

Sunni Communities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2013–2021

Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia

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Sunni Communities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2013–2021

*Securitization, Secularization
and Privatization*

By

Hessam Habibi Doroh



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Cover illustration: Makki Mosque and seminary in Zahedan, the largest and one of the most important Sunni institutions in Iran. The photo was made after its renovation by the end of 2021. Photo by Sina Habibi Doroh.

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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

In memory of
Professor Chlodwig H. Werba (1955–2019)
and
Professor Irene Etzersdorfer (1958–2022)



Contents

Preface	IX
Acknowledgments	X
List of Figures	XII

Introduction	1
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PART 1

Confessional Minorities, Comparative Perspectives

1	Coexistence and Religious Differences in Asia	19
2	The Iranian Perspective	31
	Comparison and Conclusion of Part 1	76

PART 2

Unity and Its Enemies, Perspectives from Shia Elites

	Introduction to Part 2	83
3	Unity as the Order	89
4	Enemies and Their Infiltration	100
	Annex 1	115

PART 3

Exclusionary Co-existence, Perspectives from Sunni Communities

	Introduction to Part 3	127
5	Tolerance, Co-existence and the “Glory of Umma”	135

6 Injustice, Inequality and Discrimination 144**Annex 2** 165**Epilogue** 179**Bibliography** 193**Index** 213

Preface

As I visited the Imam Reza shrine in the summer of 2015, a complex with the mausoleum of the eighth Shiite Imam, I joined a gathering of young people sitting around a middle-aged cleric. His discussion was mostly about the unity among Shiite and Sunni Muslims and how these confessions are similar to each other. After finishing his talk, one of the young participants raised his hand and asked with a doubtful voice: “Excuse me, if Sunni and Shiite are so similar and, as you said, the same – then what is advantage of being a Shiite follower?” The cleric smiled and answered: “Well, yes we are all brothers. But! At the end after we are dead, in the Last Judgment, when our life is reviewed and judged, in that moment when we are condemned due to our sins and looked down upon, he (the cleric showed his finger to the shrine of the Imam) will come and intervene and bring us to paradise.” The answer was quite satisfactory for the young man and the others, as they smiled and shook their heads. Yet, while no one knows whether the Shiite Muslims have that “Joker Card” to enter paradise, we definitely know that they do have one to enter higher political positions, such as the presidency in the Islamic Republic, as well as a more effective voice in the development of the country’s policies.

After all, four decades after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the still hidden question is: how – and what – is the relationship between Islamic Republic and Iranian Sunni community? How are their interactions and socio-political behaviour towards each other? Now, answering these kinds of questions is challenging, due firstly to the lack of proper resources and secondly because of the link of this topic with security issues. Whenever, during his fieldwork, the author asked people from the Sunni community questions which could be linked to socio-political issues, in many of the cases the answer was: “That is a security question and I cannot answer.” Nevertheless, by looking at published speeches and statements we are going to see in this book how politicians from the Islamic Republic as well as well-known people from the Iranian Sunni community publicly talk and think about each other. Furthermore, the material provided will show how both sides jointly communicate, while the analysis and interpretation of the data will exhibit moments of both contention as well as cooperation.

Of course, in the end this book will not answer all of the open questions, but open doors for new questions and discussions. The point is, discussing the situation of the Iranian Sunni community openly will shed light on a topic which is hidden in a corner, covered by securitization and observed (to some extent sincerely) by both the Islamic Republic as well as the Sunni community as an instrument in a constant geopolitical rivalry.

Acknowledgments

It was my thesis advisor, good friend and intellectual hero Walter Posch who brought my attention to the complicated situation faced by the Iranian Sunnis for the first time in 2018 as I had the pleasure to work with – and learn from – him. Hereby I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Walter Posch for his always constructive contributions, support, interesting discussions and encouragement, which sincerely aided in maintaining this student's motivation all through this work. His care over the years has shown me what it means to be a scholar.

A major thanks also to my two teachers at my alma mater for their efforts and generous support over the two years of my study at the university and for all their input. First, Irene Etzersdorfer, who sadly passed away in 2022 and did not get to see this book. She will be fondly remembered by her students. She not only expanded my knowledge in political science and international relations but also – and often through tough questions – pushed me to further develop intellectual stringency and analytical skills which all contributed to making this work possible. Second, I thank Johannes Maerk, who always responded to my requests whenever I needed. For me, it is a pleasure that I can continue to work with and learn from him.

Heartfelt appreciation goes to Mirjam Künkler, who motivated me to complete this book. She graciously took an interest in this project. Her sharp comments turned my thesis into an actual book and encouraged me to think beyond this project. I am also grateful for the opportunity that she provided for me to upload the sound material (speeches) from the Iranian Sunni communities which I had collected for this work for permanent archival on the *Iran Data Portal*. Special thanks also go to Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Arash Pourebrahimi for the kind and comprehensive support during the contributions process. I hope this, and further materials, will contribute to more research on issues related to the Iranian Sunnis and minorities in Iran in general.

Then I would like to thank Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, who included me in his always exciting, interesting and fruitful Liechtenstein Colloquium convened by the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs. These events were some of the best opportunities I had for intellectual exchange and for learning from the premier experts and scholars in this field.

I'm especially grateful to Bert Fragner, who sadly passed away in 2021, for many helpful discussions and for sharing his wide and valuable knowledge and experience in this field of work. Since I first heard about Professor Fragner in my teens, it had been my dream to come to Austria and become a student of

his, and it is amusing that in fact, Walter Posch was a student of Fragner's and consequently this dream came true indirectly and through long discussions with him. It was Bert Fragner who rightly motivated me to take a closer look at the Iranian Sunnis in Khorasan, which gave me and this book many new interesting themes.

It should also be mentioned here that this thesis would not have been possible without the kind and helpful support of those people from the Iranian Sunni communities who preferred to be anonymous but nevertheless shared their thoughts and ideas with me, and took the time necessary to answer my questions whenever they arose during my fieldwork and afterward. In particular, I'm grateful for the assistance from a few teachers and students from madrasas in Iranian Baluchistan and Khorasan who supported me in gathering data. On this note, a kind thanks also goes to my brother Sina, who continued my field research while I was in Vienna and thus was my eyes and ears.

Translations are a normal part of life in this field, and in relation to this, I extend my gratitude to Laura Georgelin who assisted with understanding articles in French. Further, I am especially thankful to Elisabeth Wieslander for both advising me and checking on the English language of my thesis as well as on the content and the analytical approach. Through her support, my analytical skills improved significantly.

Regarding professional proofreading, it was Barry Jenkins from the Language Centre of FH Campus Wien who guided me through this project. In this regard, I'd like to mention Peter Grabner at the FH who passionately encouraged my project and provided financial support for the editing process. Nevertheless, mistakes that readers might find remain of course of the author's origin.

At Brill, the publisher, I thank Nienke Brienens-Moolenaar for accompanying me through the whole process, and also the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable remarks and suggestions. Brill have published many books which have inspired me, and so I am honored to have received their support to publish with them.

Last but not least, I have amassed huge debts of gratitude to my parents for their extended unconditional love, constant support and motivation in all aspects of life and in particular to continue with my studies. I also especially thank my wife Ursula Fürnkranz, who sacrificed lots of potentially beautiful time while I was occupied with this book.

Figures

- 1 Makki Mosque in Zahedan under construction 48
- 2 Molana Haji Khwaja Ghawsoddin and his son Molavi Khwaja Sadroddin Ahrari, the khatib of Khwaf 52
- 3 The main entrance of Darolulum Talim al-Quran va al-Sunna in Shurak Maleki 54
- 4 Mohammad Rasulollah Mosque in Mashhad located in Hor street 106
- 5 A group of Sunni Afghans sitting outside the Nur Mosque in Mashhad, located in Hor street 108
- 6 Molavi Behzad Feqhi in his office 143
- 7 Major discourses presented in the examples from Shia elites and Sunni communities 191

Introduction

Der Übersetzung Kunst, die höchste, dahin geht, / Zu übersetzen
recht, was man nicht recht versteht.

FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT (1788–1866)

Die Weisheit des Brahmanen, IX, 58



As the Safavids (1501–1722) reunited Iran and declared the country an independent state in 1501, they established Twelver Shiism as the official religion of Iran to counter the threat of the Ottomans and also the Uzbeks, both of which practiced Sunni Islam. This historic moment marked one of the most important turning points in the history of Iran and also of Islam. Following this event, the populations in Iran and Azerbaijan converted to Shia; those who did not accept the new school of thought risked their lives or fled to the neighbouring Sunni states. In addition to the Sunni confessional identity, the majority of the Sunni population in Iran belong to different ethnicities than Persian, and of these the four major groups are Arabs, Kurds, Baluch and Turkmen. Apart from the fact that Sunni is the largest minority group in Iran with a heterogeneous composition of ethnicities, a major point which sets the Sunni communities apart from other minority groups is that they predominantly live in disadvantaged border areas. These locations are plagued with ecological, economic and infrastructural difficulties, but are also surrounded by Sunni states which inherently connects the Iranian Sunnis directly to the major religious issues in the Middle East, e.g. any interaction between the Islamic Republic and other Sunni States will affect the Iranian Sunnis at home.

Looking at the Iranian Sunni minority¹ in the Islamic Republic brings us to an open and problematic question: Are there any issues between the Islamic Republic (as a Shia state based on Persian identity) and its Sunni citizens

1 This study looks at the Sunni community as a sociological minority in Iran as a non-dominant group in the political, economic, and social spheres. However, the term “Sunni society”, “Sunni community” or “Sunni people” is preferred here rather than the notation “Sunni minority” in order to depart from the binary opposition between the minority and the majority narrative, which is criticised by post-structuralists (see Theoretical Framework in this chapter). Nevertheless, some scholars uses the term “minority” in order to indicate “some very concrete unequal practices, policies of disparity and institutionalized discriminative norms that

who comprise around 10 to 20 percent² of the population and are composed of a variety of ethnicities? Using the Google search³ machine on the expression “Iranian Sunnis” (*ahl-e sonnat-e Iran*) shows different and contradictory results. Some pages – mostly belonging to, or affiliated with, the Islamic Republic – take on a general description of the situation, and base the discussion on the statements claiming there is no issue and that the relation between the Islamic Republic, as well as the Shia population in Iran, with the Sunni citizens is based on “unity” (*vahdat*) and “brotherhood” (*baradari*). Consequently, *if* there are any issues then those are not part of the “truth” and their presence in Iranian society is due to actions by enemies of the country. On the other hand, other sources – for example foreign news agencies or other websites – independent of the state and in some cases belonging to Sunni community in Iran, point out problems such as “ethnic/confessional discrimination” (*tabiz-e qomi mazhabi*), “sacrilege” (*tohin be moqaddasat*), and “being alien” (*namah-ram budan*) to mention just a few examples.

A few, but very important research projects such, have published work in the past related to the situation of minorities in Iran, and of these I was inspired by the questions asked in Rasmus Christian Elling’s book “Minorities in Iran,” published in 2013, to continue the work, and particularly to drive forward with additional research on discussion(s) on open issues. This book is not going to find out which side is speaking the “truth”. What this research aims to accomplish in more direct terms is firstly to show how the Islamic Republic’s standards and norms pertaining to religious/confessional minorities compare to global international standards. Another main objective of the book manuscript is to analyse and evaluate *what* and *how* each side speaks/writes to – and about – the other side. In other words, this study includes a critical look at the discourses provided by the well-known and powerful figures within the Islamic Republic and the Iranian Sunni communities. Indeed, the interconfessional relations in the case of Iran are part of a global process of contradiction and tension in which progress and change are the outcome of infrapolitical and historically rich considerations.

express, generate and fuel complex dynamics of socio-economic and political competition” (Elling 2013: 6).

2 The Islamic Republic’s official data only indicates that 99% of Iranians are Muslim without giving a breakdown of Sunnis and Shias. Some official statistics refer to 5,307,142 Sunnis from a total of 62,038,513 (Mirrahimi 1389/2010) as well as 15 million for the same total population (Negah 1389/2011a, b and Soroush 2013). For a detailed comparison of the statistics see: Dudoignon 2009: 37, n. 34–6.

3 In Austria.

1 Theoretical Framework

For this book, I have generally been inspired by some of the post-structuralists' theories, as well as the works of Sinisa Malesevic.⁴ These theoretical perspectives are not just strict theoretical frameworks, but also facilitated the development of the lines of thought and consistency of argumentation throughout the work of this book.

Post-structuralism covers a number of associated analytical approaches which primarily focus on the relationship between *power*, *language* and *knowledge*. In orthodox social scientific understanding, knowledge ought to be separated from the influence of power. In this sense, knowledge is uncontaminated by external impacts and is purely based on reason.⁵ However, post-structuralism shares the view that knowledge is always contextual, partial and fragmentary, and that it is never neutral, and thus shapes the power relations between individuals and groups. In the words of Michael J. Shapiro and Campbell, "post-structuralism treats the knowledge as a 'political' matter".⁶ This implies that in order to study an object, for example text or speech, it is necessary not only to understand the object itself but also the system of knowledge that produces the object.⁷ Post-structuralism differs from structuralism by arguing that the language is not external to the subject or agent, but rather that the subject or agent is involved in the social construction of reality.⁸ This argument indicates the role of subjects which then inherently leads to including the concept of "other" in reproducing the existing *discourse*. Indeed, based on this understanding, language is not neutral and a pure medium of communication, but is also a tool to set a framework of conventions, values and prejudices in order to make sense of the world.⁹

For Foucault, the development of knowledge and language is intertwined with the mechanism of power. Knowledge and power are mutually supportive and they directly imply one another.¹⁰ He shows how discourses regulate what can generally be said in a society and what is considered as true or correct. Thus, the discourse is a kind of medium through which power is expressed and a society is governed, and this idea is summarised in the words of Hall:

4 Malesevic 2006.

5 Devetak 2013: 187–188.

6 1999: 1.

7 Raulet 1983: 195–211.

8 Uçarlar 2009: 22; Hall 2002: 72.

9 Devetak 2013: 188.

10 Foucault 1999: 27.

a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.¹¹

In connection to this, post-structuralism accepts the limitation of knowledge and recognises the multiplicity of realities. Derrida argued that most cultures claim to know the “truth” or “logos” better than others, in order to establish authority, status and domination over others. Further, he argued that language is used to define different concepts not just in terms of what they are, but through their difference from “others”. This form of differentiation operates through *binary oppositions* such as good/evil, male/female and majority/minority, or in the case of this study Shia/Sunni. This view of binary opposition comes from modernist epistemology and shows the tendency of humans to think in terms of opposition and hierarchy such as reason vs. passion, mind vs. body, and self vs. other. In the binary way of thinking, the first pole (e.g. value/property) is based on the greater value while the second one is downgraded and understood as being unequal to the first pole. In Derridean *deconstruction*, all texts contained this fundamental assumption and therefore they should be re-interpreted taking into account these underlying hierarchies in the language.¹²

The deconstruction of the binary opposition between the minority and the majority provides a tool to separate the minority and majority and look at them separately.¹³ As Uçarlar¹⁴ states, the deconstruction movement “tries to reveal the relation of power between the poles of oppositions in order to reverse the hierarchy”.

Consequently, under the influence of post-structuralism and deconstructionism the goal is to turn the relation of power between the opposing poles and look at the minority as an inserted social construct and political project, rather than a concrete collective. The deconstructive approach points to the majority-minority relation being not just about the power of one over the other but also about the concept of “difference” in a dialogue with the “Other”.¹⁵ Put differently, this “Other” is “fundamental to the constitution of the self, to us as

11 2002: 72; see also Uçarlar 2009: 22.

12 Derrida 1981: 56ff.

13 This deconstructive approach was used in case of Kurdish linguistic rights in the PhD dissertation by Nesrin Uçarlar (2009).

14 Ucalar 2009: 18.

15 Hall 2002: 329, Ucarlar 2009: 19.

subjects”¹⁶ – as in the old colloquial expression “it is in communication with the Other that I find myself”. Interestingly, the deconstruction of the binary opposition between minority and majority led to the criticism of the nationalist discourse, in which minorities are presented as the low-level, complicated and evil “Other” in opposition to the majority as the superior, normal and good “Us”.¹⁷

Based on this combined post-structuralist and deconstructionist theoretical framework, this book does not place the minority in a state-centric position, but rather turns the hierarchical relations around between the minority and the state (as the representative of the majority). Indeed, the deconstructionist approach decentralizes the relationship between minority and majority.¹⁸ Furthermore, these framework principles enable the study to criticise the nationalist discourse which enforces a singular identity to build a nation, as well as facilitating the study of the reactions of minorities to the nationalist discourse by the expression of *resistance*.

Resistance evolves from an existing gap within the oppressed. This gap is a result of the tension between *public transcript* and *hidden transcript*,¹⁹ of which the former implies dependency to the dominant power and the latter provides a reaction to repression resulting from domination. The tension between these two transcripts creates “a double life with double thoughts, double duties and double social classes”.²⁰ Further, Scott²¹ argues that the centre of resistance might be found in the informal networks of a community, in forms of folk narratives, culture and history, which he labels “infrapolitics”. He also states that²² the source of resistance originates in the gap between the official discourse on equality and liberty and the experience of injustices in the discourses of minorities.

Apart from the above-mentioned theoretical framework, this book manuscript will also follow Sinisa Malesevic’s proposed approach for the study of ideology, with which I became familiar through chapter three of Elling’s book.²³ Malesevic argues that the term “ideology” has been replaced since the 1990s by new concepts such as “discourse”, “meta-narrative” and “identity”.²⁴ Following

16 Hall 2002: 330.

17 Ucarlar 2009: 269.

18 Ibid.: 40.

19 Scott 1990: 44; Ucarlar 2009: 171.

20 Du Bois 1969: 221; quoted in Scott 1990: 44 and Ucarlar 2009: 170.

21 Scott 1990: 44.

22 Ibid. 52–5; Ucarlar 2009: 172.

23 Elling 2013: 83ff.

24 Malesevic 2006: 2–3.

this, he suggests that the concept of ideology can encompass those concepts and that it can be rehabilitated by “moving ideology from structure-centred to more agency-centred theories of ideology, and by shifting the emphasis from the function to the form and content of ideology”.²⁵

Malesevic’s analysis distinctly distinguishes between *normative* and *operative* layers of ideology, where the former presents the official narrative and is based on ideal terms and “fundamental goals and values”.²⁶ The normative domain presents a particular *Weltanschauung* (*world view*) by providing universalist statements. The normative layer of ideology is typically represented by texts from authorities such as “holy books” and state documents (e.g. the constitution or political manifestos). On the other hand, the operative layer is expressed in the “institutional” and “extra-institutional” arena as well “the routine circumstances of daily life in any given society”.²⁷ Now, the ideas of the operative layer can for example be investigated through the analysis of news programmes, internet web-sites with particular content and through political speeches by politicians and other important individuals. After identifying and defining these two layers, followed by analysing three cases (Islamic Iran, communist Yugoslavia and the liberal-democratic United Kingdom),²⁸ Malesevic came to the conclusion that the operative layer of ideology in these cases was found to be “staunchly nationalist”.²⁹ In other words, in the normative domain (e.g. the guidelines from the top of society) one can be democratic, authoritarian, religious or secular but in the operative domain the ideology has a tendency to become nationalist:

Regardless of the official pronouncements made by various governments and oppositional groups representing or attempting to represent a particular nation-state, and these are invariably couched in universalist terms, it is nationalism, in all its forms, which remains the dominant operative ideology of the modern age.³⁰

25 Ibid.: 7.

26 Ibid.: 92.

27 Ibid.: 93.

28 Ibid. 96–106.

29 Ibid. 2002 and 2006: 94.

30 Ibid.: 94.

2 Methodology

This study adopts the *critical theory paradigm* by following a deconstructive and post-structural approach regarding the concept of minority and its associated issues. In addition, and based on the theoretical framework by Malesevic (2002 & 2006), the following research questions were raised:

1. How is the concept of religious/confessional minority represented in the normative layer of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in comparison to other cases in Asia?
2. How is the Iranian Sunni community presented in the Islamic Republic's discourse in the normative and operative layers and vice versa?

In order to answer these questions, the following steps were performed:

- A. Organising, comparing and summarising the concepts of minority and their normative policies in the Asian context. Further, the Islamic Republic's norms and standards regarding religious/confessional minority are presented³¹ here, and at the end these are analysed and compared. The aim of this step is also to show how the state's relations with minority communities in Iran is historically and politically developed (Part 1).
- B. Identification, translation and discourse analysis of five texts/speeches from the political scene of the Islamic Republic which point at the Iranian Sunni community. The material is selected specifically to include five individuals belonging to the political elites of the Islamic Republic, at different positions in the hierarchy and with diverse interests. The texts/speeches were gathered from the era of the Hasan Rouhani presidency from 2013 to 2021 (Part 2).
- C. Identification, translation and discourse analysis of five texts/speeches from Iran's Sunni community pointing at the Islamic Republic. As in part B, the material here is also limited to five very influential individuals³² from the Sunni community in Iran and gathered from the same period (Part 3).

31 The following documents are included: Islamic Republic Constitution and the Charter on Citizens' Rights promoted by President Hasan Rouhani.

32 Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzahi (Sunni cleric, head of Makki Mosque and also Darolulum Makki, both in Zahidan), Kak Hasan Amini (Sunni cleric from Iranian Kurdistan and current head of Maktab-e Quran, Sanandaj, in the Kurdistan Region), Jalal Jalalizade (former Majlis Deputy and founding father in spring 2005 of the "Kurdish United Front" political party and elected member of Sanandaj, Diwandara and Kamiyaran, in the Kurdistan Region, in the sixth Majlis), Molana Behzad Feqhi (Sunni cleric and teacher in several parts of Khorasan province), and Molavi Hafez Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi (Sunni cleric in Rask).

2.1 *Analytical Tools*

Based on the presented theoretical framework, two research methods were utilised to address the research questions: Qualitative Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

In order to answer the first question in Part 1, Qualitative Content Analysis is used to digest the Islamic Republic's documents regarding minorities. The main ideas of the documents are collected, analysed and attributed to the various levels/categories of the presented theoretical framework. This method is an approach of empirical methodological textual analysis. Mayring³³ stated that the central interest of Qualitative Content Analysis is to develop some aspects of *interpretation* and *categories* as well as formulate them in the form of *material*. By categorizing a text passage, its content can consequently be *coded*. Mayring's three techniques of content analysis are: Summarizing (*Zusammenfassung*), Explication and Structuring,³⁴ while the area of analysis (*Schrittweise Vorgehen*) is also elaborated upon.³⁵ During the analysis of the material for Chapter 1, the Structuring technique was applied, and it is also presented further therein.

In the second and the third parts, CDA analysis is applied to the Islamic Republic's and Iranian Sunni community's discourses towards each other. CDA is an analytical tool that does not consider language as a mental phenomenon but rather a social and cultural one.³⁶ However, CDA does not just focus on linguistic patterns but also studies the relations of power, dominance and inequality and the way those are reproduced and resisted by different social groups.³⁷ Ruth Wodak³⁸ concludes that discourse analysis is an instrument to expose inequality and domination with the objective of opening up for a more emancipatory discourse.

Although most political discourses are related to the reproduction and legitimisation of power and domination, the majority of research in this area was conducted by linguists and discourse analysts, especially in Germany, France and Latin America.³⁹ However, Van Dijk⁴⁰ elegantly expresses the problems of linguistically oriented versus political science oriented CDA:

33 Mayring 2000: 3.

34 Ibid.: 164.

35 Ibid.: 6 & Ibid. 1994: 162ff.

36 Ibid. 1995: 18.

37 Ibid.

38 Wodak 1996: 32.

39 For further information and examples of political discourse studies see Van Dijk 2001: 360–361

40 Ibid.: 363.

The first one often ignores concepts and theories in sociology and political science on power abuse and inequality, whereas the second seldom engages in detailed discourse analysis.

Consequently, he suggests the adoption of a multidisciplinary CDA which combines “discourse and action with cognition and society”.⁴¹ Based on Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model, the analysis attempted here is carried out in three dimensions: Textual (descriptive), discursive (interpretative) and societal (explanative).⁴² The first dimension of Fairclough’s approach to CDA is *textual analysis* which focuses on the texts, with the objective of describing the properties of representations of textual forms. For textual data, the analysis focuses on aspects such as descriptors (e.g. selection of wordings, construction of sentences), selection of verbs (e.g. existential, material, relational), use of voice (e.g. active, passive), selection of modality (e.g. possibility, uncertainty), and sequencing of information. The second dimension of the CDA is *process analysis* and emphasizes the interpretation of data. Here the analysis objective is to unpack the actual message, by means of identifying the constructed “social identities”, “social relationships”, “knowledge” and “concepts”, and to understand and interpret the relationship between the data and its producers.⁴³ In this study, this entails the focus on the following; (a) content of the language, (b) its subjects, (c) the relationship between subjects, and (d) the connection between the role of language and the greater social structures it reflects and supports. The third dimension of CDA analysis concerns the *societal level*. Societal analysis focuses on explanations of larger cultural, historical and social discourses and aims to find out how the interpretations of the data are embedded into those discourses. Here the analyst can use micro-level linguistic analysis to identify larger macro-level discourses.

2.2 *Ethnographical Consideration*

Accompanying the analytical steps, this book is based on primary sources as well as ethnographic fieldwork. I will study policies through official data, including decrees, directives, regulations and laws, politicians’ speeches, and newspaper reports. It is notable that almost no studies have tackled the period after 2013, especially among in the peripheral areas of Iran, through a field study. In my ethnographic fieldwork, my experience as observer/participant among Sunni communities, but also in some of the Shia communities (though

41 Ibid.

42 Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 2001; Halliday, 1994.

43 Fairclough, 1992; 2001.

not as much as among Sunni communities), took place at mosques and madrasas. There is a large number of places to visit; nonetheless, I attempted to visit as many as I could, multiple times at each different geographical location. In order to get a comprehensive picture in this book, my intention is to look at multiple areas and people by conducting ethnographic fieldwork, which was applied at the following locations:

1. Tehran, visiting Sunni Prayer-room and interviewing Iranian Sunnis living in Tehran (07-2017)
2. Razavi Khorasan, by interviewing Sunni communities in the city Mashhad (07-2017 & 12-2021)
3. Razavi Khorasan, visiting Sunni community in city Khwaf, Shurak Malaki and Taybad (08-2019, 01-2022 & 04-2022)
4. Sistan-Baluchistan, Iranian Sunni communities (influential religious leaders as well as students) in Zahedan, Chabahar and Khash. (04-2019 & 09-2019)

From a practical point of view, in order to expand my research data I interviewed many people from the Sunni communities and talked to many men and women – although one of the major challenges in the fieldwork was to talk with Sunni women or visit their madrasas. The female madrasa was the most challenging site of my fieldwork to visit as access is restricted to female visitors. Yet, I had the opportunity to gain some insight from one of the female madrasas through a female informant among the Iranian Sunni Baluch communities, who visited one of the madrasas and did an interview on my behalf. Although this was a single case and indirect, it did at least provide for the first time some information about female students at Sunni madrasas.

The interviews were conducted by the author in Farsi, Baluchi and in some cases in Urdu.⁴⁴ I decided to go for these interviews, however aware of the limits the political context put in front of researchers.⁴⁵ To gain insight from the Sunni communities, I needed to be accepted as a member of their community. In this regard I maintained long relationships with several madrasas, especially

44 Semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Lamont & Boduszynski 2020: 106–7) are all done by the author. Among those who gave their consent to use their information, certain persons did not want to have their identity mentioned. For those cases, only the time and the location of the interview are given. If interviewees agreed to give their full name, then the person's details will be provided.

45 All my interviewees were aware of my research and were asked if I could use their information in this book. In some cases, the interviewees wanted to remain anonymous, and some agreed to use their name in the book. Some interviewees did not even want their exact location or institution mentioned. In all cases their requests were respected and reflected in this book.

through a project of digitalisation of their audio materials. I participated in different religious ceremonies in Mashhad, Khwaf, Taybad and Zahedan. Further, I am also connected to – and welcome in – some Sunni communities through social media especially, i.e. by joining their groups in Telegram/WhatsApp in which various topics are debated on a daily basis. In this ethnographic part of the study, people from the Iranian Sunni communities were interviewed, including religious teachers and students, but also tribal chiefs and local people living in the provinces mentioned above. By using extensive ethnographic observation in addition to interviews, this book relays first-hand information on the history and current state of mind of Sunni-Shia relations in Iran.

3 Scope

This book is divided into three parts. Diachronic narrative and synchronic analysis move through the chapters. In the Part One (Chapter 1) I introduce background information on the general concept of minority and seek to demonstrate the importance of both the concepts of ethnicity and minority in the Asian context. In order to understand the dynamics of minority rights in a wider context, it is important also to understand the historical relationship between the rise of the nation-state system in wider Islamic world, to which Iran is connected. This introduction describes how the concepts of “religious minority” and “minority rights” emerged and developed, and how they operate in a governmental context. The objective of this Part is to first introduce both Iran’s and other Muslim-majority countries’ developments regarding the question of minority within nation-states in general, and the religious/confessional minorities in particular. In the second section of Part 1 (Chapter 2) I present on one hand a historical overview of the state’s policy in Iran related to religious minorities since Safavid. On the other hand, I elaborate on the history of different types of Sunni communities’ interactions within their own communities and with others, as well as with the state. Next, I discuss the standards and main legal developments under the Islamic Republic and especially the era of Hasan Rouhani. By doing this, this part will facilitate a comprehensive picture of how the question of ethnic and religious minorities is contested in Iran.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores Iran’s historical developments from a state-centred perspective. The second section gives an overview of the way the Sunni communities in Iran (with focus of Baluch, Kurd and the Persian-speaking communities of Khorasan) maintained their religious affairs and interact vis-à-vis the state. In the third section of this

chapter, the Islamic Republic's understanding and definitions of religious/confessional minorities are explained and discussed. By using Qualitative Content Analysis and the structuring technique, the Iranian normative discourses are elaborated upon and compared to other cases, to identify their similarities as well as any differences.

Parts 2 and 3 will provide material to answer the second research questions. In Part 2, five speeches/texts directed towards the Sunni minority, from individuals belonging to the Iranian political Shia elites during (see details under point B), are analysed by applying the CDA method. Part 3 has the same structure as Part 2, e.g. the steps are the same and it includes five speech/text examples from the same period, but this time from important individuals in the Sunni community. In each part, a short introduction about the individuals and the protagonists who gave the speech is provided, after which the specific material to be analysed is introduced. In each part (2 & 3), the major and dominant discourse is presented in independent chapters. By looking at the discourses from both sides, how the normative and operative layers of ideology are reflected in the language, as well as how power and resistance are reflected in the discourses of representatives of the Islamic Republic and the Iranian Sunni community, will be demonstrated. The full translation of each speech (translated by the author) is given at the end of each part in the Annex. Additional remarks regarding the text are also available in the Annex.

4 Aims of the Study

The overall aim of this book is to understand – by means of language analysis – the communicational exchanges between the Islamic Republic and its Sunni citizens as well as how the former's discourse presents power and domination while the latter's challenges the Islamic Republic by resistance. Within this objective, the manuscript presents explicit examples of the Islamic Republic's and Iranian Sunni community's discourses toward each other during 2013–2021.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the rather vibrant political and social discussions – both nationally and internationally – about Sunni-related issues in Iran, there is still little research published in contemporary Iranian studies or political studies globally. This topic is generally ignored – or plainly avoided – for a variety of reasons of which the three below are discussed:

First of all, on the international scene, the Iranian identity is perceived to be strongly linked to the Islamic Republic's Shia identity. Consequently, by being of Iranian origin an individual person is assigned the Shia label at a first

encounter. Furthermore, following the Iranian state's increased foreign activity in Syria and Iraq as well as support to various Shia groups in the Middle East, the Shia link to the Iranian identity is further reinforced. The result of this strong Shia dominance in the overall discourse is that the issues related to the multi-ethnic Sunni community are perceived as insignificant and are rarely discussed.

Secondly, the public sphere in Iran has the tendency to associate the Sunni communities with a non-Persian identity, since the majority of Iranian Sunnis are of ethnicities other than Persian. In this case, being Sunni is automatically interpreted as being for example Kurd, Baluch or Arab, and the fact that there are also Persian Sunnis, of which most live in Khorasan, seems not to be generally known. The result is that a discussion of Sunnis as a minority in the Islamic Republic of Iran has until now inherently been indirectly associated with discussing non-Persian groups, and therefore easily fall into a discussion either of the various ethnical groups' unique issues, or in the worst case, a discussion in which the loyalty and collaboration of the non-Persians with the Persians is questioned, including even their relation or loyalty to the state.

Finally, Iranian scholars are hesitant to discuss the topic of Sunni communities from a minority standpoint, and the reason for this is twofold. To some extent there is just a lack of interest or plain ignorance of the minority groups' daily reality and strife. But, more importantly, discussing ethnic identity and the demands for minority rights, especially when it comes to Sunnis in Iran, often causes fear within the Iranian academic and intellectual circles residing within the country. Many scholars and experts hesitate to acknowledge the ethnic dynamics of minorities due to fear of a potential movement for separatism and the secession which could follow, which was also discussed by Elling⁴⁶ as "the security view". In other words, there is an apprehension that such discussions could lead to increased polarisation in society and possibly result in national security issues. As it turns out, there is both a lack of interest and a portion of ignorance as well as self-censorship among the scholars and experts who could be active in this field.

The security view is mostly combined with another discourse which Elling⁴⁷ calls the "[n]ationalist-minded" that is prevalent among Iranian scholars. Iranian nationalists think that discussing ethnic and minority issues poses a threat to a country which is known historically for its ethnic stability. The political scientist Mehrzad Borujerdi stated that "many (ultra)nationalists worry

46 Elling 2013: 147ff.

47 Ibid.: 134ff.

that discussing the plight of ethnic minorities may open a Pandora's box, and lead, even if indirectly, to Iran's eventual breakup".⁴⁸ This fear came into existence due to external interventions by other regional powers, and therefore this issue is seen as directly related to national security threats.

5 Final Remarks

It is clear that the issue of Sunni communities within Iran has several trans-national dimensions and that it poses a challenge to a country located in an erratic region; but understanding their situation from a variety of angles will provide context to the socio-political developments and demands of Sunni society in Iran. To a large extent, the problem is that the issues related to Sunni society are generally pushed down the list of priorities into the shadows of mainstream's demands such as the abolishment of the Hijab. Saying that does not necessarily mean that Sunni society does not agree with the public mainstream's demands, it merely means that all the other topics at the top of their agendas are never addressed. It is quite significant that the scholars and intellectuals – especially those in Iran – did not clearly report, analyse or discuss the social environment of the Sunni society until now, and omitted to initiate and foster a discussion in the public arena of what Sunni society actually wants in the context of the modernisation of Iran.

An investigation of the discourses of the Islamic Republic (as representative of the Shia majority) and the Iranian Sunni communities leads to a set of broader questions: How are the discourses between Sunni and Shia in general in Islamic civilisations? How will Islam develop in the presence or absence of a strong nationalism in contemporary times? Paying attention to, and endeavouring to answer, these questions would potentially not only shed light on the future of Iran, but also provide additional understanding of the complexity of the Islamic world per se. Moreover, analysing and looking closely at Sunni-Shiite relations and their discourses in the Islamic world may show that civilisations are not just plural (as Samuel Huntington claimed)⁴⁹ but, following Peter Katzenstein's thesis, are also internally pluralist, i.e. they are comprised of convergent and divergent actors and processes, including different

48 Quoted from Elling 2013: 2.

49 Huntington 1993.

cultures.⁵⁰ Finally, understanding the dimensions of the Sunni-Shia division may bring additional support and sophistication to Katzenstein's theory that, in the recent past, clashes have happened within civilisations rather between them⁵¹ (such a discussion necessitating the exact definition of what comprises a specific "civilisation" to be well understood notwithstanding).

50 Katzenstein 2010: 5. From Katzenstein's view, Huntington missed the key importance of the internal pluralism of each civilisation, assuming a sociocultural homogeneity and "succumbing to the 'illusion of singularity'" (ibid.: 9).

51 Ibid.: 8.

PART 1

Confessional Minorities, Comparative Perspectives



Coexistence and Religious Differences in Asia

As Saba Mahmood (2015a) briefly discussed, the majority-minority identity related to the religious demographics of the Islamic world was a slow and varied process. In fact, the struggle for modernisation and secularization persists throughout modern times, when a variety of newly established states have to deal with new challenges of social and legal equality among their peoples. A comprehensive overview of the major developments in varying modern nation states in Asia and also the Middle East will help us capture a better understanding of the religious communities of Iran and the wider worlds of Asian Islam to which it is connected. By engaging with the literature of Islamic Studies, this chapter will provide a comparative investigation into Muslim religious minorities in different cases in the Middle East, Central and Southeast Asia, and China. This will put the question of minorities and religious liberty into a wider picture and facilitate a comparative understanding of the social and historical framework of the modern Islamic world.

1 Ottoman Millet System

Ottomans used the word “Millet” (from the Arabic “Milla”) to refer to non-Muslim religious communities or sects, within which they were allowed to apply their own law according to their religions. Through this juridical autonomy, the *ahl al-kitab* (the people of the book; i.e. Christians and Jews) had a certain autonomy over their religious affairs (including issues of marriage, family and worship). By maintaining this “nonliberal model of pluralism”, the Ottomans managed to preserve the diversity of different religious identities for over six centuries.¹ In fact, the Ottomans did not aim to assimilate minorities and transform the differences as does the modern nation-state. The concept of the millet system had been applied since the 15th century, i.e. as of the rule of Mehmed II (commonly called Mehmed the Conqueror, i.e. Fatih Sultan Mehmet in Turkish, ruling in from 1451 to 1481), and this system remained effective until the beginning of 19th century. The Ottomans, in other words, adopted a communal coexistence driven by tolerance and mutual interaction based on

1 Mahmood 2015b: 143. For further discussions see Giovanni 2010: 27ff.

inequalities between subjects, which changed with the European intervention in the late Ottoman period.²

Further, as early as in the sixteenth century the Ottoman rulers granted a privilege known as “capitulation” to Western European traders to ensure their freedom in matters of criminal and civil jurisdiction as well as in religious affairs. In 1606, with the signing of the Peace Treaty of Zsitvatorok between the Ottoman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy, the concept of minorities was indirectly discussed – although not explicitly – for the first time. In this treaty it was determined that the locally present Catholics could, at this point in history, decide if they wanted to establish a recognized religious community within the Ottoman Empire based on the millet system. Once Ottoman power started to decline, the privileges given to Western Europeans expanded and included European missionaries and also indigenous Ottoman Christians (Eastern Christians). As critically discussed and analysed by Mahmood (2015a & b), the idea of religious liberty was a means to secure the missionaries’ activities among Muslims without causing an issue regarding prohibitions against religious conversion.

The Ottoman millet, similar to the Arabic term *umma*, had been used throughout the sixteenth century and referred to a Muslim majority.³ Since the nineteenth century, Ottoman reforms (Tanzimat) to the millet system meant that the term came to denote “a non-Muslim protected community.” In this case, the millet system allowed each religious community to establish a sub-system in which one’s own traditions, customs or religious acts set up the legal, administrative, educational, communicative or financial systems to be followed by only those belonging to a particular community. Solely taxation, military and defence were organised by the Empire. This concept is still applied, in “modernized versions”⁴ in the Near and Middle East. Francesco Palermo and Jens Woelk defined the Millet system as follows:

[a] very controversial technique of differential promotion of groups that makes legal systems which adopt it resemble multinational systems (in that it stably institutionalizes groups), although they structurally distinguish themselves from these, in that the institutionalization is limited to certain purposes. It is the creation of a system of “pillars” that provides

2 Makdisi 2019.

3 Mahmood 2015a: 60.

4 Giovanni 2010: 27ff.

for separated and, ultimately, self-governed communities for different groups, in sectors such as education or personal status.⁵

During the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire embarked on significant administrative reforms of almost every piece of legislation related to minorities, of which the two most important edicts were prepared during the periods of Tanzimat (until 1839) and Islahat (until 1856). The Tanzimat (regulations) started as the Ottoman Sultans Mamud II and his son Abdulmejid encouraged the legislators to create the edict now known as Hatt-i Sherif (royal edict), which was signed in Gülhane (Palace Rose Garden) on November 3, 1839. This edict declared for the first time that subjects of the Empire were equal regardless of their religion. The edict was further improved during the period of Islahat (improvement) and launched as a second declaration in 1856, known as Hatt-i Humayun (imperial edict) largely under European pressure, which climaxed in its being incorporated in the proclamation of the 1876 constitution.⁶ Further, these reforms took form from above, and, despite the new regulations, informal discrimination against non-Muslim communities continued:

The struggle between the crumbling Ottoman center [sic] and its dissenting Christian subjects not only resulted in the secession of Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro, among others, but also led to a series of massacres of Christians in Mount Lebanon and Syria (1860), Crete (1866 and 1896), and Armenia (1894–96). The European press and governments widely represented this conflict as an object lesson in the essential barbarity of the Ottomans, using their mistreatment of Christians as an excuse to stage “humanitarian interventions” on behalf of Christians and further truncating Ottoman sovereignty.⁷

In 1878 the Congress of Berlin added to the understanding of the “Protection of Minorities.” The Congress included the six great powers at the time – Russia, UK, France, Austria-Hungary, Italy and Germany – as well as the Ottoman Empire and four of the Balkan states (Greece, Serbia, Romania and Montenegro). After the independence of Greece in 1830, the tension in the Balkans increased and

5 Francesco Palermo and Jens Woelk, *Diritto Costituzionale Comparato dei Gruppi e delle Minoranze*, 52. The quote translated by Giovanni 2010: 26.

6 Huart 2012. Interesting to note here that these two edicts were so essential for the Ottoman Empire and to Turkish society that Kemal Atatürk later referred to them as crucial reasons for the Turkish War of Independence from the various states to which the Ottoman Empire had been distributed after the Empire's defeat in WWI. Atatürk 2004: 528.; see also Ongur 2006: 13.

7 Mahmood 2015a: 40. Also see Maksud 2019: 7–8.

led to the Ottoman-Russian war (1877–78), which ended with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the bi-lateral signature of the peace “Treaty of San Stefano” in the spring of 1878. Consequently, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and Bulgaria became independent, of which the enlarged Bulgaria referenced in the treaty was seen as a threat by neighbouring states as well as by some western states. Following this development, it was generally thought that further arrangements for the Balkans were needed and such were thus discussed at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In the endeavour to stabilise the Balkans and balance the power of the Ottoman Empire, Russia and Austria-Hungary, the outcomes of the congress included new borders for the Balkan states, denied the independence of Bulgaria (declared an independent principality inside the Ottoman Empire) and of Macedonia (given to Turkey), and explicitly prohibited any discrimination based on religious differences.⁸ This Congress brought many new-born states as well as minorities into existence by the drawing of new borders. Most importantly, the new multilateral agreement bound the states to respect explicit “minority rights” and threatened their Sovereigns in case of any opposition or neglecting to adhere to the new norms. However, in hindsight it is adequate to mention that the control, or “audit,” of the adherence to the agreed “minority rights” was somewhat difficult to follow up on in 19th–21st century and a variety of “minority rights” implementations (or understandings) could be expected across the continent. It is typically the case that the language of a treaty is understood and implemented differently, and there is normally no specific body of authority to control if the treaty is followed. To put it differently, during this period several European states were involved in the process that weakened the decision-making of the Ottoman Empire (due to the treaties as well as the implementation of European ideas within the Ottoman Empire’s administration through its own bureaucrats educated in Europe) which consequently also led to the further development of the character of the minority treaties in a multilateral context.

2 Colonial Rule

In the twentieth century, after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and creation of twenty-two Arab states, mostly under direct and indirect forms of colonial rule (primarily under the British and French), religious difference did not disappear. Additionally, as argued by Makdisi, a mobilization of national unity was actively implemented across the Mashriq to build new sovereign states

⁸ Ibid.

and, in this context, the idea of religious freedom, used by European mandate leaders, formed “a metaphor for colonial domination”.⁹ During the French mandate period in Syria (1923–43), certain Islamic sects, the Druze, Ismailis, and ‘Alawi, were recognised as “national minorities”. Similarly, in Lebanon, the Shia/Jafari Muslims received formal recognition for the first time in 1926.¹⁰ Indeed, during the mandate period, the concept of religious community (sect) was attached to a community’s autonomy in religious-based family and personal status law, which continues to this day in countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Israel.¹¹ In general, the colonial arrangements exemplify on one hand the “divide-and-rule” policy of the French and British, and on the other hand the double characteristic of political secularism: “simultaneous relegation of religion to the private domain and the amplification of religious differences”.¹²

In contrast to the case of Syria and Lebanon, the process of secularization in Egypt followed a different trajectory. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Egypt was religiously diverse including a significant number of Coptic Christian minorities as well as small but politically important Jewish communities. Until the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine, Egyptian Jews were accepted as a local sect (*ta’ifa*) and played an important role economically but also politically, including their active participation in drafting the first constitution of Egypt in 1923.¹³ Interestingly, the case of Coptic Orthodox Christians, briefly discussed by Mahmood (2015a), shows their hesitance toward the assignment “national minority”, as it separated them from the identity of the nation. Indeed, as today, the Coptic Orthodox Church prefers being in the category of “People of the Book” which gives them juridical autonomy over Coptic family law.¹⁴ In general, in modern Egypt, the demand for minority rights has always been attached to the issue of national sovereignty. On the one hand, in the eyes of the nationalists, the assignment of minority and their appropriate representation were colonial plans. On the other hand, the designation of minority opened a new era of exclusion and majoritarian rule. Moreover, religious identity in postcolonial Egypt is best to be understood as a product of dismissing the secular promise of the modern state to separate religion and politics.

9 Makdisi 2019: 116.

10 Mahmood 2015a: 62. Regarding the French mandate in Syria and the emergence of national minorities see White (2011), for sectarianism in modern Iraq see Khouri 2010, for Shias in Lebanon see Weiss 2010.

11 Mahmood 2015a: 63.

12 Ibid. Regarding the religious minorities in Mandate Palestine see Robson 2011.

13 Ibid.: 64. For a parallel history of Jews in Egypt see Benin 1998.

14 Mahmood 2015a: 63–4; see also *ibid.*: 72.

A double movement characterizes this logic: on the one hand, the modern state enshrines majoritarian values in the social and legal norms of the nation; on the other hand, it holds out the promise that the state can be a neutral arbiter of religious differences. This paradox characterizes not only Egypt but also other secular liberal polities.¹⁵

3 Central Asia and China

Looking at the relations between religion and politics in Muslim Central Asia shows the importance of religion and religious identity as (de)stabilizing factors.¹⁶ As can be seen historically, while the Russian state undermined and ignored local populations and their arrangements,¹⁷ an outstanding degree of pluralism continued to the end of the Russian Empire.¹⁸ Further, the Russian's main approach was to have minimal interference in religious affairs, improving infrastructure and establishing a bureaucratic administration.¹⁹ By the end of nineteenth century, Islam became a concern to the imperial regimes due to its potential to unite Central Asian groups, in its own right or with a sense of pan-Turkic nationalism. In the case of the Soviet Union and in China, the significance of Islam in public life decreased with the closure of mosques and madrasas and by the placing of pressure on the religious authorities. Nonetheless, Islam in central Asia retained its social significant and merged with nationalism.

In Soviet Central Asia, the religious practices were “folklorised” and came out as “cultural heritage” (*mirath* in Persian and Arabic, *meros* in Tajiki and Uzbeki): “Thus a Kazakh who was a member of the Communist Party and who by definition held an atheist worldview would still claim to be a Muslim when asked to indicate his cultural background. From a local perspective the notion of ‘atheist Muslim’ was not perceived as a contradiction.”²⁰ Moreover, created in 1943 by Stalin, The bureaucratisation of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Middle Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM in its Russian acronyms) became an important element in interreligious affairs. After the demise of socialism and the collapse of the Soviet bloc, newly established independent states started to frame the “new

15 Ibid.: 87.

16 Hann & Pelkmans 2009.

17 Brower 1997: 116–119; *ibid.* 2003: 106.

18 Martin 2001; Burbank 2007; Hann & Pelkmans 2009.

19 Brower 2003: 108.

20 Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1523–4.

religious marketplace".²¹ The process can be described as "deprivatization" of religion, using José Casanova's concept.²² In fact, the new ex-Soviet states used their Islamic "heritage" to construct and legitimize their newly established states and promoted an applicable national identity. In other words, Islam at the time of independence was a good option to fill the ideological gap after the disappearance of the Soviet state and its Marxist-Leninist ideology. More precisely, as Dudoignon (2020) showed, among the Persianophone population of the Tajik SSR, *adab* (Islamicate norms of ethics and deportment), became an element of connection to a Sunni Persian tradition, in contrast to the Russian culture. In addition, despite the restricted access to religious literature during the Soviet period, the non-verbal spiritual guides continued in the Tajik collective memories.²³

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, in the early 1990s Islam was valued as part of Kyrgyz culture and history, but in the official discourse the *Manas* epic, for instance, was presented as moral and spiritual guidance to the Kyrgyz nation.²⁴ However, as scholars have shown, *Manas* lost its appeal as the unifying national symbol in the early 2000s as the living standards of the citizens did not rise at all.²⁵ In line with the intensifying presence of Muslim missionaries (known as *davatchi*), the self-consciousness of Muslims (especially for the poorer layers of society) grew and transformed their religious practices and teachings in a "religiously pure" direction. In contrast to post-socialist Kyrgyzstan, political and religious development in Turkmenistan was directed by a single party (the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan, *Türkmenistanyn Demokratik Partijasy*), ignoring international pressure. The Turkmen political leadership manifested a vision of Islam as a major part of the country's national identity. So, in this regard, certain religious folklorised practices, such as visiting shrines, were tolerated by Turkmen authorities, due to their compatibility with the official vision of Turkmen Islam. Nevertheless, as Kehl-Bodrogi (2006) observed in her fieldwork, the shift towards Wahhabism among the poorer people who had been left out in the transformation processes were visible.²⁶ In a similar

21 Ibid.: 1518.

22 Casanova (1994), this concept was elaborated on and used in the context of Muslims in Central Asia by Hann & Pelkmans (2009). They elaborate on the concept of deprivatisation as "a movement opposed to the decentralising principle of the market, characterised by competition between property-owning individual agents, towards a centralising principle of public ownership and regulation" (ibid.: 1519).

23 Dudoignon 2020.

24 Marat 2008:12–13; Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1528.

25 Van der Heide 2008: 279; Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1529.

26 Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1531–2.

development in Tajikistan, the identification of Soviet Muslim saints with classical Islamic figures helped President Imam Ali Rahman (Rahmanov until 1992) to develop the patrimonial approach of Islam just as other ex-Soviet Central Asian leaders such as President Niyazov in Turkmenistan.²⁷

In contrast to the case of the ex-Soviet states, China views religion in general, and Islam in Xinjiang in particular, with suspicion. Since 1955 this region has been officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, with its power located in Beijing.²⁸ During the Mao Zedang era it was determined that the People's Republic was populated by 56 nationalities (*minzu*). While the Han made over 90% of the population, the Uyghurs were the largest non-Han nationality in Xinjiang. Chinese communist policies towards religion and the minorities, influenced by Soviet precedents, created much greater collective self-consciousness. Further, through a hierarchical religious affairs bureau, the party-state sought to fulfil on one hand the constitutional commitment of guaranteeing freedom of belief, and on the other hand to maintain strict control and exclude religion from the public sphere. After the death of Chairman Mao in 1976 and the expansion of the market throughout China, villagers began refurbishing and reconstructing local mosques and shrines, especially in Xinjiang. Further, the authorities gave permission for large gatherings in famous mosques on the major religious occasions. From the 1980s there was also a pilgrimage to Mecca organized by the Regional Islamic Association. The process of religious toleration went so far as to allow the establishment of an Islamic Academy in Urumchi in 1987, which was of course monitored by the government.²⁹ However, in the course of the 1990s, the repression from the Chinese government was intensified in a campaign associated with the issue of Wahhabism and Uyghur separatism. Indeed, the central authority in China pushed for a mechanism to push the religion in to the private sphere by folklorisation of the religion and by implementing a even stricter way of laicism than in Western Eurasia.

