant property to be inherited by the Prophet's widows, especially Aisha, Abu Bakr's daughter.

Ali did not pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr until six months after the former's succession to Muhammad (Madelung 43). This was also after the death of Fatima, his wife and the

Prophet's daughter. After pledging allegiance, Ali acted as a counsel to Abu Bakr and led his

army in the *Ridda* Wars (Madelung 43). Abu Bakr reigned for two years as caliph and in 634

CE, on his death bed, appointed Umar to succeed him as the second caliph.

This chapter will now turn its attention to the caliphate of the second caliph in Islam,

Umar. Abu Bakr's appointment of Umar as his successor and second caliph seemed to push the

concept of *shura* (consultation) to the wayside. This is because no consultation took place in

Umar's appointment. Rather, it was simply an appointment by Abu Bakr himself without

seeking outside advice.

As caliph, Umar, relied heavily on two Qur'anic principles. The first principle was that

of *sabiqa*, early merit in Islam. Madelung claims that this benefited the early Quaryshite

Companions of Muhammad and hurt the Banu Hashim (house of the Prophet) in terms of

succession (Madelung 58). I would argue against Madelung on this point because, in my

opinion, *sabiqa* would serve to help the Banu Hashim's claim to succession. This is because

Khadija, the Prophet's first and arguably most favorite wife, was the first to convert to Islam.

Another aspect that would help the Banu Hashim's claim of succession and hurt the Qurayshite

claim would be the fact that Ali (the Prophet's cousin and son in-law) was the first male convert

to Islam. The second principle is that of *shura*, consultation in the government of the Muslim

community (Madelung 58).

This serves to give a little background on how the Islam's second caliph, Umar, ruled.

Like his predecessor, Abu Bakr, he upheld and magnified the right of the Quraysh to rule. He

also emphasized the concept of *shura* in his government. The latter Qur'anic principle of *shura*

in Umar's governance is quite ironic, since he himself was not appointed caliph as a product of a

shura but rather was simply appointed by Abu Bakr. Umar did, however, "resolve to leave the election of his successor to an electoral conclave of early Companions" (Madelung 59).

It is argued that Umar tried to include Ali in his rule as much as possible and Ali served as his counsel. "Vital for Umar's design of a collective authority of the early Companions was at least a token participation by Ali" (Madelung 63). Umar was cunning in the sense that he made efforts to reconcile with the Banu Hashim without compromising the right of the Quraysh to rule. He treated Ali like the other early companions (Madelung 63). This political stance, however, is in contradiction with Umar's economic stance toward the Banu Hashim. Like his predecessor, Umar reminded the Banu Hashim of the *hadith* that claimed that prophets have no heirs and whatever they leave behind is for charity (Madelung 63). This was exactly the stance that Abu Bakr had taken during his caliphate by not granting Fatima her claim to the Fadak property. In short, "the caliph [Umar] recognized the danger of even partly disavowing the decision of Abu Bakr concerning Muhammad's inheritance and made sure that everybody 'knew' the Prophet's word" (Madelung 63, 64). Therefore, while Umar had tried to make some political concessions to the Banu Hashim, he still would stay stern on the matter of inheritance and property rights. As the reader may recall, Madelung uses Qur'anic inheritance and property rights to justify the kinship succession to the Prophet. Umar was keen to not open up a conundrum, which could have resulted in the Banu Hashim laying claim to the succession of the Prophet through Qur'anic notions of property rights and inheritance. This is seen by Umar largely courting the Prophet's uncle, Al-Abbas, rather than Ali. The former of which "posed no political threat since he did not belong to the early Companions and had no personal ambitions" (Madelung 62). Therefore, like his predecessor, he acted cunningly as a ruler in trying to patch up some of the conflicts with the Banu Hashim, while being cautious to not concede the matter of succession and rule to the *ahl*

al-bayt. "By his overtures to the Banu Hashim Umar evidently hoped to reconcile them with the Muslim community and its new caliphal order without giving them excessive economic and political power" (Madelung 65).

Umar was assassinated by Abu Lu'lu', a Persian slave of al-Mughira b. Shu'ba. The events leading up to and the result of his assassination are particularly relevant to the question of succession of the caliphate and thus Muhammad. It is reported by Ibn-al-Abbas, the son of the Prophet's uncle, Al-Abbas, that less than two weeks prior to his assassination, Umar had revealed to him that he believed Ali was the most worthy of the companions of the Prophet to rule, but that he feared Ali's rule for two reasons (Madelung 68). The first reason was Ali's youth and the second was his love for the Banu Abd al-Muttalib (house of the Prophet's grandfather) (ibid).

> Umar's hopes of being able to contain the aspirations of Ali and his supporters were, towards the end of his reign, rudely disappointed by the incident reported by Ibn al-Abbas which led to the caliph's address about the events at the *Saqifa*t Bani Sa'ida. In the address he reaffirmed his faith in the principle of consultation as the basis for the succession to the caliphate and denounced any future attempt to settle it without *mashwara* among Muslims. The caliphate belong to all of Quraysh and could not be monopolized by any particular family (Madelung 68).

This serves to show the deeply-rooted political nature of the Prophet's succession. Madelung claims that Ali's succession was prevented by the fact that the Quraysh were jealous and threatened by prophethood and caliphate falling into the same clan, and more importantly outside of their grasp (Madelung 68). By Ibn Al-Abbas's recollections, it does seem this way.

One may say, however, that Ibn Al-Abbas had an obvious biases toward the Banu Hashim, since he was a member of it. Although one may dismiss the personal recollection of Ibn al-Abbas as biased, one cannot dismiss the historicity of Umar's address, which is backed by other scholars, such as Caetani. Ali, therefore, could not hope to gain the caliphate on the basis of his kinship with Muhammad. Rather, "the only chance for Ali to share in the rule of the Muslim community was to co-operate fully in the consultative assembly of early Qurayshite Companions which Umar had set up" (Madelung 68).

