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The promised land of Fadak: locating religious nationalism in shiite politics

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ABSTRACT

Yāsir al-Ḥabīb is a Britain-based cleric of Kuwaiti origin who aims to establish a religious state in the Persian Gulf region. This article assesses his project as a particular form of Shiite politics, in light of Peter van der Veer's transnational theory of religious nationalism. It first examines religious conceptions of land in Twelver Shiism to situate Fadak, an oasis on the Arabian Peninsula. Fadak has been "promised land," pledged by the Prophet Muḥammad to his daughter Fātima. Ḥabīb reverts back to this sectarian trope in his legitimization of a Shiite state but reframes it in the language of religious nationalism. Three nodes in van der Veer's rendering of religious nationalism guide the analysis: the modern union of the nation's territorial embodiment with sacred geography, transnational migration enabling larger national identifications, and its "indigenous" crafting. They are traced in Ḥabīb's British operations, which mobilize local "citizenship" in unbounded sectarian confrontation for the religious "nation," while cohering paradoxically in the "freedom" discourse of his Shīrāzī Shiism. The epilogue finds heuristic value in Fadakism's comparison with Zionism, centered on the question of assimilation – in the shape more of outward pressure in the second and elective affinity in the first.

Introduction

Yāsir al-Ḥabīb is a Britain-based Islamic cleric of Kuwaiti origin who has sought to establish a religious state based in the Persian Gulf region. His *modus operandi* is characterized by radical sectarianism, an assimilation of choice, and geopolitical realignment on the axis of Iran-West confrontation. This article assesses his project as a particular form of shiite politics, in light of Peter van der Veer's transnational theory of religious nationalism.

The work of van der Veer presents a series of vital anthropological interventions in the study of both nationalism and religion. The argument here engages especially with his studies of religious nationalism, which "articulates discourse on the religious community and discourse on the nation".¹ Van der Veer's main contribution is set among Hindus and Muslims in India and must be seen principally as a challenge to the equation of modernity and secularism central to constructivist accounts of

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This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.
¹Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism. Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), x.

nationalism such as Gellner's^{2, 3} or Anderson's.⁴ The historiography of West European politics has later challenged these secularist-modernist accounts on related lines by arguing that religious exclusions, not civic integration, lay at the basis of nationalist state building.⁵ The Indian study contests clean slate ideas of the nation, for instance, as implied in Ranger and Hobsbawm's emphasis on the 'invention' of tradition.⁶ This suggests sharp secular rupture, observes van der Veer,⁷ whereas his argument has been for 'the processual character of the formation of nationalism',⁸ that reworks cultural including religious material.⁹ Ethnosymbolism provides common ground in this emphasis on nationalism's prior cultural resources,¹⁰ but van der Veer's approach is distinct in the particular processes analysed to account for religious nationalism, focused on ritual communication, pilgrimage, and migration.¹¹ Such praxis sets it apart too from Greenfeld's rejection of the constructivists, which presents nationalism first and foremost as a 'style of thought'.¹² Cesari's recent work on political Islam proceeds from a focus similar to van der Veer's, on the modern casting in the shape of religious nationalism of both nation and religion.¹³ The significance of religious nationalism in her analysis lies not in movement-based political forces, however, which are often inherently transnational,¹⁴ but in the Durkheimian constitution of religion as national culture.¹⁵ While van der Veer's perspective was set out initially in the context of British-Indian imperial encounters and their aftermath, lastly, it departs from the Saidian thesis¹⁶ in capturing religious nationalism as an indigenous reworking of the collective self, which is irreducible to Orientalism or other distortions of a 'foreign hand'.¹⁷

As civil religion, religious nationalism may feature themes such as 'chosenness by God' or 'rebirth,' and 'there is the notion of the coming of a messiah, a leader who is leading his people to the Promised Land'.¹⁸ Promised land activism involves religious nationalism as an ideational union of territorialized nationhood and sacred geography.¹⁹ The latter

²Ibid.

³Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁴Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁵Anthony W. Marx, *Faith in Nation. Exclusionary origins of nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁶Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 197.

⁸Markus Dressler, *Writing Religion. The making of Turkish Alevi Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 82; cf. Liah Greenfeld and Jonathan R. Eastwood, 'Nationalism in Comparative Perspective', in *The Handbook of Political Sociology. States, civil societies, and globalization*, eds. Thomas Janoski, Robert R. Alford, Alexander M. Hicks and Mildred A. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 247–65: 264 for kindred theory in the field of political history.

⁹See van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 197.

¹⁰See Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism. A cultural approach* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 25–6.

¹¹See Benjamin Zachariah, 'Review of van der Veer, P. 1994. Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India, *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 1 (1998): 251–53, 252.

¹²Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3–4; cf. Daniele Conversi, 'Conceptualizing Nationalism: An introduction to Walker Connor's work', in *Ethnonationalism in the Contemporary World: Walker Connor and the Study of Nationalism*, ed. Daniele Conversi, *Routledge advances in international relations and global politics* (London: Routledge, 2002), 1–23: 11.

¹³Jocelyne Cesari, 'Unexpected Convergences. Religious nationalism in Israel and Turkey', *Religions* 9, no. 334 (2018a): <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110334>; *What is Political Islam?* (Boulder: Lynner Rienner, 2018b).

¹⁴van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, ix, xii.

¹⁵See Cesari, 'Unexpected Convergences', *Religions* 9, no. 334 (2018a): <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110334>, 16, 17–8.

¹⁶Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991 [1978]).

¹⁷van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 20–21.