4 Afghanistan and Pakistan

In Afghanistan, the issue of having a multiethnic and democratic state which respects its religious and ethnic diversity has been an interest of its internal

27 Dudoignon 2020.

28 Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1520.

29 Potter 2003; Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1525–7.

communities over the last decades.³⁰ Although the average Afghan rejects the issue of ethnicity, the political elites often use the ethnic and religious differences in pursuing power. For instance, fundamentalists leaders such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar have played both the religious (pan-Islamic) and ethnic cards. Pashtuns, who are all Sunni Hanafi Muslims, make up the single largest ethnic group at an estimated 38% of the population. Maintained by ethnic bonds, Afghan Pashtun merchants are part of a transnational economic network stretching to the United Arab Emirates. As the second largest ethnic group, the Tajiki (Persian)-speaking Sunni Tajiks, mostly in urban areas, served as subordinate associates of the Pashtuns in government. In contrast, the Dari (Persian)-speaking Shia Hazaras have been the most politically and economically disadvantaged group. The Turkish-speaking Sunni Uzbeks, located in the northern terrain, are also a large ethnic group who played an important political role in the late nineteenth and middle of twentieth centuries.³¹ The rise of the Durrani tribe since 1747 at the national level strengthened Pashtun control over the country, maintaining their dominance until 1992, despite the country's ethnic heterogeneity.³² In that era, Pashtuns predominantly controlled institutionalized military, political and economic affairs in Afghanistan. Despite the Durand Treaty of 1893 between British India and Afghanistan, in which Afghanistan lost control over one-half of the Pashtuns, they continued to remain in power throughout Afghanistan.

The draft system in Afghanistan, in place after 1941, guaranteed an ethnic diversity with the aim of integrating the country's multi-ethnic society. However, some historical examples, especially from the communist regime, pointed out problematic aspects of mixing ethnic units.³³ After 1946, at the start of the rapid modernization of the country, there was a sense of greater equality among its citizens. In the 1964 constitution, all ethnic groups were granted the same privileges, even the centuries-long discrimination against the Shia Muslims being abandoned.³⁴ A reform in the mid-1960s enabled recruiting army officers under a quota proportional to their share of population.³⁵ In 1978, as the communists came to power, new interethnic dynamics appeared. During the reign of the Khalq faction (1978–79), the communist authorities

30 For instance: The United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), with military force provided by the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

31 Riphenburg 2005: 37.

32 Ahady 1995: 621; Riphenburg 2005: 37–8.

33 Riphenburg 2005: 44.

34 Rubin 1992; Ahady 1995: 622.

35 Riphenburg 2005: 42.

recognized Uzbeki, Turkmani, Baluchi and Noorastani as official languages in addition to recruiting ethnic minorities into the armed forces and the bureaucracy.³⁶ A clear decline of Pashtun influence started after April 1992 when a coalition of ethnic groups, the Northern Alliance, overthrew the regime of President Najibullah, himself a Pashtun. From 1992 to 1996 the predominantly Tajik *Jamiat-e Eslami* party led by the President Burhanuddin Rabbani with the support of Commander Ahmad Shah Masud, both Tajik, ran whatever was left of the state's sectors. As a resistance to a Tajik-dominated regime, in fact, the Taliban, a group of Pashtun students of Islamic studies, emerged onto the political scene in October 1994, and has ruled in Afghanistan from 1996 until today, with a break for a decade after 2001.³⁷ Further consideration was made to balance between ethnic groups in 2002 during the formation of Afghan Transitional Authority, with the elites from Panjshir controlling the security organs while Pashtuns were in charge of key financial institutions. In sum, the ethnic dimension of Afghanistan is an important factor of domestic politics with critical impacts regionally and internationally. Indeed, the disintegration of Afghanistan along ethnic lines would have de-stabilizing impacts on all of Afghanistan's neighbours, which are all ethnically heterogeneous sharing certain religious and ethnic similarities with each other.

In South Asia, the idea of creating Pakistan after the partition of India in 1947 was a response to the demand of having a homeland for all minorities, specifically India's Muslims.³⁸ In 1949 Pakistan officially became an Islamic Republic. However, at the beginning the place for religious minorities and the position of Islam was an open-ended process, which was addressed in the 1947 Constitutional Assembly.³⁹ During the 1950s, Pakistan was imagined as a modern Islamic state, promising "fair (but not equal) treatment of minorities".⁴⁰ Indeed, the Christian minorities imagined Pakistan as an opportunity to improve their status in a newly established state.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this dynamic was changed and complicated during the 1965 war with India and by the internal political issues in Pakistan, which impacted all citizens including the religious minorities.

The relations between Sunnis and Shias, who lived side by side peacefully until the 1970s, were changed in the light of deepening sectarianism and the marginalization of minorities. Indeed, Islamic Sharia, especially the Sunni

36 Ahady 1995: 623; for detail on interethnic relations in Soviet Afghanistan see Naby 1980.

37 Ahady 1995: 623–4; Riphenburg 2005: 38.

38 Devji 2013.

39 Malik 2020: 3.

40 Qasmi 2018; Malik 2020.

41 Ibid: 6.

Hanafi-Deobandi system of jurisprudence introduced by Zia-ul-Haq (from 1977 to 1988), provided a foundation for sectarianism in the region. Moreover, the activities of political religious associations such as Jamiat al-Ulama-i Islam and Jamiat al-Ulama-i Pakistan, helped to promote the Sunni Deobandi rhetoric after Zia's entering into power.⁴² It is also important to mention Anjoman-i Sepah-i Sahaba, (later renamed Sepah-i Sahaba Pakistan) founded by Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, which was established to fight Shia ideological and cultural influence by emphasizing the importance of the Sahaba (the Prophet's companions), in contrast to the Shia, who do not have this attention to the Sahaba, or even disrespect them.⁴³ Sepah-i Sahaba Pakistan in fact viewed the Shia's activities and presence as an issue for creating an ideal Muslim state in Pakistan.⁴⁴ At the same time as anti-Shia feeling grew in the 1980s and 1990s, so did the intensity of the ties between the Shia of Pakistan and post-revolutionary Iran.⁴⁵ However, it is to be noted that as in case of Shias in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's Shia socio-political activities and networks existed before Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979.⁴⁶ In general, as concluded by Andreas Rieck, despite the threat of violent attacks Shias have maintained their identity and "fully integrated into all sections of political, professional and social life in Pakistan without any discrimination."⁴⁷ Additionally, the Shia Ulama managed to form their exclusive authority by understanding the "core" and at the same time being aware of their bargaining position.⁴⁸

In Pakistan, the situation of Shia minorities is best compared with the case of Iran's Sunni minorities. Both groups (Shia in Pakistan and Sunni in Iran) constitute the majority of the population in neighbouring states – in Pakistan, the Shia Muslims are the minority, while in Iran they are the majority, and the Sunnis in Iran belong to the minority while in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan they are the majority. This inter-confessional dynamic created a specific tie between these two communities and can be observed in cross-border relations. For instance, the Shia Muslims come from Pakistan yearly to Iran and visit Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad. Almost every time the author visited this shrine, there were a small group of Pakistani Shia Muslims

42 Behuria 2004: 159.

43 After the ban of Sepah-i Sahaba Pakistan on January 12, 2002, it was renamed Mellat-i Islami Pakistan. Behuria (2004: 169) argues that the official ban from Pakistan was not effective as no mechanism was implemented to operationalize these bans.

44 Fuchs 2019: 162.

45 Behuria 2004: 160.

46 Matthiesen 2015; Mishal & Goldberg 2014.

47 Rieck 2015: 336–7.

48 Fuchs 2019: 5–6.

there. There are also Pakistani Shias who come to Iran to study in Shia seminaries. On the other hand, as I will elaborate on in Chapter 2, there is a historical link between the Iranian Sunni Hanafi and the Deobandi madrasas in India and Pakistan. The school of Deoband appeared as a reaction against British schooling by the Sunni Muslims in India, transforming and institutionalizing classical madrasas. Since the 1910s there has been a partnership between the Deobandi movement and Molavis (Sunni clerics with Deobandi background) from Iranian Baluchistan.⁴⁹ In Iran today, almost all Molavis, predominantly in the east of Iran, have been educated in one of the Deobandi madrasas in India or Pakistan. In addition, the Tablighi Jamaat (missionary society), created in 1926 as a response to Protestant and Hindu missionaries in northern India, has become a major player in the Sunni Islamic revival in eastern Iran and other provinces with a Sunni population. Based on author's last fieldwork, Tablighi Jamaat of Iran has become active over the last 20 years and there is an annual gathering in several provinces. Remarkably, the Shias in Pakistan, like the Saudi and Bahraini Shias, understood correctly that Tehran's extended help is driven by its foreign policy and interests, and not sectarianism.⁵⁰

49 Dudoignon 2013: 149.

50 Rieck 2015; for a detailed study of Shias in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain see Matthiesen 2015 and Mishal & Goldberg 2014. For sectarianism in Bahrain see AlShehabi 2019.

The Iranian Perspective

The second section of this part attempts to look at the Iranian historical understanding, established standards, and their developments in regard to religious minorities. In order to set the context, the historical background and developments are first discussed together with a presentation of how the Islamic Republic of Iran defines the term minority and other related ideas. The relevant parts of the Iranian constitution and associated documents which were published and introduced by President Hasan Rouhani are elaborated upon. At the end of this chapter, the standards and documents of the Islamic Republic regarding religious/confessional minorities are summarized and categorized. As a historical study, this chapter presents the major historical developments first from a state-centric perspective and secondly from the perspective of the Iranian Sunni communities.

1 A Brief History of the Shiite State

1.1 *Safavid and the Establishment of Twelver Shiite Islam*

Bert Fragner showed that “Iran” as a nation was developed as a political concept within the Islamic world during the Mongolian Empire,¹ because this was also the time period of *Persophonie* or Persophonia. Persophonie refers to a time during which the Persian language expanded as the most important “transregional contact language” (*interkontinentalen Kontaktsprache*) in the east of the Islamic world, as well as becoming an “Asian world language” (*innerasiatischen Weltsprache*).² Fragner explains in his 1999 essay *Die Persophonie* that the Persian dominance, or what is called *qalamru-ye zaban-e farsi* (the rule of the Persian language), was a spatio-temporal reality which expressed the common mutual culture of the eastern Islamic world into a cultural space inside societies of ethnically and linguistically diverse origins.³ In this context,

1 Fragner 1989.

2 Ibid 1999.

3 Fragner (ibid.: 33ff.) emphasizes the polycentricity of the Persian language and shows that many speakers and populations use/used Persian as a “second language” (*Zweitsprache*) while not being their mother tongue (*Muttersprache*).

Iran's history and identity is considered to be continuously based on territorial identity.⁴

It is important to begin a historical review of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the Safavid dynasty⁵ (1501–1722), as many scholars consider this period the starting point for the history of modern Iran.⁶ During the Safavid period, Shiite Islam was adopted as the official religion of the empire. This decision, and the enforced conversion of the population to Shiite Islam, had a strong impact on the country with significant consequences both on national and foreign affairs, as well as on Sunni-Shia relations,⁷ which was now becoming increasingly visible. In the foreign domain, Shiite Islam was a barrier and a kind of blockage against the Sunni Ottoman Empire and Uzbeks, while in the domestic domain this new transformation caused a gap in the society which still exists and causes issues.⁸ After the downfall of the Safavids a new era in Iranian history began and lasted less than a century, in which short-term dynasties of Hotaki, Afshar and Zand among others ruled smaller or larger parts of Iran. Particularly interesting in this context is the reign of Nader Shah (1736–47), who changed the perception that Iran was a strictly Shiite country as he promoted Sunni Islam under his rule. In the Sunni-majority areas of the South-Khorasan province, Nader Shah is therefore still well remembered and praised.⁹

1.2 *Qajar Dynasty; From Decentralisation to Constitutional Revolution*

The Qajar dynasty (1796–1925) is characterized mostly by decentralized power and semi-autonomous territorial units inside the empire, rivalry with the Ottoman Empire on its western frontiers, and political and diplomatic encounters with the Tsarist Russian empire. The Qajar are also known for their problematic relations with the European powers. This constant rivalry and conflict with the Ottoman, Russian and British empires re-shaped Iran's territory dramatically and formed its current borders. The initial signs of modernization and intellectual development arose during the Qajar rule, and the most significant event during this time was the Constitutional Revolution,

4 Fragner 2006: 113.

5 Safavid are known as a multi-ethnic dynasty with roots in Sufism, and which at its height ruled a number of the countries surrounding Iran.

6 Newman 2008: 2.

7 Further see Dudoignon 2011: 329.

8 Abisaab 2004: 2; Savory 2007: 29 and Elling, 2013: 30.

9 Dudoignon 2013: 141.

which led to establishment of the parliament and limited the absolute power of the monarch.¹⁰

Salehi-Amiri¹¹ argued that the different tribes (*ashire*), tribal confederacies (*il, qabile*) and ethnic groups (*aqwam*) in general were alike *shamshir-e dolabe* and that due to their military ability and the fact that they mostly inhabited the border regions, these groups could on one hand protect the country while on the other be a threat to the state. In the context of Salehi-Amiri,¹² the Qajar used the following policies toward ethnic and tribal groups:

1. Making alliances with a well-known and important person among the above-mentioned groups (typically known as *Khan*) by rewarding or treating them well, with the objective of using them for the implementation of central state policy.
2. State taxation of all tribes which were selected by the *Khan*. However, due to the lack of regulations and control mechanisms this form of tax was more or less a way of putting pressure on tribal groups.
3. Using tribal groups for military purposes without any payment (typically in border regions).
4. Initiating and maintaining intra-tribal conflicts as well as putting pressure on those groups in order to weaken them.

Dudoignon¹³ demonstrated that from the mid-17th to the mid-19th century, the relations between the Baluch Sunni and the state of Iran were based on various factors of instability. This was the result of the Constitutional Revolution that took place in the capital (and some Iranian provinces) barely reaching the empire's periphery areas such as Baluchistan.¹⁴ As a consequence, the Iranian Baluch tribes failed to send their representative to the National Consultative Assembly established by the revolution and maintained after the acceptance in 1911.¹⁵ This total disconnection of the border region with the central government fuelled the durable unpopularity of Qajar power, so much so that in modern Baluchi the term *gajar* is used to denote Persian-speaking "strangers" implicitly referencing them as occupiers.¹⁶

10 Ansari, Ali M, editor. "Introduction: Developing Iranian Intellectual History." *Iran's Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and Narratives of the Enlightenment*, Gingko, London, 2016, pp. 1–14.

11 Salehi-Amiri 1385/2006: 32.

12 *Ibid.*: 32ff.

13 Dudoignon 2017: 39ff.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Neda-ye Eslam* 1384/2006; Dudoignon 2017: 97.

16 Elling 2013: 40; Dudoignon 2017: 45.

1.3 *State-building and Nationalism in the Pahlavi Dynasty* (*A State-centred Historical Overview*)

Reza Shah was the Commander-in-Chief from 1921 and in 1925 he became the Shah of Persia. Reza Shah's era represented not only a change of the ruling elite, but also a change in the political, economic and cultural environment, which had permanent effects on Iran.¹⁷ His main influence in the political domain was the establishment of a stronger, centralized state.

The ambitious centralized programme for the economy and industrialization developed the central provinces while leaving the peripheral parts of the country, which are dominated by a variety of ethnic groups, to a large extent undeveloped and impoverished.¹⁸ The centralization process was developed and instrumentalized through military, educational and bureaucratic strategies as well as through public media. This process was backed by the Persian nationalist elites and led principally to a cultural homogenization of Iran based on the Persian identity – the development of a type of official monoculture.

Reza Shah had sworn to promote Shia Islam, but, as Dudoignon¹⁹ has stated, the Shah also claimed to be a follower of Nader Shah Afshar, whom he saw as his “great hero” and who had by modern-day Iranian historiography been introduced as a reconciler of the Shias and Sunnis. There were two important events during Reza Shah's reign for the Iranian Sunni minorities. The first was that Reza Shah (as well as his successor Mohammad-Reza) supported the development of the Sunni religious establishment in Baluchistan and Khorasan. The objective of this strategy was a part of Iran's regional politics to bulwark against influence from the Soviet Union and Saudi Arabia. The second even is that Reza Shah replaced the local tribal leadership by local Sunni clerics (*Ulama*). Dudoignon²⁰ elaborated thus:

the twentieth century witnessed successive state utilization of Baluch tribalism, through systems of selected co-optation successively operated by the Qajar Empire between 1843 and 1925, the British occupation from 1915 to 1924 and 1941 to 1947 and the Pahlavi monarchy after 1928. It is on these instrumentations and their impact on the ultimate replacement of tribal leaderships by the Sunni religious staff granted tribal protections.

17 Banani, 1961: 40–43.

18 Amirahmadi, 1989: 93.

19 Dudoignon 2017: 110–1.

20 *Ibid.*: 95.; see also *ibid.* 2011: 335.

Under the following regent, Mohammad-Reza Shah (1941–1979), the Sunni madrasas benefited from state economic support in the 1970s. The state also encouraged loyal imams and preachers in both the western and eastern border areas in order to counteract the leftist ideologies that were spreading.²¹

The Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979) adopted the process of state-building and western-inspired nationalism as the major operative dominant state ideology in Iran.²² The nationalism used by the state was mostly focused on an official language and a unique identity, which was mostly coupled with the Persian ethnicity, or race.²³ This ideology helped the centralised state to impose power on the periphery and ethnic minorities under the Pahlavi reign.

The long process of cultural assimilation into this Persian monoculture was envisioned to form Iran into a state based on the idea of one nation, one culture and one language, combined with secular national symbols.²⁴ This monoculture approach, combined with economic disadvantage, the forced settlement of nomads and the use of force to remove tribal leaders, led to the marginalisation of minority groups.²⁵ According to Litvak,²⁶ the harsh policy towards ethnic minorities under Reza Shah led to outbreaks of ethnic strife and showed “the fragility of the constructed and imposed nationalism from above and the salience of sub-state ethnic identities”.²⁷

Under Mohammad Reza Shah (1941–1979), nationalism linked with modernity was further used as an instrument of modernisation and legitimisation.²⁸ In this context the nationalism was in fact built on Iran’s pre-Islamic history dating back to Cyrus the Great and the Persian Empire which collapsed on the arrival of Islam.²⁹ The idea of glorification of the pre-Islamic past of Iran was reflected during the celebration of 2500 years of Iranian monarchy. This expensive celebration was organised at Persepolis, the capital of the ancient Persian Empire. However, it was organised as a western-style formality with gender-mixed seating, unveiled women and the serving of alcoholic drinks. The celebration received harsh criticism for the fact that the state spent enormous amounts of money on a ceremony while the ethnic minorities in the peripheral areas such as Sistan-Baluchistan were starving. The event was also

21 Ibid. 2017: 111–12.

22 Litvak 2017a: 2; Elling 2013: 25.

23 Rahimieh 2017: 47.

24 Litvak 2017b: 14.; Marashi 2008: 110.

25 Elling 2013: 94.

26 Litvak 2017b: 14.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.: 15–16.

29 Ibid.; Rahimieh 2017: 47–8.

harshly criticised, especially by the clerics and the leftist groups, for being a western-style affair mainly for the upper-class elites, and not more of a national cultural event. Criticism such as this had by the end of the 1970s become a central theme in the discourse of Islamic Revolutionary groups. Nevertheless, Iran did sign several international treaties during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah which address minority rights. An example is the 1966 Iranian signature to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) with its two optional protocols and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which are parts of the International Bill of Human Rights.³⁰

The growing dissatisfaction with political, economic and cultural policies of the Pahlavi Shah's reign led to its collapse in the revolution in 1979. Indeed, the revolution was presented as the battle of disadvantaged against privileged, periphery against centre and diversity against uniformity. During this period ethnic minorities played a very important role. However, as Elling³¹ discussed, as early as in the first days of the 1979 revolution a deep gap between the centre and peripheral regions was created, which under the foreign pressure that ensued turned the ethnic minorities into an object of security concern to the central governing elite. Finally, intra-minority division, sectarianism and tribalism on one hand and the armed conflicts with leftist militants on the other hand also dramatically affected the conflicts of the ethnic minorities in post-Revolutionary Iran.³²

1.4 *Islamic Revolution and the Struggles of Iranian-ness and Islamic-ness*

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 initially introduced a pluralistic and diverse ethno-confessional society. The constitution of 1979, as we will see later in this chapter, guaranteed equal rights and opportunities. The Islamic Revolution further formed and reintroduced a shared national identity in a unique form rooted in Shiite Islam.³³ However, from the beginning of the revolution the discrimination against Sunnis was a fact and has continued throughout the history of post-Revolutionary Iran.³⁴ Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini rejected ethnicity and nationalism (*qomiyat va melliyat*) at the beginning of the revolution and

30 Zaeri et al. 2013: 58.

31 Elling 2013: 79.

32 Ibid.

33 Rahimieh 2017: 48.

34 Dudoignon 2017: 26.

described them as ideas which brought hatred and conflict among Muslims and divided them.

Khomeini's idea was that only Umma (community, which is used in Persian as *ommat-e eslam* and in Arabic *al-umma al-Islamiyya*, i.e., the world community of Muslims) is important. In Khomeini's vision the Islamic Revolution is the key to solving not only the issues in Iran but all the issues in the whole Islamic world, and eventually for all human beings. His objective was to distance the Islamic Republic from the Pahlavi reign.³⁵ However, Elling³⁶ showed that nationalism did not disappear totally in post-Revolutionary Iran but instead a new "Islamism" was introduced into the political discourse. After the Revolution, permanent instability in the border areas was the result of the Shiite "colonialization" of Iran's border provinces where mainly Sunni communities lived next to the predominantly Sunni neighbouring states.³⁷

The Iran-Iraq War (1980–8) had an important impact on Iranian society, especially for ethnic minorities. First of all, peripheral areas such as Kurdistan and Khuzestan suffered heavily under Saddam Hussein's bombing raids. Some 65 percent of the Kurdish villages were damaged or completely destroyed³⁸ and 16,000 Khuzestanians lost their lives during the war.³⁹ The war put the issues of minorities aside as the most important task and goal was to defend the country, and in such a situation no one is allowed to raise any other concerns. In this intensified environment the last thing the Islamic Republic needed was security concerns due to internal issues with ethnic groups. In addition, a certain amount of paranoia took root in society for the fear of the minorities constituting a "fifth column" in the war, a situation that increased the concerns and suspicion toward the ethnic minorities.⁴⁰ In general, as in case of post-colonial states, the question of minorities is marked by a state's boundaries geographically but also ideologically. This easily puts the minorities into a risky situation of being perceived as "fifth column", as was the case in India during 1965 war, in which the charges of espionage were directed towards Christians.⁴¹

35 Elling 2013: 83.

36 Ibid.: 83ff.

37 Dudoignon (2011: 332) used the term "colonisation" in order to show the characteristic of the Shiite Persian settlement in the Sunni border provinces: "Depuis trente ans, celles-ci sont en proie à un intense phénomène de colonisation persane chiite en provenance du plateau central, à la faveur de la croissance continue de la population".

38 Farzanfar 1992:436; Elling 2013: 54.

39 Elling 2013: *ibid.*

40 Ibid.: 45–46 & 54.

41 Malik 2020.

After the death of Khomeini in 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei became the new supreme leader which brought new waves of Islamo-nationalism within the country. He mostly spoke about the Iranian nation (*mellate-Iran*) and expressed his vision of strengthening the Persian language, especially by the establishment of a council to “purify” the national language.⁴² As of this time the language of Islamo-nationalism moved to the political domain and into official state rhetoric. During the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997), the reconstruction of the country’s infrastructure in the war affected areas was started and, in addition, a general approach to soften the Islamic Republic’s relations with other countries was initiated. During this time, nationalism was used in the State’s discourse to push the rehabilitation process of the post-war country and present a picture of unique national identity.⁴³ However, from 1990–2000, the rise in the power of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC, in Farsi: *sepah-e pasdaran*) in combination with new waves of Islamo-nationalism precipitated several clashes between the Sunni community and the IRGC.⁴⁴

The reformist⁴⁵ president Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) introduced a new idea: *Iran bara-ye hame-ye iranian* (Iran for all Iranians). He did not reject the Islamo-nationalism discourse but emphasised more inclusionary policies, especially for the minorities. As Elling observed,⁴⁶ it was also during this time that the “secular-nationalist (*melli-gara*) and religious-nationalist (*melli-mazhabi*) trends resurfaced after decades of censorship and repression.” As Walter Posch⁴⁷ stated, Khatami’s presidential term brought some ideas from the Islamic left back to the political establishment together with a set of new democratic ideas. During Khatami’s presidency – for the first time – minority members had access to, and were placed on, key positions in local and provincial administration. Furthermore, besides rapprochement with the West, the number of minority cultural activities increased and, for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the country was open for new voices from women, minorities and young people.

Another of Khatami’s promises was the *mardomsalari* (popular rule),⁴⁸ a term used as an equivalence to democracy. However, this word is normally used in the form *mardomsalari-ye dini* (religious democracy) to differentiate

42 Litvak 2017b: 18.

43 Elling 2013: 55–56 & 89.

44 Dudoignon 2011: 335.

45 On Iran’s reformists see Posch 2010: 2–4 (general), 17–20 (clergy) and also 34–39.

46 Elling 2013: 89.

47 Posch 2013: 61.

48 Elling 2013: 59.

from western democracy. This new movement under Khatami opened up the country for a general discussion on civil rights, civil society and dialogue. Nowadays he is still well-known and lauded for his idea of *goftegu-ye tamaddonha* (dialogue of civilisations). Unfortunately for the country's minorities, as Dudoignon⁴⁹ put it, the Reformists' political failures to deliver implementation on their promises made the country's minorities feel betrayed by the Khatami administration.⁵⁰

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) came to office promising to return the revolution to its original ideas and values. Ahmadinejad was part of a continuous movement in Iran known by its radical and extreme Islamic (Shiite) characteristics, i.e. the Hezbollah (lit. Allah's party) movement (*jariyan-e hezbollah*). Being Hezbollahi means to be independent and particularly to be above all other parties, while recognizing Khomeini (later on Khamenei) as the only leader at the top of the political system. During the early years of the Islamic Revolution and even still among the Hezbollahi circles the main slogan is: The only party is Hezbollah and the only leader is Ruhollah (Khomeini) "*hezb faqat hezbollah, rahbar faqat ruhollah*".⁵¹ Ahmadinejad brought neo-nationalism back into the political discourse by borrowing the narrative of the Pahlavi regime, i.e. glorification of King Cyrus⁵² and the Iranian characteristics of Islam, as well as depicting the pre-Islamic Cyrus and Kaveh as the main national heroes (presented in the book *Shahname* by Ferdowsi).⁵³ In his populism, Ahmadinejad indeed endorsed Iran's pre-Islamic civilisation as well as *maktab-e irani-ye eslam* (Iranian school of thought of Islam) which presented Iran as the holder of the true message of Islam.⁵⁴ Another part of the populism agenda was to promote the awareness of the peripheral areas of the territory. Ahmadinejad visited a significant number of disadvantaged border provinces and showed the people of those areas his deepest sympathies for their daily strife and challenges⁵⁵ (crying while listening to their stories). He addressed the minorities in a general way, e.g., the promotion of brotherly love and unity in society without ethnic discrimination as everyone is equal before

49 Dudoignon 2017: 226.

50 For more detailed information regarding the developments of the anti-reformist camp towards the end of the first Khatami presidency see Posch 2013: 62–66 and 66–69 (principalists).

51 For a brief history and development of Hezbollahi movement in Islamic Republic see Posch 2013 as well as *ibid.* 2016.

52 Ansari 2008: 683–4.

53 Elling 2013: 89.

54 Litvak 2017b: 18.

55 Gooya News 1384/2005.

God. However, in cases of issues with ethnic demands and unrest he generally pointed to foreign enemies (the hand of the foreign enemy) with an interest in destroying Iran's national unity.⁵⁶

The state's interventions and security policies among ethnic groups, especially Sunnis, brought unrest among these groups, especially in Sunni populated areas such as Baluchistan.⁵⁷ More precisely, what created an issue among Sunnis was the establishment of the 'Council for the management of the Sunni religious schools" (see Chapter 6), aiming to monitor and regulate Sunni religious education affairs. In addition, by continuing this policy, the authorities started to educate and bring certain Sunni clerics under the umbrella of the state's institutions such as Jami'a al-Mustafa al-Alamiyya (Al-Mustafa International University). This institution, which was funded by the state, was established shortly after the Islamic Revolution and since the late 1990s has also been responsible for incoming Sunni students from abroad. Based on the author's interview with some of the Sunni personnel of madrasas in eastern Iran, there was some emphasis on the fact that "the state wants to educate Sunnis based on their own ideas to control the religious professionals in Sunni communities, to create state-dependent imams".⁵⁸

In fact, appointing imams, educated by and within the state's institutions, who can later on also promote the state's ideas among religious communities, was not a novel project and not only limited to Iran. The idea of salaried *imams* appointed by the government also existed under Kemalist Turkey and in other Central Asian states as well as Xingjiang in China. In this way, among other policies, authorities adopted a policy of "winning over, uniting, and educating [politically] the religious professionals".⁵⁹ Moreover, on a macro level, the "Bureaucratization" of Religious Education through the state's interference, as Mirjam Künkler discussed meticulously, not only referred to Sunnis. In fact, after the revolution, there was strong state intervention by regulating religious authority, religious law, and religious education by the centralization of the admissions and examination processes to the standardization of curricula in Shia seminaries.⁶⁰ In the Muslim world, another example of state-sponsored religious professionals and institutions is Turkey. The Presidency of Religious Affairs (*diyanet*), established by the state, aimed to control Islamic institutions in line with the state's agenda. In the era of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP, or

56 Elling 2013: 99–102.

57 Dudoignon 2017: 225–229; Ibid.: 101–118.

58 Interview with a Sunni teacher located in the province Khorasan-e Razavi, in August 2019.

59 MacInnis 1989: 3; Hann & Pelkmans 2009: 1535.

60 Künkler 2019.

Justice and Development Party) it became a major producer and promoter of the Islamizing agenda of the party.⁶¹

President Hasan Rouhani took up office in 2013 with a high number of votes among the minority-dominated provinces. In addition, he also had the support of Rafsanjani and Khatamai from the reformist side, which sent the signal that his reign would be another opportunity for opening up the country not only to domestic dialogue but also internationally. Rouhani managed to gather several socio-political groups to his alliance, gaining more votes. These groups were: technocratic politicians of which the major player was Rafsanjani, neoliberals, moderate Shiite Muslims, and a large number of Sunni minorities including Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzayi who is the charismatic leader of Iranian Baluchistan.⁶² Rouhani's promise, after improving of the economy and mending Iran's relationship and discourse with the West, was to reach an agreement with the minorities. This would include the guarantee of public freedom of political association and thought, more liberty for the religious activity of non-Shiite confessional groups and, finally, better cultural representation of the country's various ethnic groups.

Regarding the minorities and the rights of the citizen in general, Rouhani's "Citizen's charter of rights" (*manshur-e hoquq-e shahrvandi*) deserves to be mentioned here, although this agenda was not popular with some of the political hardliners and conservatives. These groups criticised the Citizen's charter, claiming that it would undermine the revolutionary values of the Islamic Republic.⁶³ Another action by Rouhani was the establishment of the "Special Advisor to the president in affairs of ethnic and religious/confessional minorities" (*dastyar-e vijhe-ye rais-e jomhur dar omur-e aqvam va aqalliyatha-ye dini va mazhabi*). This advisory office was created in order to observe, guarantee and implement the rights of Iranian citizens belonging to religious, confessional and ethnic minorities. The first advisor to this institution was Ali Yunesi (the Minister of Intelligence under President Khatami from 2000 to 2005). One of Yunesi's speeches is analysed in the next part, in which more background information is also provided. Yunesi had a Special Adviser in relation to the Sunni community (*moshaver-e vijhe-ye ahl-e sonnat*), a post held by Mostafa Zolfaqartalab who was a scholar at the Tehran University with background in Islamic jurisprudence.⁶⁴ In general, the Sunni minority was dissatisfied with Rouhani, although in his government two ambassadors were selected

61 Ibid.: 195.

62 Posch 2017b: 1–2.

63 Ibid. Ibid.: 3.

64 See Sonnatkh 1397/2018 and Sunnionline 1397/2018.

from the Sunni community: Saleh Adibi, Iranian ambassador to Thailand and Cambodia; and Homeira Rigi, Iranian ambassador to Brunei.⁶⁵ The latter was also the first female governor of Ghasr-e Ghand, a city in the south-eastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan. Deputy Oil Minister Emad Hosseini was also the only Sunni to serve in Rouhani's first government (and was still in office in 2019).

2 Iranian Sunni Communities and Their Relations

2.1 *Baluchs and the Deobandi Networks*

The Baluchs are mainly located in the border areas between the countries of Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and while there is a small number of Shiite in some parts of Iranian Baluchistan, the majority of them follow the Hanafi confession of Sunni Islam.⁶⁶ Other groups in the area include the Zekri (Baluchi: *zigris*), which were strongly represented in the region before the rise of the Deobandi school (Sunni) in Iranian Baluchistan.⁶⁷ The Zekris were criticized in the 1930s by the conservative Hanafi school as being "Heterodox" and characterized as *Kafer* (infidel). Finally, in 1936, the anti-Zekri Jihad⁶⁸ took place in Iranian Makran under the influence of Molavi Abdollah Hajji Mohammad, who was the religious leader of the Ismailzayi tribe⁶⁹ and one of the influential Sunni clerics from Dipkur near the village of Sarbaz. In addition to that, there were several Fatwas by Molavi Qazi Abdolsamad Sarbazi⁷⁰ (1902–75). During the conflict, many of the Zekri confessional group died, while large numbers

65 Al-Monitor 2019.

66 Boyajian-Surenians 2004.

67 Dudoignon (2017: 143) summarizes the historical background of the Zikris and explains: "the Dhikri religious system had already been extended to Baluch territory in the late sixteenth century. Known presently in the Indus River Valley under the names of Mahdavis and Da'is, the Dhikris (Bal. Zigris) are distinguished from mainstream Sunni believers by their conviction that the Mahdi has already come to the earth, and journeyed back. The Dhikris also share with a number of Sufis the opinion that a believer can access mystical union with God without the Ulama's intermediation."; see also Pastner 1978: 237; also *ibid.* 1988; Regarding Zikri religious practices and rituals see: Badalkhan 2008. Among the Iranian scholars who studied Zekri religious beliefs see Sarafrazi 1390/2011; Safarzayi; Vakili 1393/2014.

68 The conflict peaked in May 1936 at Jakigur (in the vicinity of Rask), see Dudoignon 2017: 145–50.

69 Renamed Shahbakhsh (King forgiven) during the Pahlavi reign.

70 Well-known as the first translator and commentator of the Quran in the Baluchi language: Dudoignon 2017: 158.

fled to the cities of Torbat⁷¹ and Karachi, or alternatively converted to Sunni Islam.⁷² In Iranian Baluchistan anything associated with the Zekris, including their beliefs and ideology, is still seen as *khorafat* (superstition) and has a strongly negative connotation in society. After the annihilation of the Zekris, Mulla Abdollah together with his supporters and lineage took the leading position and became a power pole in Iranian Baluchistan.

In 1930s, Molla Abdollah Sarbazi (1883–1959) created the Deobandi School in the centre of Iranian Baluchistan.⁷³ The Deobandi school of thought is a Sunni Hanafi stream founded in Delhi in 1867 and developed from the Islamic scholastic tradition from Transoxiana and the Moghul Empire. Furthermore, the Deobandi was also an anticolonial movement against British domination.⁷⁴ After the independence of Pakistan (1947), millions of Indian Muslims emigrated there and as a consequence the Deobandi started to expand. The Deobandi religious schools have a modernized and hierarchical structure and function as a trans-border organization with the overall goal of the re-islamification of global Islamic society.⁷⁵ Deobandi Ulama present their movement as an intellectual endeavour which is loyal to traditions (Sunna). While it seeks to combine Islamic conservative thoughts with the modern western educational system, the schools are well-known for their professionalism and extensive use of modern communication technologies. Their strong network among Ulamas from different tribes, together with their political connections in Pakistan, transformed the movement into a political power which started to spread through political connections with both *jamiyat al-ulama-i*

71 The Zekris are still found in south Khorasan, especially in Tobat-e Jam. The author had the chance to see Nur Mohammad Dorpur (1931–2014), who called himself *Zaker* (the person who practices Zekr) and hear him narrate several mystic stories of the Sufis accompanied with his unforgettable voice and his Dotar.

72 For a brief yet detailed history of the anti-Zekri Jihad, see Dudoignon 2017: 145–50. Another important source of this event and the Iranian Baluch in general is the four-volume monograph by Mahmud Zand Moqaddam, who travelled several times through Iranian Baluchistan in the 1940s and 50s.

73 Dudoignon 2017: 6–8.

74 Friedmann 1971: 158–9, Robinson 2000: 94–6.

75 The Deobandi school participated in the creation of two political parties in the sub-continent: the *jamiyat al-ulama-i hind* (Society of the Scholars of India) and *jamiyat al-ulama-Islam* (Society of the Scholars of Islam). Both parties promote nationalism and supporting the Ulama as main spokesperson in Muslim societies. See Haroon 2008: 51–4, Zaman 2002: 133–5, Dudoignon 2017: 7. Regarding the role and influence of the Deobandi network in the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad (1979–89) see: Abou Zahab; Roy 2002: 30; Haroon 2008: 66; Dudoignon 2017: 7. For the interconnection between the Deobandi school and the Taliban movement and other anti-Shiite extremist groups in Pakistan, see Dudoignon 2017: 7 note 23, and Metcalf 2002.

hind (Society of the Scholars of India) and *jamaat-e tabligh* (Urdu: *tablighi jamaat*).⁷⁶ The latter is a cross border group of active missionaries (Arabic: *dawa*) formed in the subcontinent and active in eastern Iran, though created in Delhi (1926) in order to resist the Hindu missionary activism throughout the subcontinent. This movement has been present in Iranian Baluchistan since 1965⁷⁷ and is a continuously expanding organization with a wide network in over 150 countries.

The Islamisation of the Baluch community brought with it another major shift in the societal hierarchy as the local Khans and Sardars (the chiefs and protectors of tribes) were replaced by the religious hierarchy during the reign of Reza Shah, which placed the status of groups of Molavis,⁷⁸ Ulama and Shaykhs at the top. While the former belonged to the “nomadic pastoralists and horticulturalists” (Baluch status) and mostly practiced the folk religion, the latter came from “settled cultivators” (Shahri status), were wedded to traditional Islamic beliefs and had strong connections to the mosques as their traditional gathering places.⁷⁹ This transformation did not totally wash away the role of the tribal hierarchy, but added a new social role to the Ulama and permitted them to be more involved in the daily life of the Baluch community and provided them enough authority to intervene in social and, later on, in political issues.⁸⁰

Starting from the mid-twentieth century, a series of testimonies indicated the occurrence of four Sufi paths (Arabic: *turuq*) in Iranian Baluchistan: Naqshbandiyye, Chishtiyye, Suhrawardiyye and Qaderiyye. The Naqshbandiyye path, which originates from central Asia, was established in the religious centres of Gandawag/Qasr-e Qand, i.e. a city located in the Sarhadd in the east, Makran (Baluchi: Makkoran) in the south, the area of Kuhvan, and finally southwards in the harbour city of Chabahar. The latter was developed as of the 1950s by Mohammadreza Shah and is today a famous tourist destination for

76 For further discussions on Jamaat-e Tabligh see Sikand 2002: 252–5.

77 Dudoignon 2017:49.

78 In the Deobandi educational system, the degree of Molla is achieved by finishing primary education at a Madrasa and a Molla may obtain permission to be in charge of rural mosques. Those who continue their religious education for around eight additional years can become a Molavi. Before the opening of higher-level religious schools in Iranian Baluchistan, the pupils had to travel to the Ganges or the Indus River to complete their studies. Only graduated Molavis who have successfully passed the complete cycles are entitled to teach in a Madrasa.

79 Dudoignon 2017: 21–23; Salzman 1971: 438–9.

80 Dudoignon 2017: 23–24; Salzman 2000: 336.

Iranians.⁸¹ In the 1970s two important madrasas, established by two Mullazayi brothers, became strongly affiliated with Naqshbandiyye. The first was the Manbaolulum of Kuhvan, which was led by one of the brothers, Molavi Mohammad Omar Mollazayi (Sarbazi), and the second was Jame al-harameyn al-sharifeyn of Chabahar under the supervision of both the current Imam Joma and the other brother, the Sheykh al-hadith (Hadith scholar) of Chabahar Molavi Abdolrahman Mollazayi (b. 1945). These brothers have much in common: they hail from the powerful tribe of Mullazayi; both were prominent figures of the Deobandi school in the Sarbaz; and both have dedicated a large number of their works to the denunciation of Wahhabism. Moreover, Molavi Abdolrahman is one of the most influential and respected Hanafi scholars, and a critic of the practice of Sufi traditions which he has characterized as non-Islamic magic (*khorafat*).⁸²

In general, the Deobandi Ulama have endeavoured to emphasize the unity of the Islamic Law (*shariat*) and the (Sufi) Path (*tariqat*). Indeed, in this way, it separates itself from certain Sufi traditions and rituals such as *sama* (a ceremony which includes the playing of music, singing and often dancing) and specific customs. However, among the abandoned traditions, there remains one tradition upheld by the Deobandi Ulama: the *bey'at* (an oath of allegiance to a teacher or master), which has helped the Deobandi school to expand and reach distant parts of Iranian Baluchistan.⁸³

After Molavi Abdollah Hajji Muhammad, his son Molana Abdolaziz (known as Mollazade, i.e. Molla's son) played an important role during 1970s and 1980s in bringing fame to his father and establishing his influence in the country. Abdolaziz expanded his father's influence in Baluchistan, expanded the Nur Mosque and Jam-e qadim (*azizi*) in Zahedan, and opened the two new mosques Madani (1978) and Makki (1979) as well as two madrasas in Dipkur and Zahedan. The latter madrasa is also known as the Darolulum (The house of learning) of Makki (named after his nickname and located next to the Makki mosque)⁸⁴ – which also is the leading institution of the Iranian Sunni community.

After visiting the founder of Jamaat-e Tabligh, Muhammad-Iliyas Kandhlawi (1885–1944), Abdolaziz encouraged from the mid-1960s the expansion of the Tablighi activities in Iran, with the goal of combating the traditional and

81 Dudoignon 2017: 127. For Naqshbandiyye and other Sufi paths in Baluchistan: Zand Moqaddam 1378/2000: 15–20, 257–60.

82 Dudoignon 2017: 129; Further see Damani 1380/2001: 311–16; Kord 1381/2002: 78.

83 Dudoignon 2017: 132.

84 The Makki mosque is known as the largest mosque in Iran and is still under construction. For further information regarding these mosques, see Bozorgzade 2015: 17–20.

magical practices in Baluch society.⁸⁵ Abdolaziz's influence was not just limited to the sphere of the Iranian Baluch community as he became a political figure and as such the representative of the Iranian Sunni community as a whole. Based on his own biography⁸⁶ and an interview with his son-in-law, Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzayi (b. 1947),⁸⁷ Abdolaziz met Khomeini in Najaf several times during which he presented the Sunni community's interests and expressed their support to Khomeini and the 1979 Islamic Revolution. After the revolution, as discussed previously, Abdolaziz was a part of the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution, in which he criticized Article 13. Together with other influential Sunni clerics, for example Mamusta Izz al-Din Hosayni (a Kurdish religious and political leader from Bane, see next example), Abdolaziz rejected Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih* (Jurisconsult's Government). These political activities were continued by Abdolaziz's son Molavi Abdolmalek Mollazade (1949–96), who after the Islamic Revolution established the organisation *sazman-e mohammadi-ye ahl-e sonnat*, which cooperated with Ahmad Moftizade and the *shora-ye shams* organisation.⁸⁸ Moreover, Abdolmalek is still seen today as a representative of Deobandi Jihad from Baluchistan as he was involved in the Afghan war against Soviet occupation 1979–1989.⁸⁹ In the late 2000s Iranian Baluch Deobandi online sources also appeared which praised Molavi Abdolmalek as a *mojahed* (fighter) who mobilized the Jihad against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.⁹⁰

After Abdolaziz's death in August 1987, his son-in-law and pupil Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzayi became his successor. The last years of the 1980s were critical from many perspectives: the end of the Iran-Iraq war; the death of Khomeini; the start of Khamenei's leadership; and a new period of drought in Iranian Baluchistan with devastating consequences for the local society. In these circumstances, Abdolhamid started to transform the Zahedan nationally and internationally into a centre for Iranian Sunni Islam, similar to Qom for the Shiite. Under Abdolhamid, Darolulum became one of the main centres of Sunni higher education within the Persian-speaking Sunni community with over 2000 male and female students in 2021. In this regard the "Persophonie," as described by Fragner, continues in the form of the expanding Deobandi activities across the border into both Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Abdolhamid

85 Dudoignon 2017: 149f.

86 Bozorgzade 2015: 27.

87 Phone interview with one of his students in July 2019.

88 Regarding this organization and Moftizade, the next example will provide more information.

89 Bozorgzade 2015: 44.

90 Dudoignon 2017: 65.

participates in various conferences together with other Ulamas, for example in Tajikistan and the most recent one in Tatarstan (Russian Federation) in September 2019, where he met Persian-speaking students with different Tajik and Tatar backgrounds in the cities of Bolgar and Kazan.⁹¹ Abdolhamid's activities are limited to those outside the country, as he is also involved in the Islamic Republic's internal political games. In the 1993 presidential election, the Iranian Reformists (or those affiliated with them) achieved their best results in the Sunni areas, especially in Sistan-Baluchistan. On the other hand the conservatives, including Ahmadinejad, had their worst results in those same areas. After a period of insurgencies and conflicts during 2005–2007⁹² and the increase of securitization in Sistan-Baluchistan, Abdolhamid appealed to the population to support Mehdi Karrubi and Mirhossein Mousavi in the 2009 election. After questioning the election's result and forming the "Green Movement", Abdolhamid eventually recognized Ahmadinejad's re-election and, as Dudoignon shows, he reused Abdolaziz's strategy in the early years of the Revolution.⁹³ After the activities of the Green Movement in 2013 and 2017, Abdolhamid and other influential Sunni clerics mobilized the wider Sunni communities in support for the presidential candidate Hasan Rouhani, who then received his highest level of voting support in large parts of Sistan-Baluchistan and Kurdistan (almost 100% of the ballots). The Rouhani administration, as discussed in the previous section, showed at least some symbolic gratitude for the strong election support with an overall reduction of the pressure on Ulamas, as well as the release of Molavi Mohammad-Esmail Mollazayi (alias Abujan, Abdolhamid's son-in-law), who was condemned to ten years imprisonment.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the Reformists' and Moderates' political failure

91 Sunnionline 1398/2019c.

92 Elling 2013: 72–75.

93 Dudoignon (2017: 237) describes this dual policy of Abdolhamid and his predecessor as follows: "Abd al-Hamid accepted Khamenei's rapid endorsement of Ahmadinejad's officially proclaimed re-election. While in his Friday sermons exhorting the security forces not to resort to violence against demonstrators, Molavi 'Abd al-Hamid disapproved of disorder, as suggested by him, potentially profitable to the country's "numerous enemies". At small expense, he defended "the youth of Iran" while invoking stability. In doing so, the Sunni Imam-Juma of Zahidan was making good use of a strategy of opposition cum compromise successfully tested from 1979 onwards by his predecessor Mullazada. This act of subordination did not prevent the Deobandi media of Iranian Baluchistan from exposing the confiscation of the 2009 ballot by the fundamentalists."

94 He, as well as the other of Abdolhamid's son-in-laws (Abdolrahim Shahbakhsh), was charged with "espionage for foreign embassies and intelligence offices in Dubai", see Shia News 1390/2011. Mohammad-Esmail Mollazayi accompanies Abdolhamid in his travels and is currently, besides teaching, in charge of the administration and financial affairs of Darululum of Zahedan.



FIGURE 1 Makki Mosque in Zahedan under construction
DATE: OCTOBER 2019. PHOTOGRAPHER: SINA HABIBI

to keep their promises in general, and in particular when it came to minorities, made the Iranian Sunni communities feel betrayed. In his most recent interview with Sunni Online,⁹⁵ Abdolhamid pointed to this dissatisfaction and claimed that the Iranian Sunni community lost their trust for both the Reformists and Principlists, which led Molana Abdolhamid and Darolulum of Makki to support Ebrahim Raisi in 2021 presidential election.

2.2 *Persian-speaking Sunnis in Khorasan*

In contrast to the previous examples of Sunni communities in Baluchistan, the Sunni population in Khorasan has developed differently. They are notably located in the districts of Torbat Jam, Taybad and Khwaf, where being Sunni is not necessarily associated with non-Persian ethnicity. Exceptions to this are the ethnic groups of the originally nomadic Teymuri tribe of Turco-Mongolic Aymaq, among others. Almost all of the Sunni-populated parts of Khorasan have a rich Sufi affiliation and a connection to its past with a long history of Sunni Islamic education. From the Saljuq period (1037–1194) and up to Teimurid rule (1363–1722), Khorasan became an intellectual centre of the Islamic World.⁹⁶ The most prominent religious figureheads from this time were Molana Ahmad-e Jam (d. 1141)⁹⁷ and Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr of Taybad (d. 1389). However, after the 15th century and especially by the rise of Safavid (1501–1722) and the expansion of Shiite Islam, the Sunni Muslims moved to more peripheral areas.

In Khorasan, as in Baluchistan, the combination of Sufi thought with the Deobandi school spread in the region during modern times. As Dudoignon⁹⁸ briefly states, as of the late 1940s “... the Deobandi teaching came together with the celebration of figureheads of the pre-Safavid Sunni Muslim culture.” Moreover, the Taymuri Sunni Ulama managed as of the 16th century to influence several madrasas and Sunni communities in western Afghanistan, as well as those in Iranian Khorasan during the 19th century.⁹⁹ On the topic of the Taymuri tribe, Mohammad Ebrahim Amir Teymur, known as Sardar Nosrat (1900–88), deserves a particular note here. He was a part of the Iranian parliament for several years during the Pahlavi regime and played a significant role in the debates on banning the women’s veil in 1936 as he was in favour of the ban,

95 Interview with Sunni-Online at July 24th 2019, see Sunnionline 1398/2019b.

96 Dudoignon 2017: 203.

97 For details regarding the importance of Ahmad-e Jam see Fazil: 1994 and Dudoignon 2017: 202–3.

98 Ibid.: 206.

99 Ibid.: 204–5; further regarding the Taymuri see Janata 1989: 136–7, Luft 2002: 64f.

while also holding the title of minister of Employment and Home Office.¹⁰⁰ In 1931, the sub-region of Sistan was separated from Khorasan. Overshadowed by the revival of Sunni education with madrasas in Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, Deobandi Sunnis in Khorasan got official support from the authorities in Iran.¹⁰¹ In addition, during that time, the Sufi networks connected with other Deobandi schools in the Indian subcontinent leading to the promotion of the Deobandi school throughout Afghanistan.¹⁰² Since then, there has been an expansion of Deobandi influence merged with praising pre-Safavid Sunni Muslim culture and figures, for example the above-mentioned Ahmad of Jam and Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr of Taybad.