Ali's cooperation was to no avail, however, as the council elected Uthman as the third caliph of Islam and successor to Umar. To Madelung, although Umar had not tried to influence the process of his succession directly, his warning address contributed to Ali's overwhelming defeat. Madelung's claim does hold some standing. The ramifications of Umar's address can be seen in the fact that the Quraysh grew even more cautious of Ali basing the caliphate on hereditary rule. The cautiousness of the Quraysh and the public toward Ali was also exacerbated by conspiracy theories, which accused Ali and his supporters of assassinating Umar. This held some value during that time since Umar's assassination occurred not even two weeks after his address. This conspiracy theory is also accounted for in the works of some scholars, such as Caetani.

This chapter will now turn to the caliphate of Uthman, which began in 644 CE. Uthman was a highly successful aristocratic, Qurayshi merchant who lacked public leadership experience. Madelung claims that "he was put forward as the only strong counter-candidate to Ali" (Madelung 80). Madelung's rationality behind this is that Uthman was twice the Prophet's son-in-law. Although this seems to be speculative, it holds some ground in context of Umar's address and the Quraysh's cautiousness of Ali and his potentially hereditary rule.

Uthman's rule was tainted by the grievances that arose against his arbitrary acts. "Towards the end of his reign dissatisfaction and opposition to his conduct appear to have been almost universal except among his kin and close associates" (Madelung 78). He was accused of nepotism and cronyism. This was evident in him appointing his close kin to political positions of governorships and giving his close relatives money from the treasury. "Uthman thus deemed it within his right to dispose freely of the powers and riches of the caliphate at his own discretion and deeply resented any criticism of interference in his conduct by anyone" (Madelung 81). Both Aisha and Ali resented Uthman's misrule. Ali addressed the peoples' complaints to Uthman and criticized him for appointing his kin and governors and not controlling their actions. Uthman, instead, chose to listen to Marwan (his cousin) and his Umayyad kin (Madelung 119). Aisha accused Uthman for deviating away from the Prophet's *sunna*. "She could see that under Uthman the caliphate of Quraysh was quickly being turned into a hereditary kingship for the benefit of the Umayyad house" (Madelung 102).

Uthman's rule ended with the caliph's death amid violent rebellion in 656 CE (Madelung 78). This occurred as a result of an Egyptian rebellion led by Muhammad Ibn Abi Bakr (the son of the first caliph Abu Bakr and the brother of Aisha) and Abi Hudhayfa (the foster-son of Uthman) (Madelung 117). The grievance they had with Uthman was his appointment of his kin, Abd God b. Sa'd, as governor of Egypt (Madelung 117). Not only this, but Uthman's inaction against his kin's misrule.

This chapter will now turn its attention towards the caliphate of Ali, which began in 656 CE. Ali was the fourth caliph in Islam. His caliphate was marked by the first *fitna* (civil war) within Islam in 656 AD. The civil war was a major schism in the history of Islam as it placed brothers against brother, fathers against sons, and Muslims against Muslims. "The same Aisha

who just before the murder of Uthman told Marwan she would like to toss the caliph into the seas only weeks later was to assure the assembled Quraysh in Mekka that Ali had killed Uthman, and that a mere fingertip of Uthman was better than the whole of Ali" (Madelung 107). This would thus ignite the first civil war in Islam, and would pose Aisha and her supporters against Ali and his party (Shiite Ali).

Aisha's grievances against Ali were three-fold. First, Ali's caliphate had not come about from a *shura* and therefore, Aisha claimed that his caliphate was illegitimate (Madelung 141). Second, Ali had failed to reprimand and punish the murderers of Uthman. Third, Aisha accused Ali of plotting the murder of Uthman so that he can come to power. A fourth reason, that Madelung attributes the civil war to, is Aisha's hatred towards Ali. Although this last reason may not be an objectively defensible reason for the civil war, there is considerable evidence of Aisha's immense dislike of Ali.

The first grievance of Aisha's was that Ali's caliphate did not come about through the principle of *shura* that Umar had laid down. Ironically, Abu Bakr, Aisha's father had not followed the principle of *shura* in appointing his successor, Umar. Ali's caliphate was mainly supported by various rebels from the provinces and the *Ansar* that were disfranchised by Abu Bakr (Madelung 146). There were oppositions against Shiite Ali from two other groups: "the majority of the Quraysh who hoped to restore the caliphate of Quraysh on the principles laid down by Abu Bakr and Umar … [and the Umayyads] who believed that the caliphate had through Uthman become their property" (Madelung 147).

As for the second and third grievances, they seem oddly interrelated. On one hand, Aisha accused Ali of plotting the murder of Uthman, and on the other, she accused him of not

reprimanding and punishing Uthman's killers. These two claims are rather counterintuitive if put together. Either Aisha truly believed that Ali was behind the murder of Uthman, or was simply accusing him because she did not want him to be the next caliph. This is because she could not honestly have believed it to be a realistic possibility for Ali to reprimand himself for the murder of Uthman, if in fact he was behind it. Ali neither justified Uthman's death nor condemned his killers (Madelung 151). It seems highly unlikely that Ali played a role in Uthman's death especially for the caliphate. This is because Ali knew that he did not have the general support of the people nor the companions who would be sitting in on a *shura*. Also, Ali had advised the Kufans and the Basrans to remain patient and nonviolent, which they did, when Uthman had sent him to investigate the causes of the unrest.

Regardless, the Quraysh and Aisha continued to place full responsibility of Uthman's death on Ali, and on that basis, wanted to remove Ali from the caliphate. This triggered the civil war. Madelung states that "the real aim [of the *fitna*] was not to avenge the death of the wronged caliph but to remove his successor from office" (Madelung 157). There was no room for negotiation or compromise since Ali considered himself the legitimate caliph and Aisha wanted his removal. Aisha and her army were defeated at the Battle of the Camel. She recollected that towards the end of the war, Ali had order that "no one turning his back shall be pursed, no one wounded shall be killed, [and] whoever throws away his arms is safe" (Madelung 175). "When Ali faced Aisha, he severely reproached her for the ruin she had brought on the Muslims" (Madelung 173) and ordered her to return to her home in Medina.