During the Pahlavi monarchy, which was characterized by the economic segregation of Sunnis in Khorasan following the military exclusion by the central government in the mid-1960s, there saw a rapid urbanization and settlement of Shia in cities such as Taybad, Khwaf, and Torbat Jam.¹⁰³ Further, during the Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878–1944) and the ban on Hijab, certain groups and Ulama from Khwaf and Taybad moved to Afghanistan. It should also be mentioned that during this time the Sunni community of Khwaf had come into contact with Sayyed Hasan Modarres (1870–1837) during his exile in there, before being sent to Kashmar where he was later assassinated. Modarres earned the respect of the Sunni community and was in touch with local Sunni elites.¹⁰⁴ Modarres' influence has remained exceptional and the local authorities in Khwaf named both a main street and a school after him.¹⁰⁵

In 1990s, following the dissolution of the USSR, Sunnis in Khorasan reached Central Asia through the trans-national Sufi traditions (*turuq*). In this regard, the Ulama and their followers mobilized and were reshaped by the Naqshbandiyye Sufi and Deobandi networks. Indeed, these networks connected Deobandi Sunnis from Iranian Khorasan, Baluchistan and Turkman Sahra to Persian-speaking communities in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Further, through to the beginning of the 21st century, the Deobandi madrasas became the new centres for, and active mobilisers of, Persian-speaking Sunni Muslim education both nationally and internationally. Nonetheless, by the end of

100 Dudoignon 2017: 204–5; Kalali 1376/1997: 45–53.

101 Ingram 2018: 5–6, 14–16.

102 Regarding this connection, the memoir of Molla Omar Sarbazi, from Iranian Baluchistan is very insightful. See: Naqshbandi 2019: 30–31.

103 See Dudoignon 2017: 219.

104 See Zangana 2003: 41–43; Ahrari Rudi 2018: 83–84.

105 Interview with Abdolkarim Ahrari Rudi, January 2022.

1990s major restrictions from the state curtailed Sunnis from Afghanistan and Tajikistan studying in Khorasan's madrasas.¹⁰⁶

When it comes to Iranian Sunnis in Khorasan, almost all links bring us to the Molana Khwaja Shamsoddin Motahhari (1903/4–1990). He was of *khwajagan* lineage, and his ancestors go back to Jabir ibn Abd Allah al-Ansari (d. 697 CE), a companion of the Prophet Mohammad, through Molana Ahmad-e Jam. Besides his sacred origin, his education connects him to the major Deobandi madrasas in Herat (in Khirqi Mubarak), Delhi (in Fathpuri madrasa) and Divband (in Darolulum of Divband), where he met Shaykh al-Tafsir of Darolulum Molana Muhammad Idris Kandhlawi (1899–1974), one of the leaders of the Tablighi Jamaat (known as Jamaat-i Tabligh in Iran). In 1946, Molana Motahhari returned to Iran via Afghanistan and settled in Khwaf. In 1961, he established the first Hanafi Sunni madrasa known as Jamea-ye (or Hawza-ye elmiye) Ahnaf-e Khwaf with support from the local endowment.¹⁰⁷ The madrasa was respected throughout Iranian Khorasan and, like its founder, symbolizes the continuation of the golden age of Islamic learning in Khorasan. The management of the madrasa is currently in the hands of Shamsoddin's son, Molana Habibolrahman Motahhari (1956), who studied in Pakistan and upon his return in 1983 expanded the area of the expertise of the madrasa by adding a specialization in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) at Jamea-ye Ahnaf.

In establishing the Jamea-ye Ahnaf, Molavi Shamsoddin Motahhari established the madrasa with the support of Haji Khwaja Mohiuddin Ahrari (1895–1971), the tribal chief and *wali* (governor) of Khwaf.¹⁰⁸ The Ahrari clan belong to the *khwajagan* tribe, descending from the Caliph Abu Bakr on their father's side and the Caliph Omar on their mother's. The Ahrari's ancestors also trace back to the well-known Naqshbandiyye Sufi guide Khwaja Ubayd Allah Ahrar of Samarqand (1404–90).¹⁰⁹ Based on the author's interview with the members of the Ahrari family, they were *imam juma* (Friday prayer leader of a mosque) and *khatib* (Sermon) of Khwaf.¹¹⁰ The family held these important positions until Reza Pahlavi's ban of the Hijab in January 1936. They then moved to Herat to join other family members, returning to Iran in 1951 during

106 Interview with a student at Anvarolulum of Khayrabad, January 2022.

107 The madrasa is located close to the *Hazrat-i Bilal* Mosque, but shortly after the revolution it was moved to the Pir Ahmad district in Khwaf. For more details see: Zangana 1991: 106, 124–5, 131,2; Dudoignon 2017: 203–204 & 209; Bavaqar 2019: 30–31.

108 Interview with Khwaja Abdolkarim and Samad Ahrari in Khwaf, January 2022.

109 Ahrari Rudi 2018: 11–12. The book's author is the older brother of current Sunni *imam juma* of Khwaf Molana Khwaja Sadroddin Ahrari.

110 Interview with Khwaja Abdolkarim Ahrari in Khwaf, January 2022.



FIGURE 2 Molana Haji Khwaja Ghawsoddin (right) and his son Molavi Khwaja Sadroddin Ahrari, the khatib of Khwaf
DATE AND PHOTOGRAPHER: UNKNOWN. THE PICTURE AND RIGHT TO PUBLISH WAS GIVEN TO THE AUTHOR BY MOLAVI KHWAJA SADRODDIN DURING THE AUTHOR'S VISIT TO KHWAF

the reign of Mohammadreza Shah.¹¹¹ After their return, Khwaja Sadroddin Ahrari became the *imam juma* of Khwaf until 1972 and then after that Molana Haji Khwaja Ghawsoddin (1927¹¹²–2011), the son of Khwaja Sadroddin, held this position until 2005. Since then, his son Molavi Khwaja Sadroddin Ahrari has held this position.

Besides the *khwajagan* tribe, the *teymuri*, who migrated to Iranian Khorasan from western Afghanistan in the early 19th century, were also important in developing the madrasas in Khorasan.¹¹³ Among the *teymuri* tribe, two clans are important to mention. The first is the *taheri* clan,¹¹⁴ whose chief is Molavi Haj Habibollah Taheri, the *imam juma* of Sangam and the head of Khadim

111 It should be noted that not all people from the Ahrari tribe returned to Iran. Some remained in Herat and continue to live there today, while others have relocated to different parts of Khorasan, especially Birjand and Tabas.

112 On his birth certificate, which was issued later, his birthdate is given as 1933.

113 Ahrari Rudi 2018: 8–9; Dudoignon 2017: 205–206.

114 Originally located in Miyanrud and Muhammadabad in Khwaf.

al-Quran madrasa. The second is the *salehi* clan, located mainly in Tizab, whose chief is Molla Mostafa Salehi. One important clan member is Molavi Hasan Salehi (1925–2004), the founder of the Mazhar al-Tawhid madrasa of Taybad and *imam juma* of Taybad, who migrated to Afghanistan and studied for eight years in Herat and Qandahar, followed by a further 15 years in Pakistan. After his return, he established the first madrasa in Taybad, Mazhar al-Tawhid in Khalil al-Rahman Masjed.¹¹⁵ After the revolution, the madrasa relocated to a larger space; currently it has around 500 hundred male and 300 female students.

Furthermore, in Taybad, the *fazeli* clan had a major impact in expanding the Deobandi madrasas. A noted figure from Darmiyan in present-day southern Khorasan is Molana Sayyed Abdolali Fazeli (1893–1979), known as Aqa Saheb, Qazi al-Qozzat and *imam juma* of Gazik, who spent much of his life in Herat and studied under the guidance of several Deobandi scholars.¹¹⁶ In the absence of Aqa Saheb, his brother Molana Sayyed haj Qazi Fazel Fazeli (1909–1983), who also studied in Herat, was appointed as *imam juma* of Gazik and headed the village's madrasa from 1940 onward. His son, Molana Mir Abdolali Fazeli (1940–2020), also educated in Pakistan and Afghanistan, maintained his father's position. Currently, Sayyid Fazl Allah Fazeli, Qazi Fazel's grandson, is the *imam juma* of Gazik. Within the Fazeli family another important protagonist to mention is Molavi Hajj Sayyed Mohammad-Said Fazeli (1951–2005), son of Aqa Sahib. He studied in Pakistan in Jamia Ashrafiyya, Lahore, under the guidance of prominent Deobandi teachers including Molavi Muhammad Idris Kandhlawi. After his graduation he went to Herat where he became *imam juma* of the Great Friday Mosque of Herat.¹¹⁷ During that time, together with other Ulama in Afghanistan he was also involved in the Jihad against Soviet forces in Afghanistan.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Mohammad-Said was a part of "Sunni Central Council" (abbreviated as SHAMS in Persian. More detail in the next section). After the 1979 revolution, he started the circles of Quran commentary, Hadith and Islamic dogma at the Sheykh Feyz Mosque in Mashhad – a

115 Other groups of influential people from their community such as Haj Abdolhaq and Haj Abdollatif were involved in establishing this madrasa. But this madrasa is still today called the memorial (*yadigar*) of Molavi Salehi. See also Bavaqar 2019: 164–6.

116 Bavaqar 2019: 38–9.

117 Interview with Molavi Sayyed Ibrahim Fazeli in January 2022. See also: Bavaqar 2019: 145–52; Dudoignon 2017: 208–209.

118 Molavi Abdolmatin Hosseini, originally from Helmand province in Afghanistan and currently the *imam juma* of Nur Mosque in Mashhad, explained in January 2022 the following: "My father, Molavi Muhammad Rasul, who issued a Jihad against Soviet fighters in Afghanistan, met with Muhammad-Said in Herat and asked him to return to Iran's Khorasan and support Afghan students and 'Ulama' who will be their guest in Iran".



FIGURE 3 The main entrance of Darolulum Talim al-Quran va al-Sunna in Shurak Maleki
DATE: APRIL 2022, PHOTOGRAPHER: HESSAM HABIBI DOROH

mosque which was demolished by the authorities in 1994 (for more detail see chapter 7). In addition, in 1980, Mohammad-Said established Darolulum Talim al-Quran va al-Sunna in Shurak Maleki, a village 60 km east of Mashhad, with a mix of students from Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹¹⁹ In 1989, he also opened in Taybad the Jamia-ye Ahnaf madrasa, which became a pillar of Sunni madrasas in Khorasan.

In Khorasan, two other madrasas which opened in the 1970s are important to note. First, Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr, established in Taybad in 1974 and founded by Molana Hasan Karimdadi (1937–2007), another scholar who graduated from Herat and had strong connections with Ulama in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan. During the Soviet – Afghan War, some of the students in this madrasa went to Afghanistan and join the Mujahedin and were killed in the war. Currently, the madrasa's management lies with Molana Hasan Karimdadi's sons: Molavi Abdolbasir (the headmaster) and Mohammad Said (the deputy head). One of its main teachers is Molavi Behzad Feqhi (b. 1980), a well-known figure among Iranian Sunnis in Khorasan and Baluchistan, one of whose speeches is analysed in part three of this book. The second madrasa is Anvarololum, established in 1979 in the town of Khayrabad by Molana Gholam Ahmad Alibayi (1934–2017) with financial support from two wealthy brothers, Haj Abdolghafur and Haj Abdolkarim Rajabalizade.¹²⁰ Molana

119 In 2022, at the time of author's visit, the school had approximately 150 students.

120 Dudoignon 2017: 210, 248.

Alibayi was a direct student of Molana Shamsoddin Motahhari and came from Mashhadrize (meaning small Mashhad, located in Taybad county), a city where the majority of its population are Hanafi Sunni. Anvarololum had around 90% of its students and teachers from Afghanistan. By 1994, there were more local teachers, including Molavi Mohammad Yamadad (1955–2012, he later changed his family name in Pakistan to Jami), who moved to Khayrabad to teach and became Shaykh al-Hadith.¹²¹ He also expanded smaller village schools and opened a religious school for women, which currently has around 100 students.¹²² Anvarololum, with approximately 800 male and female students, is the biggest madrasa in Khorasan. The Darolefta (Fatwa Office) located in Khayrabad and established by Molana Alibayi, is also the oldest Fatwa Offices in Khorasan.¹²³

2.3 *Kurds and Their Socio-political Movements*

The Kurds are located in different parts of Iran, mainly in the western provinces of Kurdistan,¹²⁴ Kermanshah and West Azerbaijan as well as in the north east province of Khorasan (speaking the Kurdish Kurmanji dialect). The majority of the Kurds are Muslim, with the Sunni Kurds mostly located in Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan while the Shiite Kurds are mainly located in Sanandaj and Khorasan as well as in a large Shiite community in Kermanshah. It should be mentioned here that the mystic sects, such as the Ahl-e Haqq (Yarasanis), are also included in the Shiite category despite their pre-Islamic elements.¹²⁵

There are four major Sunni schools of jurisprudence and these are, in order of size, the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii and Hanbali. The Iranian Sunni Kurds predominantly follow the Shafite confession, which is considered by Iranian religious experts a confession actually very close to Shiite Islam, while a smaller group of Kurds follow the Hanbali school. The Kurds in the western provinces, where the majority of Sunnis are of the Shafite school, developed their ethno-political and religious traditions differently due to their religious identity as well as their historical connection with other Kurds in neighbouring

121 For details on his life see Bavaqar 2019: 134–38.

122 Interview with Molana Mohsen Jabbari, teacher and employee of the Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr madrasa, in January 2022. Due to flooding in January 2022, all roads to Khayrabad were damaged and the author could not visit the madrasa. Nonetheless, interviews with some of madrasa's students and teachers were done by phone.

123 Ibid., for more detail on Alibai's biography see Bavaqar 2019: 127–132.

124 The official name of the province is *Kordestan*. Ezzatyar (2016: 75, n. 2) correctly points out the fact that this province is a "misnomer of sorts" as it only contains one third of Iran's Kurdish population.

125 Elling 2013: 34.

countries. The centralisation of Iran during the time of Reza Shah, and the subsequent allied occupation, caused a new socio-political environment for the Iranian Kurds and especially for those in the western provinces.¹²⁶ In 1942 the secular Kurdish leader Qazi Mohammad (1893–1947) founded the Kurdish Society of Resurrection (*komalay jianewey kurd*) which was combined with new socialistic ideas to form the Democratic Party of Kurdistan – Iran, KDP-I (*hizbi demukrati kurdistani eran*), in 1945. This was followed by the declaration of the self-governing Republic of Mahabad (*komara mehabade*) in January 1946 with Q. Mohammad as president. The republic lasted for less than a year, as when the USSR withdrew from the region the Pahlavi security forces entered and had by December gained total control of Mahabad. Finally, in March 1947 Q. Mohammad and two of his associates were hanged for treason and a new era of oppression of the Kurds started.¹²⁷

Inspired by the Iraqi-Kurdish movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the Iranian Kurds continued their activities despite an ongoing conflict with the government. The Iranian Kurds were at that time not just inspired by nationalist and Marxist ideologies, but also by traditional Islamist schools of thought – thus conservative Islamism matched with Kurdish nationalism. In this mixing-process, the regional Sunni clerics were consequently involved in providing a Kurdish identity (Kurdish: *kurdayeti*). At the same time, the secular leftist groups also rose in prominence among the Iranian Kurds, but these were in opposition both to the influential religious Kurdish clerics and the central government (before *and* after the Islamic Revolution). After the Islamic Revolution, the central government managed to drive out all leftist political groups, i.e. primarily the KDP-I, Komalah and Khebat.¹²⁸

Among the Islamist Kurds there are two important persons that should be discussed to understand the Islamic movements to date. Firstly, Mamusta Sheykh Ezzod-din Hoseyni (1921–2011), who was a member of Q. Mohammad's Society of Resurrection and later also allied with the KDP-I in opposition to the Shah regime until the start of the Islamic Revolution. In March 1979 he, among other Sunni clerics such as Abdolaziz Mollazade, rejected Khomeini's proposition of *velayat-e faqih*.¹²⁹ Moreover, Ezzod-din had clear demands regarding the autonomy of Iranian Kurdistan and the protection of Kurdish language and culture. In the summer of 1979, clashes occurred between the Islamic Revolutionary Guard and the Kurds during demonstrations in Mahabad,

126 McDowell 2004: 231–6.

127 See Moradi 1992: 30–3; McDowell 2004: 416–9.; Elling 2013: 35 and Ezzatyar 2016: 21–24.

128 Posch 2017a: 338–41.

129 McDowell 2004: 271; Dudoignon 2017: 220.

Sanandaj and other cities, which made the situation complicated for the government.¹³⁰ Afterwards Ezzod-din was invited to Tehran to meet Khomeini and Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, but the negotiations with the Islamic Republic went nowhere and as a result the Kurdish movement, along with all its participating individuals, were labelled “separatists”. The Islamic Republic’s Revolutionary Guard intensified their oppression of Kurdish groups, several people were condemned to death and consequently all Kurdish groups went underground. Ezzod-din continued his activities together with other Kurdish activists until he died in Uppsala, Sweden, where he had received asylum in the 1980s together with many other Iranian Kurdish individuals that were active in leftist groups.¹³¹

In addition to Ezzod-din, another important activist and intellectual active among the Iranian Kurds and the Iranian Sunni in general was Ahmad Moftizade (1933–93),¹³² going under the name of Kak¹³³ Ahmad. Moftizade (the son of the Mufti) was born in Sanandaj to parents from Pawa (in the west of the Kermanshah region), of which the latter became the starting point for the Muslim Brothers movement in Iran. He studied at the University of Tehran (but did not finish a degree) and also visited several religious schools for minor studies in Erbil, Sulaymaniye and Halabja.¹³⁴ During the 1970s, he was influenced by Ali Shariati and Seyyed Qotb, who also influenced Khomeini and Abul Ala Maududi, the Pakistani Islamic theologian and politician who founded *Jamaat-e Islami* in 1941. Guided by political Islamic and leftist ideologies, Moftizade started with political activities in Sanandaj and Tehran. However, his activities and support for the KDP-I brought him into difficulties with the Pahlavi government, leading to him to spend one year in the Shah government’s prison in 1964, while outside of prison he was continuously monitored

130 Ezzod-din criticized the oppression and the violence against the Kurds, and asked all Iranians to join the Kurds to be with them in the demonstration. See Ezzod-din’s and KDP-I’s statements, as well as a fresh view of the upheaval in the Kurdish areas in the newspapers published in the first months of the Islamic Republic: Hosseini 1358/1979a. Note the interview with Ezzod-din before the Tehran negotiation with Khomeini on December 4 1979: Ibid. 1358/1979b.

131 Further see Elling 2013: 47–8; Entessar 2010: 41. The last interview with Ezzod-din with BBC-Persian: VID 3 (1389/2010).

132 A brief history of Moftizade and the Iranian Kurds is found in the recent book by the American scholar/diplomat Ali Ezzatyar (2016: 49–63) & regarding his activities before the Islamic Revolution: *ibid.*: 79–110. For a detailed overview: Dudoignon 2017: 189–91 & 241. The official homepage of *maktab-e quran* (<http://fa.maktabquran.com/>) offers a variety of material including Moftizade’s books, speeches and letters.

133 In the Kurdish language “brother”, but the term is equivalent to “Mr” in English.

134 Ezzatyar 2016: 65.

and put under pressure by SAVAK (the Pahlavi regime's intelligence service). Two years before the Islamic Revolution, he established the *madrise-ye islam* in Sanandaj, which was later renamed *maktab-e quran*. This religious teaching network was especially active among Iranian Kurds in Sanandaj, Saqqez, Mariwan and other cities. Moftizade rapidly became the spokesperson for the Kurds, and in particular for the urban young people, because of his criticism of "superstition" (*khorafat*), which was strongly present in the traditional Sufi community in the region.¹³⁵ In his speeches, he pointed out several times that Islam in today's world has a different meaning than that of the past, and therefore in our current time Islam should be transformed into a movement for a socio-political agenda.¹³⁶

Moftizade's activities were not limited to just his *maktab-e quran*. On 1 and 2 April 1981 (date 12 and 13 of the Persian month Farvardin, year 1357, in the Iranian calendar) he established the "Sunni Central Council" *Shura-ye Markazi-e Ahl-e Sunnat* (abbreviated as SHAMS in Persian) in Tehran as a civil society group independent from the state or any political party. In accordance with the Islamic system of *shura*, Moftizade hoped to unite the voice of Iranian Sunnis nationwide as a supra-ethnic network. It should be noted that the council's first gathering on the first of April took place exactly on the second anniversary of the Islamic Republic referendum (12 Farvardin 1357). This indicates that the council was not just a representative of but also partly a reaction to the unaddressed Sunni demands after the Islamic Revolution – more precisely to article 12 of the constitution, which allows only Shiites to run for the presidency.

The first congress of SHAMS took place in Tehran in a house belonging to Molavi Nazar-Mohammad Didgah (1936–2021), deputy of Iranshahr in the first elected parliament (1980–84), who was also a member of SHAMS. Besides him and Ahmad Moftizade, the founder of SHAMS, other Sunni Muslim thinkers from the provinces of Kurdistan, Khorasan and Sistan-Baluchistan also took part. It should be noted here that Molavi Abdolaziz Mollazade and his son Abdolmalek also played a role in forming this council.¹³⁷ The Kurdish Sunni scholar Naser Sobhani (1951–1990) who was active in the Iranian branch of the Muslim Brothers and also cooperated closely with Moftizade, had

135 Dudoignon 2017: 190; for further regarding the *maktab-e quran* and the Kurdish nationalism see Khosravi et al. (2016); Ezzatyar 2016: 167–70 & 189–97.

136 Amini 1384/2005.

137 Besides Moftizade and Mollazade, other influential figures in the SHAMS council as well as from the Deobandi school of Khorasan are: Molana Motahhari (Deoband school of Khwaf), Molavi Abdolaziz Allahyari (Birjand), Molavi Seyyed Mohammad-Said Fazeli (Taybad).

to continue his activities underground after the ban of SHAMS. During this time, Sobhani lived in Pakistan where he met Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Burhanuddin Rabbani from the anti-Soviet Afghan Jihad, and in addition created the association “Kurdish Islamic Link” (Pers. *Rabete-ye eslami-ye kord*) in Turkey. Finally, he was arrested in June 1989 and hanged in jail one year later in March 1990.¹³⁸

A year after the establishment of SHAMS, its second and final congress was arranged in Kermanshah on 5–6 August 1982 (14 and 15 Mordad 1361) with more participants as well as increased security pressure from the state. One month after the second congress, SHAMS came to its bitter end consequent to its ban by the government. Moreover, some of its members were arrested, including Ahmad Moftizade, who was sent to jail for almost ten years. While the utopian project of the Iranian Sunnis only lived for two years and never developed in the originally intended way, other forms of it have been established and crystallised up to today. The importance of this short-lived Sunni utopia lies in the fact that for the first time Hanafi Sunnis, belonging to the Deobandi School of thought from eastern Iran, came together with Shafei Sunnis, a nascent Muslim Brothers movement of western Iran.

The SHAMS provided 16 goals which addressed the main agenda of the Iranian Sunni community, as for example “strengthening the Islamic unity among Iran’s diverse communities” (Articles 1–3), “resolving confessional, ethnic and social inequalities and oppression” (Article 4), “supporting the Iranian Sunni community, their social and religious activities in Iran” (Articles 5–9) including establishing religious centres in Tehran as well as higher education possibilities in all Sunni regions of Iran. Furthermore, SHAMS sought to stop the public display of disrespect for Sunni beliefs, as well as to have access to national TV and radio channels for promoting programmes from the Sunni community (Articles 10–11). Appointment of imams and sharia judges in the Sunni regions of the country were suggested to be under SHAMS’s control (Article 12) and the council should also mobilize the resources of the Sunni community for the use of religious purposes (Article 13). Finally, the organization strived to bring all Muslims inside and outside of Iran together and strengthen their “unity and brotherhood” (Article 14–15).¹³⁹ This Charter was originally created during the first assembly of the organization (*kongere-ye tasis-e shams*) in April 1981 in Tehran. In August the year after that, the second

138 Dudoignon 2017: 240, 242.

139 SHAMS 1360/1981.

gathering was organized in Kermanshah, but only one month later SHAMS was banned by Mir Hossein Mousavi's government.¹⁴⁰

After the Islamic Revolution, Moftizade separated himself from the new government, first by rejecting Khomeini's proposal of *velayat-e faqih* and then by questioning the legitimacy of the new constitution.¹⁴¹ Thereafter, Moftizade was naturally seen by the regime as a major threat and was therefore sent to jail for ten years in 1982, of which most of the time was spent in solitary confinement. He died shortly after his release. The pressure and arrests of people connected to Moftizade and his movement continued all through his prison sentence as well as afterwards. The SHAMS gathered for the last time in March 2008 and despite their lack of influence and power, this organization can be seen as the ancestor of the present-day "Sunni faction" (*fraksion-e ahl-e sunnat*) in the Iranian parliament.¹⁴²

After Moftizade, his Maktab-e Quran was divided into two streams:

- Maktab-e Quran-*aksariyat* (majority); under the supervision of Saadi Qoreyshi, who was one of the closest students of Moftizade by whom he was appointed as an observer to the Maktab-e Quran and responsible for communication between Moftizade and his followers during his arrest and after the release.
- Maktab-e Quran-*aqalliyat* (minority); led by Hasan Amini. This organisation is also known as Maktab-e Quran-e Kurdistan. Based on Amini's biography published on the homepage of Maktab-e Quran-e Kurdistan.¹⁴³ (For more on his biography see Part 3).

While Hasan Amini steered his organisation in a more political direction, trying to bring in both nationalist and socio-political demands into its discourse, Qoreyshi distanced himself from politics and was absent from public activity. In light of this, it is important to mention the establishment of "the jurisprudential assembly of Kurdistan's Sunni" (Kurdish: *kori fiqhi komale la zanayani ahli sunnati kurdistani eran*; Persian: *majma-e feqhi-ye olama-ye ahl-e sunnat-e kordestan*, infra MFK) in December 2014 and organised by Amini together with other Mamusta from Iranian Kurdistan. The assembly, with its nine councilors, had five main objectives: Answering jurisprudential questions, promoting moderation, defending Sunni rites, coordinating between different Sunni madrasas as well as their residences (*hojre*) and finally defending confessional

140 Dudoignon 2017:241.

141 Particularly the speech in autumn 1980 in Hosseiniyeh Ershad in Tehran, see AUD 1 (1358/1980), and the talk in Sanandaj the same year.

142 Dudoignon 2017:241.

143 <http://islamkurd.net>.

and legal rights of Mamusta and Tollab (Islamic theology students).¹⁴⁴ The annual assembly continued for four more years either in Sananadaj or in the Nachit village (western Azerbaijan province). During the last gathering in September 2016 Amini stated:¹⁴⁵

This assembly belongs to all Ulama of all provinces of Iranian Kurdistan. This movement is not an (political) organization or party. We invited all Mamustas and all people belonging to all different movements and ideas in the region: Mamustas from Sufi, Salafi, Brotherhood (*ekhvani*), *davat va eslah* and independent. Also (we invited) Mamustas close to the State.... We gather here to unify our decisions. Whoever is aware of the expediency of the Sunni community and the Kurdish Muslims, and thus is happy with the unity of all Sunni Muslims, cannot disagree with this assembly

After the Tehran terrorist attacks on 7th of Jun 2017 by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the attackers were identified as Kurds and consequently the Islamic Republic's security forces intensified its pressure on the Kurdish community in the western provinces of Iran to identify and destroy all networks which could have any connection with ISIL. This policy affected Amini and the newly established assembly. Although the assembly published a short statement denouncing the attack, only a month later on 13th of July another declaration was published which stated that due to "the sensitive political situation in the region and difficulties on the way" the assembly and its activities were temporarily suspended.¹⁴⁶

Another Kurdish political party important to note is the "Kurdish United Front" (*jebhe-ye mottahed-e kurd*, infra JMK). The party was established in 2006 after many reformist politicians, among them Kurdish members of the JMK, were disqualified and excluded from the Majles by the Guardian Council in 2004. The most active members were also disqualified in 2009 ahead of the upcoming Majlis election. Among the active members of JMK it is important to mention a few other reformist Kurdish politicians: Jalal Jalalizade (b. 1960), Bahaoddin Adab (1945–2007), an elected member of fifth and sixth Majles and holder of several posts as deputy chairman of the Confederation of Iranian Industries, member of the Board of Directors of Chamber of Commerce and

144 The council statements and further information in their Telegram channel: MFK 1393/2014.

145 MFK 1395/2016.

146 MFK 1396/2017.

Industry, deputy chairman of Karafarin Bank; Saleh Nikbakht, an active lawyer and spokesman for the political prisoners in Iran; and Bayazid Mardukhi, an economist who studied in Tehran, Maryland and Tokyo and worked both before and after the Islamic Revolution in several governmental departments (Plan and Budget Organization and the ministry of Cooperative, Labour and Social Welfare) and who also wrote several books and articles. Finally, it is also interesting to mention Mohammadrauf Qaderi, one of the early politicians who discussed the rights of minorities after the 1979 Revolution (see Part 1). The JMK party published on their homepage (which is no longer active, although the older files are still accessible¹⁴⁷) ten declarations presenting their general policies which comprised topics such as: the issues of underdevelopment and deprivation of Kurdish society in Iran; the emphasis on the party being there to protect the “values of the Islamic Revolution” and the demands of Iran as a nation; and, finally the main goals of the party which were summarized as “seeking democracy, social justice and equal development.”¹⁴⁸

Kurdish politicians such as Jalalizade belongs to the group of Sunni scholars who came from religious madrasas as well as universities and with a background in Islamic jurisprudence, but which did not adopt religious titles or traditional clothing. Further, they came not just to defend Kurdish culture and minority rights, but were also involved in political issues at a national level. This also characterizes the Iranian branch of the Muslim Brothers, which appeared in Iran in the 1970s and in particular in the Kurdish Sunni community, as well as the ideas of politicians such as Ahmad Moftizade and Naser Sobhani.¹⁴⁹ The Muslim Brothers were further developed in Iran during the 1990s, when they became a political party under the name of *jamaat-e davat va eslah*, which to date continues in that form under the leadership of a Kermanshahi native, a jurist named Dr Abdolrahman Pirani (b. 1954). The party has organized five congresses since 2002 and had a strong impact on public mobilization during the 2013 presidential election.¹⁵⁰

3 The Islamic Republic's Standards

Looking at how the concept of “minority” is *defined* in the Islamic Republic as well as in the public sphere of Iran is the first step here, before proceeding

147 Original address: <http://kurduf.com>, now archived under <https://web.archive.org>.

148 Nikbakht 1385/2007b.

149 Dudoignon 2017: 241.

150 Ibid.: 238–46.

to analyse the standards and framework in which the minority is discussed, i.e. the *public discourse*. Dehkhoda in his lexicon¹⁵¹ defined minority as: “being few, small, fewer part, opposite to majority.” The Iranian academics have a similar definition and have mostly adapted the definition by Capotorti (1991). It is interesting to mention here that Seyfodini,¹⁵² in a short report at the Network for Public Policy Studies (NPPS), which is part of the centre for strategic studies of the president, also incorporated the Capotorti’s definition. Mehrpur,¹⁵³ as well as Parvin and Sepehrifar,¹⁵⁴ defines a minority as follows: “A group of citizens of a country, who are from nationality, race, language or confession different than other groups of people, are fewer in number and do not have the power of the state in their hand.” In 2014, Habibzadeh and Hushyar¹⁵⁵ criticised Capotorti’s definition and after a comparison to the definitions provided by Iranian academics they suggested the following definition: “minority is any group of people who live in the territory of a country, which has at least one of the special national, ethnic, racial, linguistic, confessional or cultural characteristic and want to sustain their identity and features. Thus, they might be vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion.” These definitions include different categories of minorities, ranging from national to cultural. However, the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran only mentions and elaborates upon religious minorities.

Moving forward from the definition to the meaning brings us to the question of on which basis the Islamic Republic’s standards on minorities fundamentally stand. Generally, the question of being a minority is a matter of legal rights and as we will see the Constitution of the Islamic Republic does note that. The current Constitution replaced the Persian Constitution of 1906, and interestingly the Persian Constitution did not explicitly mention minorities or ethnic groups at all as it placed more emphasis on centralist policy.¹⁵⁶ Another corner-stone of the Islamic Republic in general, and the Constitution in particular, is the Twelver Shiite Islamic faith. Some contemporary scholars in Iran argue that religion and confession are the foundation for citizenship¹⁵⁷ while stating that in Islamic political thought, religious minorities¹⁵⁸ are

151 Dehkhoda 2006.

152 Seyfodini 1394/2014: 1.

153 Mehrpur 1377/1997: 176.

154 Parvin and Sepehrifar 1393/2014: 74.

155 Habibzadeh and Hushyar 1393/2014: 64.

156 Salehi-Amiri 1385/2006: 339.

157 Haqiqat 1389/2010: 212.

158 In the Islamic texts the religious minorities are called as *ahl-e ketab*, literally ‘the people of the book, which are Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian.

recognised and can live under an Islamic rule as citizens. Therefore, in the normative discourse of the Islamic Republic, Islam is in general considered to be based on respect and peace and that these two concepts are key for an overall peace-seeking policy (*siyasat-e solh-juyane*)¹⁵⁹ of the Islamic Republic.

Naser Makarem Shirazi¹⁶⁰ – a Shiite Marja (e.g., religious authority) and one of the political figures of the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose discourse is studied in Chapter 2 – shed light on how the concept of minorities is interpreted from an Islamic perspective: “Muslims have the duty to have peaceful interactions with any person, group, association or country, which are not hostile against Muslims, do not plan a revolt against Islam and Muslims and lastly do not help the enemy.” The idea of recognising and giving rights to minorities under specific conditions was also present in Khomeini’s policies, which stated that minorities are protected and no one can abuse them if: “[minorities] do not act against security (as in helping the enemy during war or supporting heathens – e. g. Atheists), do not intend to show behaviours which are not allowed amongst Muslims (such as drinking alcohol, adultery, eating pork, incest), accept the norms of Muslims ..., do not bother and hurt Muslims by thievery, supporting the heathen spies and spying by themselves [i. e. by minorities]”.¹⁶¹ It is clear here that the possibility of rights for minorities in the Islamic framework is entirely conditional, where the conditions are explicitly set by the Islamic Shiite majority group.

3.1 *The Constitution*

In the Islamic Republic’s Constitution, the word “minority” (*aqalliyat*) was used three times and in all three cases refers only to religious minorities, and not to ethnic and linguistic minorities along the lines of the League of Nations definition, hile the word “ethnic” (*qowmiyat*) was used twice (article 15 and 19). In this context of linguistics it is important to note, as Seyfodini¹⁶² argues, that in the Persian language the word *qowm* means “expanded family” and in the plural form becomes *aqwam*. On the other hand, the word for “ethnic,” with western society’s meaning of the word, is translated to *qowmiyat* (in plural *qowmiyatha*).¹⁶³ Consequently, the two words used in the Constitution and

159 Zarei et al. 2013: 59f.

160 Makarem 1375/1996: 387.

161 Khomeini 1378/1999b: 456ff.

162 Seyfodini 1393/2014: 1.

163 See also Posch (2017a: 334): “The terms “ethnic group” or “ethnicity” (*qoum, qoumiyat*) have achieved their current meaning only recently, as dictionaries would still list “nation” and “tribe” for *qoum*. Likewise, one has to take into consideration that “nation” (*mellat*) also means people (*khalq*) and sometimes society (*jâme’è*) – no wonder Persian authors

their corresponding meaning in the Persian language do not translate to the same meaning in other languages used internationally.

The first Iranian Constitution came after the constitutional revolution in 1906. After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the members of the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution (*majles-e khebregan-e qanun-e asasi*) were elected on August 3 of the same year and three months later the final version was completed. A referendum on 2 and 3 of December 1979 approved the new Constitution and it was adopted for the Islamic Republic of Iran.¹⁶⁴

The Islamic Republic generally claims that the Constitution is based on Islamic Sharia law as its foundation (Articles 1 & 2). Moreover, in the discourse of the Islamic Republic it is stated that Islam per-se provides equal opportunities for everyone and that there is no difference between people from different ethnic, linguistic or nationality groups.¹⁶⁵ Religious scholars in Iran¹⁶⁶ argue that in the Islamic jurisprudence, minorities are not described as strangers in opposition to the will and interests of the majority and therefore there is no room for conflicts between the majority and any kind of minority. They further demonstrate, based on Islamic ideology, that people from different ethnic groups or tribes are all “human beings” (*bani-adam*, literally the “children of Adam”) and as such we all have a common origin.¹⁶⁷ This narrative generally presents the idea of “peaceful coexistence” (*hamzistiy-e mosalemat-amiz*) and these two terms are used daily among academics as well as in the public sphere by, for example, mainstream media journalists.¹⁶⁸ However, it is implicit in this discourse that such differences do not matter since everyone is in any case Muslim, with the exception of minor groups of “book people”, i.e. Jews, Christians and Zoroastrian which then still have to follow the country’s Sharia-based law while having the permission to exercise some of their religious-based traditions (i.e. those concerning the private family sphere).

After presenting the Islamic Republic’s form and principles of government in Articles 1 and 2, Article 3 introduces the state’s objectives and the general policies of the Islamic Republic. All these paragraphs address the legal rights belonging to all people in Iran and sometimes explicitly to all Muslims and/or underprivileged people. However, Articles 3, 8, 9, 14 and 15 mention specifically

would often get confused themselves. Yet generally speaking *qoum* resonates positively and non-discriminatorily in Iranian common and scholarly parlance. It is also clearly preferred to “ethnic minority” as employed by Western scholars”.

164 Kauz et al. 2001: 72.

165 Khalaf Rezai et al. 1396/2017: 666.

166 Amid 1370/1983: 23; Hashemi 1390/2012: 108; Khalaf Rezai et al. 1396/2017: 675.

167 Hashemi 1390/2012: 108.

168 Ibid.

the phrases “for everyone” (*baray-e hame*) and “all people” (*hame-ye mardom*) in relation to the following topics: free education (paragraph 3), public participation in political, social and cultural areas (paragraph 8), elimination of unjust discrimination, providing fair opportunities (paragraph 9), equal juridical security in all areas (paragraph 14) and, finally, developing and strengthening Islamic brotherhood as well as public cooperation for all people (paragraph 15).¹⁶⁹ It should be noted here that the phrase “for everyone” is mentioned seven times in the other Articles of the Constitution (20, 28, 30, 31, 34, 43/1, and 151).

Articles 11 to 14 are related to religious/confessional minorities and clearly present the normative narrative which the Islamic Republic uses when it comes to religious minorities in general and the Iranian Sunnis in particular. Article 11 introduces the norms that all Muslim groups form a single nation (Ar. *umma*, Pers. *ommat*) and that the Islamic Republic is obliged to base its general policy on the unity among Islamic nations. After that, Article 12 clearly states that the official religion of Iran is Islam, that the Twelver Jafari (Shiite) is the official confession and that these two are eternally unchangeable. It is important to note here that this Article already existed in the Persian Constitution of 1906 (Article 1). However, in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, it is clear that the Islamic schools of thought belonging to the Sunnis (Hanafi, Shafei, Maleki, Hanbali), as well as the Shiite Zaidi, deserve complete respect and that these groups enjoy the freedom to have their own religious practices, education systems and processes for family affairs such as marriage and divorce. Finally, in areas where a particular Islamic confessional minority are in the majority, this population also have the right to have their own local regulations.¹⁷⁰

Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, one of whose speeches is analyzed in this book (Chapter 4), was a member of the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution. In the Assembly, he and other Shiite and Sunni clerics worked on confessional guidelines. He strongly supported Article 12 of the Constitution (Establishing Shiite Islam as the sole official confession) and opposed the hard critique from the Baluchi Sunni representative Molana Abdolaziz Mollazade.¹⁷¹ Makarem elaborates in his autobiography.¹⁷²

169 Mehrpur 1387/2008: 73; Khalaf Rezai et al. 1396/2017: 676f.

170 Hashemi 2012: 164; Khalaf Rezai et al 1396/2017: 679. It is noted here that other Islamic groups, such as Ismailis and Ahl-e Haqq, are not mentioned in the Constitution.

171 For the recorded video see VID 1 (1358/1979), for a transcript see: Mollazade 1384/2005.

172 <https://makarem.ir> also see: Aliyannezhad 1392/2014: 89.

After I pointed out that Shiite Islam is the confession of the majority of our people, and supported this (establishing Shiite Islam as the sole official confession), a brother from the Sunni community (Molana Abdolaziz Mollazade) unexpectedly spoke after me and opposed my statement. I answered him after that, logically, and made it clear that in a country, the laws should follow one confession ... Although other confessions (here referring to Islamic confessions) should be respected and have all citizens' rights, a plurality of dominant rules is not possible. People are free in their personal life but regarding the public, all have to follow one law.

This is an interesting point, as it becomes clear that the Islamic Republic's official standpoint (here represented by Makarem) is that: the law of the country depends on the official religious confession within the country, not taking any minorities (religious or otherwise) into account; that there is indeed only one law, in this case the Islamic Republic's implementation of Sharia law according to Twelver Shiite beliefs; that other Islamic confessions should have citizen's rights (note that non-Islamic confessions are not indicated); and finally, that there is only freedom in the personal sphere. Now, considering that every Shiite is obliged to follow a Marja – a group which is also a part of the political leadership of the state – it naturally follows that the personal sphere in which freedom separate from state involvement could be exercised is limited for the majority of the population, and consequently it is to be expected that the same limitations are applied upon minorities (religious or otherwise). So in conclusion, there is not a great deal of freedom left to exercise in any sphere and the religious minorities (Islamic or otherwise) have consequently no possibility for self-determination.

In summation, Article 12 shows the recognition and the status of the Iranian Sunnis without explicitly mentioning them, and more interestingly the Constitution does not put them into the category of minority – similar to case of the Pakistan's Shia community, who are not recognized as religious minorities.¹⁷³ However, Elling has shown that this Article is more of a “symbolic gesture” and in effect the Constitution makes non-Shiite Muslims as well as non-Muslims second-class citizens.¹⁷⁴

It is in fact Article 13 which lists the recognised religious minorities, i.e., the Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranian. Under the Constitution these religious minorities also have the right to exercise their religious ceremonies, have their own educational systems and are free to exercise matters associated with

173 Fuchs & Fuchs 2020: 59.

174 Elling 2013: 51.

family affairs. Article 14 claims to proceed to secure the rights of the religious minorities and indicates that it is the Islamic Republic's – and all Muslims' – duty to treat non-Muslims with respect and fairness. The important caveat here is that this Article is valid only as long as a minority has not conspired or acted against Islam and/or the Islamic Republic of Iran, i.e., the minority is clearly treated as a collective and not as individual people. Consequently, when a small group, or even an individual, of another confession acts or speaks in opposition to the Islamic Republic or even the local politicians or clergy, the whole minority group in the entire country may be collectively punished and/or stripped of certain rights or benefits. Finally, Dudoignon¹⁷⁵ shows that the Iranian Sunni community is not recognised as a minority following the definitions in the Constitution, and thus came under the umbrella of all Muslims, albeit excluded from some rights held solely by the Shiite majority population. This lack of status (shared with all non-Islamic confessions) moved the Iranian Sunni communities to expand their influence and activities to protect their identity.

The third chapter of the Constitution (Articles 19 to 42) presents in general terms the rights of the citizens, or as denoted in the Constitution "Rights of Nation" (*hoquq-e mellat*). The first two Articles of this chapter are important parts which address the equality before the law of all Iranian citizens. These two Articles are always exercised within Iran when the minority groups' rights are debated, although the word minority is not used in any of the Articles.

The people of Iran enjoy equal rights, regardless of the tribe or ethnic group to which they belong. Colour, race, language, and other such considerations shall not be grounds for special privileges (Article 19).

Members of the nation, whether man or woman, are equally protected by the law. They enjoy all the human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights that are in compliance with the Islamic criteria (Article 20).¹⁷⁶

Further, Article 26 in this chapter allows the association (*anjoman*) of specific religious minorities to take place and that no one can prevent/force them from participating in their congregation(s). However, this right can only exist on the condition that these associations/congregations do not "neglect the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, Islamic criteria, and the foundation of the Islamic Republic" (Article 26).

¹⁷⁵ Dudoignon 2011: 329–330.

¹⁷⁶ English translation of the constitution is from Papan-Matin 2014.

Regarding political rights, Articles 64 and 67 address the religious minorities' right of participation at the Islamic Consultative Assembly (*majles-e shora-ye eslami*) known as Majles. Article 64 grants a seat to each religious minority: "The Zoroastrians and the Jews each elect one representative; the Assyrian and Chaldean Christians elect one representative together; the Armenian Christians of the North and the South each elect one representative".¹⁷⁷ It is also stated in Article 67 that all representatives should take an oath before the Quran, as well as other religious books as applicable for the representatives from religious minorities. Regarding the representation of the Sunni community in the Majles, there is nothing mentioned in the constitution. However, from the election law of the Majles (Article 30 paragraph 1) the candidates are required to "believe and be practically bound to Islam" (*eteqad va eltezam be islam*) with the only exception of religious minorities. Thus, there is no specific process or regulation for the Iranian Sunnis, and in the words of Hashemi¹⁷⁸ "... administrative and bureaucratic rights regarding most of the state's offices include all non-Shiite Iranians." Although these two Articles include religious minorities into the political system, Article 115 demands that the president has to be of "Iranian origin" and that he has to believe in the fundamentals of the Islamic Republic of Iran and practice the official religion of the country, i.e. Twelver Shiite Islam. Thus, the non-Shiites (and also non-Twelver Shiites) are automatically excluded. Hashemi explains this Article by stating that Shiite Islam, as Iran's official religion, is an ideological and social reality and that "protecting this heritage is the will of a majority of Iran's nation. Thus, the president, who is the representative of the whole territory with this majority nation of Shiites, firstly should believe and practice the country's official confession, and secondly promise to be the protector of the official confession".¹⁷⁹

3.2 *The Era of President Rouhani*

This book puts Rouhani's era in a new section, separate from that of the Islamic Republic's standards, although that does not mean that it is not a part of the Islamic Republic. The reason is that Rouhani's additional standards are a framework within the Islamic Republic but are limited to Rouhani's presidency, with a significant risk of being entirely abolished after his presidency. Furthermore, some of Rouhani's policies relating to minorities are still to be implemented as they are under heavy criticism by domestic political hardliners. As this book focuses on the timeframe as of 2013, the suggested

177 Also stated in the Majles election law (Article 2 proviso 1).

178 Hashemi 1390/2012: 599; see also Khalaf Rezai et al. 1396/2017: 681.

179 Hashemi 1390/2012: 159.

socio-political developments to a certain degree institutionalized by Rouhani are important in providing a clear picture of current day Iran.

One of the main slogans in Rouhani's policy from the beginning was the statement of "Win-Win policy" (*siyasat-e bord-bord*). He used this in his election campaign, during the nuclear deal process and in domestic communication with his political rivals as well as in relation to minorities. This strategy differs from Khomeini's general understanding of minority, in which minorities are protected as long as they do not cross the defined "red lines" of the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, Rouhani's approach is that the state helps and supports the minorities and in return these minorities support and cooperate with the state. Rouhani's policies related to minorities were domestically widely regarded as a step forward for Iran, although on the operational level many of his promises – and policies – were not implemented due to his political limitations.¹⁸⁰

In the following sections the policies provided by Rouhani's administration which address the religious and confessional minorities are listed and discussed. At the end, the content of these documents is summarised and categorised in order to proceed with a comparison.

3.3 *Declaration Number 3*

During his election campaign Rouhani often mentioned the rights and issues related to minorities. One of his slogans was "ethnic participation for Iran's ennoblement" (*mosharekat-e aqwam baraye iran*).¹⁸¹ He also visited several provinces and met with tribal leaders and well-known respected individuals among minorities.¹⁸² Rouhani collected and formulated particular points which were published as a declaration on 30 May 2013 on his homepage.¹⁸³ This declaration starts with the famous slogan "All places of Iran are my home" (*hameja-ye iran saray-e man ast*) and has the title "Rights of ethnic (groups), religions and confessions" and comprises 10 Articles. These Articles showed his overall plan and view of minorities in Iran by the time of the elections and was later included in an extended form in the Citizen's Charter of Rights. One important point of the declaration is that the word minority is never

180 ISA 1394/2016.

181 Khabaronline (1392/2014).

182 One of his early meetings was with Arab-origin Shaykhs from the province: Mashreghnews 1392/2013a. Further in his visit to Zahedan he posted the idea of "Iran for all Iranians" used by Khatami. Rouhani also mentioned that during his presidency the "security environment" (*fazay-e amniyati*) will disappear to be replaced by "moderate and cultural environment" (*fazay-e etedal va farhangi*).

183 Rouhani (1392/2013).

mentioned in the text. The introductory paragraph elegantly begins with the poetic phrase “Our beloved Iran is a garden perfumed by different regions, languages, religions and confessions.” By this statement Iran is at the outset described as a garden of diverse flowers or plants and each group a kind of well-scented flower. In addition, in this paragraph it is also declared that the president is obliged to implement these 10 Articles and not just demonstrate them, which are part of the Nation’s Rights (Articles 19–42) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic.

In Articles 1 and 4 the declaration demonstrates that the implementation of minority rights already exists in the Islamic Republic’s Constitution in order to avoid discrimination. Interestingly, the “elimination of discrimination on all levels and in all forms” is the sole topic of Article 8 in Rouhani’s declaration, which clearly shows the importance and relevance of this issue. Articles 2 and 3 elaborate on “public participation” (*mosharekat-e omumi*) regardless of language or confession, aiming at implementing “competent primacy” (*shayeste salari*) at all political as well as administrative levels for all citizens with an “equal circumstances” (*sharayet-e yeksan*) approach, and here include also local populations in the local administration(s) in order to politically empower them. This is then added to in Article 5, in which the culture and literature of minorities should be protected as “ancient Iranian heritage” (*miras-e kohan-e irani*). Short- and long-term studies and planning to improve peripheral areas of Iran are declared in Article 7, with improvements typically of infrastructure, the economy and socio-cultural aspects of society. Article 9 proceeds to include an important and new approach by Rouhani related to a change in the “security view” (*negah-e amniyati*)¹⁸⁴ of minorities:

Changing the security view toward Iranian ethnic and cultural groups and changing the politicised-securitised construction and methods to the scientific and profitable system, in order to make efficient use of the rich material and human resources of these regions.