The Battle of the Camel, which took place on the seventh of November 656 CE, was the first official battle of the civil war. The civil war resulted in a major schism in Islam because it, for the first time, formally split the *ummah* into two parties. It was also the first time that there

became something known as *Din Ali* (the religion of Ali) (Madelung 178). Although Madelung claims that this could only have had a limited meaning of being the legitimate successor to Muhammad, Ali was highly sensitive to this term. Ali had said that the there was no religion of Ali and rather it was the same religion that Muhammad had preached, Islam. However, Ali still firmly held the belief that he and the *ahl al-bayt* were the rightful heirs to the Prophet. Ali is recalled to have said that that he refrained from opposing the three previous caliphs so that the ranks of the Muslim community would not be split after the death of the Prophet. Regardless, the civil war was the first time that *Shiite Ali*, the party of Ali, was formed.

This was a critique of Madelung's work that brought insight on Ali's role during the caliphates of the first four caliphs of Islam, including his own. The historicity of Ali's role during the four caliphates is instrumental to Shia-Sunni polemics as both Shias and Sunnis differ on the extent of Ali's contentment with the caliphates of the three caliphs that preceded him. Whereas Shias believe that Ali was highly displeased by being passed over thrice for what he believed was his right, Sunnis point to Ali's cooperation with the caliphates as being evidence of Ali's contentment and approval. I would argue that Ali was in fact hurt by being passed over as Muhammad's successor and did believe it was his right to succeed the Prophet. I would argue that the reason for Ali's support of the three caliphates preceding his own was a genuine interest in keeping the Muslim community from splintering after the death of the Prophet. The following chapter will serve to show how these historical sectarian differences and their interpretations play out in contemporary sociopolitical situations and circumstances.

Chapter Five:

Contemporary Shia-Sunni Sectarian Conflicts

This chapter will analyze the role sectarianism and the Shia-Sunni polemics play out in the contemporary world. Sectarian conflict and violence have been present in Islam since the first *fitna* (civil war) within Islam that placed Ali against Aisha in 656 CE. It has especially been on the rise in the contemporary world since the second Iraqi invasion and has amplified during the Arab Spring and the Syrian conflict. This conflict and violence takes on many forms. It is seen in the targeted killings on the streets of Pakistan, the bombing of mosques in Afghanistan, and in the civil war in Syria. This chapter will show how sectarianism is often the result of sociopolitical situations and circumstances. This is very similar to the view that the issues and events surrounding the succession to Prophet Muhammad were the result of sociopolitical circumstances and situations, such as the event of *Saqifa*. That being said, the fundamental theological basis for the divide and conflict cannot be overlooked. This is because of the fact that if there was no theological basis for the divide and differences, sociopolitical and economic issues would not be able to take on the form of theological and sectarian differences and conflict.

The analysis and claims of this chapter will be largely based in PEW Research Center's report titled: *Many Sunnis and Shias Worry about Religious Conflict*. This research polled more than 5,000 Muslims (Shia and Sunni) and was conducted in five countries: Iran, Iran, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Azerbaijan. Shias comprise of a majority of the Muslims in Iran, Iraq, and Azerbaijan; Sunnis are a majority in Afghanistan; and they are even in Lebanon. With the exception of Azerbaijan, there does in fact seem to be large concerns over Sunni-Shia tensions in the countries polled (Figure 1).
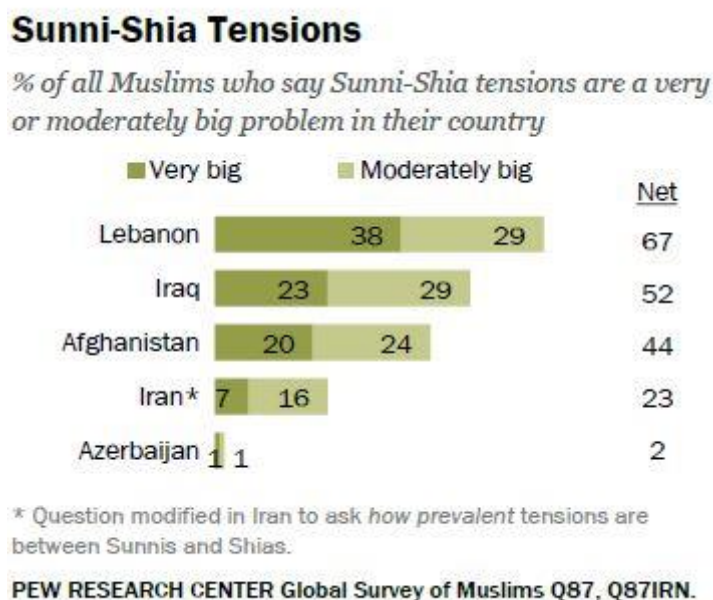
Sunni-Shia Tensions

% of all Muslims who say Sunni-Shia tensions are a very or moderately big problem in their country

■ Very big   ■ Moderately big

	Very big	Moderately big	Net
Lebanon	38	29	67
Iraq	23	29	52
Afghanistan	20	24	44
Iran*	7	16	23
Azerbaijan	1	1	2

* Question modified in Iran to ask *how prevalent* tensions are between Sunnis and Shias.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Global Survey of Muslims Q87, Q87IRN.

Figure 1

Interestingly enough, the results of the survey showed that Shias were in fact less concerned about sectarian tensions (Figure 2). This may however be the result of the fact that three of the five countries polled in this research have a Shia majority. It would be very interesting to see how these results would look in countries such as Syria, Egypt, or Pakistan, where there are Sunni majorities. A peculiar case is Afghanistan, where Sunnis comprise of ninety percent of all Muslims and yet more Sunnis claim that Sunni-Shia tensions are a big problem in their country (forty-four percent) than Shias (thirty percent) (Figure 2). Regardless, the point that is important to understand is that sectarian conflict, tensions, and violence work both ways. Although sectarian conflict does not get much attention from the media as does other forms of religious extremism, when it does get attention, it is usually centered on Sunni oppression of Shias. This, however, is not always the case.

Shias Less Concerned About Sectarian Tensions

% of ... who say Sunni-Shia tensions are a very or moderately big problem in their country

	All Muslims	Shias	Sunnis	Diff.
Iraq	52	38	71	-33
Lebanon	67	53	80	-27
Iran*	23	20	47	-27
Afghanistan	44	30	44	-14
Azerbaijan	2	2	3	-1

Significant differences shown in bold.
*Question modified in Iran to ask *how prevalent* tensions are between Sunnis and Shias.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Global Survey of Muslims Q87, Q87IRN.

Figure 2

Although most claim that sectarian conflict is the result of sociopolitical power struggles in various countries, the fundamental theological basis for the divide and conflict cannot be overlooked. As mentioned above, this is because the identities of the two branches of Islam have become deeply rooted within the question of succession to Prophet Muhammad and the theologies which results thereof. The sectarian strife is apparent in a sister study conducted by Pew: *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity*. This study measured the degree to which Shias were accepted by Sunnis as Muslims. The results show that Shias are not considered Muslims by forty percent or more of the Sunnis who were surveyed in five of the seven countries (Figure 3). This is in fact the trend in many countries around the world. Many Sunni Muslims do not consider Shias true Muslims and view them as innovative heretics, who have strayed from the *sunna* (Prophetic example). If the data is analyzed carefully, there seems to be a correlation between Sunnis who were polled in a given country and that country's Sunni-Shia demographics. Iraq, where eighty-two percent of those polled viewed Shias as Muslims, has a Shia majority.

Egypt, where more than half of Sunnis who were polled said that Shias were not Muslims, has a

Sunni majority.

Sunnis More Accepting of Shias in Iraq and Lebanon

% of Sunnis who say...

	Shias are Muslim	Shias are not Muslims	Diff.
Iraq	82	14	+68
Lebanon	77	21	+56
Tunisia	54	41	+13
Jordan	46	43	+3
Egypt	42	53	-11
Morocco	37	50	-13
Palestinian terr.	38	40	-2

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q41b.

Figure 3

This chapter will now go into a more in-depth analysis of the sectarian conflicts in Syria.

In Syria, the sectarian conflict is intensifying day by day. The rebels claim that the

sectarianism is the result of Syrian political leaders, such as Bashar al-Assad, trying to strengthen

and solidify their rules by playing on ethnic and sectarian differences. This can be paralleled to

colonial powers drawing on nationalistic, sectarian, and ethnic differences in their colonies to

maintain their rule. In Syria, the ruling party belongs to the minority Alawite sect of Shia Islam.

The reign is over the Sunni majority of Syria. The government and pro-government supporters

point the finger back at the rebels, accusing them of playing on sectarian differences to turn the

populace against the ruling party. It is quite obvious that both, the rebels and the government,

are guilty of stirring up sectarian tensions for their own personal, political gains and agendas.

Both sides are ruthlessly using the sensitive, religious issue of sectarian identity, originating from

the issue of the succession to the Prophet, to mobilize supporters to their camp and rally them against the other.

In 2012, *Time* magazine broke a story of how municipal workers in Homs were offered stipends of up to $500 per month by the government to agitate sectarian fears (Baker). They allegedly did this by disguising themselves as opposition rebels and propagating through graffiti messages and public chants. The message that really stuck and had negative implications from all this was, "Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the grave." Meaning, that the Christians should be exiled to Lebanon and the Alawites should be killed. This would obviously rally minority Shias in Syria, especially Alawites to the pro-government side in fears that Sunnis would seek retribution against them if they were successful in toppling the government. The government denies any such act and blames the message on opposition rebels who are trying to save face. Regardless of who started the message, the fear in both sects is evident. Sunnis fear the continuing oppression and nepotism of the government and Shias fear the negative implications that the fall of the government could have on their safety and wellbeing.

There are widespread episodes of violent sectarian attacks on civilians from both the government and the rebel forces. One such example of this violent struggle from the rebel side is the massacre of sixteen Alawite civilians in the village of Maksar al-Hesan in September of 2013 (Kalin). The group that carried out the attack is a majority Sunni group called Al-Nusra Front. Al Nusra Front has been deemed a terrorist organization by the United Nations because of its connections with al-Qaeda. Although this is an example of an extremist group targeting the Alawite sect in order to gain retribution from Assad's regime, it is an example of how some rebel groups tie the regime and its inefficiencies to the religious sect itself. In 2012, a report by the U.N. Human Rights Council documented the Syrian government's infringements on the human

rights of civilians. These abuses include systematic and organized torture in Syrian prisons and the bombing and occupation of hospitals and other civilian locations (Kalin). "The report cited evidence of massacres by pro- and anti-government militias, as well as increasing accounts of civilians being directly targeted by artillery, aerial bombs and snipers" (Kalin). The civilians are thus trapped in between a chaotic power struggle. A report by the U.N. Human Rights Council claims that "feeling threatened and under attack, ethnic and religious groups have increasingly aligned themselves with parties to the conflict, deepening sectarian divides" (Kalin).

The government and rebels have largely been successful in using sectarian differences to ignite violence and hate amongst Shias and Sunnis. This is evident in the blame that loved ones place on the opposite sect for the loss of their beloved. Abu Firas, a father who lost his twenty-two year old son in the bombing of a Sunni mosque blames Shias for the death of his son (Bowen). "Of course God almighty will kill them (Shias), but we ask God almighty for permission and help to eradicate them" (Bowen).

The Syrian sectarian conflict has also played out on a larger scale in the Middle East Region. The civil war in Syria is seen as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia for dominance in the region (Bowen). Whereas the Sunni Saudi government backs the rebels, Shia Iran backs the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad (Bowen). Although the power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a political one, their support and backing is drawn straight down sectarian lines. Each, however, blames the other for the rise of sectarianism in the region.

Although the sectarian conflict in Syria is largely tied up in sociopolitical and economic issues and circumstances, it is essential to remember that the fundamental sectarian difference stems from the death of Prophet Muhammad and the events surrounding his succession. The

events from 1,400 years ago have thus come to crystalize the differing theologies and identities

of the two sects of Islam. It is essential to mark the differentiation between sectarian conflict and

sectarian difference. Although the sectarian conflict is rooted in a sociopolitical power struggle,

without there being a theological difference, there would be nothing for the opposing parties to

play on in order to gain support for their camps. Opposing parties would not be able to reach out

to and empathize with Shias and Sunnis based on their religious sect. The civil war would

simply have an ethnic and nationalistic character, rather than a sectarian one. Rather chanting

anti-Shia slogans in the streets, the rebels would be chanting anti-regime chants alone. Without

sectarianism, the pro-government parties would not be able to label the rebels as pro-Sunni

extremists and terrorists and have to use other identifiers such as ethnicities.