When it comes to religious and confessional minorities, the core recommendations are presented in Article 6. It is stated that the followers of other religions and confessions should be respected, they should have freedom to practice their beliefs in an equal way and no one should intervene in their religious and confessional matters. At the end of Article 10, the president delegates the

¹⁸⁴ The objective of this policy was to change the securitization policies of Ahmadinejad, which led to several outbreaks of unrest during 2005–7 (Elling 2013: 101ff.). Regarding the so-called “security view” see *ibid.*: 147, 195–6.

planning and coordination of all nine Articles to one of his advisers, a position to which the Special advisor Ali Yunesi later was appointed.

3.4 *Citizen's Charter of Rights*

The Citizen's Charter was published in November 2016 by Rouhani, and for the first time in Iran such a document was also published on a specific webpage with an associated application for mobile phones with the Android operating system.¹⁸⁵ In the introduction of the Charter it is mentioned that it relies on God, follows the tradition of the Prophet, Shiite Imams, the thoughts of the founder of the Islamic Revolution and the guidance of the Supreme Leader.¹⁸⁶ The document also states that the rights therein are based on the Nation's Rights of the Islamic Republic's Constitution, although the word "citizen" (*shahrvand*) was never explicitly used in either of the Constitutions of 1906 or 1979.

This Charter is solely about the citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the introduction elaborates on who are actually considered to be Iranian citizens, and thus who are included in the Charter:

all citizens of Iran, including both the Iranians residing inside the country and abroad, irrespective of gender, age, wealth, economic or physical, mental and psychological health status, socio-political tendency, lifestyle, religious belief, race, tribe or language¹⁸⁷

So, by this definition the citizen rights are applicable to all Iranians regardless of them being in a minority or a majority. The overall linguistic statistical trends in the Charter provide some insight into the emphasis on the various aspects of minorities:

- The phrase "all Iranian/people/persons/citizens" or "every Iranian/citizen" is stated 19 times, in order to emphasise the approach of inclusion relating to the positive rights of the citizens of Iran (see the Charter's introduction and Articles 13, 26, 36, 45, 47, 48, 54, 66, 85, 86, 89, 103 and 113).
- The negative rights of the citizen are also included in the Charter 6 times, represented by the phrase "nobody, no-one, no person" (see the Charter's introduction and Articles 12, 25, 43, 49 and 56).

¹⁸⁵ Citizens' Rights 1395/2016.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

- The point that all citizens should be treated equally (*barabar, yeksan*) is stated 10 times (see the Charter’s introduction and Articles 7, 11, 15, 16, 68, 70, 78, 83 and 108).
- The emphasis on non-discriminatory policies appears quite often and is mentioned 12 times (see the Charter’s introduction and Articles 4, 8, 33, 34, 43, 77 and 82).

That said, the Charter has sections specifically addressing the cultural, ethnic and religious (including the variety of confessional groups) without using the word minority. The fact that at the beginning of the Charter two paragraphs specifically point out this topic, shows the importance of this matter to Rouhani. In total ten of the 120 Articles mention the rights of other cultural, ethnic, religious and confessional groups (Article 10, 26, 33, 77, 96–99, 102, 110).

3.5 *12th Government’s Program*

In April 2017, after Rouhani’s re-election, he published another document in order to provide a statement of his general policy and plans for the upcoming term. This document had the title “12th Government’s Program” with the subtitle “Freedom, security; peace and progress.” In the third chapter of this document it is written that one of the first Rouhani administration’s achievements was the ability to respect the rights of the religious and confessional minorities as well as Iran’s ethnic diversity.¹⁸⁸ In comparison to the Citizen’s Charter of rights, which does not use the word “minority”, the 12th Government’s Program preferred to use the phrase “Iranian ethnic, religious and confessional minorities.” The document describes under point 3.3.7 all these groups as “... resources and a part of Iran’s cultural and social diversity and [the government] is responsible for embedding their rights in the constitution and strengthening the social, political and economic unity of Iranian society”.¹⁸⁹

The part of the document with the title of “increasing ethnic and minority participation” has the following pillars:

1. Respecting Iranian ethnic, religious and confessional diversity
2. Implementing the constitution’s Articles pertaining to ethnic minority groups
3. Sustainable development and full employment in peripheral areas by redistributing national resources and introducing productive economic policies
4. Appointing human resources from ethnic and confessional minority groups to political and operational posts

¹⁸⁸ Rouhani 1396/2017: 79.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid: 84.

As the title of point 3.3.7 of this document suggests, it mostly revolves around participation and inclusion. Another important aspect of this short section is its emphasis on the economical and overall development of the “provinces,” which was not particularly present in the earlier documents. This shows the general turn of Rouhani’s presidency from security to a view more focused on economic developments through inclusion and collaboration. Indeed, as Rouhani’s economic policies did not yield any actual results and the historic nuclear deal (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) did not improve the Iranian economy as promised on the domestic political scene, the result was that Rouhani’s overall policy did not satisfy the minorities’ demands.¹⁹⁰

TABLE 1

		Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran	Declaration number 3	Citizen’s charter of rights	12th Government’s Program	Total
Minorities have	equal and non-discriminatory opportunities and rights	3/3, 3/9, 3/14, 12, 19, 20, 64	1, 2, 6, 8	33, 77		13
Minorities have	freedom to express, preserve and develop their identity and associations	12, 13, 26, 67	5, 6	26, 99, 102		
The state should	provide participa- tion, representation, engagement and inclusion	3/8, 3/15, 26, 64	2, 3, 9	33	3-3-7-4	9
The state should	promote diversity and pluralism			96, 98	3-3-7-1	3
The state should	provide assistance (legal, education abroad, policing)		7, 10		3-3-7-3	3

¹⁹⁰ Chapter 3 will depict some of the reactions to this policy by presenting different voices from Sunni society.

TABLE 1 (cont.)

	Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran	Declaration number 3	Citizen's charter of rights	12th Government's Program	Total
The state should	prevent/reduce hostility, violence and tensions against minorities		10, 110		2
Minorities have	rights to interac- tions/access/receiving support with/to/from other states		97		1
The state should	encourage dialogue, trust and conflict resolution				0

Comparison and Conclusion of Part 1

The objective here is to answer the first research question of this book (see the Introduction of this book): How is the concept of religious/confessional minority represented in the normative layer of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in comparison to other cases in Asia? In answer to the above question, the following section will elaborate on how the state in Iran, similarly to other Muslim majority countries, navigates between Islamic and liberal traditions.

The Islamic Republic states that its standards have their origins in Shiite Islamic Law (e.g., Sharia) and Islamic Ideology. One aspect of Shiite theology is for example, the *adl* (justice) principle, which is the second principle of the religion and addresses social justice in human society. Consequently, in the documents of the Islamic Republic, the minorities and their protection are connected with the *adl* principle, i.e., justice as described by Shiite Islamic Law. In this context, it is important to note that the Constitution and other documents of the Islamic Republic use the word *hoquq-e ensani* (human rights, where human is an adjective) instead of *hoquq-e bashar*, where the latter is a common translation and refers to the international understanding of human rights. In conclusion, the Islamic Republic thereby differentiates its domestic policy from that of the international human rights policies without either ignoring or rejecting it – it is, simply put, a linguistic play to avoid trouble or discussion. Furthermore, the documents of the Islamic Republic generally refer to minorities as collectives, and not on an individual level. Rights are both conditioned and limited by a set of “rules” provided by the State, and a minority – as a group – can lose their rights if these rules are broken.

The Islamic Republic’s Constitution only acknowledges *religious* minorities and states that a specific race, language or culture does not entitle a group to more or less rights, and by doing so makes these characteristics irrelevant in terms of minority discussion. In Rouhani’s Declaration Article 3 and the Citizen’s Charter of Rights, the word “minority” is in fact never used. In the Citizen’s Charter Rouhani incorporates all Iranians, both domestic and in diaspora, as well as the minority groups and various social/political groups, into the category of “citizen” (*shahrvand*). Later, in 2017, Rouhani’s administration published an additional document which states both the terms “Iranian ethnics” as well as “religious and confessional minorities.” This shows a general issue inside the Islamic Republic, in the use of different definitions of the same concepts and usage of a variety of different words for the same, or similar, things. For instance, in the words of several of the Islamic Republic’s officials it can be asserted that the word *aqalliyat* (minority) has a negative connotation and thus

they try to avoid it. This can be compared with the Austrian government, which in its official discourse uses the term *Volksgruppen* for its national minorities, thus referring to ethnic groups with a positive – or neutral – connotation as it declares their belonging to the “Volk” i. e. the people of Austria.¹

Investigating and analysing the main documents from the Islamic Republic of Iran (the Islamic Republic’s Constitution and Rouhani’s documents) shows that the following three topic areas dominate the discussion:

- a. *Equal and non-discriminatory rights and opportunities*, which is statistically presented most frequently in the texts (13x).
- b. In shared second place are the phrases/concepts of *Participation and inclusion* (9x)
- c. In third place is the topic *Freedom of expression* (9x).

How the reality on the ground is, and whether the Iranian Sunnis themselves acknowledge these three points, is another story, which I elaborate on further in Part 3. But a quick overview of the current situation in the era of Hasan Rouhani shows that there have been some political shifts toward more participatory and inclusive policies. For instance, in addition to Sunni representatives in the parliament, which have been there since its establishment, Rouhani’s presidency brought additions to that with two ambassadors, a deputy minister and the appointment of Yusuf Basanjide (Turkman) to be Governor of the Gulistan province.² Further, by appointing a special advisor in affairs of ethnic and religious/confessional minorities, Rouhani tried first to encourage dialogue and trust, and second, to provide more assistance to minorities as well the state’s organisations and institutions. In addition, as was mentioned in the Rouhani government’s programme, ethnic groups, who are to a large extent Sunni, have the right to interact with groups in other states which share the same ethnicity or religion – a policy that at least at the beginning of his presidency was promoted, up to a certain point. However, the Iranian Sunnis relations with other Sunni communities in other countries, especially in the Indian sub-continent (due to historical and ideological ties with the school of Deoband) and thanks to Persophonie, is not something new. Dudoignon demonstrated several events which show the cross-border relations of the Iranian Sunni communities by “[o]pening an era of utilisation by Iranian diplomacy of the country’s Sunni soft power”.³ However, this is a general policy of the Islamic Republic to oppress and limit the activities of the Iranian Sunni communities

1 VoGrG 1976.

2 Dudoignon 2017: 246.

3 Ibid.: 247–9.

within Iran, while simultaneously letting them operate and expand outside the Iranian territory, as for example in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.⁴

Altogether, it seems that the Islamic Republic created a framework and standards in which some rights for minorities are guaranteed. It seems also that these standards are developing, and the question of minority is becoming clearer in the official discourse. Nevertheless, having these standards does not mean that they are all implemented. Demands for the previously granted rights in the Constitution by minority groups, notably by the Iranian Sunni communities show a lack of cohesive policy on the operational level and direct or indirect discrimination against the officially postulated minority rights. For instance, the state has to date not allowed the Iranian Sunni minority to build a mosque in the capital city Tehran, due to what in Iran is called *barkhord-e saliqei* (the based on taste incident, see Chapter 6). In general, and in a comparative outlook with the wider region, the relations with minorities, particularly with Sunnis, the era of Hasan Rouhani can be characterized by privatization, secularization and securitization.

First, a fundamental aspect of Rouhani's internal policy was the mass privatization of the economy and public goods. The agenda of economic liberalization, deregulation and privatization in Iran is similar to case of Egypt in late 1970s, started by Sadat's regime and continued by the Mubarak's administration, which impacted the religious domain and its dynamic in relations with the state. In the case of Egypt, during Mubarak's privatizations, the country witnessed a mass growth of both Christian and Islamic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which provided the kind of services that in the past had been maintained by the state. Consequently, the organized transfer of public wealth to private hands has tied the religious communities to their religious authorities (Church or Mosque) far more than the state, which failed to support its citizens.⁵ Put differently, the free-market economy and privatization of public services has led to an expansion of religious authorities and their influence and power among the citizens. As a concrete example, I was fascinated by the influential charity organizations under the umbrella of the Makki Mosque in Zahedan. The Mohsenin charity institution, funded by private donors and fully independent from the state, ran several projects to support the economically and socially disadvantaged population of Sistan-Baluchistan. Interestingly, this institution was also very active in supporting other Sunni communities in Iran outside of the Sistan-Baluchistan province. For instance, during the flood of 2019 in Golestan province, where a large community of Sunni Baluch and

4 Dudoignon 2011:336.

5 Mahmood 2015a: 83–4 & 92; Gaffney 1991: 32.

Turkmen are located, the Mohsenin charity institution, together with some other smaller Sunni charity associations, mobilized support for the affected Sunni communities in Golestan. In fact, the rise of the Mohsenin charity institution, in an era of economic hardship, once again showed the authority of Zahedan's Makki institution and their growing influence and involvement in the Sunni population, who feel left out by the central government.

Second, it was not only the continuous privatization which emboldened the religious domain during Rouhani's presidency, but the process of "secularization" was also an important indicator. As a result of regulating religious minorities, which had been increased since President Ahmadinejad, the power of religion became more important, rather than less, to the identity of populations. Comparing with the situation in the wider Middle East, and more precisely in modern Egypt, we can see how the sociological and historical project of secularization has transformed the religious life of Egyptians. In fact, this transformation has led to "the intensification of interreligious inequality and conflict, the valuation of certain aspects of religious life over others, and the increasingly precarious position of religious minorities in the polity".⁶ In addition, following Mahmood's argument, making the state the arbiter of religious equality led to the utmost paradoxes of secularism. Indeed, this downgrades equality to the politics of rights and recognition and strengthens the power of the state to intervene in religious life, which intensifies religious polarization and inequality.⁷

Last but not least, quite similarly to other states in the Middle East and Asia, religious minorities are tied to the national-security practices of the state. In this regard it is critical to note that minorities in the case of Iran and the wider Middle East as well as in Asia, as distinct from the Jews in Europe, are territorially bound and were motivated to establish their own homeland within the state in which they were located. This ambition, of course, was seen as a security threat to state sovereignty and required alternate political action. This can be seen in the ongoing struggle of the Kurds in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, or Baluchs in Iran and Pakistan, but also in the secessionist movements in the Balkans and Yugoslavia. The issue becomes more complex when it ties in with wider elements such as terrorism, as has been the case in the Egyptian state since the 1990s, where the militarization and securitization, discursively and strategically produced as a fight against "Islamic terrorism" when Islamic

6 Mahmood 2015a: 15. Saba Mahmood (ibid: 107) further argued that in Egypt, secularism is imparted with the legacy of Islamic and Oriental Orthodox Christianity, both consequential to the shape that majority-minority relations have taken in the present.

7 Ibid: 211–12.

militancy was at its highest point, led to the further politization and sectarianization of religious life.⁸ In words of Saba Mahood, in the Egyptian state “despite having decisively defeated these groups in the early 1990s, the Mubarak regime continued to deploy anti-Islamist rhetoric as a means to suppress all forms of political dissent”.⁹ By looking at the history of post-Revolutionary Iran, as this Part of the book has shown, I found it noticeable that regardless of which policies are implemented – from Rafsanjani’s progressive developments, Khatami’s quasi-liberal reforms, Ahmadinejad’s populist agenda to Rouhani’s attempt at a policy of economic and social liberalization – inequality and securitization has been a constant feature of Iranian Sunnis’ life. Indeed, the protests which started at the end of 2019 that shook Rouhani’s administration and his overall popularity, were to a large extent a part of a continuous exclamation caused by poverty and destitution in which many Iranians live, including Iranian Sunnis.

8 See Madkusi 2019: 67. For more on sectarianization in the Middle East see Hashemi & Postel 2017.

9 Mahmood 2015a: 85.

PART 2

*Unity and Its Enemies,
Perspectives from Shia Elites*



Introduction to Part 2

Shia and Sunnis have been living together for a long time in this country. We have had some issues between ethnic groups, we should not let these happen, and we should be careful. Someone might say something wrong, and the other side will defend themselves but we should not discuss it (publicly) and must maintain our unity.

ALI KHAMENEI (9 January 2022)



The following two chapters portray the major discourses of the Shia elites within the Islamic Republic in the time span of 2013 to 2021. These protagonists are Ali Khamenei, Ebrahim Raisolsadati, known as Raisi, Ali Yunesi, Naser Makarem Shirazi, and Javad Karimi Qodusi. In order to understand the discursive characteristics that generate power and establish boundaries, a single speech from each of these protagonists, which is translated by the author (see Annex 1), is analysed and categorized through the next two chapters. These examples, which all are from the era of Hasan Rouhani, will further present the status of the Iranian Sunnis, and the way in which they are presented in the Islamic Republic's discourse. Before diving into the signature ideas of the speeches, as part of the introduction a background to each protagonist will be provided.

Analysing the examples in the next two chapters shows that among the Shite elites within the Islamic Republic two major points always come to the surface when the elites are talking about the Sunnis: first is the discourse of *unity* (chapter 3), which emphasizes the importance of the unity between Sunni and Shia by promoting ideas such as *Taqrib* (rapprochement). In this chapter, I analyse how the idea of unity is institutionalized in the state's narratives and how it drives the political machinery of the state. Second, the analysis of the examples clearly demonstrates that the idea of *unity* is interestingly tied with the threat from the *enemy* (chapter 4). To put it differently, the relations between Sunni and Shia in Iran are reflected as ideal, even "glorious" and "divine," which presents the country's power regionally and globally. But, on the other hand, as confessional relations in Iran are tied with broader interest in the region, it is therefore a matter of geopolitical contestations which are in play and thus reflected in the speeches given by the Shia elites in Iran. Taken as

a case study, in this part, I will look at the situation of the Sunnis in the city of Mashhad, which enables us to understand the micropolitics of management of interconfessional relations in Iran.

1 Protagonists

1.1 *Ali Khamenei*

Ali Khamenei (b. 1939 in Mashhad) regularly gives speeches at a variety of events. In his speeches and notes he introduces the overall policy of the Islamic Republic, as well as providing the values and missions for the Islamic Republic in general. However, in his speeches he does not address the Iranian people, but like Khomeini he provides instructions to all Muslims – even aiming at young people around the world. Khamenei's speech was chosen not only because he has the most influence in the Islamic Republic's policy making, but also because it presents the State's discourse towards Sunnis in both the normative and operative layers.

Ali Khamenei lived in a poor neighbourhood in Mashhad, although his father (Sayyid Javad) was born in Najaf and lived in Tabriz until 1918. Ali Khamenei's education started in Mashhad, then continued in the Qom and Najaf seminaries. After 1964, when he returned to Mashhad, his political activities also expanded among the younger students.¹ He continued his *tafsir* (exegesis) classes in Mashhad until December 1977, as he was exiled to Iranshahr, in the Sistan-Baluchistan province, where he came into contact with the local Sunni and Shia population.² He continued his religious and political activity in the Al-e Rasul mosque by mobilizing people to join the Islamic Revolution. Khamenei always mentions his experience in Iranshahr in a variety of cases when it comes to Sunni-Shia relations as well the situation of Sunnis in peripheral areas of Iran. After the revolution of 1979, he emphasized at the Council of Revolution (*shoray-e enghelab*) the importance of including Sunni communities in country's decision making as well as improving the socio-economic issues of the Sistan-Baluchistan province and of Kurdistan. After the revolution, Khamenei visited the Sistan-Baluchistan province twice (in 2000 and 2002), however there were no official meetings with the Sunni leaders such as Molana Abdolhamid in Zahedan. Khamenei also visited the Kurdistan province in 2009 around the critical times of the Green Movement in Iran. During this visit Khamenei ordered the local authorities to broadcast the Sunni Adhan

1 Khamenei 1393/2014.

2 For further detail about the exile of Khamenei, see the Azarshab 1397/2018.

(Islamic call to prayer) on Kurdistan local Radio and Television, an order which was very exceptional and was praised by the local Sunni communities.³

1.2 *Ebrahim Raisi*

Seyyed Ebrahim Raisolsadati (born 1960), known as Raisi, started his career after the Islamic Revolution as a legal prosecutor and worked for several years in the General Inspection office of the Islamic Republic (*sazman-e bazrasi-e koll-e keshvar*), as well as being the first vice Chief of Justice of Iran where he engaged in identifying and handing down sentences to political prisoners.⁴ Since 2007 Raisi has been a member of the Assembly of Experts, which is the body empowered to designate and dismiss the Supreme Leader. In the presidential election of 2021, Raisi was elected the eighth President of Iran with 62.9% of the votes.

Raisi became more widely known to the general public on 9th April 2017 when he declared his presidential candidacy. However, for many people Raisi was not a new face and especially not for the population of Mashhad who knew him from his chairmanship of the Astan-e Qods-e Razavi foundation (appointed by Khamenei, 2016–2019) as well as his family ties with Ahmad Alamolhoda (the Supreme leader's representative and Friday Prayer leader of Mashhad) to whom he had married his daughter. Raisi belongs to the influential political circle from Mashhad which became a major player after the Islamic Revolution. Khamenei himself is also from Mashhad and his early ties with Raisi and his father-in-law Alamolhoda formed there, and he has assisted Raisi to a very successful career.

The Astan-e Qods-e Razavi foundation is both long-lasting and one of the largest foundations in Iran, which includes branches and activities in several areas of culture, religion, economy, construction and education, and since 2018 has even had its own security forces.⁵ This foundation, which was originally established for the management of the Imam Reza shrine (the eighth Shiite Imam and a central figure as his is the only Shiite Imam's shrine in Iran), has grown to have control over large parts of the economy and is the

3 See: <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/page?id=6702> (accessed March 2022).

4 Vatanka 2017.

5 The Astan-e Qods security forces (*yegan-e hefazat-e astan-e qods*) were established in October 2018, shortly after the terrorist attack in Tehran (on 7 June 2017). Beforehand, the safeguarding of Astan-e Qods was under the control of the Revolutionary Guard and the Police. Raisi, who established this security force, claimed that the purpose of this force is "to legally follow-up on activities which may have effects on security" (IRNA 1397/2018). The official homepage of the security force: <https://hefa.razavi.ir>.

largest employer in the province of Khorasan Razavi.⁶ With its presence literally everywhere, the foundation is colloquially called the *emperaturi* (the Emperor) in Mashhad city.

1.3 *Ali Yunesi*

Ali Yunesi took part in the Islamic Revolutionary court and was active in the judicial system until he was appointed by the reformist president Mohammad Khatami to be the new Minister of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic in 1999, a post he held until 2005. This appointment was made possible as the former minister, Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi, resigned from the post following the public scandal known as the “Chain murders” (*qatlha-ye zanjirei*) – an ongoing process in the decade 1988–98 during which up to an estimated 100 Iranian intellectuals who were critical towards the current Islamic Republic system were murdered or disappeared. After Yunesi’s appointment, he determined his main objectives and presented these at the Iranian Majlis:⁷

to gain public participation, to have comprehensive and sustainable security by empowering unity and alliance and having continuous relations with people and building trust between society and the country’s intelligence services.... an effort to attract the opposition, and transforming the enemies into opposition. Providing a peaceful environment for domestic and foreign investment

In Rouhani’s first term, Yunesi was appointed the “Special advisor to the president in affairs of ethnic and religious/confessional minorities”, an advisory office to observe, guarantee and implement the rights of Iranian citizens belonging to religious, confessional and ethnic minorities. This advisory office organized among other things many conferences and events to address the importance of the question of minorities in Rouhani’s government.

1.4 *Naser Makarem Shirazi*

Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi is one of the well-known Shiite *Marja* in Iran. In the Twelver Shiite belief system every Muslim, except those who completed advanced religious training (*ijtihad*), are instructed to follow a *Marja* for their religious guidance across a diverse set of topics from worship to social issues. Thus, it is built into the religious system, and consequently the society of the Islamic Republic, that all individuals must be a follower of

⁶ Ghorashi; Zanganeh 2014: 446.

⁷ Hamshahri 1377/1999.

a religious leader in their daily life. The Marja(s) engage in various political affairs as well as using their influence and institutional power in several Hawza (religious schools), mosques, research institutions and even TV-Channels.

Makarem Shirazi started his religious education in the cities of Shiraz, Qom and Najaf. He was a student of grand Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, a senior leader of the Twelver Shiite clerics in Iran and Iraq⁸ and of Azari ethnic origin, who later became an outspoken critic of the Islamic Republic and Khomeini. Under Shariatmadari's supervision, Makarem and other Shiite clerics published the journal *Maktabe Eslam*.⁹ Makarem was also connected to Shariatmadari through their cooperation at *Daroltabliq-e Eslami*, a Shiite institution established at 1966 in Qom and active in providing public Shiite ideology guidance by publishing books in different languages. The main goals of these publications were on the one hand to expand Shiite Islam in the region and on the other hand to confront the external anti-Shiite propaganda from primarily the Salafi and Wahhabi groups (present in other countries).¹⁰

After Khomeini removed Shariatmadari's Marja title in April 1982 and put him under house arrest, the institution was expropriated and then managed by the Office of Islamic Promotion of Hawza of Qom (*daftar-e tabliqat-e eslami-ye howze-ye elmiye-e qom*). It is interesting to note that the institution wasn't slaughtered on the altar of the revolution, but rather acquired new leadership and direction which in one way can be interpreted to show that religious schools were important even if they were somewhat astray and needed to be brought back into the herd. Unlike Shariatmadari, Makarem managed to remain in Khomeini's circle and a member of the Assembly of Experts for the Constitution, even though his position toward the Iranian Sunni was already clear during that time (see Chapter 2).

Makarem and his institutions also regularly organize events to promote Shiite Islam. One of these events is the annual International Congress of Imam Sajjad taking place in Bandar Abbas, the capital city of the Hormozgan province, which has a large Sunni community. The congress participants are mostly national and international Shiite clerics and scholars. The speech selected here is Makarem's talk at the congress in Bandar Abbas on 17 October 2013.

8 Kadivar 1392/2013.

9 Jafarian 1390/2012: 307–10.

10 This institute also received financial support from the most religious Bazaris from Tabriz. See Tabrizi 1387/2008: 149–154. See also Jafarian 1390/2012: 339.

1.5 *Javad Karimi Qodusi*

Javad Karimi Qodusi was born in Mashhad and is a member of the Islamic Republic's parliament, where he represents the city of Mashhad and Kalat district in the eighth, ninth and tenth Majles. Karimi belongs to the religious conservatives (also referred to as hardliners) e.g. the *osulgera* (Principlists) and is a member of the political party Front of Islamic Revolution Stability (*jebhe-ye paydari-e enqelab-e eslami*) which was established in 2011, but won a landslide victory for the city council of Mashhad as soon as in 2013.¹¹ This was a new party of right-wing politicians who became "bona fide principlists"¹² and separated themselves from Ahmadinejad's circle following the conflict among the elites and the 2009 tensions in Iran, i.e. the Green Movement.

It is relevant background knowledge to be aware that during a debate in the Iranian parliament Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, the Sunni representative of the city of Torbat Jam, claimed that because Karimi Qodusi is originally from Afghanistan his legitimacy as a member of parliament should be questioned.¹³ The discussion of Karimi's origin and legitimacy as a member of parliament occurred after Karimi had spoken about the issues associated with dual citizenship (and permanent residence permits in foreign countries) of in particular Iranian officials, including President Rouhani.

It should also be mentioned here that Karimi has a strong link to Astan-e Qods and is well supported by Ahmad Alamolhoda (Mashhad Friday Prayer Imam, supreme leader representative in Mashhad, part of the Axis of Mashhad). He was also one of the main Iranian opponents of the Nuclear deal (JPCOA) both during and after the negotiations.

11 Of the 25 members elected for the city council in Mashhad, 18 candidates came from this party. See Khabaronline 1392/2013. The party also supported the Saeed Jalili in 2013 and Ebrahim Raisi in the 2017 presidential election.

12 Harris 2017: 158.

13 IRNA 1398/2019.

Unity as the Order

For the both the past and the present leaders of the Islamic Republic, the matter of good relations with other Islamic schools of thought and the unity among Shiite and Sunni was a core issue. Khomeini organized the creation of the Supreme Council of Islamic Promotion (*shora-ye ali-ye tabliqat-e eslami*) in July 1981, which later changed its name to the Organisation for Islamic Promotion (*sazman-e tabliqat-e eslami*) in April 1989. One year later, Ali Khamenei established The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Confessions (*majma-e jahani-ye taqrib-e mazaheb-e eslami*). The charter of the forum relays that this organisation tries to recognise the differences among various Islamic jurisprudences and encourages freedom of discussion whilst maintaining respect between one another. It also emphasizes the importance of unity and brotherhood among all Muslims.¹ In the 1414 (2035) vision which was published in 2018, the organisation listed the goals, objectives and policies for the members of the organisation and the Islamic world in general. These policies are in the areas of education, public sector and state-related development, the economy and diplomacy.² It is also important to note that such an attempt to bring rapprochement (*taqrib*) within the Muslim world was started earlier, in the 20th century, by both Shiite and Sunni Ulama as well as intellectuals and politicians. Until the 1920s Sunni and Shiite religious leaders and Ulamas had shown a readiness to become united under pan-Islam.³ In 1941, Mohammad Taqi Qomi, among other clerics, established an organisation in Cairo called *dar al-taqrib bayn al-mazaheb al-eslamiya* (Also *dar al-taqrib*). The organisation worked as a platform for the exchange and implementation of policies to promote unity among different Islamic communities. *Dar al-taqrib* received support from Ayatollah Seyyed Hossein Borujerdi, an important Marja and the head of Hawza Ilmiyya of Qom at that time, as well as from Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut of the Al-Azhar University. In addition, they received support from some Egyptian politicians,⁴ among whom Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brothers, was also in personal contact with the society

1 Khosroshahi 1389/2010: 19–22. Further, see Buchta 1997.

2 Taqrib 1397/2018.

3 Hairi 1977: 88–90, 125, 242.

4 See Ende 1991: 220–4; Amirdehi 1387/2008. Regarding the financial and ideological support from the Ayatollah Borujerdi, see the article in Arabic by Vaezzade 1417/1996. For further reading on other movements for unity among Islamic confessions see Kamran 1386/2007: 152–4.

and participated in their gatherings. Of *dar al-taqrib*'s many activities, publishing the magazine *risalat al-Islam* between 1949 until 1972 was one of its main achievements.⁵ Another success of *dar al-taqrib* was a *fatwa* issued in 1959 which declared Twelver Shiite as a valid confession within Islam. On the other hand, some individuals from both the Shiite and Sunni communities disagreed with the ideas of *dar al-taqrib*. One of their most important arguments, as Werner Ende⁶ shows, was that "while unity of the Muslim world must indeed be the aim, it can be arrived at only on the basis of what is religiously correct, not by a false compromise". Furthermore, *dar al-taqrib* lost its influence in the second half of the 1960s and also faced severe criticism from the Sunni Ulama following the expansion of Shiite literature distribution in Egypt⁷ (printed in Iran, Lebanon and Iraq).

On 9 January 2015, Khamenei spoke at the 28th International Conference of Islamic Unity (*konferans-e beynolmelali-ye vahdat-e eslami*), organised annually by the Islamic Republic since 1986. This conference takes place during what is called "Unity week" (*hafte-ye vahdat*). The Sunni scholars state that the Islamic Prophet Mohammad was born on the 12th of the month of Rabi' al-awwal, while the Shiites claim the 17th as the birth date. During his time in exile before the Islamic Revolution (in provinces of Sistan-Baluchistan⁸), Khamenei consequently suggested the idea of an Islamic Unity week running between 12th and 17th Rabi' al-awwal. After the Revolution, this suggestion was implemented in the form of an annual conference in which academics and religious scholars as well as politicians come together to give speeches and release various publications on the topic of "Islamic Unity" (*vahdat-e eslami*). The conference usually starts with a speech by Khamenei and then one by the president. Initially the conference was organised by Iran's Islamic Development Organisation (*sazman-e tabliqat-e eslami-ye iran*), while later on it was taken over by The World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought (*majma-e jahani-ye taqrib-e mazaheb-e eslami*).

At the beginning of his congratulations Khamenei addressed not just all Muslims, but pointed towards "all free (independent) people in the world" (*hame-ye azadegan-e jahan*) which clearly shows that he has a broader message which is summarised in the Prophet's "all great human mindsets". As of

5 For the history and main events of this magazine and the *dar al-tabliq* in general see Azarshab 1383/2004: 177–9, Ende, 1977: 80–4.

6 Ende 1991: 223.

7 Ibid.: 225–6.

8 YJC 1392/2014a.

the second paragraph, from the phrase “Me and you as Muslims,” he limited his speech to all Muslims. In this paragraph he talks directly to the scholars, Imams and politicians from the Islamic countries which participated in the Islamic Unity conference. By introducing the Prophet’s lessons and perspectives at the beginning of the speech, he reminds the audience that it’s the “duty of all Muslims” to follow these lessons and to have these mindsets, which from here on Khamenei presents as rules. However, not everyone follows these rules, because it is assumed here that “common people” follow their authorities and do what they oblige them to do. This is the establishment of the common hierarchical power, stating that the “common people” do not know the truth, and it is the leader’s responsibility to guide and rule them. The formula here is as follows: the authorities on top maintain the path of the Prophet, which subsequently the general public will follow as automatically as they follow their authorities in everyday life. Consequently, it is clearly stated that the general population is reduced to followers to those who know better, i.e. the religious and political hierarchy. Moreover, among those rules Khamenei states that “unity” is the prioritized key rule even if it is just in language.

1 The Power of Unity

In order to make it clear why this unity is so important Khamenei elaborates on the reasons, by emphasising a variety of positive words and thereby trying to present an ideal Islamic world:

If all the nations of Islamic countries all around this wide region – which builds a large number of populations of the world – accompany each other not in details but in general orientations, the Islamic world will reach its great growth and transcendence. [Indeed] when they (Islamic nations) are seen together, this great unity already in itself has an impact.

He expresses the main positive (aspirational) status markers of the Islamic countries by concepts such as a “wide region”, having a “large number of populations” in searching for “greater growth”, “pride and respect” and to be “honoured”. The example of Arbaeen in his speech is an example of the Islamic Republic’s soft power, as the gathering and pilgrimage of Arbaeen is indeed highly politicised. This can be seen in the words of Ebrahim Raisi, at that time the Islamic Republic’s head of judiciary: “Arbaeen is a strategic force and a soft power for Islam and Islamic movements to showcase this soft power to the

world”.⁹ Furthermore, describing this religious-political event, as the “largest gathering on Earth” and a “great movement”, can be seen as a political message by Khamenei to show the Islamic Republic’s regional power to its adversaries, while at the same time emphasizing that they gained *respect* from others globally by “bows” and “honours”. In conclusion, what is expressed as important in this speech is prestige, status and how the world sees the Islamic countries and civilisation from a power perspective – i.e. the speech emphasizes territorial/political power and image as the main focuses.

In Raisi’s speech, which he gave in his 2017 presidential campaign, he talked particularly about the concept of unity which metamorphoses into descriptions such as “divine blessing”. In addition, almost every sentence in this speech contains phrases like “our country”, “our society”, “our academics”, “our Ulama”, “our sources” in which “us” or “we” is the object, which increases the emphasis on unity even further in this discourse. Raisi here openly shows that he is conservative and a hard-liner by reminding everyone of the Islamic Revolution’s ideals, their relations with unity, and the desire to return to the beginning of the Islamic Revolution. This is a type of 1980s nostalgia which is growing inside Iran through the implementation of various state cultural policies, with which the population is now manipulated with ideological images referring to the time of the Iran-Iraq War when this “exemplary unity” existed. In the general discourse this is supported by using phrases like “martyrs from all ethnic groups and religious confessions”, that it was a time to be “proud of the country” (e.g. the country’s achievements in the war) and being at the “peak”, where the latter is indirectly referring to aggressive power, e.g. physical and military power and strength throughout the war and thus in effect glory and pride. Raisi creates a link between these ideals and the early time of the Islamic Revolution, by mentioning the “revolutionary” and “Jihadi management”. The latter term has been used by Khamenei as of 2015 as a definition of the Islamic Republic regime’s characteristics.¹⁰ This term could also be another word for technocracy – rule by experts, or in this context the religious revolutionary experts – in the language of the Islamic Republic. However, the term technocrat is generally negative in Khamenei’s view¹¹ even though this system of government is how the Islamic Republic was run after Rafsanjani,¹² and thus the term used by Khamenei is “Jihadi management or governance”.

9 AQR 2017.

10 Karimzadeh 1393/2015.

11 Khamenei 1392/2013.

12 Regarding the Rafsanjani and its technocratic changes in the era of reconstruction after the Iran-Iraq war, see Harris 2017: 155–6.

2 Iranisation of the Confession

In 2013 Yunesi became president Rouhani's "Special advisor to the president in affairs of ethnic and religious/confessional minorities" (see chapter 2). However, this action was criticised by ethnic activists as "a person with a security (e.g. secret service/intelligence) background is not a good match for solving ethnic and confessional issues".¹³ That said, some politicians such as Mohammad Rauf Qaderi, who at the fifth Majles was one of the Sunni's representatives and president Rafsanjani's advisor on Iranian Sunnis, saw Yunesi's appointment as a step forward and a positive sign.¹⁴ After the appointment in 2013, Yunesi was nevertheless criticized by the hardliners, indirectly targeting his and Rouhani's policies.¹⁵ Those critics predominantly addressed his nationalist discourse in which Iran was referred to as an Empire and contained imagery such as Iran's former flag with the sign of the lion and the sun, which are in fact the signatures of the Pahlavi regime.

One can be certain, however, that appointing Yunesi as the president's adviser had one major impact. An energetic debate started on the topic of the individual rights of the Iranian population, now also including the minorities in this discussion. Yunesi gave several interviews and talks, most of them focused on building trust, dialogue and the new wave of nationalism by including all individuals in Iran into the Iranian nation. This nationalism, which is clearly represented by Rouhani's discourse, is what is called "civic nationalism" (*nasionalism-e madani*)¹⁶ e.g. bringing Iranians from different ethnic and religious groups under the same flag of a new Iranianness characterised by the attributes of the citizens. Dudoignon explained the situation after Yunesi's symbolic appointment as follows:

13 Shirmohammadi 2013.

14 Ibid. It is also important to mention that Qaderi was the first person who after the Islamic Revolution suggested the Declaration of Ethnic and Confessionals (*bayani-ye aqwam va mazaheb*) and gave it to the presidential candidates. In the 2009 election he was Karrubi's advisor for ethnic and confessional groups. After that he remained an Advisor of the *majles-e shora-ye ali* (see Dudoignon 2017: 246).

15 Tasnim 1393/2015.

16 ISA 1394/2016. In this account, "civic nationalism" is contrasted with "ethnic nationalism". While the former, associated with Western Europe, planned to create a homogeneous and inclusive body politic, the latter, linked with Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa, is said to be riven with primordial differences. This image of Western European civic nationalism erases the existing history of religious persecution and helped to create the homogeneous polities of the seventeenth century. On this point, see Mahmood 2015a: 51, n. 82; Marx 2003 and Danchin 2007–8.

In Sistan – Baluchistan, contacts became easier in spring 2014 between the government and the Sunni religious leadership, thanks to the support given during the winter by the Deobandi religious establishment for the liberation of the border guards held hostage by Jaysh al-’Adl. Apart from Rouhani’s insistence on the Ulama’s role as preservers of harmony between the Shias and the Sunnis, and his promises of development of mining industries in Iran’s hilly peripheries (a trite news story of Tehran’s ruling circles since the 1950s), a first symbolic measure was the appointment, in mid-October 2013, of a Sunni member to the cabinet.¹⁷

One event organized by Yunesi took place on 17 October 2017 in Mashhad, together with a number of Sunni clerics and scholars. The event was described as a “friendly gathering” (*neshast-e samimi*) and only Yunesi’s speech at this event was published. This talk is used here for the analysis, but in order to interpret it I have also made use of another of Yunesi’s speeches, which provides a clearer picture of the discourse used by the reformists and in particular by Rouhani’s government. One of the main discourses of the technocrats, particularly in the Islamic Republic, is to see everything as an opportunity, and this is also a very common view amongst leftists globally, no matter whether it is a positive or severely negative issue that is being discussed. As Yunesi had previously stated in his programme as Minister of Intelligence in Khatami’s government, his objective is to have “peace and security” which would bring an improved environment for foreign and domestic investment and thus increase wealth and power. As of 2013, attracting foreign investors became of higher priority for Rouhani’s government, which can be seen in Yunesi’s discourse.

One important point in this speech is when Yunesi dedicates part thereof to what is referred to as “greater Khorasan”, which is of historical importance and refers to an area larger than today’s province, i.e. a part of the historical Persian Empire. The general idea is to emphasize that the Iranian Sunnis and ethnic minorities are in fact “very Iranian” and contributed effectively to the spreading of Islam (as Abumoslem did) in general and to the success of the Shiites by Abuhanife’s defending Zeynab in particular. Abumoslem was a revolutionary general in the eighth century¹⁸ and is claimed by some sources to be of Persian decent. Abumoslem overthrew the Umayyad dynasty and thus took control over the eastern half of the Khorasan Caliphate, of which he later became governor. Abumoslem remained after his death a legendary figure and a symbol

17 Dudoignon 2017: 265–8.

18 Yusofi 1983.

of ethnic group rights and the fight against the tyranny and injustice of the ethno-centric Umayyad dynasty¹⁹ – a welcome image for the ethnic groups that today consider themselves being under Persian-oriented rule. The second example of an important individual from Khorasan is Abuhanifa, the founder of the Hanafi school of thought (*madhhab*), to which the majority of the Baluch as well as the Sunnis in a large part of Khorasan province belong. The fact that the founder of the Hanafi school was Iranian, and that the majority of ethnic minorities chose to follow this school, was used by Iranian academics²⁰ to substantiate the idea that the minorities are in fact Iranian (which is logical, if the primary attribute of being Iranian is to be of the same religious confession, i.e. Shia Islam).

This indirect approach is a part of the Iranisation process, described by Elling, in which the nationalist-minded Iranian scholars “portray Iran’s ethnic minorities as historically loyal to Iran, essentially attached to the rest of the population and harmonically integrated in society”.²¹ At the end, Yunesi closes the loop by connecting the whole of historical Khorasan with the Islamic Republic, as Khamenei’s birthplace is also there (the city of Mashhad). Put simply, the revolutionary Abumoslem who defeated the Persians, the founder of the Sunni Hanafi school with a large Iranian following and the supreme leader Khamenei all belong to one united origin, the province of Khorasan.²²

Lastly, Yunesi comes to the final point – that the main goal is to prioritize unity, put aside all differences and focus on the national interest (*manafe-e melli*), e.g. “focus on Iran (’s interest)” (*iran ba mehvariyat-e iran*). However, it is important to note here that “Iran’s interest” in this context means beyond the issues at home and primarily focuses on the “wider vision”. A vision which emphasizes the Islamic Republic’s – and thus indirectly the Iranian people’s – power, status and importance by playing a key role in the Islamic world. A goal here depicted with a type of nostalgic reminiscence and glorification of the power held by Iran in the “old days” of the powerful Khorasan Caliphate.

19 Soltani 1395/2016: 50.

20 See Salehi-Amiri 1385/2006: 145; Elling 2013: 143.

21 Elling 2013: 142.

22 In comparison to the similar narrative toward the Iranian Kurds, as Posch (2017a: 341–2) states: “[e]ven Iran’s pan-Islamists feel the need to stress that the Kurds belong ‘to the purest Iranian races and peoples’ as they are part ‘of the most ancient peoples of Aryan origin.’”

3 Inequality, the Lack of Unity

Part of Raisi's 2017 presidential campaign, to which he invited a set of influential people from the Sunni community, was called the "General Gathering of Sunni Ulama" (*neshast-e sarasari-ye olamay-e ahl-e sonnat*), held in Tehran on 6 May 2017. Among Raisi's supporters from the Sunni communities are Mamusta Abdoleslam Mohammadi (Bijar, province of Kurdistan), Mamusta Farzad Salimpur (province of West Azerbaijan), Mohammad Seddiq Fahimi (Bandar Abbas, province of Hormozgan) and Molavi Nazir Ahmad Salami, who is the representative of the Sistan-Baluchistan province in the Assembly of Experts. The fact that almost everybody voted for Rouhani and not Raisi in the 2017 presidential election shows that Nazir Ahmad Salami is neither famous nor influential in the Iranian Sunni Baluch community, although he is well connected to the Islamic Republic's political elites.²³

As this speech was a part of the presidential election campaign, it has a different voice. Election campaigns are always an important time for public mobilisation in Iran. During these times there are events everywhere, it is the time for many issues to be discussed and usually somewhat hidden topics suddenly appear in the public arena. One example is when the candidates visit the Sunni communities in order to convince them, and consequently gain more votes. The mobilization of the Sunni voters through the religious schools (*madrasa*) and Ulama is a phenomenon that has been used in various elections.²⁴ In this speech Raisi has the same intention. He is addressing the Sunni Ulama directly (as potential voters) and also the Iranian population in general. Nevertheless, he is indicating that he has "no desire to be president; I am the servant of holy Astan-e Qods", which is a common disposition in the Islamic Republic, to play down the power and present it more as a call of duty.

In 2019 Khamenei appointed the 59-year-old Raisi to the high-profile position of Chief of Justice. However, since the time Raisi became a part of the Assembly of Experts in 2007, he has been mentioned as a potential successor to the Supreme Leader.²⁵ Although Raisi lost the presidential election to Rouhani in May 2017, his campaign under the slogan "Government of Work and Dignity" continued with visits to additional cities. His appointment as the Islamic Republic's Chief of Justice brought new changes in the system. The fight against internal corruption is still a priority on his agenda, and his policies intensified the securitization directed towards the political opposition in

23 See Dmsonnat 1398/2020.

24 Dudoignon 2013: 153–4.

25 Posch 2017b: 2.

Iran. One of Raisi's first visits as the Chief of Justice was to Sistan-Baluchistan, and whether it is related or not, the level of pressure on the Sunni community in those areas increased after his visit. As Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi stated in an open letter to Raisi on 4 September 2019:

Although it is not a long time that you have held this position, the repetition of the bitter events of the past disturbed the Sunni community more than ever and it proves that change and evolution inside the regime makes no difference for the minorities. Indeed, it seems the serial confessional stifling and perpetual oppression toward religious minorities' activists, especially among Sunni society, has no end.²⁶

In his speech, Raisi refers to all Iranian "citizens" (*shahrvand*), which President Rouhani generally used in his discourse, but which was not used in the Islamic Republic's constitution as shown in chapter 2 of this book. In this speech, everyone with an "ID card" is an Iranian and "drawing a line" in this context refers to the concept of separation in the way of establishing separate groups of people – a concept Raisi states should be removed with the help of "influential people". Such discourse is here used to link unity with the role of the Iranian elites in order to "move the country forward" and overcome challenges.

During the 2017 election I talked with an old conservative woman in Mashhad and asked her why she thinks that Raisi is a good candidate for president. She told me that he is not just a Seyyed (a title for people acknowledged as descendants of the Prophet and his son-in-law Ali) like Khomeini, but also, he speaks the way Khomeini did. Looking at this speech, there are several similarities to the discourse used by Khomeini before the Islamic Revolution. With the emphasis on corruption and the underprivileged, it is a reminder of Khomeini's speech in January 1978 in Najaf to a group of Shiite clerics, in which he discusses unity among political oppositions and different social groups in order to achieve cooperation to fight against Pahlavi's corruption:²⁷

26 In his letter he pointed out the pressure on certain madrasas and their headmasters, such as Molavi Fazlollahman Kuhi and his colleagues from the Anvarollahameyn madrasa in Pashamag. He also commented on the activities of the Islamic Republic security forces in the madrasa Manbaoululum of Kuhvan in Sarbaz, where some students were arrested in the summer, and according to the local population the students were questioned by the IRGC security forces. Finally, in November 2019, M.F. Kuhi was arrested in Mashhad, which intensified the already tense situation in Iranian Baluchistan.

27 Khomeini 1378/1999a: 310.

I am asking all of them (all social groups in Iran) to pray for Islam and be strong and united. This unity will cut the enemies' atrocious hands, and this will clean our country ... All the resources which our country has should be used for the underprivileged and the expediency of the country. Thereby, will everything be good.

Finally, it is interesting to mention here that a large part of Raisi's speech is focused on the economy and wealth, and at the end (paragraph 5) he also brings up the wider context than merely domestic policy by talking about Iran's relations with its neighbours, and in particular the country's regional role, by demanding that Iran increase its share in the regional market. Another key point in Raisi's speech (paragraphs 2 and 3) concerns the economic issues within the country. He criticised the Rouhani government's economic mismanagement by emphasising issues such as "unemployment", "corruption" and the existence of "hovel schools" which still exist in some parts of Sistan-Baluchistan. He used the general discourse of the early Islamic Revolution – which for comparison is the same as the west's political Left – discussing the "underprivileged and deprived" (*mahrumin va foqara*). One of the main promises of the Islamic Revolution was to support and improve the situation for the underprivileged people from the peripheral regions of Iran. This revolutionary zeal was to some extent achieved, as shown by Kevan Harris,²⁸ in how the Islamic Republic managed to reduce poverty and fill the gaps between rural and urban areas by establishing a welfare state.

In his speech, Yunesi also focuses on the economic issues, just as Raisi did. Here Yunesi wants to point out that if there are issues and dissatisfaction in the Iranian Sunni community, those are of economic character and not ideological, which means the problems can be managed by investment and better employment policies.²⁹ Further, as he speaks about solving these problems, he criticises Rouhani's opponents from the hardline faction, as they "do not want the problems to be solved" and states that they "hamper" (*mane-tarashi*) the state's efforts. Finally, he connects them indirectly to "English Shiite" as they also "hamper" the discourse of unity.

An interesting fact is that although Yunesi does talk about unity in this speech (just three times in paragraph 4), he puts more emphasize on "differences" and

28 Harris 2013: 65–7.

29 As all the other speakers in this Chapter, also Yunesi vocalises the opinion that employment and work opportunities are created by the state (through their investments), and not primarily by the civil society, which is the main concept prevailing also in non-religious leftist states.

“diversity” (nine times in the speech). By relating the concept of difference to a Hadith from the Prophet, Yunesi presents this diversity not just as “divine reality” (*vaqeyyat-e elahi*) but also as “divine intention” (*erade-ye elahi*) that these differences exist. Compared to Raisi’s speech, which describes unity as a “divine blessing”, it is clear that Yunesi has a different approach to this concept. In general, Yunesi tries to stick to the general discourse of the Islamic Republic by talking about the Umma, although using it only once in the second paragraph and later as a “brotherly society” (*jame-ye baradarane*).

In conclusion, based on Khamenei’s speech, the unity between Sunni and Shiite is the most important perspective (or rule) of the Prophet to be followed by the Ummah, but an even more essential focus for the Islamic rulers in order to reach the leader’s goals of political and territorial power, status and respect. The general understanding is that this unity does exist and is substantiated by the example of the pilgrimage to Arbaeen. However, due to enemies’ plans, not only is this unity under attack but also the wealth, power, status and respect of all the Islamic countries and the all Muslims in the world – they are all victims of global plots against them. In the end, from Khamenei’s perspective, the discourse of unity is presented as a means to an end, where the goal is in fact to show power and to confront enemies – who are represented as “Other” – and thereby gain political/territorial power, status and respect. The enemies, according to Khamenei in this speech, are all the disbelievers and in particular the countries of America and Israel, as well as the UK intelligence services.

Finally, the cases presented in this chapter clearly exemplify that in the official discourse of the Islamic Republic it is the religious and political elites who are the main players in taking up the responsibility and commitment to advance the Islamic world, while the “general population” is reduced to followers. So, even if the speech is stated at the start to be directed to all Muslims globally, it is mainly aimed at the elites while the duty of the “common population” is to join the unity and act according to instructions from the religious and political elites.