The targeting killings and bombings in Pakistan serves to show how sectarianism can

stand on its own, without a political agenda backing it. In contrast to the civil war and the

resulting sociopolitical power struggle, Pakistan's Shia and Sunnis are not fighting for political

positioning. Yet, sectarian conflict still exists. An example of sectarian violence in Pakistan can

be seen in the recent *Ashura* commemoration in Rawalpindi, Pakistan this past November.

Ashura is a Shia commemoration of Imam Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala. While the

procession of Shia mourners passed by a Sunni seminary, some people from it shouted insults at

them. This then resulted in violence and the death of eight people (Craig). There are many more

violent episodes of sectarian attacks including the assassination of many Shia doctors, professors,

and professionals.

The reason why this incident of larger Pakistani sectarianism is juxtaposed with Syrian

sectarianism is to show that sectarianism is not simply the result of sociopolitical power struggles

during times of war. In many cases, sectarian identities are deeply rooted in religion and

theology. This is, in no way, trying to undermine the other essential causes of sectarianism, such as social injustice, economic oppression, political usurpation of power, and even ethnic tensions. It is simply posing the claim that sectarianism does have a religious component to it that cannot be overlooked. Because, as was seen with the Syrian situation, sociopolitical and economic situations could not have taken a sectarian form if it were not for the issues and events surrounding the death of the Prophet and his succession 1,400 years ago.

These were some of the ways in which sectarianism plays out in the sociopolitical world today. The Syrian case study showed how political actors manipulate sociopolitical and economic issues by passing them off as sectarian ones in order to mobilize supporters to one camp or the other by appealing to their religious identities. Sectarianism is a growing and centrifugal force not only in the Middle East and the Syrian civil war, but also in the larger world. The next chapter will show this by analyzing how sectarian issues play out in the discursive debates and dialogues between Sunnis and Shias in internet chat rooms and forums.

Chapter Six:

Contemporary Shia-Sunni Discursive Dialogues and Debates

The question of succession to Muhammad is an ongoing source of conflict and difference between Shia and Sunni Muslims in the contemporary world. This thesis will now focus on the impact that the issues surrounding Muhammad's death and succession have on the contemporary Shia-Sunni discursive dialogues and debates. It will do this by analyzing various Shia and Sunni internet chat rooms and forums. This chapter will be juxtaposed with the previous one in order to show that sectarianism is not simply a product of sociopolitical and economic strife, but is also grounded in theological differences, which stem from the differing interpretations surrounding the succession of Muhammad.

Lay sheikhs and common people have started using the new medium of internet chat rooms and forums for their discursive debates and dialogues in the contemporary world. Through chat rooms, common people defend their religious traditions, practices, and beliefs as well as point out the perceived flaws and incongruities of others' religious traditions. This occurs between peoples of different religious traditions as well as between peoples of the same religious tradition. In Islam specifically, this occurs much too often between Shias and Sunnis and largely on the questions of legitimate succession to the Prophet Muhammad. People of both sects bring in their own "authentic" sources to defend their claims, views, and interpretations. It gets especially interesting when people of one sect ground their claims and justifications on the other's authentic sources. This latter method is used for added legitimacy and is mainly seen with Shias using the *hadiths* in *Sahih al-Bukhari*. This method gives the perception of added legitimacy to Shia claims because the *hadiths* in the collection are believed to be 100% authentic by Sunnis themselves.

The dialogue between Shias and Sunnis in internet chat rooms shows how sectarianism takes on a more moderate and discursive character, as opposed to the more violent sectarianism seen in the previous chapter. This chapter will also serve to highlight the critical role of interpretation that will be evident in the discourse between the users. Laymen, whether knowingly or not, take on the scholarly hermeneutical method to pose both nuanced and redundant interpretation of Islamic texts in order to defend their sect and its beliefs about succession.

The event of *Ghadir Khumm* is highly debated in internet chat rooms between Shia and Sunni Muslims. Each tries to pose their interpretation of the *hadith* as the monolithic truth. Whereas Sunnis interpret the word *mawla* from "he whose *mawla* I am, Ali is his *mawla*," to mean friend, Shias argue that the word *mawla* has another meaning, which is master. This is evident in the debate between the users Saad and The Serpent of Ali in the Shiachat chat room, who respectively belong to the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam. Saad mentions: In Arabic "Moula" means 'friend'. Rasulullaah said, 'whose friend I am, his friend is Ali. Oh Allaah! Keep friendship with that person who keeps friendship with Ali and be enemy to him, who keeps enmity with Ali'. This had no bearing at all with the caliphate or the administration or the government." The Serpent of Ali rebuts with "First of all, mawla doesn't necessarily mean friend, no it has many different linguistic meanings, one of them is master, such as a slave-master …" They continue to debate about the facts of the event. Some of the things which they debate are how many people were present and the purpose of the event. Whereas The Serpent of Ali says that this event took place amongst a large number of followers and in order to declare Ali as the rightful successor, Saad mentions that this event took place amongst only twelve or so people and it was because some people had grown weary of Ali due to a Yemeni conflict. The

Serpent of Ali goes on to pose the question: "Why would Umar go on to congratulate Ali on his appointment as a 'friend' as you claim mawla means. Weren't they already friends? Yes, so of course this congratulation was not for becoming friends." These two conflicting views reflect the Shia and Sunni interpretations of the event of *Ghadir Khumm*.

In her article: "The Dialectic of Power: Sunni-Shi'i Debates in Tenth-Century North Africa," Sumaiya Hamdani refers to a historical debate between Abu'l-'Abbas, who was Shia, and Abu 'Uthman, who was Sunni. This debate occurred during in 915 AD, during the Fatimid Empire. It highlights the differing interpretation of the word "*mawla*" from the event of *Ghadir Khumm*.

> When then asked by Abu'l-'Abbas whether or not he [Abu 'Uthman] considers 'Ali his *mawla* (master) after the tradition that the Prophet had declared 'Ali master over the Muslims after him at *Ghadir Khumm*, Abu 'Uthman resorts to a philosophical argument which turns on the ambiguity of the word, both in terms of its use to denote master and client, as well as friend. He concludes by saying that "Ali is my *mawla* in the [same] sense that I am his *mawla* (Hamdani 11).

As in this Fatimid debate, the contemporary internet dialogue shown above focused on the same issue of interpretation with regards to the event of *Ghadir Khumm*. Although I intently searched for nuanced arguments, sources, debates, and evidence; my research and analysis shows that the issues that are highly debated amongst internet chatters today surround the same old issues, use the same old sources, and are based in the same old evidence. In short, the debates surrounding succession have not changed much throughout history.

In their book, *New Media in the Muslim World*, Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson claim that there has been a "reintellectualization" of Islamic discourse with the advent of new technology and new mediums for dialogue. They "suggest that by looking at the intricate multiplicity of horizontal relationships, especially among … new communication media, one discovers alternative ways of thinking about Islam … [thus] creating senses of community and public space" (Eickleman and Anderson 16). I would argue that they could not have gotten it more wrong, especially with regards to debates and dialogues surrounding the question of succession. Sure, arguably there is an intrasectarian community being built through these discussions, but this is done at the cost of intersectarian polarization. Also, there are no new ways of thinking either, as shown in this chapter. The arguments, sources, and authority one uses have seemingly gone unchanged for centuries. The debates are circular, repetitive, and redundant. There is pretty much a complete lack of nuanced discourse. My research and analysis failed to obtain any evidence of the "more nuanced diversity of views, settings, projects, and expressions of Islam today … as a result of Islam on the internet" (Eickleman and Anderson 57). This new media and its participants definitely do not create the "civil" society that the authors claimed they would. Instead, I would argue, people have become even more polarized surrounding the question of succession and sectarian differences.

The novel aspect of these internet chat room discursive dialogues and debates is that it brings a wide array of voices from all walks of life to the table. The internet proliferates the debates regarding the succession to Muhammad. These chat rooms allow people of different sects, religions, ethnicities, and social standings to weigh in on the debates and express their opinions on the question of succession.

Stylistically, these internet chatters are very similar to scholars in the sense that they pose a claim and support their claim through various authentic Islamic textual sources such as the Qur'an and *hadith* literature. This opens up questions to authority such as whether or not these laymen have authority to interpret these sacred texts. This question will not be answered in this chapter as it can be a topic of another thesis by itself. One interesting style of argument is when members of one sect draw on the authentic sources of the other sect to disprove the latters' claims and interpretations as invalid. Arguably, this can be seen as being done in order to give added legitimacy to one's claims. It is like Native Americans using American history books in order to show the injustices that have been done to the former by the latter. It gives added legitimacy to the claim.

A topic of disagreement amongst the members of the Sunniforum chat room that provided a slightly nuanced interpretation, at least for me, was the discussion about the *hadith* of *Manzilah* (position). This *hadith* goes as follows: "Are you not pleased to have the position (*manzilah*) in relation to me as that Aaron had in relation to Moses, except that after me there will be no other prophet?" (Bukhari 59). This was proclaimed to Ali by Muhammad while the latter was preparing to leave on an expedition to Syria. Ali did not wish to stay behind in Medina, but go and fight with Muhammad. Shias interpret this to show that Ali is the rightful successor to Muhammad and caretaker of Islam in his absence, just as Aaron was by Moses. A user by the name of MysticKnight argues that "this hadith cannot mean that Ali is Muhammad's successor because Musa had appointed Harun to take his place for only the forty days that he was gone for." This is when a user by the name of Abu Muslim chimes in and says "How does taking care of affairs for forty days amount to being successor? There is really no way you can say this hadith justifies imamate. It's simple, and besides Musa outlived Harun." A user by the

name of Rasul argues back that "yes but you're overlooking the difference that 'after me there will be no prophets' if it is not about imamat then why does the prophet say this? This clearly points to the succession of Ali after Muhammad." This is yet another example of how both sides interpret a single hadith in two different ways in order to defend their beliefs as legitimate and the others' beliefs as illegitimate. Both sides go on to point fingers at each other and calling each other "*kufar*" meaning disbelievers.

In these chat rooms, Sunnis often bring up the point that if the fact that Ali was the rightful successor to the Prophet, then why did he never claim his position as Muhammad's rightful successor? This is seen in a question posed by the user Ugly Jinn in Islamicforum, where he asks: "How can the masses be held responsible when Imam Ali, himself, doesn't declare himself a divinely appointed Imam? Where is the logic here? So, basically, all the Sunnis have to do is state that Imam Ali never declared himself as a divinely appointed Imam after Prophet's death. Case closed." Another user by the name of aquibriz rebuts with "No, Ali did not lay his claim to caliphate/imamat immediately because he did not want the ummah to falter after the death of the Prophet (saw). But this does not mean that he did not believe that he was deprived of his legitimate rule and this is seen by him not pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr until six months later when Fatima had passed. In fact Ali mentions this in the third sermon in *Nahj Ul Balagha* where he says 'Then I began to think whether I should assault or endure calmly the blinding darkness of tribulations … I found that endurance thereon was wiser. So I adopted patience although there was pricking in the eye and suffocation (of mortification) in the throat. I watched the plundering of my inheritance till the first one went his way but handed over the Caliphate to Ibn al-Khattab after himself." Ugly Jinn comes back and calls aquibriz to join him and convert. This is another facet of these Shia-Sunni discursive dialogues. They often take the