Enemies and Their Infiltration

The unity which would lead the Islamic countries to the power and prestige they covet is being damaged by “hands” (which has vague similarity to the English expression “the devil finds work for idle hands”). The verbal construction in this phrase “*dast-hai dar kar ast*” (there are some hands at work) is very commonly used in Persian in respect to malicious acts and it also typically represents “the omnipresent intrusion of foreign agents and culture into Iran”.¹ It should be noted that in his approximately 20 minutes long speech, Khamenei spends approximately seven minutes (i.e. 30% of the time) talking only about “the enemies”. Raisi claims, in a similar way to Khamenei, that the Islamic Republic has this ideal unity among Sunni and Shiite as a normal state, and that is just the enemy who is trying to destroy it and infiltrate Iran and its glorious unity from the outside, which is both the country’s geographical as well as ideological borders.

1 The Enemies

Khamenei pointed to enemies of the whole of Iran and Islam (paragraph 5): British and US “intelligence services” as well as the Shiites and Sunnis who cooperate with them, known as “*mozdur*” (hireling). “*Mozdur*” is a common negative word used in the Islamic Republic’s discourse to refer to people who are employed by someone (and not necessarily with a salary), to betray their country or people. In this book it is translated as hireling, although the precise meaning – or context – of the word is different, as in English it simply refers to people employed to do menial work, or persons that work purely for material rewards. However, in paragraph six the list of western enemies is expanded and now includes the Israelis (the latter referred to as Zionists) as they are claimed in the speech to lead “American capitalism and global arrogance”.

The second group of enemies, Iran’s regional enemies/rivals such as Saudi Arabia, are presented in Khamenei’s speech (sixth paragraph), although no specific regional country is explicitly named an enemy. Those countries are stated here to be lacking in the Prophet’s perspectives of “rationality and wisdom” and having a “stupid” (*ablahane*) foreign policy towards the Islamic

¹ Elling 2013:103.

Republic. In contrast, the Islamic Republic is stated to have a foreign policy based on “friendship, brotherhood and relationship” and the Iranians to have “wisdom and supreme knowledge” by following the Prophet’s instructions (perspectives). It is concluded that this rivalry is in the “enemy’s interest” and is organised by them, i.e. externals are the reason why there is division and rivalry within the Islamic world – not the Muslims themselves – and consequently the Islamic world and Muslims are in fact victims. He also refers to “taking sides” (*yar-giri*) by the enemy, where the term used comes from the arena of sports and has strong connotation of competitiveness. The nationalism discourse is promoted in this paragraph by the use of the expressions “expediency of their country”, “wise and aware nation” and “our great Imam (Khomeini).” Though, in order to return to the idea of unity, he does mention the idea of Islamic Ummah.

In Khamenei’s speech, he also talks about a third group of enemies – indirectly and without saying that they are enemies – which are those who misunderstand the Quran and the Islamic texts, either intentionally or because they are simply ignorant. In Khamenei’s speech notes that one of the common issues of this group is to claim that Islam accepts religious “pluralism”. He argues that although the Quran respects other prophets and different religions, there should be a clear line between believers of Islam and non-believers. This is taken one step further by the instruction to the audience to “[be] friendly with believers” and “forceful” with enemies and disbelievers.

2 Enemies’ “Infiltration”

After elaborating on who are the enemies, Khamenei’s speech (at the end of paragraph 7) shows its security-centred perspective. The words used here are “earthwork” (*khakriz*) which represents a warlike situation in which the enemies want to “infiltrate” (*nofuz kardan*) and separate the Muslims from each other. The term *nofuz* (“infiltration”) is typically used when it comes to the soft-war discourse and the Islamic Republic’s representatives often branded the spies and any other troublemakers as *nofuzi* (“infiltrators”).

Raisi also links the concept of unity to “security”, and states that it is the enemies who are destroying this unity by “infiltrating” Iranian society. This is the exact same discourse used by Khamenei, but the latter put it in the broader context of the Islamic countries. Moreover, Raisi claims that the “divine unity” exists because of Ulamas’ and people’s “awareness,” which stops the enemies’ infiltration. Which means in the case of any issues affecting this unity, it is the Ulamas’/Iranian’s ignorance which led to the opportunity for the enemies’

infiltration. Raisi clarifies his standpoint by using the expression of “border guarding” (*mohafezat az marz-ha*), which is not just about countries “geographical” but also “ideological” borders. In this case the Iranian Sunnis are told not just to protect the country’s border, but also exercise control of any ideologies coming from the outside, e.g. neighbouring countries’ Muslim populations, and ideologies like Salafism which have expanded in Iran over the past few years.

In order to stay inside the defined borders of the Islamic Republic’s discourse, Yunesi borrowed some of Khamenei’s expressions as well. First, the statement of “Islamophobia” being the creation of enemies (which are unspecified here) was also presented in similar terms in Khamenei’s speech. Further, the extremist Islamic groups are stated to be the second threat and thus also enemies, but in contrast to Khamenei there is no explicit comment on whether the Islamophobia and/or extremist threats are from the inside or outside, just that they are the created by the “enemies”. This is so vague that it could in principle be that Yunesi would suggest that they – both Islamophobia and extremist groups – may have their origin within Islam, e.g. Daesh (ISIL) and the Taliban groups. The second reference to Khamenei is the term “English Shiite” (*shie-ye engelisi*), which he has used since 2003 and as many as 800 times in 2015 alone.² This term is often paired together with “American Islam” (*eslam-e amrikai*). The former term refers to those Shiite who do not follow the unity discourse and try to turn Shiite against Sunni, while the latter term refers to the Sunni extremist groups which do not acknowledge Shiite as “true” Muslims. Furthermore, there are primarily two Shiite groups to which Khamenei gave the title of “English Shiite”: the Shirazi Modarresi Ayatollahs and the Al-Khoei Foundation, both of which are the most important Shiite revival groups for Khamenei in matters of Marjaiya (the highest Shiite authority and the source of emulation).³

3 The Threat of Takfiri Movements

While Yunesi, with his security background, did not mention the issue of extremism in great depth, Makarem Shirazi dedicates large parts of his speech to it. In Makarem’s speech, the discussion of unity is entirely absent. He talks about respect and avoiding insults to the sanctity of other Islamic confessions (albeit while not mentioning other religions), but his main discourse is about

² <http://farsi.khamenei.ir>

³ See Nasr 2006.

security and the enemies' infiltration. In this speech the idea of "enemy" is represented and discussed through the concept of "Takfiri Wahhabist" movements.

The word "Takfir" is a term of criticism used in order to excommunicate other Muslims. The Islamic Republic generally denotes all Wahhabist, Salafist and other extremist groups "Takfiri".⁴ Indeed, Khalaji argues that the Islamic Republic's discourse uses Takfiri as the source of infiltration in their "anti-Saudi propoganda" and "to portray its tensions with Riyadh less as a political/economic rivalry between two countries than as a deeper conflict based on perennial sectarian differences."⁵ Further, Khalaji points out that the Islamic Republic's objective is to introduce the topic of "the rise of Takfiri" into the public arena as a way of legitimizing the regime's political, diplomatic and military activities in the region.

Now, let's put this concept of "enemies" into context. It was previously mentioned that Iran faced rising extremist Islamic movements (for example Wahhabism) in the region, and, in order to counter them, the government supported the Iranian Sunni communities and in particular the influential Molavis in Baluchistan. Since the early 1990s there has also been a general growth in extremist and militant Jihadism in the region. During the domination of conservative and principalist politicians in Iran, i.e. between 2002 and 2010, several groups similar to, for example, jondollah (The legion of Allah) operated in the Sistan-Baluchistan province, where they initiated major confrontations with the Iranian state's security forces.⁶ Subsequently, other guerrilla groups appeared on the eastern borders of Iran, for example lashkar-i janggi (on the border with Afghanistan), sepah-i sahaba (on the border with Pakistan), harekat-e ansar-e iran (a splinter faction of jondollah), and jeysholadl, the continuation of the jondollah group. Not all of these groups have a separatist agenda and anti-Shiite rhetoric, which were the signum of the lashkar-i janggi as well as sepah-i sahaba, who also enjoyed good connections with and support from Pakistan.⁷ As Walter Posch⁸ points out regarding the developments among the Iranian Kurds "Salafism especially seems to have become a formidable counter-movement against the Islamic Republic's authorities, and traditional Kurdish society likewise."⁹

4 Khalaji 2016.

5 Ibid.

6 Dudoignon 2017: 227.

7 Ibid 2011: 337.

8 Posch 2017b: 343-4.

9 Further on this point, an article was published in 2014 by one of the strategic research institutes of the ministry of interior affairs of the Islamic Republic: Jalali; Ebrahimi 1393/2014. The article discusses developments among Kurdish Salafi groups in Iraqi Kurdistan and compares

Makarem states that the roots of these extremist movements are political as well as being external. Further, he explains that the reason for their growth is the “expansion of Shiite culture”, but at the same time also states that the latter is the solution to counteracting these Sunni movements. Makarem’s institutional activities clearly present his primary objectives, which are personal power and influence and to personally dominate these Shiite institutions. According to an overview of Makarem’s activities made by the official Iranian News Agency,¹⁰ there are for example six Hawza under his supervision. Most of these schools are located in the poorer districts of various cities, aiming at reaching people from disadvantaged areas. One of the largest projects under Makarem’s supervision and financial support constructed 110 Shiite mosques in the southern provinces of Khorasan, Sistan-Baluchistan, which are mostly inhabited by Sunni followers. In addition, as noted previously in this chapter, some of Makarem’s institutions are very active in spreading the Shiite confession outside of Iran by means of translating books into foreign languages.

Among all Shiite Marja in Iran, Makarem is well-known for his leadership and involvement in establishing a diverse variety of institutions, mosques, houses for pilgrims and two anti-Wahhabi and anti-Salafi TV-Channels: Velayat TV in Persian and Arabic. These TV channels started to operate in response to a number of Salafi TV and internet channels that started broadcasting from London and a few Gulf sheikhdoms in the 1990s. However, Velayat TV was criticized several times by the Iranian Sunni communities because of disrespect to Sunni beliefs and followers.¹¹

4 The “Issue” of Mashhad’s Periphery

Makarem states (second paragraph) that there are “plans of the enemies to infiltrate the country”, here mostly by means of the economy. The important phrase in this part of the speech refers to the demographic change: “... unsettling the population structure of the region, buying the lands belonging to

them to the Iranian analogue, as well as showing how they influence each other. The authors provide a variety of recommendations which are mostly about the control and surveillance of the Sunni community, but they do also recommend supporting the Sunni groups and/or Ulama not engaged with political issues as well as those who support the Islamic Republic.

10 Hawza News 1394/2015.

11 For instance: Negaam News 1396/2017, which shows the reaction of the Sunni faction of parliament to the disrespect expressed in Velayat TV towards Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzayi (See Part 3).

the Shiite...". These two points, the "population structure" and the taking over of lands, are presented here in 2013 by Makarem¹² for the first time, but later picked-up by other speakers. Makarem obviously refers to the situation in the peripheral areas of Mashhad, a city which is an important Shiite ideological centre and economically operated predominantly by the Astan-e Qods. Since 2013, there has been a discussion about the massive migration of Sunni people from other regions, especially the Sistan-Baluchistan province, to the city of Mashhad, although in fact this process started much earlier. During the 1980s, the governor of Mashhad built several houses in the district near The Imam Reza complex and sold them at a very low price to the Shiite theology students, leading to the district still being called Tollab (religious students). A decade later during the 90s, following the increase of housing prices in combination with the influx of Afghan immigrants to Iran, the now since long graduated students sold their property directly, or through real estate agents, to these Afghan immigrants. In an attempt to stop the fast demographic, and in particular, religious confessional change, the governor of Mashhad had several houses in the Tollab district demolished as early as then, which in turn led to a massive conflict between the civilian population on one hand and the police and the security forces on the other. This incident, today referred to as the "1992 insurgence" (*shuresh-e 1371*), also included several crackdowns in the city during which people were arrested.¹³

However, the influx of Sunni populations continued to Mashhad and from then it was not only Afghan immigrants, who were mostly Shiite Hazara, but also Iranian Sunnis from southern Khorasan and Sistan-Baluchistan. The latter movements arose due to a period of drought combined with the expansion of smuggling activities in the south east of Iran, particularly in Iranian Baluchistan.¹⁴ The capital obtained by the smuggling activities encouraged the Baluchi population to move to the nearest city, Mashhad, in order to invest for the future and start profitable businesses there. Other actors, such as grand Ayatollah Yazdi and Ebrahim Raisi, have, since Makarem issued his initial statements, also raised the point that Mashhad's peripheral areas harbour the expansion of Sunni extremism. The Friday prayer Imam and the representative of the Supreme Leader in Mashhad, Ahmad Alamolhoda, stated the following:¹⁵

12 Fathi 1396/2017.

13 For further information on urban unrest in the post-Revolutionary Iran see Bayat 1994.

14 Dudoignon 2017: 34&135.

15 Ibid.

The expansion ground for Wahhabism is in the Sunni community and the enemy wants to export Wahhabism through the Sunni community to Mashhad. They want to start a Shiite killing (*shie koshi*) in the largest Shiite community in the world, build a defensive front and finally disharmonize Mashhad.

It is rather clear from Alamolhola's statement above that the Shiite political elite is very suspicious of the Sunni community of Mashhad and consider them the potential gateway – or vessel – for militant religious violence, with the assumption that the clear ultimate objective is to eradicate the Shiite population. The statement also shows that the Shiites believe that the Sunni community will be led to militant extremism and violence by an external enemy (i.e. “export the Wahhabism”), implicitly indicating that this could happen either willingly or by plain ignorance.¹⁶



FIGURE 4 Mohammad Rasulollah Mosque in Mashhad located in Hor street
DATE: DECEMBER 2021, PHOTOGRAPHER: HESSAM HABIBI DOROH

16 For comprehensive insight about the role of IRGC and Basij forces in the peripheral areas of Mashhad see Nataq pur et al. 1396/2017.

From the author's personal field work, it can be confirmed that there are two major Sunni prayer rooms as well as three Sunni mosques in Mashhad, located predominantly in the poorer areas, such as the Belal mosque in Eish-abad and the Rasullolah mosque in Rajai district. The main centre of the Sunni community is the village of Shurak Maleki, ca. 60 km east of Mashhad, with a population of around 1000 in 2012 which has been steadily increasing since then. This village also hosts a Hanafi madrasa (Sunni religious school), which is visited by young Sunnis from various parts of Khorasan and which also had a good connection with the Makki Darolulum in the city of Zahedan in Sistan-Baluchistan. When one of the religious teachers in the village of Shurak was asked (by the author) in 2017 about the rise of Sunni extremism around Mashhad, he replied the following:

We (Sunni) were always there, some decades in the south and some decades in other areas of the Greater Khorasan. We have had the same clothing style and grooming tradition (the form of the beard) for a long time. No one called us extremists earlier but in recent years we are targeted by Shiites who very often call us Daeshi (belonging to Daesh or the so-called Islamic State). In my opinion, due to the rise of social media certain ideas are expanding and we see how some people disrespect especially Afghan migrants, as they are seen as extremists, which is not true. Indeed, we have to be careful about the plans of the enemies who want to divide Sunni-Shia in the region.¹⁷

This statement does not confirm, nor deny, the presence of Sunni extremism in the area. However, the fact that the comment is cautious, and talks mainly about the past and visible attributes, indicate that this is a sensitive topic. One could argue, however, that it would not be a sensitive topic for a local religious leader if there were no issues, and thus it is possible that there are local extremist movements which the Sunni community is either trying to manage themselves or leaving alone in a way of passive quiet consent. At this point, only time – or more field work – will unveil the true situation.

The issues associated with circa one million inhabitants in the peripheral areas of Mashhad (35% of the total local population) living in poverty is one thing, but the real fear of the elite circle (usually called the Axis of Mashhad comprised mainly of Makarem, Alamolhoda and Raisi together with some members of parliament such as Karimi Qodusi) is the expansion of the Deobandi school of Iranian Baluchistan which Dudoignon (2017) denoted

17 Interview Mashhad, Jun 2017.



FIGURE 5 A group of Sunni Afghans sitting outside the Nur Mosque in Mashhad, located in Hor street

DATE: DECEMBER 2021, PHOTOGRAPHER: HESSAM HABIBI DOROH

the “Sarbaz Nexus”. In addition, the news agencies belonging to the Axis of Mashhad have claimed that there is a link between Sheykholeslam of Zahedan Molana Abdolhamid and the rise of Sunni population in Mashhad.¹⁸

On a final note, in September 2014, on the command of Khamenei,¹⁹ the “Campaign for organizing the cultural issues in the peripheral areas of Mashhad” (*setad-e saman-dehi be masael-e farhangi-e hashiye-e mashhad*) was established under the supervision of Makarem and Alamolhoda. Although the officially communicated objective of this campaign was to fight poverty and crime in those areas, nevertheless the result was the establishing of several

18 Fathi 1396/2017.

19 ISNA 1395/2017.

Shiite mosques, Basij stations and Shiite religious schools, as well as Hosseiniye and Mahdiye (large Shiite gathering places for celebrating Shiite ceremonies). The campaign organization has cooperated with Sepah (governor of Mashhad), various members of parliament and Astan-e Qods until the present day, and there are still ongoing projects.

5 To Be with Us or Not to Be

A general rhetoric presented in the Islamic Republic's political discourse is the division between *khodi* (literally "of the self," meaning "insider") and *gheyr-e khodi* ("not with us," "outsider").²⁰ This is in essence very similar to the English expression "either you are with us, or against us", and with the connotation that there is no option not to be involved or participate, as well as the assumption that there is a schism of some sort.

Karimi Qodusi, one of the hardliner members of parliament, clearly separates the people in the Islamic world per-se and those of post-revolutionary Iran in particular, and puts them into two groups: those who participate or literally are in the arena (*dar sahne*), and those who do not participate. The whole speech tries to demonstrate the existence of these two groups and states as a fact that either people are on the right side, which is strongly associated with Shiite Islam, or they are in the "deflection group". More precisely, he indicates in the second paragraph that this polarity did not start at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution but began in early Islam. He characterized the first side of this polarity as "revolutionary", "loyal", "fighter" and the latter as "Western-oriented" (*qarb gera*) and "deflected". And in particular, the latter is responsible for "any challenge to the country" who threaten the ideal of unity. Put simply, the whole idea of this two-sided divide shows the separation of the socio-political landscape into *khodi* (self, i.e. belonging to us) and *gheyr-e khodi* (other) which implicates the division of the political elites and their internal competition inside the Islamic Republic.

Looking deeper into Shiite ideology shows that the idea of *khodi* and *gheyr-e khodi* can be found as soon as in the early days of Islam and has expanded with time. The Shiite scholars claim, and refer to, a Hadith from the Prophet which stated that "Ali and I (Mohammad) belong to the same tree, while people belong to different trees."²¹ Moreover Shiites call Ali and other Shiite Imams *ahl-e beyt* (belonging to Mohammad's household, or family of the house),

²⁰ See Elling 2013: 90.

²¹ Tabatabaei 1979: 91.

which is strongly related to family and blood relations as well as associations with different tribes.²² It should be mentioned here that there is still an ongoing debate regarding who the actual *ahl-e beyt* are, and about which the scholars of Sunni doctrine have a different view.

The discourse in Karimi's speech emphasizes the *ahl-e beyt* and depicts the Shiite community as a suffering group – i.e. victims. In general, Shiite culture is focused on the victimization, historical strife and suffering caused by its Sunni oppressor. Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and the fourth Caliph, is seen in Shiite ideology as the first Imam and the successor to Mohammad,²³ albeit while being excluded from political affairs. For instance, after the Prophet's death, a small group of Mohammad's companions gathered in Medina at Saqifah without Ali and elected Abu Bakr as the first Caliph. After Ali, his sons Hasan and Hossein were also under pressure from the Umayyad rulers Muawiye and his son Yazid. However, after the death of Hossein in the battle of Karbala, a new era in Shiite history started in which Hossein and other Shiite Imams became the symbol of resistance and insurgency against oppression and injustice.²⁴ In post-Revolution Iran, this symbol of oppression and resistance is continuously presented in the official political discourse and strongly connects the 1979 Revolution to Shiite history.

In Karimi's discourse, the Islamic Revolution is presented not just as the same movement, but as though the Islamic Republic is the exact reflection of true Islam. Indeed, in his discourse, the history of early Islam is replicated in the Islamic Revolution. Khomeini is represented as the Prophet Mohammad, and just as during the early developments of Islam, which started to divide into different groups after the death of the Prophet, the Islamic Republic has likewise begun to divide. In this discourse, Ali and the historical Shiite Imams are equivalent to those who follow Khomeini and his path for the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, those who participated in the meeting in Saqifah and backed Caliphs other than Ali have continued the development of their ideology while their actions are reflected in Sunni extremist movements such as Al-Qaeda, Wahhabism and ISIL (paragraph 2). Karimi even goes so far as to place the liberal and pro-democracy Mehdi Bazargan, Iran's first prime minister after the Islamic Revolution, in this category, i.e. those not loyal to the Prophet Mohammad and the Islamic Revolution.

22 McAuliffe 2004: 48.

23 The Prophet made a statement about Ali in his last pilgrimage in 623, and addressed it to all the pilgrims. However, this event (Qadir-e Khumm) is interpreted differently by Sunni and Shiite. See Veccia 2012.

24 Madelung 1985.

Karimi basically compares both the Islamic Republic's external enemies and internal liberal non-revolutionary politicians with the early Muslims that were disloyal to the Prophet. He addresses (paragraph 3) his point by putting the moderate and reformist politicians from Rafsanjani to Rouhani in the disloyal, non-revolutionary category while labelling them the "roots of deflection". His comparison becomes very clear in the third paragraph as he substantiates his statements by referring to the fact that the "roots of deflection" are buried beside the Prophet's and Khomeini's graves. The graves of the early Caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar are in fact buried next to the Prophet in the Green Dome in Medina, while in his mausoleum Khomeini himself is buried alongside Rafsanjani. So, in his discourse, once again the Prophet – described as "the owner of prophetic mission and sacred revolution" – is reflected in Khomeini, while the early Caliphs as well as moderate/reformist politicians are labelled "deflected".

It is well known that some conservative Shiites question the first three Caliphs' legitimacy and even take it a step further by criticizing the fact that Abu Bakr and Umar are buried next to the Prophet. In a discussion with a young Shiite cleric in Mashhad (July 2017), the cleric argued while claiming support from a variety of Hadiths and historical texts that "it is legally and religiously wrong that Abu Bakr and Umar are buried there".

Karimi Qodusi compares not just Khomeini with the Prophet, but also indicates that Khamenei is the reflection of Ali, by stating "[n]owadays like the time of Nahj al-Balaqa". This book contains Ali's general political and ideological understanding especially when it comes to government, society and morality. The book also shows Ali's criticism of and complaints about other Caliphs (Sermons 3, 30, 135 and 164).²⁵ From the Shiite perspective, Nahj al-Balagha deeply reflects Ali's struggle and the state of being oppressed after the death of the Prophet.²⁶ When Karimi talks about the 2009 unrest in Iran, he describes the politicians who in some way supported the protesters as the exact people who stood against Ali after the Prophet died. It should be noted, however, that comparing Khamenei with Ali first occurred much earlier, as one of the main slogans among Khamenei's followers was always: "We are not from the Kufa, (letting) Ali to be alone".

25 Motahhari 1380/2001: 80ff.

26 Ibid.

6 Revolt and Deflection

Karimi Qodusi, as one of the major critics of Rouhani's policies, depicts Rouhani as the continuation of the "revolt" and "deflection" (*enheraf*) movement in Iran, and there are several reasons for that. Indirectly he puts the Iranian Sunni community (or at least the politically active persons) in the "revolt" movement, because during the 2009 election campaign almost all Iranian Sunnis decided to vote for Karroubi and Mousavi – the two leaders that were part of the 2009 movement and whom Rouhani later promised to pardon from their house arrest. (The Sunni followers continued their support for Karroubi and Mousavi in spite of their house arrest). In addition, in February 2017 a group of members of parliament belonging to Rouhani's moderate faction, as well as a few Sunni representatives, visited Mohammad Khatami²⁷ who is still known as the father of the reformist movement but is banned from public activity (he nevertheless supported Karroubi and Mousavi in 2009). The visit was heavily criticized by hardliners in the parliament due to Khatami's support to Karroubi and Mousavi and consequently the association with the 2009 movement, and thus led to hard reactions also from Karimi:

This moderate stream and American Islam try to defeat the religious regime and one sign of this was the revolt of -88 (2009) < ... >. The revolt of -88 was a complicated political coup d'état and nowadays we unfortunately see some of the members of parliament are visiting the heads of the revolt < ... > Some of those (associated with revolt, i.e. reformists) are suggesting a national détente. This nation is not like Afghanistan, where different tribes and clans are against each other and fight. In this country (Iran) *velayat-e faqihe* (the rule of the jurisprudent) manage the divine reign

The Green Movement, or the 2009 unrest, emerged in opposition to the 2009 presidential election in which Ahmadinejad was victorious. The protests were the largest public demonstration since the 1979 revolution started in Tehran and continued on a smaller scale in other major cities such as Mashhad, Isfahan and Shiraz. The protesters initially opposed the result of the election and supported the opposition candidates Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi – the two candidates who did not accept the result of the 2009 election and

27 Radiofarda 1395/2017.

demanded further investigations. However, the demands among the protesters grew and resulted in major opposition towards the whole regime.²⁸

After the 2009 unrest, the Islamic Republic hardliners brought the concept of “revolt” (*fetne*) into the public discourse. This time it was not about “infiltration” which is an imported threat from the outside, but rather *fetne* which means a threat which was created and expanded from within the country. This term is translated as “disorder” by Elling;²⁹ he further points out that (ibid.): “[i]n classical Islamic thought, *fetne* is one of the signs of the coming apocalypse and the return of the Messiah.... the regime has also applied the term to demonize protesters in the 2009 uprising. In the case of ethnic unrest, it carried particular connotations of the fragmentation of the Muslim community between extremism and moderation, between Sunni and Shiite and between true believers and hypocrites.” Karimi is still one of the politicians who supports the execution of both Mir Hossein Mousavi (connected to the Baluchi community) and Mehdi Karroubi (connected to the Kurdish Sunni in the western provinces), who were sent into house arrest and banned from any political activity. However, after the 2013 election, one of Rouhani’s promises was to end the house arrest, a promise which was extremely harshly criticized by hardliners such as Karimi.

In conclusion, Karimi’s discourse depicts the implementation of the Islamic Republic as a mix of literal and allegorical copies of the development of early Islam. The loyal, revolutionary and trusted elites (*khodi*) are the Shiites who supported Ali. While the other groups, which are described as “Western-oriented”, extremist groups (Al-Qaeda, Wahhabism and ISIL) or belonging to “American Islam”, are seen as the opposition to Shiite Islam and compared directly with other Caliphs and Sunnis in general. The discourse here is generally not about the Sunni or the Iranian Sunni community, but rather about delegitimizing moderate/reformist movements within Iran – e.g. by demonizing their political opponent. However, Karimi, like many other conservatives in the Islamic Republic, uses Shiite ideology and history in his favour to bring the elite’s internal competitions to a different level, in which they can present this battle not as solely political but also about religious ideology. Indeed, Karimi’s speech shows how, in the Islamic Republic’s rhetoric, the history of Islam and the roots of the Sunni-Shiite divide is still used in the state’s discourse to legitimize the elite’s interests and suppress the opposition. Moreover, this example shows the way that the Islamic Republic’s hardliners, i.e. precisely the conservatives of

28 Regarding the demonstration and its development see Harris 2017: 11–13 & 179–181. Also, Harris 2012.

29 Elling 2013: 103.

the Mashhad-Axis in this case, apply their narrative in the public sphere by presenting the Islamic Revolution as a mirror reflecting the history of Islam and the continuation of the Shiite confession.

As a result, while such a discourse may positively influence some Shiite conservatives in Iran, it also provokes the Sunni communities as they see it as direct contempt and disrespect of Sunni beliefs and followers. After this speech there was a strong counteraction by the Sunni faction of the parliament which wrote a letter to Ali Larijani, the head of parliament, and stated that such behaviour and public discourse do “not just bring dissatisfaction and disunity, but also cause social insecurity”.³⁰

30 Asriran 1395/2017.

Annex 1

General Notes about Translations

Regarding the translation of the speeches and texts in Annex 1 and 2, I would like to add the following clarifying information:

1. If there is a quotation from any other sources within the text/speech, the translation will be in single quotes if the translation is done by me, otherwise double quotes are used, and the source is provided in the footnote.
2. The paragraphs in translations are divided based on my analysis and do not always follow the original paragraph division. In order to make a reference to the translation, each paragraph starts with a number between brackets. However, in the case of official letters or texts (and not speech) the division of the original text is kept.
3. In the majority of the examples the whole texts/speeches were translated, however in order to limit the length of this book, some of the examples are shortened: a) if the text is not related to the overall topic and the aims of this study or b) if it is repetition. In the case of cutting part of the texts/speeches an overall overview of the erased part will be provided between angle brackets < >. If one or more sentences are repeated or paraphrase the previous sentence, it is denoted with < ... > as replacement in the text.
4. In order to provide the reader with quick explanations and/or make the sentences more clear in regards to the actual meaning which is inherent in the context or embedded in the language, I add additional words for clarity within round brackets (). Also, when there are reactions from the audience these are recorded within round brackets, for instance (The public shouts Allahoakbar). In cases when it is necessary to fix the sentence grammatically in order to understand it, the added words are provided within square brackets [].
5. As this book contains analysis and translation of public speeches, I mark with bold for clarity the parts of the translation during which the speaker's voice is becoming louder or emotional in order to emphasize their points.
6. For the speeches, the relevant time stamp is provided for the beginning of each paragraph.

Ali Khamenei¹

(1) <He welcomes and congratulates the Prophet and Imam Jafar on their birthdays> In addition I congratulate you all; the Iranian Nation, Islamic nations, Islamic Umma (society), and also all free (independent) people in the world; for whom liberty and humanity is valuable. Because today is the birthday of the Prophet of knowledge. [He is the] Prophet of knowledge, Prophet of rationality, Prophet of morality, Prophet of mercy, Prophet of unity, and Prophet of all great human mindsets. Whoever is attached to those human mindsets, loves the Prophet of Islam and is attached to him.

(2) 00:02:27 Me and you, as Muslims, who claim to follow this magnanimous [man; i. e. Prophet] and are proud of it and ready to persevere in his way and sacrifice our soul and property, need to follow and maintain [to reach] these lessons which the Prophet bestowed upon us. Which means the [mentioned] knowledge, rationality, wisdom, mercy and unity as well as morality and human mindset, which were compiled by the Prophet of Islam and (for which) Sadiq² did the most extensive efforts to expand the concepts and substantiate these lessons. This is the duty of all Muslims.

(3) 00:04:05 However, the general population follows their countries' authorities. Nations, elites, intellectuals, scholars (Ulama), politicians and the like, have the main responsibilities in this arena. And when nowadays I look at our own social affairs and the Islamic world, I see although these [earlier mentioned] concepts are all important for the Islamic world, knowledge is important, also rationality and morality are important. But the first priority which is important for the Islamic world is unity. We, Muslims, are kept apart dramatically. Politics, unfortunately, made a successful effort to separate Muslims' hearts from each other. Today we need unity.

(4) 00:05:44 If all the nations of Islamic countries all around this wide region – which builds a large number of populations of the world – accompany each other not in details but in general orientations, the Islamic world will reach its great growth and transcendence. [Indeed] when they (Islamic nations) are seen together, this great unity already in itself has an impact. If the authorities

1 The selected speech is from 9 January 2015, in which Khamenei spoke at the 28th International Conference of Islamic Unity. The speech is found at: Khamenei (1393/2015).

2 The short version is used here. Original speech: His highness Abi 'Abdullah Ja'far ibn Muhammad Al-Sadiq.

or the intellectuals of Islamic countries talk against each other – although just words – [that] makes the enemy rude and hopeful, indeed this is today's reality. Even if we just stand together in our statements, it will dignify the Islamic world and the characteristic of Islamic Umma. <He explained further and mentions the example of Eid prayers³ and quoted a Hadith from the Prophet> Just the fact of bodies lined up next to each other together in prayer is an honour (and brings prestige) to the Prophet, as well as pride and respect for the Islamic Umma. The same holds for the gathering of the Hajj. This year you saw in Arbaeen⁴ millions of people come together; alone this great movement of the group of Muslims – although not just Shiites but also Sunnis – was reflected in the world, they bow [to us] and honoured [us]; called this the largest (pilgrimage) gathering on earth. Who? Those who observe Islamic affairs. <He thanks the Iraqi government and people for their support during the Arbaeen ceremony in Karbala> The enemies of Muslims and Ahl-e Beyt⁵ thought they closed this path (the physical access/way to Karbala), now look what a great movement occurred. <repeating the importance of gathering together> If we stay together, and Islamic countries, Islamic nations – Sunni and Shiite and their different Islamic streams – have pure heart with each other (i. e. be on friendly terms) and do not mistrust, be suspicious and disrespect each other, you [will] see what will happen in the world, what an honour for Islam! Unity, unity!

(5) ^{00:10:43} Nowadays too, among the Sunni and Shiite, there are some hands working on separation (of the Sunni and Shiite). If you search those hands, it leads to espionage and intelligence services of Islam's enemies; **not the enemy of Iran, not the enemy of the Shiite but the enemy of Islam. That Shiite who has contact with MI-6 of England or that Sunni, who is a hireling of the CIA of America, are neither Sunni nor Shiite – both are against Islam.** (The public shouting “Allahuakbar Khamenei is leader, down with (who) is against *velayat-e faqih*, down with America, England, dissidents, infidels and Israel”) We are saying loudly in the last 35 years in the Islamic Republic, not just saying but acting. The help of the Islamic Republic until today to its brothers in the Islamic world, is mostly support to the Sunni brothers. We stand together

3 There are two special prayers called Salat al-Eid (Eid prayers), which are given in an open space. The first one is Fitr and the second one is Adha.

4 A Shiite religious ceremony which occurs 40 days after the Ashura, the martyrdom of Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet. This ceremony is acclaimed among the Shiite in different countries and millions of people (among them also Sunnis) attend Karbala annually to visit Hussein's shrine: Piggot 2014.

5 The term refers to the family of the Prophet and all Shiite Imams.

with Palestinians, the people of belief in the region. Because we know, that the matter of unity is at the top of Islamic affairs (agenda). I suggest and insist to the great Ulamas, intellectuals and the politicians in the Islamic world, to avoid divisiveness. **Some people are investing money in Islamophobia and destroying the face (image) of Islam. It is against rationality and also (our) politics to try to damage and destroy our face from the inside and frighten the people.**

(6) 00:13:32 I have heard that some states in the region aim their foreign policies against Iran! Why? This is against rationality and wisdom. This is stupid work. Why (are) people making such a big mistake? On the contrary; we based our foreign policy on friendship, brotherhood and relationship with all Islamic countries and the countries in the region, whether our neighbour or not. This is our policy; we act in this way and will act the same in the future. Alhamdulillah (praise God) Iran's nation reached this wisdom and supreme knowledge to know that the expediency of their country's future depends on Islamic unity of the Islamic nations and countries. Although [enemies] try to create issues, suspicion and lead the people into temptation. However, Alhamdulillah our nation today is wise. The loud message of our great Imam (Khomeini) – before the Islamic Revolution and after the establishment of the Islamic regime – about the matter of unity had its impact. Our people became aware. This is our responsibility. Today all Muslims around the world should think about the Islamic Ummah and the Islamic unity. If we think about the Ummah, our countries' interests will be secured. The expediency of the enemy is to divide us, attack one country, while taking sides with others. This is the enemy's intention; we do not let it (happen). <Further he discusses who are enemies: American capitalism and global arrogance led by America and the Zionists> In order to stand against them (enemies) we should look at Islam and the Quran <...>.

(7) 00:17:05 In Quran it is stated: "Say, [O believers], we have believed in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Descendants and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him".⁶ However after saying all this then [Quran] adds "So if they believe in the

6 Quran 2:136. Khamenei quoted Quran verse in the original Arabic. The English translation used here is from: <https://quran.com>.

same as you believe in, then they have been [rightly] guided”;⁷ Islam does not believe in (religious) pluralism. Those who promote – due to erroneous information or due to their ignorance – that Islam respects Moses and Jesus, thus it accepts pluralism, should read the Quran and other Islamic texts. Islam is this <he quotes the verse again>. Quran said about the Prophet “[he is] concerned for you and to the believers [he] is kind and merciful”⁸ [which means] being friendly with believers but “those with him are forceful against the disbelievers, merciful among themselves”.⁹ So, against people who are your enemy be “forceful”, which means be hard; do not be soft earthwork so that the enemy can infiltrate you. Be strong, persist, but “merciful among themselves”, with each other, your hearts should be pure and kind to each other [so that] **names cannot separate you; the geographic borders do not make you enemy with each other.**

(8) 00:19:26 These are lessons from the Prophet. Today we should learn from it <...> our priority in the Islamic world is unity. We hope God helps us to practice what we preach¹⁰ Oh God! Make the Islamic world and Ummah everyday greater and prouder.

Ebrahim Raisi¹¹

(1) <Welcoming and thanking the participants>. Today an exemplary unity exists in our society due to the blessing of people’s participation and the guidance of Ulamas – [such as] you in different regions! Further, this unity is a divine blessing. The security in our country is beholden to awareness of Ulamas and people, because without their presence, the security will be destroyed by the enemies’ infiltration. But you, Ulamas, sounding the alarms in your tribune [so] that no one can infiltrate into the lines of people. This border guarding, geographical borders as well as ideological borders, is very valuable.

7 Ibid. 2:137.

8 Ibid. 9:128.

9 Ibid. 48:29.

10 This is the English idiom corresponding to what is said in Persian, i.e. “to act according to the words we speak”.

11 There is no sound recording available of this speech, while a written and probably shortened version of the original speech is found in Raisi 1396/2017.

(2) 38 years after the Islamic Revolution the economy and living circumstances of especially the underprivileged and deprived people is not graceful for the Islamic Republic's regime. The unemployment and lack of jobs is not graceful for our academics. The structures which build corruption in offices and organizations must be reformed. We should not have hovel schools in some regions. We should not witness the cry of mothers, for the unemployment of their children.

(3) In our country the resources are not few. We have a rich country. Kurdistan, Sistan-Baluchistan, and Bandar Abbas and all our provinces have good potential. Some western countries have 50% of their GDP from sea (exploitation, e.g. of water resources), whereas our percentage is just two. If we would have invested a part of liquidity to employment, many of our factories would not be closed [today]. Thus, the resources should be managed. The fact that we do not have few resources is not an electoral [campaign] word (slogan). In my heart there is really no desire to be president; I am the servant of holy Astan (the foundation) of Imam Reza, which is not replaceable with anything in the world. But I believe that the country's current situation can be changed with revolutionary, competent and religious management.

(4) Abstain from drawing a line [between] the Sunni and Shiite political orientations, as citizens of this country we should be ready to serve. In the forced war (Iran-Iraq War) we had martyrs from all ethnic groups and religious confessions. The pride of the country is the pride of us. Our country can reach new heights and wherever there was a Jihadi management, [as result] a glorious movement occurred.

(5) Our priority is the relationship with our neighbours. We have 15 neighbours and our priority should be a relationship with them. There is 2300-billion-dollar trade in the region. How much is our share there and in the transit market? We have to play a role, and drawing a line has served no one. Whoever has a National ID card [is Iranian], the symbol is this National ID card. <He addresses again the issues of unemployment and poverty and his fight to solve them>. By removing this line (between Shiite and Sunni) and with the help of God this (solving the problem) is not impossible. Together with the influential people in today's society, those who have appreciation for their country, we can move the country forward. We have competition from no one. I am here to eradicate absolute poverty, to overcome Sunni and Shiite opposition and destroy the unemployment and corruption <...>.

Ali Yunesi¹²

(1) First of all, I have to tell you a Hadith by the Prophet about the point “difference among the Umma is a blessing”. If we define difference so that our opinion is different than yours, the Prophet said that it is a divine reality that people differ from each other.

(2) The divine volition is so that people are different. The Prophet said that this difference in some other places can make trouble, but among my Umma it is an opportunity. The God created us as human and humans are different. Important is whether we acknowledge these differences as an opportunity, or as a threat. Even the companions of the Prophet were diverse and sometimes faced challenges among themselves. But at the end they build a brotherly society.

(3) Not just the differences between Shiite and Sunni, but we have to acknowledge the differences between Islam and non-Islam also as an opportunity. Islam did not proceed by violence and force, but by the exercise of morals. The heart cannot become peaceful by the sword, but with the Quran. Unfortunately, we are witnessing that the enemies are trying to create a wave of Islamophobia and actually the symbol (of this Islamophobia) is Daesh (ISIL) and Taliban who try to demolish Islam. But it is our duty to not let our soil come into the hands of extremist groups.

(4) One of the government’s duties is the matter of employment, and the government’s priority is the peripheral areas. There are good investments from the government, while for the results we have to be patient <...>. The president keeps his promises and puts emphasis on accomplishing these promises. There two barriers are the following. First the government’s budget. The second is that some do not want the problems to be solved and try to hamper the process. Be sure that the border areas are a priority. In the words of the Supreme Leader the unity among the Shiite and Sunni is in focus and he even designates those who hamper the unity among Shiite and Sunni the “English Shiite”. The regime’s intention is the unity of Shiite and Sunni.

12 There is no sound recording available of this speech, while a detailed transcript is found here: ISNA 1395/2017. Note that this speech is a written version of the original speech and probably is shortened at some points.

(5) Khorasan¹³ played an effective role in the history of Islam. It was Khorasan who fought together with Abumoslem Khorasani against Islam's enemies, leading to Abuhanife defending the Zeynab. Nobles, Imams, Ulama and a variety of historians came from this region and it's the birthplace of the Supreme Leader.

(6) We have to endeavour that Iran (as a country), focuses on Iran ('s interest). As the Supreme Leader already stated, "the Sunni Mufti should be from Iran". The local issues are not unimportant and have to be solved, but our vision should be wider than these. Regarding opening a (religious) University for the Sunni community, we are trying to accomplish it.

Makarem Shirazi¹⁴

(1) Regarding the plan of Takfiri Wahhabism to infiltrate the region, the Grand Ayatollah warned and pointed out that: "If there will be no consideration, lots of dangers will confront the country and regime". He acknowledged the roots of these movements (Takfiri Wahhabi movement) as political and from outside the country: "Expanding the culture of Ahl-e Beyt (Shiite) in the region made the Takfiri Wahhabi angry and confused, so they (enemy) plan to target the centre of this axis (Shiite ideology) – the Islamic Republic".

(2) In the opinion of the grand Ayatollah: unsettling the population structure of the region, buying the lands belonging to the Shiite, forced emigration of Shiite to regions in which they are a minority and making economic investments in the region, are some plans of them (the enemies) to infiltrate the country. Further he stated: "An agent has to examine this issue and ways of countering it based on statistics and realities".

(3) Grand Ayatollah acknowledged that arranging events such as this congress in order to present important Shiite persons and spreading the Shiite Imams' works, is one way to counteract the enemies' infiltration and stated: "This (policy) will be a blessing for the region and also for the regime and it should be operated majestically. Because this is a service to the school of Shiite, and to the holy regime of the Islamic Republic". <Makarem mentioned another

13 Here is meant the historical "great Khorasan", which is a wider territory, and not today's province.

14 The speech selected here is Makarem's talk at the congress in Bandar Abbas on 17 October 2013. There is no sound recording available of this speech, but the official news agency of Makarem provided a selected summary version: Baligh News (1392/2013). In the translation the exact quotation of Makarem is given in double quotes.

upcoming congress and stated:> “Some people shout that someone (Makarem himself) together with his friends, wants to oppress the Sunni community, although we invited people from the Sunni community, who gave speeches and participated in this congress”.

(4) Grand Ayatollah pointed out that no one has the right to insult the sanctity of the Sunni Community or other Islamic confessions. Nor does anyone have the right to dare to (insult) the sanctity of the Shiite and he said: “The supreme leader of the Revolution and Ayatollah Sistani also do not accept the harassing and insult of the sanctity of other Islamic confessions”. He stated: “Our discussion here is about the Takfiri (Wahhabism) movements, which made the Islamic countries and the world unsecure, and everyday kill innocent people”. Grand Ayatollah further stated that the main source and core (i.e. their teachings) of the Takfiri movements are lies and accusations: “This shows that they do not employ logic, but anyway we should clarify and answer their lies and accusations.”

Javad Karimi Qodusi¹⁵

(1) Leaving the arena, the absence of the Muslims, at a time during which Fatimah and Ali suffered is the biggest grief of the Islamic world and the Muslims < ... >. The public participation is the whole message of our Islamic Revolution. This is the Imam’s (Khomeini) words that all (people) should be in the middle of the arena to protect the Islamic Revolution’s accomplishments < ... > thus, if you see your revolution is deflected, take position, and shout to gain power. < ... > whoever is against the enlightenment of the (Iranian) nation, acting for loneliness (suffering) of Fatimah in our time and prepare the repetition of that major catastrophe < ... >.

(2) The earlier time of the (Islamic) Revolution was similar to the early time of Islam, as two streams were opposing each other. One was the revolutionary stream, which was loyal to the religion from the heart. They were not part of any (political) party or group. They were self-motivated and always ready in their core to fulfil their duty to this grand sacred revolution. The other stream, which was from the beginning against the former one, was the stream which said: your revolution is over, the Shah is gone, and the Islamic Republic is

15 This speech was given on Friday 3rd of March 2017 in Mashhad at the Imam Reza shrine. There is no sound recording available of this speech, while a detailed transcript is found here: ISNA Khorasan 1395/2017.

created. Bazargan went one day to the Imam (Khomeini) and said: I do not believe that you should continue the revolution and fight with America. The Imam stated: This is the beginning, and this is the message of pure Islam, which succeeded, succeeds and will succeed. Thus he (Bazargan) resigned and left. Until today if you see any issue and challenge in the country, the roots are in that latter west-oriented stream, which opposed the revolutionary stream. The west-oriented stream was active in those last 38 years. Similar to the early time of Islam, as the deflection happened, and the people were excluded. They created a Saqifah (a gathering place) with five persons and caused a fearful environment and made supporters and facilities. Until today the last of them (supporters) are Daesh, Al-Qaeda and the Wahhabi streams.

(3) <He continues the point that the moderate stream of Rouhani is the same as the deflected stream of early Islam>. The Moderate stream is the root of deflection. Interestingly (in the early Islam) those people who were the root of the deflection, were buried beside the owner of the prophetic mission and sacred revolution (the Prophet), so that the Muslims do not forget their names. In our country the same thing happened. Those who were the root of the deflection are buried at the same place as the Imam (Khomeini) is buried. Thus, the moderate stream together with the American Islam are trying to change the Imamate regime into monarchy. <He further elaborates the issue of the American Islam and criticizes the moderate faction>. This moderate stream and American Islam tries to defeat the religious regime and one sign of this was the revolt of -88 (2009) < ... >. The revolt of -88 was a complicated political coup d'état and nowadays we unfortunately see some of the members of parliament are visiting the heads of the revolt < ... >.

(4) Some of those (associated with revolt, i.e. reformists) are suggesting a national détente. This nation is not like Afghanistan, where different tribes and clans are against each other and fight. In this country (Iran) *velayat-e faqihe* (the rule of the jurisprudent) manage the divine reign. Its most important mission is the unity of the Islamic Ummah, and this unity is maintained in its best form. Nowadays like the time of Nahj al-Balagha (famous collection of sermons, talks, letters and narrations of Ali), [Some people] (associated with revolt) want to breakdown the supreme leader's power and planned to oppose him and the effects of his word and his management. From the event of 9th of the Khordad (30 May 1992) in Mashhad, as the supreme leader stated; if the Revolution needs 20 attacks to be defeated, one was this event which the criminals in Mashhad created, then the further incidents which they created, with the peak being the revolt of 2009.

PART 3

*Exclusionary Co-existence, Perspectives
from Sunni Communities*



Introduction to Part 3

This part, similarly to the previous part, reveals the main discourses of the Sunni elites from the Iranian Sunni communities between 2013 and 2021. The protagonists of this part are: Abdolhamid Esmailzayi; Hasan Amini; Jalal Jalalizade; Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi; and Behzad Feqhi. A short biographical background to the person is presented at the beginning of the part. It is important to note that in this part, especially concerning the biography of the protagonists, the author consulted all of them and remained in contact with them. In fact, the author translated this part into Persian and gave it to them, received their feedback and then finalized the analysis. In other words, the author did not work on the protagonists' sermons without including their perspective and insight, a process which brought the analysis into a new dimension. In this regard, it is important to remark that in the wider religious frame, sermons cannot be understood apart from their setting, the speaker and the audience, which "constitute a system of reference" in the words of Patrick Gaffney.¹

Each chapter in this part elaborates on a socio-politically specific set of problems that Iranian Sunnis face in Iran. The idea is also to show how these issues originated from "paradoxes that the modern nation-state generates in its management of religious difference", as Saba Mahmood briefly argued (see also chapter 1).² This part is divided into two separate chapters. First, in chapter 5, the idea of tolerance and co-existence is discussed among the Sunni elites. The core idea of this chapter is how the Iranian Sunni elites define tolerance and co-existence and in which ways these ideas differ or are similar to the Islamic Republic (compare to chapter 3 where the idea of unity was discussed). Second, in chapter 6, by discussing the issues related to the life of Iranian Sunnis such as injustice, discrimination and inequality, we will go through the major concerns and demands from Iranian Sunni communities. In this chapter, I will discuss how these socio-political and economic issues are reflected in the protagonists' discourses. Further, in order to grasp these issues, various examples from the Hasan Rouhani era are given. Rather than discussing these socio-political events based on a journalistic view from a variety of news agencies, I carried out a situated analysis with an emphasis on the narration which was reflected among the Iranian Sunni communities based on extensive ethnographic observation.

1 Gaffney 1987: 204.

2 Mahmood 2015a: 11.

1 Protagonists

1.1 *Abdolhamid Esmailzayi*

Molana Abdolhamid Esmailzayi was born 1947, in the Galugah village in the west of Zahedan in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan. In his childhood there was no religious school, so he studied with the local Mullas at the mosque. He later moved to Pakistan and studied in Dar al-Huda and later on in Badr al-Ulum Rahim Khan. One of his main teachers there was Shaykh al-Tafsir Molana Abd al-Ghani Jajrudi. After his return in 1971, he supported his father-in-law Molana Abdolaziz in opening the Makki Darolulum, which became the largest and one of the main Sunni institutions belonging to Iranian Sunnis (see part 1). Initially Abdolhamid was a teacher and also in charge of the madrasa's internal affairs, and after Abdolaziz's death in August 1987, he became the head of Darolulum and Shaykh al-Islam of Zahedan.

Abdolhamid sees his path as the continuation of his predecessor Molana Abdolaziz, which he described as “the path of reform and toleration”.³ To achieve this idea Abdolhamid emphasizes the creation of a peaceful society in which differences do not destroy security. For this the reason, one of his main activities is solving social issues in the Sistan-Baluchistan province. The different tribes come to him to solve their issues as he also plays a mediatory role within his community – a role which he interested in expanding and bringing to a wider context by being involved in the country's internal politics. It is very common that in the case of socio-political issues in Iran, Abdolhamid tries to show his support for the opposition while following the establishment's general red lines and orders, as was the case during the Green Movement, or the 2019–2020 public uprising.

Under his guidance, Darolulum of Makki expanded massively, and other institutions were added to it. Worthy of mention are:

- The institution for the Arabic language (*ma'had al-loghat al-Arabiyya va al-Darasat al-Islamiyya*), similar to a Bachelor programme established in 1999 for studying in Arabic.
- A Shafei Jurisprudence specialization, which was established in 1998 for the Shafei Muslims who want to study at Darolulum.
- Expanding the Sunni madrasas for women; while by the death of Molana Abdolaziz there was only one madrasa for women (*maktab-e hazrat ayeshe*), by the end of 2016 the number of madrasas for women in Zahedan alone had increased to 12. The women can mostly obtain their specialization in

3 Interview with one of Abdolhamid's pupils on Jun 2019. He is currently working at Darolulum of Makki. The interviewee wanted to remain anonymous.

reading Quran, Hadith and *fiqh*. In an interview with one of the female teachers in Zahedan, she explained: “The female curriculum is a bit different from the male one, as the female madrasas should prepare women for their affairs at home and for their duty as wife and mother. However, there is a growing interest among our girls in madrasas in expanding their knowledge in Hadith and Tafsir interpretation, which we fully support.”

- *Majma-e feqhi*, which was organized in 2007 to connect other Sunni scholars (*feqh specialists*) from all over the country.
- Creating the official website of Darolulum (Sunnionline⁴) which reflects news related to the Iranian Sunni communities as well as Muslim minorities all around the world. The website claims to be the “news agency of Iranian Sunnis” and provides its content in five languages (Farsi, Arabic, Baluchi, Urdu and English).
- Publishing two magazines; *Neday-e Islam* (since 2000, published quarterly) and *al-Sohvat al-Islamiyya* (since 2004, published monthly in Arabic). In addition to these two periodicals, Darolulum has its own publisher (Seddiqi Publisher), providing a variety of religious books, translated or written by the main teachers at Darolulum.
- Three financial institutions which are all independent from the state:
 - 1) Office of Donor Relations (*daftar-e omur-e khayyerin*), which is in charge of the public donors to Darolulum.⁵
 - 2) Mohsenin Charity Institute, established in 2002, providing support for poor families in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan and also in other Sunni inhabited provinces. During natural catastrophes such as earthquakes or floods (as in 2020 in northern Iran), this institution mobilizes and facilitates large scale support.
 - 3) Aziziyye financial institution, opened in 2010, which gives financial credits to poor families to support them in facilitating marriage or education.

1.2 *Hasan Amini*

Hasan Amini was born in 1946 in a Qeshlaq-e Afghanan in Saqqez county, Kurdistan province. Until 1977 he lived in small villages in the province Kurdistan and continued his religious activities. He studied Shafeii *Feqh* and was a student of Sunni clerics such as Mamusta⁶ Molla Abdolrahman Taheri, Seyyed Mohammad Sheykholeslami, Mollah Khaled Mofti and Ahmad

4 www.sunnionline.us.

5 In conversation with one of the personnel of this office, he claimed that Darolulum is fully dependent on the public donations given by the Iranian Sunnis inside and outside Iran. Every year, around the month of Ramadan, they expect to receive the money from their donors.

6 Higher religious teachers are called Mamusta in the Kurdish community.

Moftizade. He subsequently moved to Sanandaj upon the invitation of Kak Ahmad Moftizade and became his assistant. After the Islamic Revolution, when Ahmad Moftizade decided to organize SHAMS, the “Central Council of the Sunnis” (see Part 1), he contacted Hasan Amini to be the moderator of the meeting, and then he continued to support Moftizade and his *maktab-e quran* and SHAMS until its ban in 1982. Amini then received the official permission from Moftizade to become the *hakem-e shar-e kordestan* (Chief of religious law) who is responsible for answering religious questions, and his office was in principle a kind of *fatwa* office, which is a well-established administrative office in several religious schools in the Sistan-Baluchistan region. Amini was also sent to jail in 1982 after Moftizade was arrested and spent three years in the Islamic Republic’s prisons. Finally, he became the head of a madrasa of Imam Bukhari of Sanandaj.

Amini was well-known, predominantly for his social and religious affairs, but also for giving interviews to news agencies based outside of Iran and critical of Islamic Republic, such as Deutsche Welle, Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Farda, in addition to the Sunni satellite channels Nour and Kalame. Due to these activities, he was investigated by the authorities.⁷ Finally, it is interesting to point out Amini’s connection with the Iranian Sunni Deobandi in Baluchistan. Indeed, he was invited to a Sunni graduation ceremony (*khatm-e bokhari*) in Zahedan, during which he held a speech containing criticism of the government and the discrimination against the Sunni communities. However, in recent years he has not been permitted to join this gathering and has generally been banned from visiting Iranian Baluchistan.⁸

1.3 *Jalal Jalalizade*

Jalal Jalalizade (b. 1960) is a politician, scholar and intellectual from the Kurdish community. Originally from the city of Sanandaj, Jalalizade started his first Islamic education with his father, Haj Mamusta Molla Ali. Later, he began his education from Bachelor to PhD at Tehran University in Islamic jurisprudence. Currently he is a faculty member in the Shafei jurisprudence department in Tehran University. Beside his journalistic and academic activities he was the deputy member of Sanandaj, Diwandara and Kamiyaran (in the Kurdistan Region) to the sixth Majles (2000–2004), which was dominated by reformist

⁷ Sunnionline 1392/2013a.

⁸ Based on the magazine *rah-e ma* (our path) published by *Maktab-e qoran-e kordestan*, Amini’s last visit to Zahedan for *khatm-e bokhari* was in 2009, where he was arrested after his speech. In that speech he discussed the 2009 presidential election and the oppression of the demonstrators, amongst other criticism of the Islamic Republic: *Rah-e ma* 1390/2011.

politicians. Jalalizade also came from the reformist political group and was closely connected to the former president Muhammad Khatami, as Jalalizade was the adviser to the future Interior Minister for the Sunni affairs during the Khatami presidential campaign,⁹ as well as lobbying for Khatami in the Sunni community. During this time, as Jalalizade visited Aq-Qala (a Turkmen village dominated by Sunni in north Iran) to give a speech in June 2005, but as a result he was arrested and sent to prison for a year.¹⁰ In his speech he had criticized the general policies of the Islamic Republic relating to the lack of free media and the discrimination against minorities, a point which he also addressed from time to time later on. He was also the director of Sirvan weekly newspaper (from 1997 to 2005), which has been published since end of 1990s in Persian and Kurdish.

Jalalizade was one of the founders of the Kurdish political party “Kurdish United Front” (See Part 1), where he cooperated with Kurdish reformist politicians. Jalalizade wrote and translated over 20 books mostly about Islamic jurisprudence. He also publishes his notes about socio-political issues, mostly related to the life of Iranian Sunnis in various newspapers and magazines on a weekly basis. Among his main activities at the parliament, the following are worth mentioning: opening the Kurdish Studies department at the University of Kurdistan, and establishing the Kurdish members of parliament faction at the sixth parliament. He also gave a speech in Kurdish for the first time in the history of Iranian parliament.

1.4 *Behzad Feqhi (Saljuqi)*

Behzad Feqhi (b. 1980) from the Saljuqi clan, originated from the Hanafi Muslims of the Taymuri tribe descending from the nomadic Teymuri tribe of Turco-Mongolic Aymaq.¹¹ The most prominent of his lineage was his grandfather, Molana Serajoddin Feqhi (1923–2014), a poetry and religion teacher at the Talimolqoran madrasa in Saleh-abad in Tarbat Jam, and educated by the Deobandi school master Molana Abdoljamil Badakhshani. It is also important in this context to note Serrajoddin’s affiliation with the Naqshbandi Sufi order, which is an influential Sunni Sufi lineage especially in the Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia, as well as being strongly represented in Iranian Khorasan and Baluchistan.¹² Behzad Feqhi once pointed out that his grandfather was

9 Dudoignon 2017: 255–6.

10 HRW 2009: 39.

11 This information was given by him in an interview with the author in July 2019 and December 2021.

12 Regarding the Naqshbandiyye in the Indian Subcontinent and its spread in Iran see Weismann 2007: 51–5 & 101–7.

in contact with Ali Khamenei before the Islamic Revolution as both of them lived in Mashhad.¹³ In addition, the Feqhi family is well known because of Serajoddin's father Molana Qazi Jalaluddin Feqhi Saljuqi (1891–1974, born in Musaabad district of Torbat Jam in the village of Almajuq), who was a famous poet both in Khorasan and Afghanistan, where he completed his religious studies. Among his numerous literary works there are a variety of poems praising the Imam Ali and his son Hossein as well the twelfth Shiite Imam Mahdi. After his return from Herat, he was in contact with Amir Teymur (Sardar Nosrat) and became the Sharia judge (*qazi-ye shar'i*) and Imam in the Qarachador (later Chahabad), where he also established a madrasa and a library. Due to the major role of Qazi Jalaluddin in conflict resolution and mediation in Chahabad, the village was renamed *dar al-aman* (the house of safety) by the Sardar Nosrat. Finally, Qazi Jalaluddin was a part of *dar al-taqrib* and thus had an established connection with the grand Ayatollah Seyyed Hossein Borujerdi and other clerics active in *dar al-taqrib*.¹⁴

Raised within this family, Behzad Feqhi went to school in Mashhad and later went for religious study to the Manbolulum madrasa of Kuhvan in Iranian Baluchistan. Here he became, like many other Iranian Sunni Ulama, the pupil of Molavi Mohammad Omar Mollazayi (Sarbaz) (1937–2007), who was the founder of the Manbaolulum madrasa and one of the most influential Sunni protagonists of the Sarbaz region and an active critic of the Wahhabi movement.¹⁵ Later, Feqhi travelled to Pakistan to continue his education at the Ashraf ul-Madaris in Karachi, a madrasa with more than 10 centres in Karachi alone and more than 5000 pupils in total. Feqhi was also a disciple of the Sufi master Molana Hakim Akhtar (d. 2013), the founder of the Ashraf ul-Madaris and one of the founding fathers of the Sufi Paths (Ar. & Pers. *Turuq*) with a large influence in the Subcontinent to this day.¹⁶ After his return from Pakistan to Taybad he taught in the Molana Abubakr Taybadi madrasa, and is the Friday Imam of Hazrat-e Osman Mosque. Besides a series of speeches in Afghanistan (mostly in the Nimruz province), Khorasan and Iranian Baluchistan, he established *ommahat ul-momenin* in Taybad, which is something as unusual as a madrasa for young women where they can learn general Islamic affairs in a

13 Feqhi 1396/2017.

14 For *Dar al-taqrib* see Chapter 2, Example 1. For information on Qazi Jalaluddin see Feqhi 1394/2016: 55–76; Feqhi 1371/1993, especially the brief biography in the introductory section.; For details on him from field observation see the short article by a scholar of the Ahmadiye Sunni madrasa in Torbat Jam: Teymuri 1395/2016.

15 For his Fatwas and strong criticism of Wahhabism see Sarbazi 1385/2006: 5, 11–13.

16 For a brief biography by his student in Urdu see Khanqah N.N.

variety of areas in a three-year programme “so they can use Islam in their life and for their family.”¹⁷

1.5 *Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi*

The now thirty-five-year-old Molavi Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi belongs to the same line of traditions as the school of Deoband from the Sarbaz Nexus and Naqshbandiyye guidance, which is reflected in his family name. However, in an interview with the author,¹⁸ he emphasized that “[a]ll these Sufi groups are just names, we all believe in Allah, in his Prophet and his Sunna ... Family names are also not very old in our country and it does not tell you anything about your roots”. Further, he refused to answer in which tribe he has his origin: “We all are Muslim and Baluch, and we should stop separating ourselves by categories into different tribes”. Naqshbandi began his Quranic education in the madrasa Jame Al-harameyn Al-sharifeyn located in the city of Chabahar on the coast of the Gulf of Oman (Sistan-Baluchistan province). There, he became a Hafez (memoriser) of the Quran, a highly respected status in the Islamic community. He also came into contact with Molavi Abdolrahman Mollazayi. Naqshbandi continued his religious education in Zahedan’s Darolulum, where he focused in particular on the Arabic language.¹⁹

Regarding Molavi Naqshbandi’s education, it is also worth mentioning that one of his teachers was Abdolghaffar’s father, Molavi Fathi-Mohammad Naqshbandi (b. 1958), who graduated from the renowned Darolulum of Karachi and studied in Chabahar with Molavi Abdolrahman Mollazayi as well as in Gowsht with Molavi Sayyed Abdolvahid Sayyedzade (1916–96). Fathi-Mohammad was also a companion to Molana Abdolaziz and later supported Molana Abdolhamid in the Rask region, where he (Fathi-Mohammad) was the Imam Juma of the Qasemi mosque and the Hadith teacher at the Meftaholulum madrasa of Rask. Fathi-Mohammad remained the Imam Juma of Rask until 2011.

Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi usually gives his sermon, or *khutba*, on Fridays in the grand Qasemi mosque of Rask. These enthusiastic speeches are extremely popular among his many young, passionate followers. His speeches are typically divided into two parts. First, he talks about a general topic and some ideas from the Islamic school of thought. In the second part, he addresses some of the socio-political issues affecting the Baluchi and Sunni communities, and sometimes, Iran in general. In this context it is notable that the revival

17 Interview in July 2019.

18 Interview in August 2019.

19 Based on an interview with one of his students, July 2019.

of Islamic preaching is related to modern political awareness, as was also the case in other Islamic communities.²⁰ Based on the author's participation in Naqshbani's sermon, he, as quite a popular preacher, always makes comments on controversial questions and can be expected to be provocative and critical on socio-political issues. However, similar to other preachers, he has to avoid crossing the red lines on matters of high sectarian and political sensitivity.

20 For instance, to compare with the Islamic preachers in Upper Egypt, see Gaffney (1987: 202).

Tolerance, Co-existence and the “Glory of Umma”

Ba dustan morovvat ba doshmanan modara

“With friends, magnanimity; with enemies, tolerance”

HAFEZ



On 26 June 2019, Molana Abdolhamid participated in and gave a speech at an international conference on the “Strategic Capability of Islamic Teaching to Achieve Peaceful Coexistence” (*zarfiyatha-ye rahbordi-ye amuzeha-ye eslam dar tahaqqoq-e hamzisti-ye mosalemat-amiz*) held at Tehran University (Faculty of Theology and Islamic studies).¹ The conference was organized by Mostafa Zolfaqarnasab, who works together with Ali Yunesi, and was the Special advisor on matters relating to ethnic, religious and confessional minorities to President Rouhani. The conference participants were comprised of clerics, students and scholars both from Iran and from other countries, among them being participants from the Deobandi network in India and Pakistan. The event took place at what turned out to be a critical time: one year after President Trump withdrew the US from the historic nuclear deal (JCPOA); increased tension between Iran and the US particularly after Iran shot down a US military drone; insecurity in the Strait of Hormuz; and new sanctions from the US which increased the pressure on the Iranian economy.

In this speech, Abdolhamid talks broadly to all Islamic countries and leaders and uses the common vocabularies in the Islamic Republic’s discourse such as “unity of the Umma”, “enemy” or “Islam’s high capability”. The main topic and emphasis of his speech is on solving the issues faced by the Islamic world, while Iranian nationalism is mostly absent in his discourse. Finally, the main topics and expressions often included in his discourse as a whole are: “peaceful life”, “maintaining rights”, “tolerance” and “dialogue and negotiation”.

In reaction to this conference, a text was published in Kak Hasan Amini’s social media accounts on 24 June 2019. He was invited to the conference as

1 See the official homepage: <https://scitpc.ut.ac.ir/>.

was Abdolhamid. However, Amini refused the invitation and he responded and criticized events such as these with a written statement. Amini uses the “peaceful coexistence” promoted by the Islamic Republic in a different way, namely in reverse and as a point of criticism of the state. He starts his statement by discussing the concept of “unity”, which is presented by the Islamic Republic discourse as a basic standard concept which is mandatory to achieve. Secondly, by adding that all the people of Iran are “compatriots” (*hamvatan*), he includes a reference to the fact that everyone should be seen as a “citizen” (*shahrvand*) – a concept that was also brought into the Islamic Republic’s discourse during the era of president Rouhani.

1 Reconciling with Enemies

In his speech, Molana Abdolhamid refers to several historical events from early Islam. Firstly, he mentions the Aws and Khazraj, two tribes of Medina (at that time named Yathrib) that were hostile to each other. Mohammad tried to unify them² under the umbrella of Islam, but they were still hostile after they had converted. It is interesting that in Iranian Baluchistan the “tribal conflicts” (*ekhtelafat-e tayefei*) are a serious issue which from time to time cause insurgencies and even brutal incidents. In such a society the Ulamas, like Abdolhamid, play an important role as mediator, a role which the Sardar or Kadkhoda (headman) played in earlier times. In Iranian Baluchistan there is a particular term for the “tribe reconciliation process”.³ In today’s Baluchistan the media and local people emphasize the role of Abdolhamid, referring to him as very heroic as a person and the solver of several tribal conflicts. In Abdolhamid’s second point, he wants to highlight the importance of tolerance by bringing up Mohammad’s relations with the Jews during early Islam and that there were no shouting of “death to the Jews”. Shouting “death to ‘X’” where “X” is the Islamic Republic’s enemies is very common in post-revolutionary Iran. One of those enemies is always Israel. In this part it seems that Abdolhamid is trying to criticize the Islamic Republic’s verbal hostility towards Israel. In the Iranian Sunni community it is not common to use such slogans towards any group, although

2 Watt 2012: 771f.

3 In Baluchi it is called *zahn o kapon* (lit. sword and shroud.) Based on this tradition, when someone was killed (mostly by another tribe), the offender’s tribe’s Elder brought the offender to the victim’s house together with a sword and piece of white fabric (shroud) as a symbol of death. With this they offered the victim the chance to forgive or kill the offender. I asked one of the Molavis in Zahedan about this tradition, and he told me that the Molavis do the same thing, albeit they just bring a script of the Quran and ask for forgiveness.

the community and the Ulamas clearly declare their protest against what they consider an "Israeli occupation" and Israeli behaviour towards the Palestinians. In addition, Abdolhamid raises the same point about the *monafeqin*,⁴ which is a term that after the Islamic Revolution primarily refers to the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation (MKO, i.e. People's Mojahedin of Iran). The MKO is a leftist Islamist political militant organisation which to this day is opposed to the Islamic Republic.⁵ From the Islamic perspective, *monafeq* (pl. *monafeqin*) is a person who pretends to be Muslim outwardly, but in reality is not a believer of Islam and may even in their actions endeavour to hurt the Islamic community. There is a Sura (63) in the Quran which describes them mostly as liars, misguided and corrupt. Within Shiite Islamic ideology, being a *monafeq* is much worse than being *kafer* (infidel, pl: *koffar*). Morteza Motahhari, an important cleric who had a major influence in the Islamic Revolution, stated:

monafeq is a bigger threat than *kafer*, as *kafer* is a person who does not accept Quran and the Prophet but is honest ... but whoever hides his beliefs in his heart and talks in one way and is at heart different, is a bigger threat ... In the history of Islam, we see that the Prophet fought and won but Ali could not. The reason is that the Prophet fought with *koffar* and Ali with *monafeqin*.⁶

The third point which is used in Abdolhamid's historical references is the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah. Due to the struggles between Mohammad and the Quraishi tribe of Mecca, the Muslims were banned from visiting Mecca. In 628, Mohammad and a group of Muslims marched towards Mecca for pilgrimage. They managed to enter Mecca peacefully and without violence primarily due to their achievements through "negotiation" and "conflict management".⁷ Thus, in this context Abdolhamid compares Iran's situation with that of the Muslims during early Islam, at a time when they were under hard sanctions

4 In Islam the *Monafeqin*, or *Munafiqun*, are outwardly Muslim but are in fact concealing that within they carry disbelief and hope to undermine the Muslim community. They may also actively seek to undermine the Muslim community with actions, even in cohort with enemies of Islam.

5 See Cohen 2009: 10–18.

6 Motahhari 1375/1996:149.

7 For the full narration and interpretation of the event through an Islamic perspective, it is very interesting to read a biography of Mohammad written in Urdu by Molavi Safi al-rahman Al-Mubarakpuri (1976: 459–73). The book is well-known in Iranian Baluchistan and both the original Urdu version as well the Persian and Arabic translations are available in most madrasa libraries. This book could potentially be a source of Abdolhamid's reference to this treaty.

and their strategy for extricating themselves from this situation was through diplomacy rather than direct conflict – a solution Abdolhamid has suggested several times in recent years.⁸ It is important to mention here that the reference to the Hodaybiyyah treaty as an example of diplomacy – both as encouragement and criticism of the negotiation with the US – was used in the state's discourse after Rouhani became president.⁹ However, as soon as in 2002 in a note in the conservative newspaper Keyhan, Abbas Pasandide stated that this kind of comparison is not legitimate and he consequently rejected the idea of negotiations with the US based on such a comparison to scripture.¹⁰

Abdolhamid used the term *Dhimmi* or *Ahl ul-dimma* (the people of *dhimma*) which is: “a non-Muslim subject of a state governed in accordance with sharia law. The term connotes an obligation of the state to protect the individual, including the individual's life, property, and freedom of religion and worship, and in turn required loyalty to the empire and a poll tax known as the *jizya*, which complemented the Islamic tax paid by the Muslim subjects, called *Zakat*.”¹¹ It seems that by raising this point, Abdolhamid wanted to be the representative and voice of *all* minorities in Iran, not just the Iranian Sunni, a similar standpoint to that of his predecessor Abdolaziz Mollazade, who was introduced as the protector of minorities in general.¹² In a 2019 interview, Abdolhamid again addressed this issue: “... maintaining the rights of minorities, paying attention to the nation's demands and détente in foreign policy, can bring us to political stability.”¹³

2 A Highlight from Khatm-e Sahih-e Bokhari

While in previous section we looked at speech from an event organised by the state, in this section I present an example from an event organised by the Sunni communities with a different setting. On the 3 of April 2019 the 28th

8 Example: in a 2018 interview with Hossein Dehabshi, Abdolhamid suggests that diplomacy and negotiation is the best way to solve the country's issues: VID 2 (1397/2018).

9 2013 interview with Rajab Davani: Mashreghnews (1392/2013b). Compare also with this essay from a more conservative perspective: Tasnim 1393/2014. See also a short note from Akbari 1396/2017, in which he compares the Hodaybiyyah with JCPOA. Also see Dehqani 1396/2017: 89–91.

10 The note is reposted on Khamenei's Website: Pasandide: 1381/2002.

11 Glenn 2007: 218–9.

12 Bozorgzade 1394/2015: 10.

13 Sunnionline 1398/2019b.

annual Khatm-e Sahih-e Bokhari (the graduation ceremony of Sunni pupils) at the Darolulum Makki took place in Zahedan. In this annual ceremony (since 1991) at the end of the Rajab month (seventh month of the Islamic calendar), the pupils of the Darolulum who have finished their eight years of education finally become graduated Molavis. Khatm-e Sahih-e Bokhari is named after the book sahih al-Bukhari, a collection of Hadiths by Mohammad Al-Bokhari, which is one of the main Hadith resources among Hanafi Muslims. Generally, the graduation ceremonies of the Sunni madrasa are an important aspect of the Deobandi madrasas in the subcontinent as well as in Iran and Afghanistan. In the last few years it has grown to become an annual assembly of all Iranian Sunni, with the unspoken objective of showing the "greatness of the Iranian Sunni communities." Last year around 150 000 people from different parts of Iran gathered in Zahedan, of which a majority were from the Sunni communities in Iranian Baluchistan and Khorasan. Apart from the graduation ceremonies, there are a variety of cultural activities and other "side events." Some of the most popular of these are the speeches by invited international speakers mostly from Pakistan and Afghanistan, who are predominantly famous, influential and charismatic Sunni Ulama as well as politicians (for instance the Sunni members of parliament). In addition, the Supreme Leader's representative and other officials from the Islamic Republic are usually invited to the ceremony. However, from time to time limitations to this event are enforced by the Islamic Republic, such as forbidding the participation of foreigners (mainly during Ahmadinejad's presidency) or the banning of Hasan Amini's participation and travel to Zahedan. In general, Khatm-e Bokhari is an opportunity for the wider Sunni community in Iran and neighbouring countries to see and listen to their Ulamas, and participate in discussions and debates. It is also a time for the Iranian branch of the Deobandi school – and particularly Zahedan's Darolulum – to present its power and influence.

At this event, in which Behzad Feqhi held a speech, there were several other speakers too. Earlier the same day there were two younger Molavi speakers from Iranian Baluchistan, who presented a similar discourse. Molavi Hossein Taheri, who had recently finished his education at the Darolulum of Makki, warned in his speech about the Christian Missionary groups in the Islamic world. This kind of suspicion in the Sunni community is not generally only about Christianity but of Western modernity in general, and the solution is always the promotion of Islamic values. In Molavi Feqhi's discourse the speech also starts with presenting the Islamic world or Umma as "glorious" and the cause of mercy (*rahmat*) and blessing (*barekat*). Interestingly, the words "global" and "all humans" are used frequently, which demonstrates that

Feqhi tries to address a wider public than just the Iranian Sunni community or Islamic Republic. Moreover, the use of modern words such as “brand” to present the Umma shows that he is from a new generation and with an objective of advertising Islam as a critical (missing) part of the modern world.

One of the main characteristics of Feqhi’s speech is the demonstration of dichotomized representations of right and wrong, or in essence the self (the Muslim) and the other (non-Muslim). Even when he talks about Muslim’s missions on a global level, he refers to non-Muslims as the other. In the last paragraph his voice turns considerably louder when he, by quoting the Quran, presents the Umma as something superior and appointed (*bargozide*) by God (compared to the other) and as a “cause of mercy (*rahmat*) and blessing (*barekat*) for all humans,” a point with which he started the speech.

The speech’s main topic is “Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong” (*amr-e be maruf va nahy -e az monkar* infra. AMNM) and “religious mission work” (*dawa*). Both are important Islamic obligations on a social level. Basically, it is the duty of a Muslim to encourage other people to do “Right”, i.e. their Islamic tasks (*amr-e be maruf*) and meanwhile forbid them to do “Wrong”, i.e. to sin (*nahy -e az monkar*). These Islamic requisites are a central part of the Islamic Republic’s doctrine in the political discourse. AMNM is even presented and redefined in the Islamic Republic’s constitution (Article 8) as: “a general and concomitant responsibility of the people toward one another, the government toward the people, and the people toward the government.”¹⁴ Feqhi takes a similar approach to that of the Islamic Republic by means of a modern understanding of AMNM. Although, as the scholar of Islamic history, Michael Cook, pointed out, there are a variety of differences among the Sunni and Shiite in the understanding and interpretation of the AMNM concept.¹⁵ For instance, the above interpretation of AMNM can be compared to that of Morteza Motahhari: “The necessity of using all legal means to advance Islamic objectives (*pishbord-e ahdaf-e eslami*),”¹⁶ and in this context “legal” means according to sharia law. Moreover, *dawa il Allah* is the Islamic practice of encouraging their fellow Muslims to follow sharia law or alternatively invite – through information and teaching – non-Muslims to convert to Islam. *Dawa* is in principle similar to the Christian missionary ideas, and it is one of the fundamental principles of the Tablighi Jamaat (a group of Islamic cross-border missionaries) affiliated with the Deobandi school and its cross-border engagements.

14 Papan-Matin 2014: 9.

15 Cook 2001: 549–560.

16 Motahhari 1368/1989: 131.

In Feqhi's discourse, AMNM should be applied at four levels, i.e. the personal, family, socio-political and global. At the personal level he claims that AMNM will transform a person (or society) into becoming more offensive rather than defensive and passive, of which the latter is described with entirely negative connotation and as a weakness which leads to catastrophe for both the individual and Islam as a whole. When Feqhi talks about being weak, or "invited" (*mad'u*) in the third paragraph, he mostly refers to the defence against modern western culture (modernity and western culture are generally mixed in the discourse of the Islamic world). As his main followers are from the younger generation, he discusses with them the concept of "being *aware* of western culture, which nowadays due to modern technology is everywhere."¹⁷ This kind of criticism and opposition to modernity is also seen when he talks about AMNM at the family level. He argues that the lack of AMNM in the wealthy and educated families will lead to the dissolution of family ties and result in everyone ending up alone in a "graveyard of parents, the Elder's (final) house" – a common criticism among conservative Muslims towards the modern society.

In this regard, it should also be mentioned that it is possible the friction within Islamic society between modernity and historical values, as well as between Islamic societies and the west, cannot be resolved until there is actual understanding of modernity itself by the clergy, as well as by the population which consumes international cultural expressions and as all of them embrace at least certain parts of modernity. Resolving this could also be *one small part* of bringing the Islamic world into more peaceful, productive and prosperous times ahead.

When it comes to using historical Islamic events and characters, Molana Behzad Feqhi also uses a few historical persons as well as events to support his points. First is Abdullah ibn Amir, the governor of Basra (649–55), who together with his army played a major role in invading Khorasan in 650 and as a result the general extension of Arab rule eastwards – an interesting reference as Feqhi is from Khorasan.¹⁸ This paragraph also mentions the battle of Qadisiyya (during the 630s) in which the larger Sasanian army was overcome by Muslim warriors,¹⁹ a battle which in the Iranian nationalist discourse is used to show the hostility of Arabs against Persians, and vice versa in the Iraqi nationalist discourse used by Saddam Hussein.²⁰ In this speech, as well as in the discourse of radical Islamists, the battle of Qadisiyya symbolizes, as

17 Author's talk with Behzad Feqhi in July 2019.

18 Regarding Abdullah ibn Amir, see Shaban 1979: 16–23.

19 Lewental 2014.

20 Ibid.

Gershon Lewental shows, “the victory of few against the many ... and the success of the pious believers against the superpowers.”²¹

In addition to the second caliph Omar, Feqhi brings up two Sahaba (Companions of the Prophet). First is Khalid ibn al-walid, who massively expanded the early Islamic Caliphate from the Sasanian Empire to the Byzantine Roman Empire, was widely known as one of the most important warriors in Islamic history and was called by Mohammad *saif Allah* – the “sword of Allah.”²² The second Sahaba is Musab ibn Omair, the Prophet’s envoy to the city Yathrib (Medina) and who “diplomatically”²³ prepared the ground for the Prophet and other Muslims. Moreover, in this paragraph there are two military figures from the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750): Tariq ibn Ziyad and Muhammad bin Qasim. The former was a Berber commander of the Muslim troops who undertook the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711,²⁴ while the latter conquered the Sindh and Multan and established Islam in the Indian peninsula,²⁵ which is another important connection with the Deobandi school from the Subcontinent which influenced Molavis such as Feqhi.

At the end of his speech (paragraph 4), he speaks in a different way to how he started. His language comes closer to that of the Islamic Republic’s discourse. Suddenly, he is explicitly talking about the enemy (which was strongly presented in Islamic Republic’s discourse and Abdolhamid does not explicitly mention that much in the majority of his speech) by mentioning the US, international Zionists and Israel. In addition, he uses and discusses the term “unity” (*vahdat*) in his discourse. Nevertheless, he does bring his agenda into the same paragraph, namely that of “dialogue” and “maintaining the rights of minorities”. This shows the dual policy of Abdolhamid: supporting/cooperating with the Islamic Republic’s policies in general while both criticizing as well as presenting the Sunni demands to them.

To summarize, the central point of Molavi Feqhi’s speech in Khatm-e Bokhari is the importance of the duality between right and wrong, and while the former should be promoted the latter must be prohibited. This is the Islamic mission, which should be implemented at different levels from the strictly personal to the international global level. This mission is seen as a way to confront and oppose what is seen in the Islamic world as western modernity on one hand, and the socio-political issues within an Islamic society (for example the

21 Lewental 2011. It is striking how similar this is to the battle of David against Goliath in the Old Testament (although the latter considerably earlier in time).

22 Crone 2012.

23 For instance, Abd al-Latif (2011: 51), calls him as the “first ambassador of Islam”.

24 Molina 2012.

25 Friedmann 2012.



FIGURE 6 Molavi Behzad Feqhi in his office

DATE: AUGUST 2019, PHOTOGRAPHER: HESSAM HABIBI DOROH

Islamic Republic) on the other hand. Feqhi, with his origin in the Khorasan Sufi milieu and the cross-border Deobandi school, tries in this event to paint Islam as a universal idea and a global player which provides solutions to global issues. Finally, in this speech, Feqhi brings up several of the Islamic Republic's socio-political issues which affect the Sunni communities. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that his criticism is primarily pointed at the government and not directly at the Supreme Leader Khamenei, as in the fifth paragraph Feqhi does indicate that his opinions had already been discussed two decades ago by Khamenei.

Injustice, Inequality and Discrimination

بنزین هست ولی بها ازات
جوانا به جانوزامیش دات
درسش هوانت یاد گرنه
انسانیتا په شغلا ولی انسانیتا
په شغلیش دات

There is benzene but with free market price,
The young ones are in control of the older one,
They got educated to learn their job to be a good human,
But they gave away the humanity for the sake of their job.

BALUCHI RAP from Benyamin Panah



In part 2 of this book we saw that one of the main phenomena in the Islamic Republic's discourse was extremism and the rise of radical movements, and their connection with the Iranian Sunni community – an accusation which was always denied by the Iranian Sunni. In the first part of Abdolhamid's speech, it seems that he responds to the accusations that these kinds of extreme ideologies do not belong to Islam. Further he mentions "injustice" (*bi-edalati*) and "discrimination" (*tabiz*). These two words are commonly used in the Iranian Sunni discourse. So, in this phrase he responds to the accusation from the Islamic Republic regarding the rise of extremism among the Iranian Sunni while on the other hand points out indirectly the discrimination against the Sunni communities in Iran. He repeats his point in this part by including the words "justice" and "preserving the rights of all humans" (*raayat-e hoquq-e tamam-e ensanha*) into the main characteristics of Islamic thought.

In his critical letter, presented in the previous chapter, Kak Hasan Amini starts with "we, the Iranian Sunni community" in order to reflect that here are the voices and demands from the Sunni population of the country, and as such are addressed directly to the Islamic Republic. To underpin his discourse, Amini frequently uses the concepts and expressions of "forced and

mandatory”, “oppression”, “excluded” (*mahrūm*), and even more frequently repeated is “oppression and discrimination” (*setam va tabiz*).

After the introductory questions of the purpose/need and the freedom of participation, Amini presents a long list of what he considers the main issues at stake and these can be organized into six categories:

1. Suppression of the Sunni community.
2. Restraint of religious activity, including the absence of a Sunni mosque in Tehran.
3. Lack of self-authority in the Sunni regions, i.e. courts, religious affairs and management.
4. Excluding the Sunni from higher political and military posts.
5. Discrimination on various levels of employment in the public service system.
6. Economic issues, such as poverty and a high unemployment rate in Sunni regions.

Jalal Jalalizade, similarly, frequently talks about three points: the achievement of democracy, freedom and equal development. As discussed in Chapter 2, these three points were already in one of the first documents published by the party JMK “Kurdish United Front”.¹ Moreover, the issues of “discrimination”, “inequality” and “exclusion” are well presented in his interview as well as in the documents from JMK.² From my observation and comparison, this interview is in principle a summary of JMK’s general ideas and Jalalizade brought them back to the public after 12 years. However, Jalalizade’s interview is not just a discussion about the Iranian Kurdish society, but about the Iranian Sunni community, minorities and to some extent about all Iranians in general (e.g. paragraph four), although it should be noted that in this interview he talks *first* about the Kurds and *then* about the Sunni community.

In a different setting, Molavi Naqshbandi explains in his Friday sermon the concept of Taqwa in a similar style to how it was presented and enforced by the Islamic Republic. It is also clear that he uses Taqwa as a metaphor for fundamental ideas for a functioning society, such as justice and equality as well as freedom of thought and speech. Naqshbandi hones this point further still when he incorporates current social issues such as unemployment and the lack of sufficient infrastructure, which affect the Sunni Baluch community. Finally, by mentioning two important political figures from the Indian subcontinent,

1 Nikbakht 1385/2007a.

2 See the JMK annual report: *ibid*.

Naqshbandi demonstrates his intention of representing the Sunni phenomenon of political Islam and carry this torch forward.

1 Suppression and Discrimination

In the introductory part of his speech, after talking about the respect of “others”, Molana Abdolhamid points to two issues: the “destroying of shrines”, indirectly, and the “blasphemy” of sanctity of other religions, directly. Although not explicit, this likely refers directly to the Iranian Sunni communities. The Iranian Sunni still remembers and talks about the demolishing of the Sunni mosque Sheikh Feyz in Mashhad on 1 February 1994 during the Fajr Decade (a 10-day annual celebration of the time between Khomeini’s return to the country on 1 February 1979 until the Islamic Revolution’s victory day on 11 February). The demolished mosque was replaced shortly thereafter by a public park.³ The event in Mashhad led to a major incident in the Makki mosque in Zahedan, the seat of Sunni Sheykhholeslam founded by Molana Abdolaziz. The news from Mashhad made the Sunni community angry and the situation resulted in direct conflict between the security apparatus of the Islamic Republic and the Sunni community. Protests and unrest also occurred on the same day in the city of Khash in Sistan-Baluchistan,⁴ and another example is the destruction of Sunni mosques in Bojnord which belonged to the Turkmen community. Although there are some weblogs and individuals (whom I met) which claim that there are other mosques which were destroyed after the Revolution, the evidence on which we can rely is still weak. The matter of Sunni mosques is one of the most important issues for the Sunni communities. The Iranian Sunni use the word “shahid” (martyr) regarding the destroyed mosques and claim it as the Sunni community’s ultimate red line. In March 2019, a number of videos

3 In his book, Molavi Musa Karampur (1385/2006: 85–8.), the Sunni Imam of sheykh feyz mosque, briefly describes the situation of the mosque before the attack and the whole story in an emotional way.

4 For a brief history of this incident see: Kord 1386/2007: 33–5. Also, Dudoignon 2017: 223. From an interview with a senior active Sunni citizen in Mashhad (July 2019) about this mosque: “It was not just a mosque, it was special meeting point for Sunni from different parts of Iran – you saw Baluchs, Turkmens, Khorasanis, Arabs and Afghans. The mosque was like a home which united all of us. Even diplomats from the council of Afghanistan or Pakistan came to this mosque ... Children could participate in various activities and extra courses. Generally, it was like an expanded family. The same thing could also happen here (the masjed-e jame Hanafi in rezayiye). The Sunni want to expand the mosque for more activities, thus buying neighbouring houses until it becomes an issue with the *shahrdari* (municipality) and Astan-e Qods.”

were published on social media claiming that another Sunni mosque had been demolished by Shahrdari in the city of Chabahar (Iranian Sistan-Baluchistan), although the whole story was unclear and the Sunni Ulama did not respond to it. However, people asked Molavi Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi, to give a statement and in doing so he focused on the uncertainty of the information and the general atrocity of demolishing places of worship:

We are not certain about the demolition or martyrdom of this mosque ... All of us, the state and the nation, should keep it in mind that the mosques are the places of worship of the creator. They (mosques) have no other plans but just prayer and some religious and social activities ... If any system, organisation, persons or regimes try to demolish and martyr any mosques, based on the Quran, those people or regimes are the most atrocious.⁵

Another point which is still a concern among the Iranian Sunni communities (and also the Islamic Republic) is the public display of blaspheming Sunni beliefs. For instance, recently in a live programme on national tv (Shabake-ye 5), a eulogist during the celebration of Imam Hassan (the third Shiite Imam) disrespected the Sunni Caliphs and Ayesha (one of the Prophet's wives, who is highly respected by the Sunni). The Sunni Ulama as well as one of the Sunni parliament members from Khash responded immediately to this event and as a consequence the head of the tv channel and the live programme was fired.⁶

Regarding the suppression of the Sunni community, Hasan Amini explicitly named several prominent individuals in the Sunni communities: his teacher Ahmad Moftizade; Naser Sobhani; Sheykh Mohammad Ziyai (1939–1994) from the province Fars and the founder of the madrasa in Bandar-e Abbas;⁷ Faruq Farsad (1961–1995), also a student and close companion of Moftizade who was murdered during the Chain Murders (*ghatl-haye zanjirei*) in 1988–98; Mamusta Mohammad Rabi'i (1932–1996) who was murdered in Kermanshah after his return back from the "Unity week" conference in Tehran.⁸ More elaboration is available for the subsequent names mentioned. Ahmad Sayad, known as Doktor Ahmad Mirin (1945–1995), was a Salafi scholar in the Baluch community who studied in Pakistan and continued his education in Saudi Arabia.

5 (June 2019) in the Darolulum of the city of Rask.

6 Aftab News 1398/2019.

7 For biographies of all the "martyrs" from the Sunni community, as well as sharp criticism of the Islamic Republic, see Mohammad Abdollatif Ansari (1394/2015).

8 Ansari 1394/2015: 65–68.

Ahmad created the mosque and madrasa of *darolsonnat* of Zarabad located in Sandsar, a village of 500 inhabitants in Sistan-Baluchistan. The circumstances of Ahmad's death are not clear, but based on information from local people he was also a victim of the Chain Murders. Another prominent individual from Sistan-Baluchistan is Sheykh Ali Dehvari (1960–2008) from the city of Saravan (Aspich village), who studied in Gowsht Darolulum and Medina and later established the *darolhadis* (House of Hadith) Madrasa in Saravan. Sheykh was shot in October 2008 during a time of high tension and many violent incidents in Iranian Baluchistan. The last name mentioned is Bahman Shakuri, an activist fighting against the Pahlavi regime even before the Islamic Revolution, and with his origin in the city of Talesh in the country's northwest. Shakuri was arrested just after the Islamic Revolution and based on Abdollatif Ansari's short biography,⁹ Shakuri was executed in 1986 in Evin prison.¹⁰

Finally, the oppression of the Iranian Sunni communities is a matter which in the present time has been – and still is – also addressed by international human rights organisations. Amnesty International published a report in November 2016 which contained criticism relating to “forced confessions.” These confessions relate to Sunnis from Iranian Kurdistan who were involved in extremist groups (as labelled by Iran), and were sent to jail as they were accused by the regime of being participants of Jihadi groups – an accusation for which they can be sentenced to the death penalty. Amnesty reported the public execution of 25 men from Kurdistan province alone.¹¹

2 Taqwa as Social Justice

Normally the Friday speeches of both Sunni and Shiite clerics have two parts. While the first part involves general talk about Islamic values, the second is about current socio-political issues and the connection between the two. As can be seen in this speech, Molavi Naqshbandi starts with the very general topic of Taqwa, and then connects this point with a current issue and explains it in the last two paragraphs.

Taqwa, the main topic of Naqshbandi's speech in his Friday sermon, is a verbal noun with the meaning “to fear” and demonstrates the piety and fear

9 Ibid.: 52.

10 These names, among others, from the Iranian Sunnis are presented in a Saudi publication in a similar order: Abu Daud 1435/2014.

11 Amnesty 2016; See also Human Rights Watch report and its indication of “discrimination against religious minorities, including Sunni Muslims” HRW 2019.

of God.¹² While other meanings can be understood from this word, in general it can be recognized as a synonym to *iman* (belief).¹³ The term is used 17 times in the Quran and its other forms can be found more than 200 times. In Islamic Sufism, Taqwa also occupies a strong position, being one of the fundamentals of the Sufi path (*tariqa*). In political Islam, especially in the Islamic Republic, Taqwa is understood as a political tool for the Islamic rulers. Morteza Motahhari, one of the main supporters of the Islamic Republic's doctrine, claims that in the political realm Taqwa means "freedom from money and rank."¹⁴ Moreover, among the Shiite clerics, Taqwa in political practice refers to justice and equality. In the words of the famous Shiite cleric Mahdi Naraqi, Taqwa is about "the justice of ruling" and "if it is lacking, no one can provide justice."¹⁵ This idea was further embraced by the founder of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini, who also claimed that Taqwa ensures justice among politicians in Islamic society.¹⁶ Additionally, Khomeini emphasized¹⁷ the connection of Taqwa with social equality: "Islam recognises all classes of society as equal and only based on Taqwa one person can be more in favour than another". In his speech, Naqshbandi uses this understanding, and the interpretation of Taqwa elaborated upon in the Islamic Republic Shiite doctrines, to criticize policies towards the Sunni Baluch community.

Naqshbandi starts his explanation of Taqwa in the socio-political dimension during the second paragraph of his speech by mentioning Abu Bakr and Ali, the first and the fourth Caliphs. However – as in the case with Behzad Feqhi in the previous example – the second Caliph, Omar, who clearly symbolises "justice and fairness", was advised by Abu Bakr to take care of "peasants" (i.e. the "common man", mentioned twice in the second paragraph). Naqshbandi in general demonstrates two of Omar's socio-political characteristics. First, as the story in the second paragraph shows, Omar listened to his opponents and did not send them to jail. Second, Omar and his son are described as the fighters of corruption and betrayal of the people (in the third and fourth paragraphs). It is interesting to note that Naqshbandi – who spent four years in prison – speaks with a louder, more dramatic tone when he talks about prison. Moreover, in the story of Yusof in the fifth paragraph, Naqshbandi talks about "oppression", "injustice" and the "prison of Aziz of Egypt". Here his speech turns even more personal, as he compares himself with Yusof, who "had to suffer for a crime

12 Lewisohn 2012.

13 Izutsu 1965: 10.

14 Motahhari 1368/1988: 16–18 and 23.

15 Naraqi 1364/1983:123–5.

16 Khomeini 1378/1999c: 328.

17 Khomeini. 1378/1999d: 49.

he did not commit". Regarding this comparison, one of Naqshbandi's pupils informed me that Abdolghaffar composed a Ghazal (form of poem or ode) during his imprisonment in Zahedan's central prison:¹⁸

I am composing due to my separation from the school and study of the
Quran,
I am composing with an afflicted heart and crying eyes,
Although I am in a corner of the prison like Yusof because of the injustice
of time,
I am composing "My Lord! The prison house is dearer"¹⁹ in the corner
of jail

In 2011 Molavi Naqshbandi's father, Molavi Fathi-Mohammad Naqshbandi, was replaced by his rival Molavi Mostafa Jangizayi (1954–2012) going by the nickname "Molavi Basiji" (due to his cooperation with the Revolutionary Guard's Basij forces) as well as "*ulama-ye darbari*" (courtier Ulama). Mostafa Jangizayi was famous for his strong support of Khomeini's *velayat-e faqih*²⁰ and went so far as to state that "following the Supreme Leader is the (religious) obligation (Ar. *wajib*) of all Muslims."²¹ He actively taught both local Basij groups and other small local communities. However, in 2011, Mostafa Jangizayi was promoted by Ali Khamenei to the position of Imam Juma of Rask's Al-Khuzara mosque. Jangizayi was also famous for wearing the military uniform of the Sepah (the Revolutionary Guard) and a Keffiyeh – the symbol of the Palestinian resistance movement and the Basij in Iran – during his speeches in the mosque. In this context it is important to mention his close connections with the local security forces, especially with Brigadier General Nurali Shushtari (1948–2009), who was killed in one of Jondollah's suicide attacks on 18 October 2009 in Pishin, near the border between Iran and Pakistan. Jangizayi himself was assassinated on Friday, 20 January 2012, approximately one year after his appointment as the permanent Imam Juma of Al-Khuzara mosque.²²

No one came forward to take responsibility for Jangizayi's assassination. The event did, however, enable Ahmadinejad's administration to further

18 This Ghazal was also published on the official Telegram channel of the Qasemi mosque of Rask on 2 August 2017: https://t.me/hafez_naghshbandi.

19 Quran 12:33, this Aya was also mentioned in Naqshbandi's speech in the fifth paragraph.

20 Dudoignon 2017: 253–4.

21 DEFA 1395/2016.

22 Ibid.; also Dudoignon 2017: 253. The media of the Islamic Republic denotes Jangizayi a martyr: YJC 1392/2014b, whereas the Sunni community of Iranian Kurdistan label this event as "terror". For a report by the Iranian Muslim Brothers see *Islahweb* 1390/2012.

securitize and exert control over Sunni madrasas in Sistan-Baluchistan. In April 2012, Fathi-Mohammad and his son Abdolghaffar, along with five others, were arrested in connection with the assassination. In December of 2013, Fathi-Mohammad and his son were sentenced to 15 and 13 years in prison respectively, and both forced to live in exile.²³ These arrests drove residents of Rask to the streets, resulting in large-scale demonstrations and violent incidents which in turn brought intervention by the security forces.²⁴ Even Molavi Abdolhamid's attempts to exert influence and secure their release remained fruitless. Confessions of guilt were extracted from both father and son under severe torture.²⁵ Abdolghaffar's confession, in which he stated that his father was behind the assassination and had received financial support from Wahhabis from Qatar, was published in *shabak-ye hamoon*, the Iranian national TV channel of the Sistan-Baluchistan province.²⁶ Afterwards, Abdolghaffar made several claims about the "invalidity and unfairness" of the confession,²⁷ and in 2014 they both brought their cases for review before Iran's Supreme Court. In a further step, Fathi-Mohammad wrote a letter to President Rouhani, just one year into his presidency, asking for justice and explaining the injustice.²⁸ Whether through Rouhani's influence, or Abdolhamid's negotiation, or just as a result of the revision by the Supreme Court, Fathi-Mohammad was released in May of 2015 and Abdolghaffar the following October.²⁹ Following exoneration, both resumed their activities in Rask: Fathi-Mohammad remained the Imam Juma of Qasemi mosque and Abdolghaffar his deputy as well as the head of Meftaholulum Madrasa.

As Naqshbandi talks about his imprisonment and the "conspiracy" against him and his father, he mentions two well-known political figures from the Indian subcontinent associated with the Deobandi school of thought: Shaykh Mahmud Al-Hasan Divbandi (1851–1920) and Seyed Ata Ullah Shah Bokhari (1892–1961). Both actively opposed British rule in India, and both were famous scholars in the Darolulum of Deoband. Mahmud Al-Hasan is most famous for his activities related to the Silk Letter Movement (Ur: *reshmi rumal tahrrik*),

23 Sunnionline 1392/2013b.

24 Locals claimed that three people from the Sunni community were also killed (Interview July 2019).

25 A claim that both his students and the inhabitants of Rask told me, as well as stated by Abdolghaffar: VID 4 1393/2014.

26 Part of this confession can be seen in: VID 5 1392/2013.

27 His speech on 14 July 2018.

28 The letter was written from the central jail of Zahedan on 12 April 2014; HRA News 1393/2014.

29 Sunnionline 1394/2015.

which spanned 1913–1920 and aimed to fight against British rule by forming an alliance with Ottoman Turkey, Germany and Afghanistan.³⁰ During the activities of this movement, Al-Hasan was captured in Mecca and sent to prison on Malta (the Turkish part) for around three years.³¹ The other figure mentioned, Seyed Ata Ullah, was the founder of Majles-e Ahrar-e Islam (known as Ahrar) – a Muslim political party formed in 1929 on the subcontinent, which brought together Muslim leaders from most Islamic sects. Ahrar was a well-known nationalist party with a strong anti-imperialist and anti-feudal discourse.³² In 1921, Ata Ullah was arrested in Calcutta following his fierce criticism of the government, in particular highlighting the suffering of the lower middle-classes and the poor living conditions of the people. Naqshbandi's speeches are similar to Ata Ullah's in style, in which he addresses the sorrows of the Baluch population in the region.