form of proselytizing and calling for the conversion of the other to the "true/right" Islam. Ugly Jinn says: "Fine!!!! Well why don't you do the same instead of causing division…accept abu bakr for the sake of unity… Ali did it after six months whereas you Shia can't even do it after 1400 years!!!!!! So for the sake of unity in this day and age accept abu bakr… Come join the majority bruv, it is easy that you may understand it using a bit of logic." Therefore, an interesting aspect of these internet chat rooms is the proselytizing that takes place within them. Both Shias and Sunnis call for one another to revert to their version of "true" Islam and leave behind their ignorant ways. Shias and Sunnis often accuse each other of being a *kafir* in the state of *jahiliyyah*. In Arabic, *Kafir* means disbeliever in God and His message and *jahiliyyah* means the state of ignorance. *Jahiliyyah* was originally used in the Qur'an to refer to the pre-Islamic time of paganism in Arabia. The reason why these insults are interesting to analyze is because historically, in the Qur'an and in contemporary society, these insults are used by some Muslims to describe non-Muslims. However, here are instances where Muslims use them against one another. Therefore, what these internet chatters are actually doing is what is called *takfir*. *Takfir* is the excommunication Muslims by on another through accusing them of apostatizing.

One question that was asked on the Shiachat forum was particularly enlightening. A user by the name of Mu3lam posed the question: "What are the legitimate sects?" Meaning, of course, which Islamic sects are legitimate and which are not. Referring to not only Sunni vs. Shia, but also the subsects of Shia Islam. This made me think. What exactly makes a sect legitimate? Adherence to the five pillars of Islam? The Qur'an? The *sunna*? Orthodoxy? How many followers it has? Believing in Ali as the rightful successor? A user by the name of GreyMatter responded: "The sects/madhabs that were considered legit by the Amman Message. The non-legit ones are the ones that were left out … and I shall abide by that opinion, for

declaring *takfir* on an entire people is too much of a risk." This thread was particularly

interesting because it led me to find something called the Amman Conference, which resulted in

the Amman Message.

The Amman Conference was a congregation, which resulted in the issuance of the

Amman Message.

The Amman Message started as a detailed statement … by H.M. King Abdullah II bin

Al-Hussein in Amman, Jordan. It sought to declare what Islam is and what it is not, and

what actions represent it and what actions do not. Its goal was to clarify to the modern

world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam. In order to give this statement

more religious authority, H.M. King Abdullah II then sent the following three questions

to 24 of the most senior religious scholars from all around the world representing all the

branches and schools of Islam: (1) *Who is a Muslim?* (2) *Is it permissible to declare*

someone an apostate (takfir)? (3) *Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal*

rulings)? (Amman Message)

For the purposes of this thesis, the focus will be on the first two points of the Amman

Message. The first point of the Amman message recognizes eight *madhahibs* (Islamic schools of

thought) as being legitimate and valid. These include the Sunni *Hanafi*, *Hanbali*, *Maliki*, and

Shafi'i, the Shia *Ja'fari* and *Zaydi*, the *Ibadi*, and the Sufi *Zahiri*. The message recognizes the

followers of these eight *madhahibs* as being Muslims. The second point of the Amman message

prohibits *takfir* done by Muslims against one another. "It is neither possible nor permissible to

declare any group of Muslims who believes in God, His Messenger, the pillars of faith,

acknowledges the five pillars of Islam, and does not deny any necessarily self-evident tenet of

religion" (Amman Message). Here is a point of ambiguity. The reason being is that the Message

defines a Muslim as belonging to one of the eight *madhahibs*, but it excludes some subsects of

Islam from those eight *madhahibs*. That being said, the Message declares that *takfir* is

prohibited upon any Muslim who acknowledges the five pillars of Islam. So one may rightfully

wonder: well is *takfir* prohibited amongst only those eight *madhahibs* or is it prohibited amongst

any self-describing Muslim?

As seen above, the Amman Message has some ambiguities, uncertainties, and exclusions.

It does not mention the *Alawites* or *Druze* at all, although it can be argued that these subsects

could fit into the *Ja'fari madhhab*. It is also ambiguous with regards to the inclusion of the

Ismailis. In the introduction of the Message, Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad mentions that the

Ismailis affirm loyalty to the *Ja'fari Madhhab*, but does not actually include them in it explicitly.

He only explicitly recognizes the *Ithna'ashariyyah* as belonging to the *Ja'fari Madhhab*.

Therefore, the Amman Message may not be as inclusionary as it may seem. The Amman

Message's *takfir* clause can be a tool to eradicate sectarianism from our societies, if it is

supposed to be liberal and inclusionary.

Geographically, it is possible to discern the location of some of these internet chatters if

they report it in their profiles. For example, Mu3lam's profile says that he is from America and

GreyMatter's profile reveals that he is from Canada (Figure 4). This is interesting because it

shows that sectarian issues, differences, and conflicts are not simply prevalent in the Middle

East, Europe, and Asia, but also in the West.

GreyMatter

Me being a happy baby :D

Advanced Members
●●●●
1,153 posts
Location: Canada
Religion: Islam
Interests: ...

Figure 4

Demographically, there are certain things that the users' profiles reveal about them and then there are certain things that remain a mystery. For example, there is no section on these profiles that would reveal the users' genders or ages. Therefore, it is hard to discern between what age group and sex sectarianism is highly prevalent amongst. Although I have no hard evidence to prove my claim, I believe that most of these users are males. The reason being is that users frequently refer to each other as "brother." The icons of these users are usually left picture-less. If there is a picture, it is almost never of themselves. Rather, it is often some sort of calligraphy, a sheikh, a mosque, etc. Some of the funniest icons that I have seen include a picture of batman and a picture of a lion holding a rifle and the meme saying "Now it's fair!"
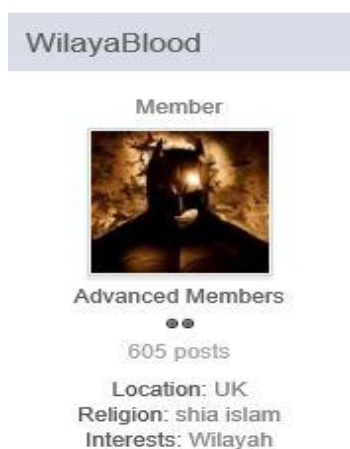
WilayaBlood

Member

Advanced Members
●●
605 posts
Location: UK
Religion: shia islam
Interests: Wilayah

Figure 5

power

Member

Now It's Fair!