3 The Issue of the Non-existing Sunni Mosque in Tehran

Based on semi-official state's sources, Sunnis in Iran have all received equal support and their lives have improved after the Islamic Revolution. Some of these sources emphasize the fact that Sunnis have their own places of worship and can practice their confession based on their belief. Sources inside Iran further suggest that there are around 10,000–15,000 Sunni mosques in Iran as well as 340 Sunni madrasa and 37,000 Sunni *talabe* (theology students).³³ However, in almost all of the conversations that the author had with people from Sunni communities, or listening to a variety of speeches from the Sunni elites, the issue of opening a Sunni mosque in Tehran has always been a major topic.

The issue of there being, or not being, a Sunni mosque in Tehran is something of a hot potato for Iran in general. The discussion of a Sunni mosque in the capital is important both within the Iranian Sunni communities as well as among those who follow the situation of Sunnis and other minorities in Iran in general. The matter is frequently addressed in the Sunni Friday *Khutba* (Islamic public preaching). As eloquently put by Molavi Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi in his Friday *khutba* on 11 October 2019 in Rask: “Currently, the Hindus and Sikhs have opened new temples in Tehran, which shows openness and the (wide view of the) constitution ... The fact that for every 4 thousand (Shiite) Muslims

30 Ansari 1986.

31 Ibid.

32 Copland 2005: 90–94.

33 Soltani 1395/2016: 114–5. Also see Tabnak 1392/2014.

there is one mosque, is the sign of justice and correctness. Thus, if a mosque does not exist for the one million Sunni of Tehran – if it is not a sign of injustice and discrimination, then what is it?”³⁴ After the demolition of a Sunni prayer room in the Punak district of Tehran on December 2014, Molana Abdolhamid, who tries to present a more moderate response, discussed this issue as follows:

At this time among the Muslims, the biggest challenge is the disunity and extremism ... The religious places have to be safe and secure from any aggression. So, the current event which occurred was very unexpected ... nothing wrong had taken place in that prayer room or any other prayer rooms which would be against the regime and the Shia Muslims ... We heard some people claiming there are nine Sunni mosques in Tehran. We are ready to provide any award, if someone can show us one of those mosques. Those are not mosques, but just prayer rooms.³⁵

In a conversation with a person from the Sunni community, I was informed that the prayer room in Punak, which was mostly visited by the Hanafi Sunni from Baluchistan, was an apartment in a building and due to constructional changes by the Sunni members of that prayer room, the mayoralty (*shahrdari*) of Tehran closed the place (i.e. the apartment). Nowadays in Tehran the main prayer room is located in Sadeqiye district, and is facilitated by the Aziz Babai, a Shafei Sunni Imam from the city of Ardebil.³⁶ The matter of securitization is strongly present at this location, mostly on Fridays and in particular when there is a Shiite ceremony such as Ashura or Arbaeen taking place in the streets. The first time I visited this prayer room was for the Eid ceremony (celebrated after the end Ramadan) in 2015, and at that time all the streets around the location were closed and large groups of people waited for hours in the walking zone to come closer to the prayer room. The majority of the visitors were Kurdish, although Turkmen and Baluch were also present. The police and civil security forces were also present, nevertheless everything seemed relaxed and there was no sense of tension within the crowd. Due to the lack of space, the

34 AUD 2 1398/2019.

35 The claim of nine mosques present in Tehran from the Islamic Republic's media: Mehr News 1394/2015; For a more exaggerated version which states that there are more than 100 Sunni mosques see Middle East Press 1395/2016. Regarding the demolished Punak prayer room, see the responses from state media: Mashreghnews 1394/2015.

36 No more information about him is available. Some webpages wrongly denote him a Molavi while others use Mamusta. His discourse is mostly very close to the Islamic Republic's, see the interview about IRGC & Trump: Posrseshgaran 1398/2019.

Eid prayer was repeated around 10 times as of 6 am, yet still I was not successful in getting inside the building to the prayer room itself.³⁷

The second time I wanted to visit the Sadeqiye prayer room for Friday prayer, it was the day before the Shiite ceremony Arbaeen. Many streets were closed by the police and a friend from the Sunni community advised me to not actually visit the location on that day. Finally, some days later I visited the Sadeqiye prayer room, which in fact is a small building with a parking garage and an extra floor. The garage serves as the praying room itself, while the floor above it was the office for cultural activities. During the visit I had the chance to talk with Imam Aziz Babai about the prayer room as well as about the Sunni community in Tehran in general. In a similar manner to his online interviews the Imam stated that “there are no societal issues among the Sunni community in Tehran and we are very happy with this place.” Regarding the question if there is a need to have a mosque for the Sunnis in Tehran he stated: “First of all, there are many prayer rooms in different districts, and second, we should accept and respect the fact that we are minorities and the majority in Tehran are our Shiite brothers. Therefore, when you visit cities in which the majority are Sunni like Baluchistan, you see more Sunni mosques. Finally, Shiite Islam is the official confession of Iran, a fact which should be considered.”

It is important to mention here that in September and October 2019 tensions arose between the Baluch community and the Islamic Republic’s security forces, which resulted in a series of events. Students belonging to the Manbaolulum madrasa of Kuhvan in Sarbaz were detained and pressure was exercised on the Hafez Ataollah Siryazayi, one of the teachers and head of the organisational team at this madrasa. Additional pressure was also brought to bear on other madrasas and their headmasters, for example Mowlavi Fazlorrahman Kuhi and his colleagues at the Anvarolharamayn madrasa in Pashamag. In addition, the son of the well-known Baluch Sunni activist Molavi Mohammadebrahim Damani (1950–2003), Mohammadosman Damani, was under arrest for one month. All these events, together with the ever-present issue of a Sunni mosque in Tehran, were brought up by Sunni Ulama in Baluchistan during their Friday speeches. During this intense time, on October 21 2019 the official website of Darolulum Zahedan (and the Iranian Sunni community in general), sunnionline.us, published several documents and official letters written between Molana Abdolaziz and the Islamic Republic’s authorities after

37 Additional observations from the Sadeqiye prayer room’s Eid prayers are given briefly by Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, the Sunni representative of the city of Torbat Jam in June 2018: Rahimi, J.J. 1397/2018.

the Islamic Revolution.³⁸ The communication is from May to October 1980. The letters show that Khomeini gave the Sunni community 10,000 m² of land near the national Radio and Television building. The land was given by a religious foundation of the Islamic Republic (*sazman-e oqaf*) and was ratified by: Habibollah Asgaroladi who was the head of the foundation at that time; Mohsen Yahyavi who was the minister of Housing and Urban Development; and Ayatollah Mohammadreza Mahdavi Kani who was the minister of interior affairs. Despite all arrangements being made, including the available funds, the project was for unknown reasons stopped. Publishing these documents online for the world to see, clearly showing the withdrawal of an agreement, of course brought new attention to this issue as well as increasing tensions between the Sunni community and the Islamic Republic's authorities.³⁹

4 Independent madrasa

When Hasan Amini uses the term “independent madrasa,” it is important to shed light on a policy from the Ahmadinejad presidency. On 30 October 2007, the “Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution” (*shora-ye ali-ye enqelab-e farhangi*) – a council established after the Revolution and under the control of the president – established the “Council for the management of the Sunni religious schools” (*shora-ye barnamerizi-ye madares-e olum-e dini-ye ahl-e sonant-e keshvar*). The newly established council, which of course was seen by the Sunni Ulama as the state's intervention in Sunni community's internal affairs, came up with four main goals: 1) Educate Ulama loyal to the Islamic Republic to address and answer religious questions, 2) Coordinate educational and cultural affairs with an emphasis on the state's official language, 3) The promotion of the Islamic culture of rapprochement and unity, 4) Improving the quality of the Sunni madrasas. Moreover, the council started to publish two magazines *hablobmatin* (since 2012) and *vefaq* (since 2010). The former is more focused on Islamic theology, the Hadiths together with Khomeini's and Khamenei's ideas, while the latter covers social and cultural content. In spite of this being more of a “state project”, Mamusta Molla Qader Qaderi from

38 For detailed information and copies of all letters: sunnionline 1398/2019d.

39 For example, Molavi Fazlorrahman Kuhi mentioned this document in his Friday prayer (25 October 2019) and stated: “If no one responds to the Sunni community regarding building a mosque in Tehran, the sound of the Sunni Adhan (call to prayer) will be heard from the streets and parks of Tehran ... And even if we are killed for this demand, history won't forget”. Note: A month later on 28 November, he was called to the Special Clerical Court of the Islamic Republic in Mashhad, and after that appearance he was arrested.

Kurdistan and Molavi Seyyed Abdolsamad Sadati from Sistan and Baluchistan are among the council members.⁴⁰

Additionally, as was discussed in Chapter 2, regulating the madrasas in Iran is part of wider policy of centralizing the religious education and managing the Shia seminaries and their professionals which is not only limited to Iran. In case of Shia religious education in the Islamic Republic, this creation of dependency on the state is important, as the country's leading political positions, including the next Supreme Leader, are filled from seminaries.⁴¹ However, in the case of Sunnis in Iran, who are excluded from higher political positions, the state's interference in religious education has a different objective. Here, as in the case of religious education in modern Egypt, the aim is to centralize and control the existing discursive logics in the hand of central authority.⁴² Further, due to the existing transnational connections (with Afghanistan and Tajikistan for instance) it is in the interest of the state in Iran to keep an eye on, and even have an influence on, the case of incoming Sunnis seeking to study in Sunni madrasas in Iran. In general, whether this process is to be seen as a form of depoliticization, Künkler concludes as follows:

The standardization of curricula, the narrowing of pedagogical content to regime-approved subjects and methods and the centralization of admissions and examination procedures, is not so much geared at depoliticization as it is to ensure that debate and contestation on the basis of religion remain within officially defined discursive spaces.⁴³

5 Socio-political Exclusion

In Amini's criticism, another point of discrimination is in the recruitment to various levels in the public administration. In general, there are possibilities for individuals from the Iranian Sunni communities to become a public civil servant, however, they are excluded from the office of presidency (as per the Constitution Article 12) and from some important political bodies of the Islamic Republic (historically). This exclusion occurs from time to time at the lower levels of the public sector, according to repeated claims by some Sunni Ulama. This selection process is called *gozinesh* ("designation") in the general

40 SCCR 1386/2007: 447.

41 Künkler 2019: 190.

42 Starret 1998; Künkler 2018.

43 Künkler 2019: 206.

discourse, and through this process people are asked about their religious confession, which may lead to them being disqualified based on their confession, ethnicity or due to a lack of trust. As noted in Chapter 3, the idea of *khodi* vs *gheyr-e khodi* strongly exists in the present day public and private sectors and targets not just the Iranian Sunni communities. This injustice is frequently commented upon by Sunni Ulama, particularly from Iranian Baluchistan, and an example of this is Abdolhamid's speech (11 October 2019) in Zahedan in which he broadly discussed "implementing justice", "avoiding ethnic and confessional standpoints" and encouraging "meritocracy" (*shayeste salari*).⁴⁴

In a similar way, Jalalizade's discourse presents the primary discontent of the Islamic Republic's development policies and in particular the lack of tangible improvements in unemployment rates, social security and inclusion. However, ideological and political demands are also raised in this interview as the concept of "feeling of being alien" (*namahram budan*) is discussed. The term *mahram* and *na-mahram* literally means "unmarriageable kin" and is generally used in the context of marriage or sexual intercourse (as not being allowed), and is as such also a legal term – although in Iran this term is used in a similar way to *khodi* (from us) and *gheyr-e khodi* (other). This divide, which leads to exclusion (also very present in this interview), can be improved by "changing the perspective", as said in his second paragraph. This may refer to changes in, for example, the "security view" of the Islamic Republic.⁴⁵ As discussed in Chapter 1, security issues are to a large extent closely linked to minorities as so often described in the Islamic Republic's security studies by Iranian scholars. Looking to these types of studies⁴⁶ shows that the Iranian Kurds were in various cases seen as objects for foreign influence and intervention. Further, the regional dynamic, including the establishment of the autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq, reinforced this security view, which in turn put further pressure on the Kurdish community in Iran.

As Jalalizade (in the second and third paragraphs) demonstrate, there were small initiatives and steps of improvement taken during the reformist president Khatami's administration and some of these were continued by Rouhani. However, the interview highlighted the political marginalization and exclusion from political decision-making, and to clarify this point Jalalizade criticized the issue of "approbative supervision" (*nezarat-e estesvabi*). Article 99 of the Iranian Constitution regarding the responsibilities of the Guardian Council states that "the council has the responsibility of supervising the elections of

44 Sunnionline 1398/2019e.

45 Elling 2013: 147–8,

46 For instance: Ahmadi 1386/2007; Mahkui et al. 1394/2015.

the Assembly of Experts for Leadership, the President of the Republic, the Islamic Consultative Assembly [Parliament], and the direct recourse to popular opinion and referenda.”⁴⁷ The word “approbative” is in fact not explicitly mentioned in this Article, and thus in May 1991 one of the members of the Guardian Council (Qolamreza Rezvani) asked for further clarification and an interpretation of this Article. One month later, the council explained that “supervision” here should be interpreted as “approbative”, which includes verifying and disqualifying any candidate(s) in the elections.⁴⁸ This law, which consequently provides the Guardian Council with significant power, was criticized by reformist politicians, for example Mehdi Karrubi, and the opposition groups in the Islamic Republic argue that with this kind of supervision, the Guardian Council can exclude any candidate(s) from elections according to their whim without providing any reason. Notably, in the seventh Majles in 2004, a large number of reformist politicians were disqualified and among them several Kurdish politicians connected to JMK. Six months later, in 2005, Jalalizade published an essay in *neda-ye eslam*, the official magazine of Zahedan Darolulum, in which he discussed the issue of elections and minority rights from a more fundamental standpoint.⁴⁹

Today the situation is different, nobody can in the name of being right and claiming the other as wrong, exclude them from their political, social, cultural and economic rights ... The citizens of a country are the best decision makers for ruling their country and anyone who is from this country and has connection to the history of it, cannot be excluded from the (political and social) scene and service (to the country)

In general, the issues raised and main demands presented by Jalalizade are parts of Iran’s social and political reality – facts that are by no means hidden in the public discourse – which is the matter of democracy, freedom, and equal and inclusive development. Finally, one conclusion of Jalalizade’s statements could be that Kurdish society, and particularly the Sunni part within it, are trying to define themselves and their role as critical and central to this matter, since they are here describing themselves as the main target of the exclusion and discrimination.

In a different way, Feqhi puts “religious mission work” (*dawa*) as a central characteristic of political Islam, although here used in a quite different

47 Papan-Matin 2014: 22.

48 Arshadi 1385/2006: 27–8.

49 Jalilizade 1383/2005: 42.

meaning, namely as a democratic feature. He discusses this point further in the fifth paragraph by interpreting the concept of “Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong” (*amr-e be maruf va nahy -e az monkar*) as having free thinking, having freedom of speech, and encouraging to have an active civil society. He clarifies his interpretation by referring to the second caliph Omar as an example, where Omar is also referred to by his epithet Al-Faruq (the one who distinguishes between right and wrong) or Faruq-e Azam (the great distinguisher). In this speech, Omar is characterised as a great ruler who “governed two and a half continents” and also destroyed imperialists and dictators, among them the Persian Empire. Feqhi further describes Omar as a symbol of justice and indicates the issues with social injustice and inequality by pointing at nepotism amongst the political elites. The term *jhen-e bartar* (better lineage, lit. better genetics) which was used twice in this speech, was introduced to the general public when the son of Mohammdreza Aref (a reformist parliament member) claimed that his financial success was due to his “good lineage” (referring primarily to his parents). This claim was broadly criticized and used as an example to show the issues with corruption and nepotism inside the political system.⁵⁰

6 Socio-economic Concerns

Besides the issue of “designation” as a social and political matter, there are many economic concerns reflected in the discourse of the Iranian Sunni communities in Kurdistan and also in Baluchistan. After the Iran-Iraq war and during the time of president Rafsanjani, infrastructure as well as healthcare, education and welfare services in the country were expanded and these policies also affected rural areas such as Iranian Baluchistan. As Harris⁵¹ pointed out: “In the early 1980s, demographers observed fertility rates in Iranian Baluchistan as high as 9.5 children per family. In 2006, the province’s fertility rate had declined to 3.7. In neighbouring Pakistani Baluchistan, the rate still stood at 5.4 in 2006, although down from 7.3 in 2001”. Now, these numbers do not necessarily reflect the birth rate (i.e. the number of live born children), but can still serve as a ballpark measure of the local family situation and most likely some use of birth control measures. When it comes to industrial investments, we can see that the factories related to heavy industry and production are located around Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan. The fact that as much as 40% of the total Iranian labour

50 Tasnim 1396/2017.

51 Harris 2017: 142–3.

force were employed within the Tehran province in 1990s,⁵² shows the unequal distribution of opportunity, and as a consequence fewer resources and less power for self-determination. Looking at the human development index (HDI) across the Iranian provinces showed a general improvement of the HDI during 2001–2009 for Iran, although it was unequally distributed with the low scoring provinces not experiencing the fast improvement of the other provinces, for instance Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, and thus they stayed at the bottom of the HDI ranking list also through the “improvement years” (Kurdistan 27th and Sistan-Baluchistan 28th of 28 provinces). Both international and state reports state that these two low-scoring provinces have the overall lowest scores, in particular when it comes to socioeconomic indicators such as education, health and poverty.⁵³

In his interview, Jalalizade appraised and strongly emphasized the matter of “equal development” (*tose’è-ye motavazen*), which is the third pole of the political party JMK’s overall policy. The deficiencies, the social and economic underdevelopment in the Kurdish areas of Iran, were also strongly presented in Amini’s text. This underdevelopment reached an all-time low at the time of the Iran-Iraq war, during which a large number of the Kurdish population in various areas was displaced as vast parts of their homeland were destroyed by the war. In the post-war era, and following reconstruction policies during president Rafsanjani’s administration, there was some improvement. However, since then Kurdish society has claimed that the development policies are unequal. Furthermore, Jalalizade brings up the economic issues in the border areas by reference to the general term of “border market”, and in this context it is important to remember the importance of cross-border trade between Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan. These economic ties were strengthened after Saddam’s reign and brought new opportunities, as well as a number of issues, for the regime in Tehran. The Islamic Republic occasionally closed and/or increased the control of these economic border areas, for example Bashmaq, which is one of the main border crossings in Iran.

Regarding the socio-political level, Molavi Feqhi addresses a few points with the specific language also common in the Islamic Republic’s discourse. In the second paragraph he uses the phrase “trash and dust” (*khas o khashak*) – a slogan used by Ahmadinejad to refer to demonstrators in the 2009 protests – and

52 Elling 2013: 55–6.

53 Sabermahani et al. 2013; Elling 2013: 55–6, 67 & 72.; See the international reports regarding the inadequacy of services such as water and electricity in Kurdish regions of Iran: UNDP 1999; UNCHR 2006: 76–93.

the idiom “revolt” (*fetne*) which was also used in reference to the 2009 unrest. The latter term, as shown in chapter 4, signifies the reformist politicians in the Islamic republic who in some way supported the Green Movement and criticized the regime. Feqhi also mentions corruption, which is another frequently used word in the Islamic Republic’s discourse, particularly after the appointment of Raisi as the head of the judiciary (see chapter 3). By using this language, Feqhi indirectly claims that the reason for these issues is due to the leaders of society, i.e. “because of the ignorance of the farmer”. He elaborates on his ideas about political Islam in the third and fourth paragraph and as he characterises the Islamic political system he brings up the concept of Zakat (typically referred to as an Islamic religious tax), which is one of the five pillars (Ar. *arkan*) of Islam. Feqhi utilizes this pillar to tackle the economic issues of the Islamic Republic (without saying it), which are unemployment, poverty and corruption; points which are presented in most of the examples from the Sunni communities.

7 Issue of Smuggling

During the Rouhani era the above-mentioned issues (especially suppression and exclusion) intensified and, in combination with economic hardship and the collapse of the Iranian currency, the whole situation led to increased cross-border smuggling not just in Kurdish areas but in many of Iran’s other border areas. The issue of these smugglers is presented in the fourth paragraph of Jalalizade’s interview. These cross-border porters, which are called *kulbar*⁵⁴ (pl. *kulbaran*), are predominantly men who carry heavy goods between two countries. The rise of *kulbaran* activities became a security issue for the Islamic Republic, which consequently tightened its border control, leading to some cases of border guards opening fire at *kulbaran* resulting in many deaths and injuries. Based on the latest UN report (2019) on human rights in Iran, there are up to 84,000 *kulbar* in Iranian Kurdistan and in 2018 alone 75 of these were killed and 117 injured.⁵⁵ International human rights reports showed an increase of such cases as of 2016, when 51 *kulbar* were shot, among them two under the age of 18.⁵⁶ On the other hand, after the *kulbaran* issue came to light both

54 A Kurdish term meaning literally “(on) back carrier”.

55 UN Document 2019: 21.

56 See the report from the Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan of Iran-Geneva: KMMK-GE 2019: 7.

nationally and internationally in August 2017, the Ministry of Interior published new regulations regarding economic activities in border areas with the objective of legalising it and avoiding further conflicts between the *kulbar* and the Islamic Republic's security forces. These new regulations the government use the name *pilevar* (meaning "small merchant") and provide regulations on which goods that can be traded. The new programme managed to formally register around 9000 *kulbar* so that they can move legally across the border, instead of taking dangerous and risky mountain roads in combination with being chased by the security forces.⁵⁷ Border workers exist among other minority groups too, such as the Baluchs and other habitants of Iran's borderland.

Like the issue of *kulbaran*, the situation is quite similar in Iranian Baluchistan. These smugglers are known as *sukhtbar* (pl. *sukhtbaran*) and also *sukhtkesh* (lit. energy carrier), who transport gallons of diesel with their cars and motorcycles to Pakistan where it is sold at higher prices and mostly paid in US dollars. A *sukhtbar* has to deliver his containers over perilous mountain roads under very challenging conditions, including for example driving extremely fast in order to transport several rounds in a day as well as evade the police.⁵⁸ Their fast driving cars filled with fuel, are colloquially called "moving bombs" (*bomb-e moteharrek*).⁵⁹ According to 2017 Islamic Republic state media reports, around 100 million litres were smuggled from Iranian Baluchistan on a monthly basis.⁶⁰ To counter the smugglers, the Islamic Republic implemented new control mechanisms at the border and imposed fines. However, smugglers continue to risk their lives on this dangerous road because they see it as their best chance of earning enough money to support their families in a Baluchistan suffering from the consequences of long-term drought combined with the overall lack of job opportunities. The influential Molavis of Iranian Baluchistan have for the most part supported the *sukhtbaran*, citing the issue of unemployment and a corresponding lack of opportunities in the Sistan-Baluchistan province, blaming the government for this situation.⁶¹ This issue became critical following several explosions in the border areas due to car accidents as well as hostile fire by the security forces. That said, cross-border smuggling is nothing new in Iranian Baluchistan, but increased dramatically during periods of drought as

57 See Mehr News 1397/2018 and YJC 1396/2017.

58 Interview in Zahedan July 2019.

59 These high-speed smuggling cars are also active in the province of Bushehr, where they are called *shuti*, and smuggle goods to the northern provinces and especially to Shiraz.

60 IRNA 1396/2017.

61 See the interview with Abdolhamid Mollazayi criticizing the hard fines on *sukhtbaran* and condemning the police and security forces shooting them: Sunnionline 1398/2019a.

of the 1960s onwards.⁶² Regarding the word *sukhtbaran*, the Ulama of Iranian Baluchistan have tried to avoid associating the word “smuggler” (*qachaqchi*) which has a negative connotation. In his speech, Naqshbandi calls those *sukhtbar* who died or were killed “martyrs of bread” (*shahid-e nan*).⁶³ Finally, in the last paragraph, Naqshbandi mentions another physical danger posed to the ethnic groups living in the border areas of Iran (including provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam with Kurdish majority populations, and Khuzestan with an Arab majority population), namely the landmines. Based on data published by Landmine and Cluster Munitions Monitor, more than 10,000 Iranians have fallen victim to landmines since 1988.⁶⁴

Further, in contrast to speeches from the other Sunni figures discussed in this book, Naqshbandi refers to women in his speech and also does so in general. The first narration elaborates on the topic of a woman who criticizes the Omar.⁶⁵ In the third paragraph, there is a conversation between a mother and a daughter, in which the girl is presented as loyal to God and described as “the girl of Sahaba ... educated by Mohammad”. Here it is worth noting that Naqshbandi, who belongs to the younger generation, also illustrates the difference between the two generations in matters of belief; in his story, while the mother encourages the daughter to commit prohibited actions, the daughter refuses and even warns her mother against it. Generally, in Naqshbandi’s discourse young people are the main audience, as he clearly indicates by saying “Oh young ones!” at the beginning of some of his sentences. From the author’s observation, it is also clearly visible on-site how enthusiastically his speeches are received by younger people. In his speech, Naqshbandi does not only talk about women in early Islam to demonstrate his ideological discourse. In the sixth paragraph, he also speaks about the mothers of young *Sukhtbar* (energy carriers), who have suffered the death of their children and who are disappointed after participating in elections and making the effort going to the voting boxes:

I tell all Ulama, speakers, writers, the media and especially the (parliament) representatives. Oh, people’s representatives! Who sleep in the

62 Dudoignon 2017: 126–7.

63 The idea of martyrdom (Ar. & Pers. *Shahadat*) is often presented by Deobandi scholars, especially through expanding on the Persian-language literary tradition within the Baluch community. See Dudoignon 2017: 61.

64 Ceasefirecenter et al. 2018: 22–3.

65 In a different narration, this woman’s name is Khule, who met the Prophet and complained to him about her husband’s misbehaviour, see Tabatabai 1378/1999: 319.

seats of the parliament, wake up! The alas and prayer of that mother, who smelled her young one was barbequed (during smuggling gallons of diesel), will disrupt the strands of our life. Wake up! Oh representatives, who came to the region before the election in order to get more votes ... These branded mothers waited hours under the burning sun in order to vote for you, so that you can protect their rights and defend the rights of this downtrodden nation (i.e. the Baluchs).

Annex 2

Abdolhamid Esmailzayi¹

(¹) <He starts his speech by reciting phrases from Quran regarding the merciful God> Islam as the last divine religion until resurrection is the guidance of the people. Islam is the religion of mercy, rationality, reason and peaceful life. The magnificent Allah puts a lot of capacity in Islam <...>. Islam is a religion which tolerates all ideas and thoughts. Allah² forces no one to accept and agree on Islam <...>. As is stated in Quran “There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has to become clear from that which is wrong”³ there is no force in religion and people are not deprived of free will regarding the choice of religion. Thus, the goal and destination of Allah for sending Prophets and holy books, is to establish what is correct. Even the philosophy and objective of Jihad in Islam was not to force to accept the religion. So, in Islam tolerating blasphemy does exist <Abdolhamid quotes two verses from the Quran relating to his point⁴> and Allah does not forbid tolerance. We have with all religions commonalities and with all humans common interests. Islam encouraged us, for the sake of these commonalities and interests, to have good relations, peace and show good behaviour towards them (the people from other religions and ideologies). Islam is not the religion of anger and extremism. Extremism, radicalism, injustice and discrimination have no place in Islam. Islam is the religion of cooperation, mercy, thought, intelligence, justice and preserving the rights of all humans.

1 The script of Abdolhamid's speech can be found on his official homepage: Abdolhamid 1398/2019.

2 It is notable that in his speech, as well as for a majority of the Sunni believers globally, *Allah* is used instead of the Persian word *Khoda* (which in this book is translated with God). Abdolhamid uses the adjective *taala* (magnificent) as an attribute together with the word Allah, i.e. Allah taala, which is translated only the first time it appears in this speech.

3 Abdolhamid quoted the Quran verse in the original Arabic. English translation: <https://quran.com>.

4 Quran (60:8–9): Allah does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes – from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly. (8.) Allah only forbids you from those who fight you because of religion and expel you from your homes and aid in your expulsion – [forbids] that you make allies of them. And whoever makes allies of them, then it is those who are the wrongdoers. (9.) Translation from: <https://quran.com>.

(2) The generous Prophet (Mohammad) transformed the 120 years conflict among the tribes of *Aws* and *Khazraj*, with dialogue into peace and compromise. His highness (Prophet) made a treaty with the Jewish, who were worried about his prophetic mission, so that if they do not act against Muslims they can live peacefully among the Muslims. The *Hudaybiyyah* peace treaty which the Muslims accepted under hard circumstances shows that Islam is the religion of peace. <He is quoting from Quran⁵> One of the *Sahaba* (Prophet's companions) said: "today is the day of bloodshed", but his highness (Prophet) said: "today is the day of mercy". His highness did not order to kill the *Monafeqin*, who pretended to be Muslim but inwardly were infidels and hurt the Prophet and Muslims. His highness did not shout the slogan "death to the *Monafeq*" or "death to the Jews", but he tolerated the *Monafeqin*, Infidels and Jews.

(3) During early Islam the non-Muslims were denoted (simply) "*Dhimmi*" among the Muslims. Many think that "*Dhimmi*" is a disrespectful term, although it is not, it means somebody who lives under the "protection" of God, the Prophet and Islam <...>. The Prophet respected the sanctity of other religions and did not destroy anyone's shrines. Islam emphasizes the sanctity of all prophets, (holy) books and divine religions. The Muslims, as they believe in Mohammad, believe in other prophets and respect them. Islam forbids (the Muslims) to blaspheme the object of worship of others. Islamic thought (provides) us with humanity, tolerance, foresight, human dignity and maintenance of rights. So, Muslims should be capable of more than believers of other religions. Unfortunately, as the Muslims nowadays distance themselves from the Quran and the Sunna, they face difficulties <...>. Unfortunately, nowadays Muslims instead of tolerating non-Muslims and having peaceful life with them, they cannot tolerate (others and neither) each other. The world's Muslims did not conquer the world with war and conflict, but also with good behaviour and action <...>. Jihad is right, but we have to know its correct place. Jihad is only with those who do not believe in negotiation and dialogue, and who do not want to obey justice <he refers to a Hadith and adds a narration about the importance of negotiation and dialogue>. We are proud that Islam propounds and emphasizes a peaceful life. We claim rights and respect for all nations and emphasize keeping the dignity of all humans.

(4) The plan of Islam's enemies and international Zionists is to disunite us and create conflict among ethnic and confessional (groups) and they benefit from this. All problems, pressure and line-building from enemies, which we see in

5 Quran (8:61): And if they incline to peace, then incline to it and rely upon Allah.

the Islamic countries, is due to the disunity of the Muslims <...>. My message from this international conference to all leaders and heads of Islamic countries is: consider reducing the disagreements in order to stop the enemy's abuse, especially the international Zionists. The leaders of the Islamic countries, ethnic and Islamic confessions have to end their disagreements. So that US and the occupier regime of Israel cannot take advantage of these (disagreements) and cannot make Jerusalem – the first Qibla of Muslims – the capital of Israel. The best way is negotiation and dialogue, and maintaining the rights of religious and confessional minorities. Respecting these rights helps the unity and brotherhood. Alhamdulillah (thank God) we in Islamic Iran use dialogue, and our way is the unity of the Islamic Umma. My belief is that all Muslims should stand beside each other and solve their issues with negotiation and dialogue.

Hasan Amini⁶

⁽¹⁾ If the objective of this conference is to have peaceful coexistence with other Muslims and non-Muslims outside the country, we, the Iranian Sunni community, have no issue or tension with them. Thus, there is no need for such a conference. If the purpose is to achieve coexistence of Iranian Sunni with Shiite, this is also clear and there is no necessity for this gathering with high costs in this difficult economic situation in our country. The Iranians – Sunni, Shiite and other ideologies and religions – as Iranians (they) are citizens. Separated from politics and political matters, they do not have problems with each other. If it is about “peaceful coexistence” of the Sunni community with the authorities and the state's organisations and the apparatus of the country which rule us in the name of Shiite confession, then the concern is different and bring a variety of questions to mind:

- What is the definition of peaceful coexistence and its characteristics?
- Why has this coexistence not been accomplished, at least within the country, and thus why is there need for such a conference?
- Is this peaceful coexistence mandatory or voluntary?

⁽²⁾ If the coexistence is the state's recipe then it is mandatory. This coexistence was forced on Iranian Sunni community for 40 years. So that thousands of them (Sunni community) were in prison. Hundreds of its leaders, superiors and activists in the last four decades executed and assassinated. Martyrs such as: Allame Kak Ahmad Moftizade, Sheykh Mohammad Ziyai, Kak Naser Sobhani,

⁶ The letter was published on his Instagram account: Amini 1398/2019.

Kak Faruq Farsad, Mamusta Mohammad Rabi'i, Doktor Sayad, Sheykh Ali dahvari, Bahman Shakuri and etc. Nowadays there are tens of political prisoners in Rajai prison in the city of Karaj. Despite more than one million Sunni in Tehran, they do not have the permission to build a mosque. In other cities with a majority or 100% Sunni population, they are not allowed to appoint their Friday Imams, establish and regulate their independent Madrasas as well as other Quranic classes, appoint judges for their religious legal matters, organise freely their religious celebrations. With the one third of the total population, they are excluded from having a minister, Vice President and province governor (*ostandar*). The Iranian Sunni representatives do not have the right to participate in the main decision-making centres of the country such as: Guardian Council, The Expediency Discernment Council, Head of parliament, Supreme leader representative in the provinces. Further the Sunni community are not allowed to reach higher military position such as: *artesh* (Iranian Army), *sepah-e pasdaran* (IRGC), police and intelligence services. Even in employing civil servants or teachers, we saw and heard about harmful ideological designation. Deprivation and economic as well as industrial backwardness in the Sunni regions are in themselves another story <He mentions again the "peaceful coexistence" in a sarcastic way>.

(3) However, if the vision of this conference is about "operating and resorting the achievement of peaceful coexistence", upon agreement, arbitrary and based on Islamic and devotional brotherhood, without doubt with all this discrimination and oppression peaceful coexistence will not be proven to be true. Although all of you were in the last 40 years in these conferences in much larger scale. For instance, you were in the annual conference of "*hafte-ye vahdat*" (week of unity) and heard the promises. It had no outcome or affirmative and positive result for the Sunni community in order to achieve peaceful coexistence, and also every time it brought disappointment towards these gatherings and their organisers. I believe that the principle of "whoever attempts what has already been attempted, deserves the disappointment"⁷ happened in such a conference, but unfortunately we see it repeating.

7 This Arabic phrase (*man jarrab al-mojarrab hallet bi al-nidama*) is a proverb used also by the Persian classical poets Sanai, Attar and Hafez. Well-known is the second verse in Qazal by Hafez starting with *harchand kazmudam az vey nabud sudam* (Although I tried, I was not successful by him/her), which fits in the context of Amini's text.

(4) <He is mentioning a phrase from the Quran⁸ and a Hadith⁹ from the Prophet, regarding “brotherhood”>. If we believe this Quranic verse together with straight and honest belief, strive and make efforts to act on this Hadith and also pushing out and undoing oppression and discrimination, then we will embrace the “peaceful coexistence”. Then it won’t be necessary to organize and spend lots of money on such a conference. Otherwise it will be no “belief and Islam” so that we can have a peaceful coexistence under its shade.

Jalal Jalalizade¹⁰

(1) The primary difficulty of the Kurds and the Sunni community in Iran is discrimination, the feeling of being alien and met with disdain <...> which causes wide cultural, political, economic and social issues. In the country of Iran around 16–17 provinces with a Sunni community exist and five provinces inhabited by Kurds, but in relation to this population no credit and budget were designated, their (the minority group’s) elites are not used at the higher managerial levels locally and regionally, except for a few small cases in addition to the two ambassadors and one chairman in a technical organisation. Further, they (the Sunni community and Kurds) have no place in the development programmes, thus this discrimination and inequality always hurts the soul and spirit of these minorities. <...> In the area of development and progress, productive employment, industrialisation and so on, the Kurdish-inhabited provinces and those with confessional minorities are ranked the lowest. Solving these issues needs serious examination and development of the programmes and policies.

(2) Earlier there was an advisor to the president regarding the Sunni community, which during president Rouhani changed to the Special advisor on ethnic, religious and confessional minorities. During this time, there was a lot of talk from Ali Yunesi, but until now there is no significant or visible result. Moreover, this advisor should have been chosen from the Sunni community in order to show that the Sunni community also has a share, right and permission to influence the major policymaking of the country and (the mandate) to inform

8 “The believers are brothers” (Quran 49: 10).

9 “None of you become a true believer until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself” from *Riyad As Salihin* 22/185; Nawawi 1975:47.

10 The following text is an interview of Jalalizade by Saqqez Rudaw, from the Kurdish News Agency, on 14 April 2019. See Jalalizade 1398/2019.

higher authority about problems. <talks about the point that Yunesi is retired and Rouhani's government did not choose a Sunni for this position>. The important point is about changing the perspective (of how) to look at nations, (in words of) ethnic groups and the Sunni community. If the view of this does not change, then we will not see any development. The few achievements by Rouhani by appointing two ambassadors and the initiative of the Kurdish language as a university subject, are too small compared to his promises. These (changes) were the result of earlier agreements, in the sixth Majles and during the Khatami government, and which were not implemented by Ahmadinejad. <Jalalizade further criticized Rouhani's policies regarding minorities, but mentions that in Rouhani's government some posts were given to the Kurds and Sunni community>. There is not enough intellectual and operational attention, nor enforcement for further development in Kurdistan and changing the existing routine. Generally, there is no will for evolution, just trying to maintain the current situation.

(3) The statistics of inflation, underdevelopment, poor quality of roads, lack of proper use of border areas <he mentions Bazars at the western border of the Kurdish areas>, absence of proper investments, lack of industrial and productive chains, high unemployment rate, low average income etc. are concerning. Although 40% of Kermanshah's population are Sunni, there is not any Sunni even at the level of school director, county governor or similar. Despite the dense population of Kurds and Sunni in West Azerbaijan, there is just one top manager from the Sunni community and few governors, although some of them were recently dismissed unjustly. In spite of continuous requests, the government does not agree on building an extended mosque for the Sunni community in Tehran.

(4) Until we have strong parties, nationally (for Sunni) and for Kurds, and popular parties with good programmes sending their representatives to the parliament, and until we have "approbative supervision" with respect to all other parliament members – we won't have strong representation. If it would not be "approbative supervision", there will be a possibility for more rightful, constructive and functional election. I personally say, that a Kurdish or Sunni representative that enters the parliament should have exact and comprehensive knowledge about culture and the issues belonging to Kurdistan and the Sunni community, and should defend their rights and demands with audaciousness while trying to expand and support civil societies as well as free and independent media. In the following points we see weak actions: rights of *kulbar* (border logistics) as well as operatives of border markets and the opening of border

markets; attracting credits to achieve regional (economical) balance and poverty alleviation; establishing justice in power and dignity; recreating a Kurdish faction in parliament and so forth. <further he explains what the parliament members should know and do>. The matter of today is to evaluate the governments' and parliaments' actions and also humanity, (socio-political) demands, safeguarding of human rights, justice and democracy. So, these should be the most considered (here). The necessity of amnesty, removal of privative opinions (i.e. try to keep an objective standpoint), equality before the law for all nations (ethnic groups) and religious as well as (Islamic) confessional minorities, will strengthen the social capital and lead to development of the society. Establishing justice in three levels of assets, power and dignity, furthermore the formation of democracy, freedom as well as equal and inclusive development are the main demands of the society. So each government which comes, has to make an effort to seriously achieve and accomplish these points.

Behzad Feqhi (Saljuqi)¹¹

(¹) <The speech starts with citations from the Quran>. Friends! One of the main and important basis and brand of this Umma, which makes it glorious from the early time of Islam and in later times globally, and it brought the Umma to purification, edification and internal illumination and makes this Umma the origin of benevolence, mercy and blessings for all Humans is the action of 'Enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong' (*amr-e be maruf va nahy -e az monkar*) 'invitation to Allah' (*dawa il Allah*). <...> This Umma carries a great global message. A Prophet was sent to an Umma, and an Umma (sent) to the humans. This Umma is important and essential like water for humans. As long as water is moving it is the essence of lush greenery and life, its freshness and growth. But if the water is standing, it becomes the source of diseases <...>.

(²) 00:03:45 Behold, the historical origin of us Muslims, since early Islam the birthday of the Prophet is not as that (of Jesus) for the Christians. But why? In this there is a significant secret. Islam is not the religion of events and anniversaries. Islam is not the religion of meetings and sitting down, it is the religion of moving and progress! Therefore, from the time of early Islam, the historical origin of Muslims, is the Hijra.¹² As long as we Muslims on a personal level emigrate from sins, and on a global level try to make efforts to develop humanity – then

11 Speech took place on the 3rd of April 2019AUD 3 1398/2019.

12 The migration of Muslims from Mecca to Medina.

we are alive. But if we forget our prophetic mission and global message, then we become a problem and catastrophe not just for each other but also for all humanity <he quotes from Imam Al-Dawa Allama Nabavi in connection to the previously mentioned point>. If the farmer sits, all the plentiful land will turn to wasteland and dozens of species, a variety of weed and dust will take over that land. If the house is surrounded by spies, this is due to the ignorance of the house owner and not because of the spy's power. If the land goes to waste it is not due to the power of weeds and dust, but because of the ignorance of the farmer. Furthermore, if the world is full of revolt and corruption, it is not due to the power of wrong. Wrong was always weak, it *is* weak, and will remain weak, wrong has no root and fundament. The power of wrong exists (solely) because of the weakness in the movement of right <...>.

(3) 00:06:23 My friends, if we pin 'Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong' 'invite Allah' to our life, it will on a personal level manifest and strengthen our faith <...>. It will help us to not be defensive, but be offensive against wrong. As it is said, the best defence is to attack! **If we strike the wrong, it protects our personal and social rights. But alas! The position of the group of right against those of wrong is (remaining) only still, constant and defensive. And now we have to destroy and make wrong disappear with its sins and misgivings in the world.** On the personal level, a person who is an inviter (*dai*) will be protected from bad friends and bad environment. If someone is an inviter, his/her belief will become strong and will lead to growth and development. **If someone is an inviter, he will not become the invited. If someone said the righteous words, wrong cannot change him! Indeed, he will be the source of change and evolution** <Further discussion of the importance of invitation as an essential aspect on the personal level>. On the family level, if we want to strengthen the family and respect the parents we have no other choice than 'invite Allah' and 'Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong' <...> If in a family the purpose is human education, this family will experience the stability and respect of the parents <Two Surahs given as examples, i.e. Maryam and Loqman as examples of a successful mother and father, and explains that the purpose of family is not just having children but the main purpose should be to 'invite Allah' and 'Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong'>. The families are formed through the principle of invitation. Allah said to his Prophet (14:29) Oh Prophet, your family, your generation, your Ahl-e Beyt, are all prayers, but the invitation to pray should not be stopped. **Although in the house of the Prophet and his Ahl-e Beyt a lack of prayer makes no sense, however, if there is prayer but without invitation – then the prayer will go unheard. Thus, invitation, accomplishment and the value of prophecy should be repeated in the home of the Prophet <...>. If**

your child knows God, your child will know you too, but if it does not know God, definitely it will not recognise you and one day will bring you alive to the graveyard of the parents, at the Elder's house. Thus, most people in the Elder's house are not poor, but educated and wealthy although in their houses they did not have the mission of Loqman and Maryam <...>. The stability of our personal life, our family and political system is depending on the 'invitation of Allah' and 'Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong'.

(4) ^{00:18:35} About the political system of Islam, how beautifully said Allah "those who, if We give them authority in the land."¹³ In the political system of Islam what is the purpose of power and obedience? Pressure and rule, are for what? The *casus fortuitus* is for what? In which direction should the politics and power be used? As Allah said, a political system is characterised by four things: 1. Establish prayer < further explanation of importance of prayer for everyone and every society>, 2. Zakat, which means having a healthy financial system and **healthy economy** (albeit Zakat is more typically referred to as an Islamic type of religious tax), **which must be used effectively in Islamic government for poverty reduction, creating jobs and economic growth in order to stop the corruption and the class system** <...> 3 & 4. 'Enjoin what is Right and forbid what is Wrong' means that the civil society has to be strong and all the state's organisations must be transparent for all – all people.

(5) ^{00:21:47} In this society (an Islamic society) the highest person of society, Our Master great Faruq (Caliph Omar), came to his pulpit and wanted to examine his society. (He said) in my society maybe there are prayer and Zakat, but is there also a place for free thinking or freedom of speech? Is there any place for constructive criticism? Are the civil society, organisations and parties active? He (Omar) was on the place of Mohammad, **governed two and a half continents of the world, sent two imperialists and dictators to the trash pile of history. He removed the empire of Iran and Rome from the world. He is (now) concerned about 'Enjoin what is Right and forbid what is Wrong' and about the civil society** <...> As the Supreme leader (Khamenei) already also said during the '70s (1990s) Friday prayer in Tehran. In the time of the great Faruq and his democracy, one day the son of Amr ibn al-As,¹⁴ an aristocrat thinking himself of 'better lineage' (*jhen-e bartar*, lit. "of better genetics") insulted

13 Quran 22: 41. The full translation of this verse is: "those who, if we give them authority in the land, establish prayer and give Zakat and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. And to Allah belongs the outcome of [all] matters."

14 The general governor of Egypt during the time of the second Caliph Omar.

a Coptic man, who was of a religious minority and another ethnic group. The complaint of that person reached the great Faruq: Oh Omar! Your governor oppressed me! <...> **In an official court the corruption has to be replaced by complete transparency. All those aristocrats, and those who think they are of 'better lineage' should be put on public trial. <...> Under the ruling of Omar, not just the general governor and his son are punished, but also his governor, as it was in his power and due to his mismanagement this happened. Under the ruling of Omar people, in the pulpit of the Prophet, can criticize and request answers from him (the people now shout Allahoakbar). Indeed, 'Enjoin the Right and forbid the Wrong' in the political system creates public trust, so the Coptic (man) also feels himself at home in the Muslim society <...>, and this (trust) is the main capital of a society, not the bombs, tanks and foreign exchanges.**

(6) 00:25:56 On the global level we also have a mission. "You are the best nation produced for mankind."¹⁵ This is our message which was loudly vocalised by (Muslims like) Abullah Ibn Amir¹⁶ before the battle of Qadesiye in the palaces of tyranny, "Allah has been appointed us."¹⁷ **Today, the Kremlin, White House, Tel Aviv, are waiting until the sound of Abdullah Ibn Amir will be raised there. Some people from this Umma and from Iran, from Sunni and Shiite together with some organisations hand in hand, beyond confessional and personal opinions and ideologies, will make the message of Islam global and say in the palaces of tyranny: "Allah has been appointed to us" (the people now shout Allahoakbar). Only we can pilot the ship of salvation! Only we can bring justice into the palaces of tyranny! The world is on the edge of destruction due to the tyrannies of west and east. The world is full of weapons, military and cyber weapons on the ground, water and in cyber space <...>. The leader of blasphemy made the world full of weapons, they cannot manage the world. The Christchurch mosque shootings <he talks about the details of the attack> was not an attack of one person towards one religion, it was an attack from an ideology. Behind this was your Islamophobia and your communicational war. The names of leaders of the crusades, who killed dozens of Muslims, even kids, were written on the weapons of that blood-thirsty stranger (referring to the Christchurch attacker). That is the reflection of your thought that every time something happens there is a religious**

15 Quran 3: 110. The full translation of this verse is: "You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient."

16 The governor of Basra (647–656) and a military general during the Uthman.

17 Expressed first in Arabic and then in Farsi.

and confessional colour to it. <...> The world can be changed just from the youth from the generation of Khalid ibn al-Walid, Omar, Musab ibn Omair, Muhammad bin Qasim and Tariq ibn Ziyad <he briefly summarises his speech and the public shouts Allahoakbar>.

Abdolghaffar Naqshbandi¹⁸

⁽¹⁾ <The introduction includes recitation of Quran verses and an Hadith about the topic of his speech: Taqwa>. ‘Whoever feared the Truth (or God) and chooses Taqwa,¹⁹ demons and humans will fear him.’²⁰ Dear friends and grateful listeners, the quotations which are presented are about an important matter which the great God brought into various parts of the glorious Quran, (and these are) on the matter of Taqwa <He recites different parts of the Quran in which Taqwa is mentioned, for example 3:76, 7:96 and 65:3>. Friends, what is Taqwa? The glorious God points out that if you, the believers, want to know whom will be supported and accompanied by Allah, the God said: “I will be with Al-Muttaqin (those who practice Taqwa)” If you search the ‘Friends of God’ (Ar. Awliya Allah) on earth and want to know who they are, the glorious God said: “They are those who practice Taqwa”²¹ <He repeats it again but louder>.

⁽²⁾ 00:06:54 But what is Taqwa, dear? Our master Ali Al-Murtaza said Fear of Allah, acting to Quran, be satisfied with what God gives us and be ready for the last travel (to die). <He gives another example of Taqwa from the Quran, mainly on the point that God is all-seeing>. Our master Abu-Bakr Al-Seddiq, also when he went to the pulpit of the Prophet and wanted to advise the Umma, one of his first points was **“Oh people, I advise you to Taqwa!”** Also, when he was at his last moment and wanted to give the reins of the Caliphate to the super-human of Islam and history; the Omar. He (Abu-bakr) told the Omar **“Oh Omar, I am leaving and giving you the Caliphate! About the peasant, be afraid of Allah and follow the Taqwa.”** If we look at the Omar, Taqwa can be interpreted in the life of Omar. One day Omar was with his companion Abu-Obeida in the street and woman came to stop them and said “Be careful Omar <he repeats it>, **Oh Omar do not forget that one day your name was**

18 The following speech is from Friday, 5 May 2019: AUD 4 1389/2019.

19 Islamic term referring to religious piety. For further information see the Discourse Analysis.

20 From Rumi’s Masnavi-ye Manavi, 1/78.

21 Quran 8:34.

Omarak (small Omar) and had no value for the people. But soon you receive the reins of the Caliphate of all Muslims and today you are Amir-e Momenan (The King of Believers). Be careful oh Omar, <he first recites it in Arabic and then translates it> do know that tomorrow in the last Judgement in God's court you will be presented, and you will be asked about your Umma and your peasant <...> Oh Omar be fearful of that day." Abu-Obeida was concerned and blamed that woman "Oh, woman! Be careful with whom you are talking," <...>. After he blamed the woman and wanted to send her to jail, the Omar immediately stopped the Abu-Ubeida and closed his mouth and said "Wait Abu-Ubeida, stop." Omar did not say; Oh woman, watch your mouth! You are talking with me! You are talking with ruler of the Muslims! Omar did not have the woman sent to jail. He said "Watch your mouth Abu-Obeida! Don't you know this woman? <...> This is the woman, whose loud voice of her heart was heard by the munificent God. (Who) then sent the Sura of Mujadila through Gabriel to the heart of the Prophet. <He cited the first Aya of Mujadila²²>. Oh Abu-Ubeida! This is the woman, who was heard by God of the world, why then me, Omar, should not listen to her?" Taqwa means Omar <...>.

(3) ^{00:18:49} Another time, when Omar was in the city when everyone were sleeping peacefully. He heard the conversation between a mother and her daughter. The mother encouraged the daughter to add water to the milk so they could make better profit the next day. But the daughter resisted and said that Amir-e Momenan, Omar, banned this action and said to not betray in business. The mother said, the Omar is sleeping deeply right now. Omar has no idea that we mix the milk with water. **But see here the Taqwa from a girl of Sahaba, from a girl who was educated by Mohammad: Oh mother! be careful! If Omar is sleeping, God of the world is awake and is watching us.** Omar marked that house and the day after asked her to marry his son Asem <He proceed to the story that from this family Omar Ibn-Abdullah, who became the second Omar, was born>.

(4) ^{00:21:59} Friends! Our master! Omar, the myth of justice and fairness, the man of the ground of braveness, jurisprudence, valiant, justice and Taqwa, wrote a letter to his son Abdullah encouraging him to also practice Taqwa <...>. One day Abdullah, son of Omar, was in the field and wanted to examine a shepherd and told him: Oh shepherd! Kill one of the lambs and let us eat and enjoy it. The shepherd said that: I cannot, as I am just a slave and these lambs are not mine. Abdullah told him that no one is here, and you can say one of lambs was killed and eaten by a wolf. **The shepherd did not accept and said: I can betray**

22 Quran 58:1.

the owner of the lambs but <first in Arabic and then in Persian> **how can I answer to Allah?** <...> Abdullah was impressed and thereafter sent a messenger to the owner of the shepherd to pay the owner to make his slave free <...>. That is Taqwa.

(5) 00:25:26 <He further recites Quran²³ verses about Taqwa, in which it is compared to a cloth and then tells the story of Yusof and the wife of Aziz, Zoleykha.²⁴ Naqshbandi narrates the part of the story in which Zoleykha claims, untruthfully, to Aziz that Yusof attacked her, for which Yusof was sent to jail>. Pay attention young ones! Yusof had to suffer for the crime which he did not commit. <He recites Quran 12:33²⁵>. **The chaste and immaculate Yusof, <...> who was under the worst oppression and injustice by his half-blood brothers, was sent to prison by Aziz of Egypt. <...> Oh, young ones – listen to message of Yusof carefully!** <He recites Quran 12:33 again and translates it>. Behold – friends! Allah opens the doors of jails. A friend of mine told me that: you were also innocent (like Yusof) and it was a divine trial for you, but were the doors of jail opened for you too? I answered: My dear friend! Although at that time the doors were open for Yusof, he was still there for a time. It was not important that if at that moment the doors were open or not, **but it was important that the betrayal and conspiracy of Zoleykha was entirely shredded to pieces and Yusof came out of jail with pride and dignity. I am thanking my God because, the jail doors were not opened for us, but they were also not opened for Mufti Mahmud Al-Hassan Divbandi and Shah Ata-Allah Bokhari. But, thank God that the strands of malice and conspiracy towards us who are sworn to God, were anyway disrupted** (the people in the mosque shout Allahoakbar). This is the message of Allah, oh young people! You follow the Taqwa and then Allah with his powers and angels will support you. (He brings the first part of his speech to an end and says that due to lack of time he will talk about this topic another week).

(6) 00:37:40 My dear ones, we heard that one of our young and beloved *sukht-bar* (gasoline smuggler) was killed near the city of Jakigur. Yesterday we were informed that someone shot his car so that he was burnt alive and died. I have said it several times, although we have no strong influence, but it is our duty and responsibility to speak up. <...> First of all, the term smuggler should be

23 Quran 7: 26 “O children of Adam, we have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness (Taqwa) – that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember”.

24 Quran 12.

25 “My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant.”

removed from our young Baluch *sukhtbar*. They preserve their dignity as they are not selling their bodies or go stealing or embezzle. For their own dignity they are doing this, going under bullets and take such a risk. <...> I tell all Ulama, speakers, writers, the media and especially the (parliament) representatives. Oh, people's representatives! Who sleep in the seats of the parliament, wake up! The alas and prayer of that mother, who smelled her young one was barbequed, will disrupt the strands of our life (the people in the mosque shout Allahoakbar). Wake up! Oh representatives, who came to the region before the election in order to get more votes <...> these branded mothers²⁶ waited hours under the burning sun in order to vote for you, so that you can protect their rights and defend the rights of this downtrodden nation (e. i. Baluchs). Where are our factories and our companies? If we had factories and companies, why would our young ones be killed at the border? <he expresses his sadness about the young *sukhtbar* and claims that the traffic police of Sistan-Baluchistan said the young Baluch was not killed by police shots but instead in an accident>. If it was not the shots from the police and security forces, then we are thankful to them. But if not and you are a man of faith and conscience, then the person who shot the young Baluch *sukhtbar* has to be hanged in public (the people in the mosque shout Allahoakbar). Regarding the martyr of bread, the young *sukhtbar*, if it is confirmed (that he was shot by security forces), it should be explained. <...> Thus, we ask for investigation and examination, to bring justice to those in right, and to rectify the right of this young (*sukhtbar*) to his family.

(7) 00:45:36 Another point is that some days ago in the city of Jalq in Saravan county, two young Baluchs were in a region with landmines which they did not know about and consequently went with their motorcycle on a mine and were killed. As a result, young people in Jalq were emotionally influenced by this event and took to the streets for demonstration. I am not supporting that the young people set fire to the local administrative office. We are not supporting the violence. But you have to admit these young ones the right to be angry. <...> We should put ourselves in their shoes. If my own brother also died in this way, I would be angry and riot in the city. We are asking that our dear fellows should stop the violence. I ask all dear (security) forces to release as soon as possible the 20 youth from Jalq, who were arrested after the demonstration. <...> They are angry that those two youths were killed because of landmines. And we say, why were there no jobs or factories created for them? <...>.

26 Expression: equivalent to great suffering.

Epilogue

As I have explored throughout this book, especially in the first Part, in Iran, as in other non-western societies and in contrast to the western liberal democracies, the term minority, and the overlapping uses of ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian communities, are essentially contested concepts, to use Walter Gellner's term.¹ A closer look at the post-revolutionary documents and scholarly debates in Iran demonstrated that the Islamic Republic is generally lacking clear definitions of various aspects associated with minorities. However, within the Islamic Republic constitution, the following ideas are reflected when it comes to minorities without making the state responsible for implementing them:

- Equal and non-discriminatory opportunities and rights
- Freedom to express, preserve and develop ones identity and associations
- Participation, representation, engagement and inclusion

Later, during the Presidency of Hasan Rouhani, some new concepts used these in the main documents of his famous Charter on Citizen's Rights, possibly adopted from the European standards, for instance as provided by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which are:

- Promotion of diversity and pluralism
- Providing assistance (legal, education abroad, policing)
- Preventing/reducing hostility, violence and tensions against minorities
- Rights to interactions/access/receiving support with/to/from other states

Moving from the normative layer and to investigate the current discourse of the Islamic Republic and the Sunni communities at the operative layer of ideology, presented in parts 2 and 3, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was chosen as an appropriate methodological approach. Through the CDA method, the language in public speeches/written publications of 10 well-known individuals – five from the Islamic Republic and five from the Sunni community – were translated, described and interpreted. Further, the processes, structures and background associated with each individual were explained. After analysing each example, the main characteristics of all the examples were divided into 16 categories (see Figure 6).

The analysis of the examples delivers two general findings. First, it illustrates the existence of *plural discourses* when it comes to the Sunni communities in the Islamic Republic, i.e. the main figures of the Islamic Republic have a different focus in their discourse when compared to the individuals from the Sunni communities. A comparison of the Islamic Republic's and the Sunni

1 I thank one of the reviewers, who pointed out this term during the review process.

community's discourses shows that each side expresses different ideas around different issues. However, both sides also demonstrate similarities which can be linked.

A second result of the analysis is that it shows the *internal pluralism* on both sides. Indeed, they are internally highly differentiated in their discourse and generate different debates and ideological focuses. This diversity of discourse within both sides is an indication that they are shaped by multiple actors, from different traditions, with various socio-political ideas, as well as by having a variety of objectives. In the following step, the main characteristics of the discourse of the Islamic Republic and the Iranian Sunni communities are compared. Further, this comparison is not just limited to *between* the two sides (the Islamic Republic versus the Sunni communities), but also presents similarities and differences *within* each side.

1 Islamic Republic vs Sunni Communities: Plural and Pluralist Discourses

Among the 16 categories of main characteristics presented in the discourses of the Islamic Republic and the Sunni communities (Figure 7), there are three points of focus which appear in several examples: *economic matters*, *unity* and *enemy*. The former is discussed more frequently among the Sunni communities (in four examples among the Sunni communities and three examples among Islamic Republic), while the other two are completely dominated by the discourse of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, all examples from the Islamic Republic mentioned the *enemy*, while it was only referred to in two examples from the Sunni communities. Similarly, almost everyone from the Islamic Republic, with one exception, Makarem Shirazi, talked about the unity between Sunni and Shia. It seems as if no one can talk about Sunni-Shia relations without bringing in the idea of unity as a kind of safe-code. Indeed, the main idea is that there is an ideal unity between Sunni and Shia and it is the *enemies* who intend to destroy this harmony from the outside (through the intelligence services of the foreign countries and through regional rivalry) but also the inside (through the Takfiri movements or political opposition). Here, it is important to note that the issue of security is indeed strongly presented in the discourse of the Islamic Republic, which sees the Iranian Sunni communities as the target of "enemy infiltration" and manipulation either as a result of the Sunnis' ignorance or their maliciousness. This view has placed the Sunni communities under a lens of extra suspicion and places them in the group of "outsiders" (*gheyr-e khodi*). As a consequence of the Islamic Republic's discourse on this

topic, the position of the Ulamas as the “guards of the geographical border as well as the ideological border” (Raisi, see chapter 4) is strongly emphasized and thus their indirect power increased.

The highlight of the comparison is when Supreme Leader Khamenei in his speech emphasizes “being friendly with believers” and “forceful” with enemies, while the prominent Sheykhholeslam of Zahedan, Molana Abdolhamid talks about peace, toleration and compromise. However, Abdolhamid is not the only one talking about tolerance. Rouhani’s Special advisor on ethnic and religious/confessional minorities, Ali Yunesi, also speaks about the importance of *tolerance & dialogue*, although this point is emphasized far more in Abdolhamid’s speech than in Yunesi’s, who mentions the idea of peace but shortly after rings the alarm about the threat of extremism. Another issue discussed in three examples is *Islamophobia*. This idea is used twice in the discourse of the Islamic Republic and once in the Sunni’s. Khamenei, firstly, similarly to Yunesi, sees *Islamophobia* as an ideology created by the “enemy”, whereas in a similar – but even harsher – way, Molavi Feqhi, in one of the largest gatherings of Sunnis inside or outside of Iran in Zahedan, talks about *Islamophobia* as a “war of communications” by the west by mentioning the Christchurch Mosque shootings of 2019. In this regard, I found it always fascinating in my interviews with people from Sunni communities, especially with younger people, that referencing and reflecting on events happening in the west is extremely important for them.

Economic matters, which is dominated by the Sunni discourse, is reflected in one of the examples from the Islamic Republic as well. Raisi, at the time Head of Judiciary, as was the well-known Sunni preacher Molavi Naqshbandi, touches on economic issues by using similar rhetoric, e.g. “the cry of mothers, for the unemployment of their children.” However, while the former uses the issue of the economy among Sunnis in his presidential campaign as a critique of Rouhani’s administration, the latter reflects on the daily issues of people from his community who face severe economic hardship. In another example, Yunesi mentions the economic difficulties in the peripheral areas in his speech in order to highlight the Rouhani government’s economic plans and promises.

In addition, there are issues as *socio-political rights & freedom, injustice & discrimination and political oppression*, which are discussed only within the Sunni communities. Kak Hasan Amini, Jalal Jalalizade and Molavi Naqshbandi directly, and Molana Abdolhamid and Molavi Feqhi indirectly, talked briefly about these issues. The matter of *injustice* is interesting, as it is addressed both at economic and socio-political levels, showing how the Sunni communities consider themselves outside the Islamic Republic’s efforts to improve society and demonstrating the apprehension about the pressure applied by

the Islamic Republic onto the Sunnis. In fact, the Iranian Sunnis' struggles for equality, which are described among some Sunnis as "open wounds", illustrates a series of structural challenges that scholars have seldom addressed. However, if the Sunnis themselves draw attention to these issues, there is a risk of highlighting their differences from the identity of the nation, intensifying "the fissure that produces the group's exclusion in the first place", to use the idea of Saba Mahmood.²

Relating to the previous point, the notion of *Martyrdom* is remarkable, and is presented in two examples from the Sunni communities (Hasan Amini and Molavi Naqshbandi) and in one example from the Islamic Republic (Raisi). However, it is interesting to note that the concept of Martyrdom is not used in same way. While Raisi talks about "martyrs from all ethnic groups and religious confessions" during the Iran-Iraq War, Amini refers to the assassination of Sunni activists and leaders after the Islamic revolution. Then, in a similar way, Naqshbandi emphasizes the economic characteristic of Martyrdom by speaking about the "martyrs of bread" when referring to the cross-border smuggling in impoverished border areas. Different interpretations can be found when it comes to the term 'Jihad'. For Raisi, Jihad is about "Jihadi management" for the sake of the country and for solving the economic issues. From the Iranian Sunni side, Jihad – commonly referenced in Iranian Baluchistan and usually with strong historical links – for Abdolhamid is only to be enforced when "negotiation and dialogue" do not work and thus, in his discourse, Jihad is in the shadow of other ideas such as "cooperation, mercy, thought, intelligence, justice and preserving the rights of all humans". In principle, Abdolhamid sees Jihad as the last resort if other solutions cannot be found. Without directly mentioning the Jihad, Molavi Feqhi, in a dramatic way, claims that Muslims, Sunni and Shia, will bring "the messages of Islam to the Kremlin, White House and Tel Aviv."

Similarly, there is divergence among both sides when it comes to using historical figures or historical Islamic events in the speeches. The hardline member of parliament, Karimi Qodusi, refers to Saqifah, the location where some of Prophet's companions gathered and pledged their allegiance to the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. Karimi uses this historical event as the "root of deflection" concerning political opposition in the Islamic Republic and connected this event to Green Movement of 2008 but also Takfiri movements. Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, on the other hand, describes the roots of the Takfiri and Wahabi movements as being outside the country but sees "expanding the culture of Ahl-e Beyt (Shiite) in the region" as the solution. Among the Iranian Sunnis, historical figures and events are used with different associations.

² Mahmood 2015a: 67.

Molana Abdolhamid uses the peace treaty of Hundaybiyyah to emphasize the importance of dialogue and compromise. Frequently, Molavi Feqhi and Molavi Naqshbandi refer to the second Caliph Omar to highlight his governance and present him as “the myth of justice and fairness ... who does not send his opponents to jail.”³ Among these two protagonists, who both come from school of Deoband with its linkage to Sufism, Omar is described as the symbol of “free thinking and freedom of speech” under whose Caliphate the “civil societies, organisations and parties were active”, who destroyed the Persian Empire and “sent imperialists and dictators to the trash pile of history”.⁴

2 Internal Pluralist Characteristics of the Islamic Republic and the Sunni Communities

Among the five protagonists from the Shia elites of the Islamic Republic there are contradictory statements which illustrate the pluralist character of the Republic’s discourse. While Khamenei claims that “Islam does not believe in (religious) pluralism”, Yunesi sees the differences as an “opportunity”. Regarding *economic matters*, Raisi and Yunesi elaborate on economic issues in the provinces with Sunni majorities, while Makarem discusses the economic issues in the Shiite community in terms of being caused by “(the enemies who) infiltrate the country”.

As is mentioned above, *enemy* is one of most frequently used words in the Islamic Republic’s discourse. But these enemies vary between the examples: Khamenei sees the enemy as the “Shiite who has contact with MI-6 of England or a Sunni who is a hireling of the CIA of America” as well as “American capitalism and global arrogance led by America and the Zionists,” while in other examples the enemies are “Takfiri Wahhabi” movements. Karimi Qodusi describes enemies in a much more extreme way than the others – for him the enemies belong to the “west-oriented stream, which opposed the revolutionary stream”, which is seen as “(supporters of) Daesh, Al-Qaeda and the Wahhabi streams”. Further, Qodusi links this stream directly to the “moderate stream of Rouhani” and thereby indirectly associates Rouhani with the enemies – indeed both a harsh and controversial statement about the president. In such a context, the Sunni representatives who visited the former reformist president Khatami could also be categorized as enemies. In other words, although enemies are mostly from outside of the country, the examples from the Islamic Republic

3 See Annex 2, Molavi Naqshbandi.

4 See Annex 2, Molavi Feqhi.

show that they also consider enemies to be found within the country, and thus no one is truly immune from being perceived as and labelled an enemy.

In general, these examples show that the individuals driving the Islamic Republic's main discourse do so on the basis of what they believe is best for the national interest and the general political objectives both regionally and domestically, which are interestingly enough similar to the policies of the Pahlavi regime. Now, what are these concepts? For Khamenei it is unity, dignity and security from the enemy (by securing the interests of the Umma). In contrast, Raisi and Yunesi emphasise Iran's interests as well as the "pride of the country" and reaching "new heights" by "jihadi management". Makarem takes this a step further, clearly acknowledging that "expanding the culture of Ahl-e Beyt (Shiism)" and Shia institutions as the main policy "will be a blessing for the region and also for the regime." Similarly, Karimi Qodusi defines his revolutionary position and zeal as being "to protect the Islamic Revolution's accomplishments" by being "self-motivated and always ready to fulfil the duty to this grand sacred revolution." In addition, Qodusi mixes the history of early Islam (from the Shiite perspective, which claims that Shiites were betrayed and excluded from power) with the current Islamic Republic's elite power competitions, in which the hardliners see their position as weak and betrayed by the moderate faction. In principle, one could say that the Iranian political (and religious) hardliners are victimizing themselves in this particular context, in order to gain unity against a common enemy, where the enemy varies depending on the objective of the current speaker and their institutional interest.

Looking at the five protagonists from the Iranian Sunni communities, the discourse also shows pluralist characteristics. Abdolhamid's speech focuses on *peace, tolerance and dialogue*, but these ideas are missing from the other Sunni examples. In particular, while Abdolhamid places emphasis on "tolerance" (*tahammol*), Amini writes mostly about "enforcement" (*tahmil*). Furthermore, Abdolhamid is the only one using the discourse of "enemy" in a style similar to the Islamic Republic, namely "enemies and Zionists who disunite the Islamic societies". Interestingly, Abdolhamid as the most famous and influential Sunni leader in Iran manages to keep a public discourse on the topics of injustice and/or discrimination, but he does so in a very indirect way, whereby he side-steps the mandatory line of criticism that otherwise would be directed towards him from the Islamic Republic. Whereas, on the contrary, Amini, Jalalizade and Naqshbandi criticise the Islamic Republic directly by elaborating the challenges facing the Sunni communities. Also, in a very direct way, both Amini and Naqshbandi raise the issues of securitization, such as Sunni political prisoners, in their discourse and thereby openly challenge the security view of the Islamic Republic.

In this context it is important to remember the use of Islamic history as a reference and connection point to the current issues in Iran, and in particular in connection with the Sunni communities. As mentioned earlier, those from the Deobandi School (Molana Abdolhamid, Molavi Feqhi and Naqshbandi) use Islamic historical links to elaborate their points, while among the Sunni Kurds, Amini and Jalalizade do not use these links to early Islam. Remarkably, while in all examples a variety of quotations from the Quran and Hadith are found, the examples from the Kurdish communities are in stark contrast with Amini using just one phrase from the Quran and one from the Hadith, and Jalalizade not including any quotation at all from Islamic scripture. Jalalizade is also the only individual from the Sunni communities in these examples who demands the safeguarding of “democracy and human rights”, indicating a different fundamental standpoint from which he sees the world and which does not necessarily have its primary base in literally abiding with Islamic scripture – something which comes to the surface in his public discourse. However, the structure of Jalalizade’s discourse may also just be a result of prioritizing what is of most importance for the Kurdish community at this time, and thus the religious demagoguery takes a back-seat while socio-political empowerment and economic development is at the top of his agenda.

Comparing the examples from the Kurdish Sunni community (Amini and Jalalizade) with the other Sunni examples shows that while Islamism and Islamic identity are dominant themes in the latter group, the Kurdish discourse is rather driven by nationalist motives. This comparison demonstrates the “inverse” relation between the Kurdish identity and the central Islamic Republic government, as discussed by Ali Ezzatyar:

in Iranian Kurdistan historically (and Kurdistan generally), Islamism has maintained an *inverse* relationship with the Islamism and Islamic identity of the dominant opposing force where Kurds reside. In Iran, this means the Islamism of the majority Shia population, and of the regime in Tehran. As secular governments were founded in Turkey and Iran, and in the midst of a still undeveloped sense of nationalism in Kurdistan, Islam as a motivating tool peaked in Kurdistan. Islamism’s propensity in Kurdistan would gradually decline as the Iranian revolution approached.⁵

5 Ezzatyar 2016: 37. Furthermore, Ezzatyar (*ibid.*) argues that this inverse relationship exists between Islamism in Kurdistan and Kurdish nationalism, in other words when Islamism weakens among the Kurds, Kurdish nationalism is strengthened.

3 The Wider Picture

Samuel Huntington (1993 & 1996) provided a new perspective when looking at global politics following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. His main argument was the acknowledgement that *plural* civilisations exist. Peter J. Katzenstein (2010) agrees with Huntington on the plurality of civilisations, but argues that Huntington missed an important key point; namely the “internal pluralism of civilisations.”⁶ Katzenstein further argues that civilisations are “configurations, constellations, or complexes. They are not fixed in space or time. They are both internally highly differentiated and culturally loosely integrated”⁷ which consequently generates debate and contestations within civilisations.⁸

Civilisations constitute a world that is neither a Hobbesian anarchy nor a Habermasian public sphere, neither empire nor cosmopolis ... Instead, they are weakly institutionalized social orders reflected in, and shaped by, a variety of practices and processes.⁹

Looking closely at the dynamics of Sunni-Shiite relations and their discourses in contemporary Iran shows the complexity of Islamic civilisation,¹⁰ and by all means civilisations in general. In this book, the analysis of speeches/text from 10 individuals in the public sphere of Iran shows how they present different modes of thought which are “loosely integrated” as they show: disparate histories and a varying sense of past, present and future; a range of challenges and solutions; and diverse understandings of the relations within their own – and with other – communities.

When presenting the theoretical framework in this book’s introduction, the approach proposed by Malesevic (2002 & 2006) was discussed: every ideology exists in two layers, *normative* and *operative*. While the former provides universalist statements “with the voice of moral or cognitive (or both),”¹¹ the latter layer is presented in the “institutional” and “extra-institutional” arena as

6 Katzenstein 2010: 7.

7 Ibid.: 5.

8 Ibid.: 5–8 & 36.

9 Ibid. 6.

10 Lawrence (2010: 159 & 165) argues the Islamic(ate) civilization as “the bridge from ancient to modern social systems” included different “racial, linguistic and cultural” dimensions across the Middle East.

11 Malesevic 2006: 92.

well as in “the routine circumstances of daily life in any given society.”¹² The discourse of the operative layer is mostly “emotional and instrumental” and, indeed, addresses the interests of individuals and particular groups. Malesevic concludes that the operative layer of ideology always has the tendency to be nationalist. In this book, in all 10 examples we find the normative layer of the discourse to be represented for example by quotations from the Quran, Hadith or Constitution. It is in the normative layer of the Islamic Republic’s discourse where we can find the concepts of unity of all Muslims and equality of all Iranians. Whereas in the operative layer, matters associated with the state and security come to the surface, for example: Iran’s position and influence in the region; Iran’s share of the region’s economy; the pride and glory of Iran and being Iranian; and the daily political competition among the Islamic Republic’s elites. On the other side, among the Sunnis, the main topics of the normative layer are the glory and significance of Islam and the Islamic Umma as well as unity among all Muslims. In the operative layer, however, the issues of daily life and the concerns of individual Sunni communities reveal a range of emotional reactions, for example: matters of exclusion from Iran’s internal politics; continuous socio-political oppression; and the daily economic struggles among people of the Iranian Sunni communities which are typically associated with the fact that they are located in border regions.

Thanks to the comprehensive research on Sunni Muslims in Iran by the historian Stéphan Dudoignon, we know much more about the dynamics of Sunni-Shiite relations in the modern history of Iran. Dudoignon shows that the Sunni communities were used in predominantly two different ways by the Islamic Republic, which are in principle described as follows. Dudoignon¹³ discusses the adoption of the “double ligne” (double lines) policy by the Islamic Republic: “plus grande fermeté à l’intérieur” (more oppression inside) and “... relative ouverture à l’extérieur” (relatively open for the outside). This policy presents a fascinating and complex relationship between the Islamic Republic and its Sunni communities. On the one hand, the Islamic Republic limits the activities of the Sunni communities inside the country by *suppressing* them, while on the other hand it allows them to *engage* in some areas. First, the State (Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic) uses the Sunni community, through their influential religious representatives, as a firewall to stop foreign influence (for example against the Soviet Union during the Pahlavi era and, since the beginning of the 21st century against, Salafi propaganda and Saudi

12 Ibid.: 93.

13 Dudoignon 2011: 339.

influence¹⁴). Second, since the 1980s, the Sunni communities and especially the Sunni religious representatives have been transformed into “vote-getters”¹⁵ and thus became a part of public mobilisation during the election campaigns. Third, Tehran instrumentalizes Iran’s Sunnis in the regional game to “promote Sunni soft power, exporting an attractive image of the regime”¹⁶ and to expand the state’s influence by using its community to create religious and cultural connections between the subcontinent, the Near East and former Soviet Eurasia.¹⁷ Tajikistan in particular plays an increasingly important role through the network of the madrasas of the Deobandi school of thought as well as Tablighi Jamaat and their connection with Iranian Baluchistan.¹⁸

Now, by looking at the examples provided in this book we can clearly see how the above-mentioned dual *exclusionary* and *inclusionary* policy is reflected in the discourse of the Islamic Republic. For example, the Sunnis are excluded from access to in higher positions within the Islamic Republic’s administration and have also faced long-standing difficulties trying to open a Sunni mosque in the capital city, which is the home to around one million Sunni followers. At the same time, they are included in the Islamic Republic’s political objectives, with Raisi describing the Sunni Ulamas as the guards of both the “geographical borders as well as the ideological borders”, or Yunesi when quoting the Supreme leader, “the Sunni Mufti should be from Iran”. This dual policy is also echoed within the Sunni communities and reflected by a dual discourse of *encounter* and *engagement*, exemplified here by the Sunni cases discussing their difficult relationship with the Islamic Republic by elaborating on “discrimination”, “oppression” and “being alienated and disesteemed” within their own country. But then there are moments of engagement when the discourse of the Iranian Sunni communities comes close to that of the Islamic Republic by touching upon themes of “unity” both within the country and in regards to common enemies (the U.S. and Israel). This is, however, one of the oldest war strategies of mankind, to find a common external enemy in order to create unity within the group, and thus the discourse on unity cloaked in religious terms in fact serves a dual purpose where the latter likely is more important to the elites of both communities as it is associated with political and territorial

14 Ibid.: 335; 2013: 149 & 2017: 169, 220 & 245.

15 Dudoignon 2013: 144; 2017: 256–62.

16 Dudoignon 2017: 276 and also see Ibid. 2011: 336.

17 Dudoignon 2013: 153; 2017: 271.

18 A remarkable current example took place on 1 January 2020 in Makki Darrolulum of Zahedan, where Nezamoddin Zahedi, Tajiki ambassador to Tehran, visited Molana Abdolhamid and discussed with him the legal status of Tajiki students of Darolulum, among other points: IRNA 1398/2020.

power. More precisely, when it comes to the question of Palestine, the Sheykh al-Islam of Zahedan and a prominent spokesman of the Iranian Sunni community, Abdolhamid Esmailzayi, is in consensus with the Islamic Republic and Khamenei “in a mood that is more often nationalist than pan-Islamist.”¹⁹

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All in all, the era of president Hasan Rouhani opened up a new chapter in Iran’s contemporary history with a particular focus on the complex relationship between the Islamic Republic and its Sunni communities. In the first Part we discussed how Rouhani made certain conciliatory steps by elaborating on the rights of the “citizen” and by providing the symbolic Charter on Citizen’s Rights, as well as promising public freedom for political association, thought and more liberty for the religious activities of Iranian ethnic groups and various (Islamic) religious confessions. Meanwhile, this general politics was also intended to block the conservative opposition (hardliners) among the political elites. This temporary openness, combined with the expansion of telecommunications and internet access in every corner of the country – absurdly even in the areas without access to proper drinking water in Sistan-Baluchistan – opened up new expectations as well as broad opportunities for freedom of expression in social media. However, after Rouhani’s re-election in May 2017, the Iranian Sunni communities realized that they found themselves in the same situation as before, with economic issues growing worse and the historical nuclear deal (i.e. JCPOA) which was supposed to solve the financial situation and improve Iran’s relations with the world not delivering the great improvements they had all hoped for. One year later, the U.S. announced its withdrawal from the JCPOA deal and the tensions rose in the region, leading to an increase in securitization both in the general public and in the political spheres. All these developments have naturally led to increasing pressure on the Iranian Sunni Muslims. The Baluch community, in particular, witnessed in September and October 2019 the growing strain between the Sunni madrasas (Manbaolulum of Kuhvan in Sarbaz and Anvarolharameyn in Pashamag) and the Islamic Republic’s security forces. These tensions peaked with the arrest of Molavi Kuhi (not yet released) at the end of November 2019, just a few days after a wave of civil protests swept across the country following the 15 November 2019 increase in fuel prices.

In addition, in light of the escalated tensions with the U.S. (particularly following the assassination of Qasem Soleymani on 2 January 2020 and the

19 Dudoignon 2013: 151.

uncertainty regarding the nuclear deal) and the more hardliner politicians entering Iran's domestic politics, the ongoing regional development in the middle east and finally the Taliban taking over Afghanistan in August 2021, it remains imperative to follow the new circumstances. But, in order to be able to put the current and upcoming developments into context as well as somewhat predict where they may lead to, it is important to understand the historical framework as well as the socio-political networks and the agendas of the various factions in this region which were in place in Iran between Sunnis and Shias in the era of Rouhani. In fact, understanding the complex dynamics of Sunni-Shia relations during the Rouhani era, as I have tried to do in this book, helps us to understand the beginning of a new era in the presidency of Ebrahim Raisi in 2021. Despite pockets of dissent and disagreement among Iranian Sunnis, the institutions and elites of the Sunni communities, such as Darolulum of Makki, continued their ongoing dance with the Shia ruling elites and cast their vote for Raisi as a new approach to their political support after decades of following reformist minded politicians.

Indeed, one of the triumphs of the Islamic Republic is that the tension between Sunnis and Shias in general, and with the state in particular, with its long historical issues, has been so markedly reduced. The reasons for this are diverse and complex, but are certainly linked to the geopolitical developments associated with wider relations with east and west. However, the continuous conflation of Shia ideology and nationalism and the gradual Shiitization of the public sphere has resulted in fact in an ethno-confessional consciousness among Sunni communities. They are explicitly aware and concerned that the ostensibly neutral position of the state toward interconfessional issues is in reality being used for socio-political purposes and will result in discrimination against, and neglect of, the Iranian Sunnis. The reactions to these concerns surely will not be homogeneous as Sunni communities in Iran are after all large and diverse. More importantly still, the very fact of learning to live in hard socio-economic and environmental conditions under the domination has resulted a remarkable flexibility and innovation among the Iranian Sunnis, which this book has tried to stress. In the end, there is nevertheless the possibility that with increasing socio-economic frustrations, an ecological crisis and geopolitical developments, the sectarian sensitivity will lead to disagreements between Sunnis and the Shia communities in general and the state in particular.

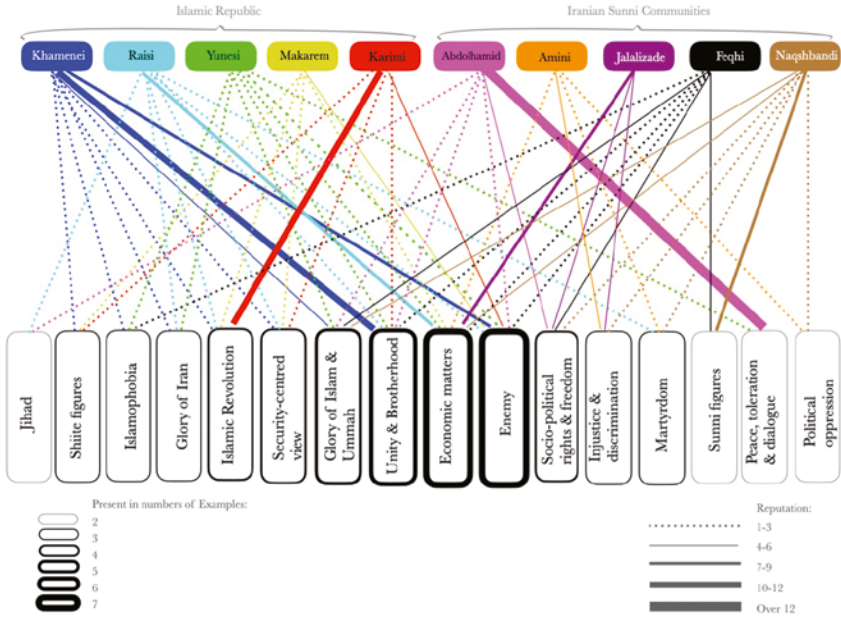


FIGURE 7 Major discourses presented in the examples from Shia elites and Sunni communities
COMPILED BY THE AUTHOR

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Index

- Abumoslem Khorasani 94, 122
Adab, Bahaoddin 61
Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (AKP) 40
Afghanistan
 and Iranian Sunnis 42, 50–53, 55, 78,
 103, 132, 156
 Ethnic groups 26–28
 Migrants from 105, 107
 Mujahedin 54
 Sunni Madrasa 50, 139
 Soviet war 43*n*75, 46, 53–54, 59
Ahl-e beyt 109–110, 117, 122, 172, 182, 184
Ahl-e haqq 55
Ahmad-e Jam, Molana 49–51
Ahmadinejad, Mahmoud 39, 47, 79, 80, 88,
 112, 139, 150, 155, 160, 170
Ahmad Shah Masud 28
Ahnaf-e Khwaf Madrasa, Khwaf 51
Ahrar, Khwaja Ghawsodin 52
Ahrari, Khwaja Mohioddin 51
Ahrari, Khwaja Sadrodin 52
Alamolhoda, Ahmad 85, 88, 105–108
Al-Ansari, Jabir ibn Abd Allah 51
Al-Azhar University, Cairo 89
Al-Banna, Hasan 89
Al-Hasan, Mofti Mahmud 151–152, 177
Alibayi, Molana Gholam Ahmad 54
Al-Khoei Foundation 102
Al-Mustafa International University 40
Al-Qaeda 110, 113, 124, 183
Amini, Hasan 60, 129–130, 135–136, 139,
 144–145, 147, 155–156, 167–169, 181–182,
 184–185, 191
Amir Teymur, Mohammad Ebrahim 49–50
Amnesty International 148
Anvarololom Madrasa, Khayrabad 54–55
Anvarolharameyn Madrasa, Pashamag 154,
 189
Arab 1, 141, 163
Ardebil 153
Aref, Mohammadreza 159
Asgaroladi, Habibollah 155
Assembly of Experts 65, 158
Astan-e Qods-e Razavi 85–86, 88, 96, 105,
 108–109, 146*n*4
Azari 87
Babai, Aziz 153–154
Baluchistan, Iran 33, 40, 41–46, 50, 54, 97,
 103, 105, 113, 131, 139, 147–148, 154, 159–
 160, 188. *See also*, Sistan-Baluchistan
Baluchi language 28, 33, 42
Bandar-e Abbas 147
Basij 106*n*, 109, 150
Bazargan, Mehdi 57, 110, 123
Birjand 52*n*
Bokhari, Shah Ata-Allah 177
Border
 and cross-border activities 29, 46, 77,
 140, 143, 160, 170–171
 and ethnicity 33
 Disadvantage 39, 160, 182, 187
 Ideology 35, 181, 102, 140
 Security 1, 37, 93–94, 102–103, 119, 150
 Smuggling 161–164, 182
 Tribal groups 33, 42–43
Borujerdi, Seyyed Hossein 89
Capotorti, Francesco 63
Central Asia 24–25, 50–51, 131
Chabahar 44–45, 133, 147
Chain Murders (1988–1998) 86, 147–148
China 23–26
Christchurch (mosque shooting) 147, 181
Christian 19, 21, 37, 65, 69, 171
Citizen's Charter of Rights 41, 72–74, 76,
 179, 189
Colonial Rule 22–23
Congress of Berlin 21–22
Constitution, Islamic Republic 63–65,
 71–72, 140, 156–157
Constitutional Revolution 32–33, 63, 65
Corruption 96–98, 120, 149, 159, 161, 173–174
Critical discourse analysis 8–9, 179
Damani, Molavi Mohammadebrahim 154
Damani, Molavi Mohammadosman 154
Dar al-Taqrib 89–90, 132
Dehviri, Ali 148
Delhi 51
Democracy 38–39, 62, 110, 145, 158, 171, 185
Democratic Party of Kurdistan – Iran
 (KDPi) 56–57

- Deoband School 30, 42–44, 49–51, 77, 107, 135, 139, 140, 143, 151–152, 183–184
- Derrida, Jacques 4
- Dialogue 39, 41, 75, 77, 93, 135, 142, 166, 181, 184
- Didgah, Molavi Nazar-Mohammad 58
- Egypt 23–24, 78, 89–90
- Esmailzayi, Molana Abdolhamid 41, 46–48, 84, 108, 128–129, 135–138, 144, 151, 153, 165–167, 181–184, 189, 191
- Ethnicity 1–2, 12–13, 27–28, 34–36, 40–41, 49, 59, 64–65, 68, 72–73, 77, 92–93, 136, 157, 181
- Evin prison, Tehran 148
- Ezzatyar, Ali 185
- Farsad, Faruq 147
- Fazeli, Molana Abdolali 53
- Fazeli, Molana Haj Qazi Fazel 53
- Fazeli, Molana Mohammad-Said 53–54
- Feqhi, Molavi Behzad 54, 131–132, 139–143, 158–161, 171–175, 181, 183, 185, 191
- Feqhi, Molavi Serajoddin 131–132
- Feqhi, Qazi Jalaloddin 132
- Foucault, Michel 3
- Fragner, Bert 31, 46
- Freedom 41, 67, 71, 73, 77, 138, 145, 181
- Gallie, Walter 179
- Gazik 53
- Green Movement 84, 88, 111–112, 124, 128, 130n8, 160–161, 182
- Guardian Council 61, 157–158, 168
- Habsburg Monarchy 20, 22
- Hafez (poet) 135, 168
- Hekmatyar, Gulbuddin 27, 59
- Herat 51, 53–54
- Hezbollahi (political current/culture Iran) 39
- Hosayni, Mamusta Ezzod-din 46, 56–57
- Hudaybiyyah (Peace treaty) 137–138, 183
- Huntington, Samuel 186
- Imam Bukhari Madrasa, Sanandaj 130
- India 27–30, 37, 44, 50, 151
- Intelligence services 99, 117, 183
- International Bill of Human Rights 36
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) 36
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 36
- Iranian Sunnis
- Ambassadors 42, 169–170
- and IRGC 38, 56, 57, 97n26, 150
- and Reza Shah 34
- and Zekris 42–43
- Border areas 37, 15, 150
- Confessional identity 1
- Deoband School 30, 42–44, 46, 49, 107, 139, 188
- Elections 41, 47, 49, 62, 96, 112, 158, 163, 188
- Madrasa 35, 40, 44–45, 48, 50–52, 54–55, 96, 128–129, 139, 152, 155–156, 188, 18, 189
- Parliament members 60–61, 131, 139, 147
- Population 2n2, 30, 55, 105–107, 168–170, 188
- Security view 70–71, 79, 105–107, 157, 180, 184, 191
- State intervention 40, 155–156
- Urbanisation 50, 98, 105
- Women 10, 46, 50, 53, 128–129, 163
- Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) 37, 46, 92, 120, 159–160, 182
- Iraq 13, 23, 79, 90, 157
- Islamic Revolution (1979) 29, 36–37, 39–40, 46, 53, 56, 58, 60, 62, 84, 92, 97–98, 110, 114, 123, 146, 148, 152, 182, 184, 191
- Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) 38, 56, 109, 150, 168
- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) 61, 102, 110, 113, 121, 124
- Islamophobia 102, 121, 174, 181, 191
- Israel 23, 99, 117, 136–137, 142, 167, 188
- Jahanabadi, Jalil Rahimi 88, 154n37
- Jajrudi, Molana Abd al-Ghani 128
- Jalalizade, Jalal 61–62, 130–131, 145, 157–158, 160, 169–171, 181, 184–185, 191
- Jamaat-e Islami 57
- Jamaat-e tabligh (in Urdu: tablighi jamaat) 30, 44–45, 51, 140, 188
- Jame al-harameyn al-sharifeyn Madrasa, Chabahar 45
- Jamiyat al-ulama-i hind 43–44

- Jangizayi, Molavi Mostafa 150–151
 Jihad 46, 166, 182, 191
 Jeysholadl 103
 Jondollah 103, 150
- Kandhalawi, Muhammad-Iliyas 45, 51, 53
 Kani, Mohammadreza Mahdavi 155
 Karimdadi, Molana Hasan 54
 Karrubi, Mehdi 47, 112–113, 158
 Katzenstein, J. Peter 157, 150, 186
 Khebat 56
 Khamenei, Ali 38, 39, 46, 57, 84–85, 87,
 89–91, 95, 96, 100–101, 108, 111, 122, 132,
 143, 150, 181, 183–184, 191
 Khatami, Mohammad 38–39, 70, 80, 86, 112,
 131, 157, 170, 183
 Khatm-e sahih-e bokhari (ceremony) 130,
 138–139
 Khayrabad 54–55
 Khomeini, Ruhollah 36, 39, 46, 56–7, 64, 70,
 89, 97, 110, 124, 149, 155
 Khorasan, Iran 34, 49–55, 94–95, 104–105,
 122, 131–132, 139, 141
 Khuzestan, Iran 37
 Khwaf 49–51
 Komalah 56
 Kuli, Molavi Fazlollah 97, 126, 154, 189
 Kulbar 161–162, 170
 Kurdish Islamic Link 59
 Kurdish language 56, 170
 Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI)
 56–57
 Kurdish United Front (JMK) 61–62, 131, 145,
 158, 160
 Kurdistan, Iran 37, 47, 55–62, 84, 113, 120,
 129–130, 147–148, 159–160
 Kurdistan, Iraq 157
 Kurmanji 55
- Larijani, Ali 114
 Lashkar-i janggi 103
 League of Nations 63
- Mahabad 56–57
 Mahmood, Saba 19, 80, 182
 Majles (Iranian Parliament) 68–69, 86, 88,
 157–158, 168
 Majles-e Ahrar-e Islam 152
- Makki Darolulum Madrasa, Zahedan
 45–48, 128–129, 133, 139, 154–155, 158,
 188, 189
 Makki Mosque, Zahedan 45, 78–79, 107,
 128, 146
 Makran (in Baluchi: Makkoran) 44
 Maktab-e Quran 57, 132, 58, 130
 Malesevic, Sinisa 3, 5, 6, 7, 186–187
 Manbaolulum Madrasa, Kuhvan 45, 132,
 154, 189
 Mardukhi, Bayazid 62
 Martyrdom 92, 120, 163, 167, 182, 191
 Mashhad IX 29, 53, 118, 55, 84–85, 88, 93, 95,
 104–109, 114, 124, 132, 146
 Maududi, Abul Ala 57
 Mazhar al-Tawhid Madrasa, Taybad 53
 Meftaholulum Madrasa, Rask 151
 Migration 105
 Militarization 27, 34, 79
 Minority rights 22–23, 62, 64, 77–78, 93,
 142, 158
 Mirin, Ahmad 147–148
 Modarres, Sayyid Hasan 50
 Modarresi, Shirazi 102
 Moftizade, Kak Ahmad 46, 57–60, 62, 130,
 147
 Mohammad-Reza Shah 35–36, 44, 52
 Mojahedin-e khalq (MKO) 137
 Mollazade, Molana Abdolaziz 44–46, 58,
 66, 128, 138, 146, 154–155
 Mollazade, Molavi Abdolmalek 46
 Mollazayi, Molavi Abdollah 45, 133
 Mollazayi, Molavi Mohammad-Esmail 47
 Mollazayi, Molavi Mohammad Omar
 (Sarbaz) 132
 Mongolian Empire 31
 Motahhari, Molana, Khwaja
 Habibollah 51
 Motahhari, Molana Khwaja Shamsoddin 51,
 55
 Motahhari, Morteza 137, 140, 149
 Mousavi, Mir-Hosseini 47, 60, 112–113
 Muslim Brothers 57–58, 62, 89, 150, 22
- Nader Shah 32
 Naqshbandi, Molavi Abdolghaffar 97,
 133–134, 145–152, 163, 175–178, 181–185,
 191

- Naqshbani, Molavi Fathi-Mohammad 133,
150–151
- Naqshbandiyye 44–45, 50–51, 131, 133
- Naraqi, Mahdi 149
- National minority 23
- Nationalism
and Islamic Republic 36–38, 39, 93, 101,
135
and Pahlavi dynasty 34–35
Iraq 141
Kurdish 56, 58, 135, 60, 185
Operative ideology 6, 187, 190
Pan-Turkic 24
Postcolonial Egypt 23
- Nikbakht, Saleh 62
- Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) 70, 74, 88, 135, 138,
189–190
- Ottomans
Ahl al-kitab 19–20
Capitulation 20
Hatt-i Humayun 21
Millet 19–21
Peace Treaty of Zsitvatorok 20
Relations with Safavid 1, 32
Tanzimat 20–21
Treaty of San Stefano 22
- Organisation for Security and Co-operation
in Europe (OSCE) 179
- Pakistan
and border security 103, 150
Deoband School 29, 30, 43, 50, 53, 128,
132, 147
Independence 28, 43
Jamiat al-Ulama-i Islam 29
Religious minorities 28–29
Shia community 67
- Pahlavi dynasty 34–36, 39, 42, 69, 49–50,
56–57, 97, 184, 187
- Palestine 23, 118, 137, 189
- Persian language 31, 38, 64–65
- Persophonie 31, 46, 77
- Pirani, Abdolrahman 62
- Post-structuralism 3
- Privatization 78–79
- Qaderi, Mohammadrauf 62, 93
- Qaderi, Mamusta Molla Qader 155–156
- Qajar dynasty 32–34
- Qandahar 53
- Qazi Mohammad 56
- Qodusi, Karimi Javad 88, 107, 109–113,
182–183, 191
- Qoreyshi, Saadi 60
- Qualitative Content Analysis 8
- Rabi'i, Mamusta Mohammad 147
- Rafsanjani, Hashemi 38, 41, 80, 92, 111,
159–160
- Raisi, Ebrahim 49, 85–86, 91, 96–98,
100–101, 105, 107, 161, 181–184, 188, 190,
191
- Rajai prison, Karaj 168
- Rask 133, 147, 150–151
- Rigi, Homeira 42
- Reformist (*eslahlab*) 40, 61, 86, 111–113,
130, 157–159, 161, 183, 190
- Religious minorities 11, 19, 23, 28, 31, 63–64,
66–69, 79, 97
- Reza Shah Pahlavi 34, 50, 51, 56
- Rezvani, Qolamreza 158
- Rouhani, Hasan 31, 41, 47, 69–74, 76–78, 86,
92–93, 98, 111–112, 124, 136, 138, 151, 161,
169–170, 179, 183, 189
- Russian Empire 24
- Sadati, Molavvi Seyyed Abdolsamad 156
- Saddam Hussein 160
- Safavids 1, 32, 49
- Sahaba 142, 163, 166, 176
- Salafism 87, 102–104, 187
- Salami, Molavi Nazir Ahmad 96
- Salehi, Molavi Hasan 53
- Salehi, Molla Mostafa 53
- Sangan 52
- Sarbaz, Baluchistan 42, 45, 97, 26, 108,
133–134, 147, 154
- Sarhazi, Molavi Qazi Abdolsamad 42
- Sarhazi, Molla Abdollah 43
- Sardar Nosrat 132
- Saudi Arabia 29, 30, 34, 100, 103, 147, 187
- SAVAK 58
- Sectarianism 23, 28–30, 36
- Secularism 19, 23
- Securitization 47, 71, 78–80, 98, 153, 184, 189
- Security view 13–14
- Sepah-i sahaba 29, 103

- Seyyed Qotb 57
 Shakuri, Bahman 148
 Shaltut, Shaykh Mahmud 89
 Shariati Ali 57
 Shariatmadari, Mohammad Kazem 87
 Sheykh Feyz Mosque, Mashhad 53–54,
 146–147
 Shirazi, Naser Makarem 64, 66, 86–87, 102,
 104, 107–108, 180, 182–183, 191
 Shurak Maleki 54
 Shushtari, General Nurali 150
 Silk Letter Movement (*reshmi rumal tahrík*)
 151–152
 Sistan-Baluchistan 42, 47, 58, 78, 84, 90,
 96–98, 103–105, 120, 128, 133, 147,
 150–151, 156, 189. *See also* Baluchistan
 Sobhani, Naser 58–59, 62, 147
 Socialism 24–25
 Soleymani, Qasem 189
 Soviet Union 34, 46, 50, 53, 56, 186, 187
 Sufi paths (*turuq*) 44–45, 49–50, 51, 58,
 131–133, 143, 149, 183
 Sukhtbar (also Sukhtkesh) 162–163, 177–178
 Sunni Central Council (SHAMS) 53, 58–60,
 130
 Supreme Council of the Cultural
 Revolution 155
 Syria 23

 Tabas 52/111
 Tablighi Jamaat 30, 45, 140–141, 188
 Tajikistan 46–47, 50–51, 54, 78, 156, 188
 Talesh 148
 Taliban 102, 121, 189
 Taybad 49–50, 131–132
 Tehran University 130, 135

 Tizab 53
 Torbat Jam 49–50, 131
 Transoxiana 43
 Trump, Donald 135, 153/236
 Turkey 22, 40, 59, 79, 185
 Turkmen 1, 25, 131, 146, 153
 Turkmenistan 25, 26, 29

 Ubayd Allah Ahrar 51
 Umayyad dynasty 94–95, 110, 142
 Umma 37, 66, 99, 116–117, 121, 139–140, 167,
 171
 Unity (*vahdat*) 2, 39–40, 59, 61, 89–99, 109,
 136, 142, 155, 180, 184, 188, 191
 Unemployment 98, 120, 145, 157, 161, 170, 181
 Uprising (2019–2020) 128, 189
 USA 99, 117–118, 124, 183, 188, 189
 Uzbekistan 54

 Velayat-e faqih 46, 56, 60, 112, 124, 150

 Wahabism 25, 26, 45, 87, 103, 106, 110, 113,
 122–124, 132, 151, 182–183

 Yahyavi, Mohsen 155
 Yamadad, Molavi Mohammad 55
 Yunesi, Ali 41, 72, 86, 93–95, 98–99, 102, 135,
 169, 181, 183–184, 188, 191

 Zahedan 78, 84, 107, 128–130, 139, 146, 154,
 157, 181
 Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr 49, 50
 Zayn al-Din Abu Bakr Madrasa, Taybad 54
 Zionism 100, 118, 142, 166, 183, 184
 Ziyai, Sheykh Mohammad 147
 Zoroastrian 63/158, 65, 67