Advanced Members
●●●●
1,505 posts
Location: U K
Religion: Shia Imamiyya
Ithna Ashari

Figure 6

The profiles provide a section for the users to list their religious affiliations. This led me to discover some interesting affiliations. A user by the name of mutazili(wasil) self-describes himself as belonging to "Red Shi'ism" (Figure 7). When I researched this further, it is actually a term coined by Ali Shariati, an Iranian scholar, who wrote an essay called "Red Shi'ism vs. Black Shi'ism." In this essay, Shariati defines "Red Shi'ism" as being devoid of the grips of established power structures such as the clergy. "Black Shi'ism" is what he sees as being a deviation away from and a corruption of true Shi'ism. "Black Shi'ism" is characterized as being under the control of the established power structures of the government and clergy. Thus, whereas "Red Shi'ism" is inclined towards the common people and against oppression, ignorance, and poverty, "Black Shi'ism" is inclined towards the elite and leaves the masses powerless. Shariati attributes "Red Shi'ism" to the Safavid Era and "Black Shi'ism" to present-day Iran. Lastly, he claims that "Red Shi'ism" eventually changes to "Black Shi'ism."

Figure 7

Another user's religious affiliation was as follows: "48% Sunni, 32% Zaydi, 20% Sith Lord wannabe" (Figure 8). The reason why this user's religious affiliation is interesting to analyze is because *Zaydiyyah* is a sect of Shia Islam. *Zeidis* are also known as the "Fivers" because of the number of Imams that they acknowledge. It is hard to discern whether or not this

user is using this affiliation in a satirical manner or is serious about it. It is hard to imagine how someone could be both Shia and Sunni due to the differences in ideologies and theologies of the two sects. If indeed he is serious, here is a user who simultaneously self-identifies himself as being Shia and Sunni. One such example that may lend to thinking he is serious is his statement: "This is getting a bit silly now if I'm honest. We spend more time bickering about leadership of people who ultimately cared more about a unified Ummah than we'll ever do." Even if he is not serious, why choose *Zaydiyyah* in particular? Why not any other or even the larger "Twelver" (aka *Ithna'asharia*) subsect?

Figure 8

A section of the profile, titled interests, is also worth analyzing. Most of these users have some sort of interest in Islam and religion. A peculiar interest that I came across was "Wahabi Killer and Momin lover, Medicine, Science, and Islam" (Figure 9). There are so many facets to this user's interests section. Wahabi Islam is a form of Sunni Islam, which is described as being orthodox, ultraconservative, and fundamentalist. Momin simply means believer in God, but I believe it refers to his religious affiliation with "Twelver" Shi'ism specifically. Lastly, you see the binary of science and Islam together. The reason why this is interesting is because there is

often a western misconception that science and Islam are incompatible. This will not be covered

in any particular depth as it could be the topic of another thesis on its own.

Figure 9

This chapter and the analysis of internet chat rooms served to show how sectarianism

plays out in the contemporary world. It also explained how sectarianism does in fact have

theological basis, rather than simply being the byproduct of sociopolitical and economic issues.

Therefore, sectarianism needs to be understood through the binary of religion and politics.

Sectarianism cannot simply be reduced to one of these two binaries without sacrificing its clarity.

In some instances, as seen in the Syrian case study, sociopolitical and economic issues are passed

off as sectarian ones in order to gain support, but in other instances, as seen through the chat

rooms, they do in fact have theological foundations. This binary is defended in the fact that

these internet laymen have no direct or immediate political aims. Also, if these theological

differences regarding succession to Muhammad, the sociopolitical issues could not be passed off

as sectarian ones in the first place. Instead, they would have to remain what they are.

Conclusion:

This thesis has shown how the events surrounding the death of the Prophet and the question of succession have contributed to the creation and crystallization of the Shia and Sunni sects within Islam. It highlighted the essential difference in interpretation of the event of *Ghadir Khumm*, which led the two sects to have different ideas of succession to Muhammad. The thesis then went on to critique and complement Madelung's claims about the rightful successor. Thirdly, the immediate events and issues surrounding the death of the Prophet, particularly the event of *Saqifa* and the succession of Abu Bakr to Muhammad, were highlighted. In doing so, it was shown how Ali was passed over for succession for the first time. This was followed by a description of Ali's role in each of the four caliphates. This allowed the reader to understand that Ali played a nominal role in the three caliphates that preceded him and arguably for the sake of the unity of the community. Next, contemporary implications of sectarianism were highlighted through a case-study of Syria and the Pew Research Report. Lastly, sectarian discursive debates were analyzed through internet chat rooms and forums.

The claim that this thesis makes is that sectarianism is on the rise in the contemporary society. Sectarianism needs be understood through the binary of religion and politics. In particular contemporary situations, sociopolitical issues are masked as sectarian ones by political actors in order to mobilize support for their causes and parties. This political sectarianism was exemplified by the Syrian case-study. The theological basis for sectarianism must not be overlooked, however. Through the analysis of internet chat rooms, it was concluded that sectarianism not only takes on violent forms for political ends, but also has a passive and discursive form that is rooted in theology and the question of succession to Muhammad.

It is essential to remember that people of both sects developed different interpretations of events and texts in order to support and justify their beliefs. Therefore, interpretation is essential as it is the leading contributor of the discrepancies between Shias and Sunnis. The significant differences between Shia and Sunni interpretations of succession may be a never ending factor. Therefore, peoples of both sects must learn to live in cohesive harmony, and not in constant tension. The two branches should not focus on the differences between each interpretation. Rather, they should focus on the commonalities that they both share, such as the belief in the five pillars of Islam. They must look for unity amongst diversity, create pluralism out of chaos, and be accepting and tolerant of one another's interpretations. Shias and Sunnis should not take part in *takfir* and sectarianism against one another. The feuds, debates, violence, and bloodshed are all meaningless and need to stop. Both sects need to appreciate that Islam is not a monolith, but a heterogeneous religion, with rich diversity, culture, traditions, practices, beliefs, rituals, and theologies.

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