¹⁸Peter van der Veer, 'Nation, Politics, Religion', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7–21, 11.

¹⁹Cf. van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 122.

theme is central to this article's discussion of shiite politics, but in the shape of 'radical religious nationalism'²⁰ contesting the state.

Islamic cases come readily to mind for some of these phenomena—as do religious specifications. Among mainstream (*oṣūlī*) Shiism's key dilemmas is the imposition of clerical authority on a religiosity of 'expectation' (*entezār*), and many have been its messianic challenges. While messianism remains a social force in the Iranian state, however, its primary vessel, the *Anjoman-e ḥojjatiye* organization, was dissolved in 1983. While ambiguity surrounded Khomeynī's status in the revolutionary era, moreover, its elite have stood firm, once the Islamic state was established, in refuting the imminence of the Mahdī's advent.²¹ Mentions of 'promised land' in relation to Khomeynī refer typically not to sacred geography but, metaphorically, his religio-political mission.²² Where invoked in Muslim contexts more broadly (e.g., as *al-waṭan al-maw'ūd*), the term 'promised land' has been thought 'evidently copied' from Zionist vocabulary.²³ An additional point applies to the organization of Yāsir al-Ḥabīb, which is called 'Servants of the Mahdī' and whose Jericho is Fadak (see further below). But there is no confusion in their project between the Mahdī and Ḥabīb's leadership for the promised land.

The 'construction of territory in nationalist discourse' in van der Veer's rendering of religious nationalism depends significantly on movement in the shape of religious or secular travel, seen as mutually reinforcing, through which conceptions of a larger world emerge.²⁴ Thus, the emphasis here and elsewhere in his work is on the transformative qualities of modern migration²⁵ and of transnational religious movements²⁶—adding processual detail to his view of religious nationalism as a radical modern reformation of pre-modern selves.²⁷ 'In general, the migratory experience can lead to more embracing identifications on the margin of the host society[,] it is observed, as among '[t]hose who do not think about themselves as Indians before migration [becoming] Indians in the diaspora.'²⁸ 'What can be argued,' he illustrates through globetrotting groups such as Tablighī Jamā'at, 'is that new possibilities emerge in the transnational element of religion owing to the growth of transnational migration'.²⁹ It is only in politically defined movements with ambitions for state capture, however, that identitarian clashes in exile might translate into 'a religious nationalism [bent] on effecting changes in the migrants' countries of origin'.³⁰

These substantiated positions open up interpretive space for researchers of shiite politics and invite consideration of the conditions under which they apply. The British context, for

²⁰van der Veer, 'Nation, Politics, Religion', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7–21, 11–12.

²¹Cf. Ze'ev Maghen, 'Occultation in Perpetuum: Shi'ite Messianism and the Policies of the Islamic Republic', *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 2 (2008): 232–57, 250.

²²David Menashri, 'Iran 35 years after the Islamic revolution—A conversation with David Menashri', *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* [World Jewish Congress] 2014, <http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en> [...] (accessed 26 April 2019).

²³Emmanuel Sivan, 'The mythologies of religious radicalism: Judaism and Islam', in *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*, ed. Mark Juergensmeyer (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 71–81: 73.

²⁴van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism* 106–108, xii.

²⁵E.g., Peter van der Veer, 'The Diasporic Imagination', in *Nation and Migration. The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, ed. Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 1–16.

²⁶E.g., Peter van der Veer, 'Transnational Religion. Hindu and Muslim Movements', *Global Networks* 2, no. 2 (2002 c): 95–109, 95.

²⁷van der Veer, 'Nation, Politics, Religion', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7–21, 9, 11–12.

²⁸van der Veer, 'The Diasporic Imagination', 7.

²⁹Peter van der Veer, 'Cosmopolitan Options', *Etnográfica* 6, no. 1 (2002a): 15–26, 21.

³⁰Cf. van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 130. Thus, I have interpreted van der Veer's contrasting of Tablighī Jamā'at and Jamā'at-i-Islāmī.

instance, is crucial for an understanding of how Ḥabīb's operations flourished through a European environment uniquely permissive of politico-religious activism and the exilic concentration of radical Shiites of Shīrāzī orientation. Ḥabīb's incitement of his Western milieu for sectarian politics, moreover, is key to deciphering his activism. But Britain, clearly, neither invented nor endorsed it. The argument from colonial India on indigenous religious nationalism applies too in this British realm of post-migration settlement: its representation focused on a 'foreign hand' obscures 'consciously chosen political behavior guided by a specific worldview'.³¹ 'Much of the material' that nationalism is seen generally to rework into rival versions, lastly, extends beyond the 'proto-nationalist,' featuring 'ancient understandings of sacred geographies together with sacred histories of particular peoples'.³² The Fadakist controversy, however, was also fuelled by Ḥabīb's Western resettlement and articulates through 'geopolitical overlay.' The Khomeynist enemies of the sectarian Shīrāzīs, that is, have helped escalate the scope and redefined the framing of the latter's ideology by associating it with Western political interest.

The following sets out first to examine some key religious conceptions of land in majoritarian Shiism and their inflection points from Islamic tradition at large. The second section charts the legend of the land of Fadak and its significance to Shiite political projects. Ḥabīb's adoption of Fadak as a cause reverts back to the initial irredentist design but borrows a page from modernists in its grand political ambition, couched in the language of religious nationalism. Fadakism reshaped through migration is the focus of the third section. It establishes Ḥabīb's paradoxical quest as it evolved in Britain as a hybrid merging ethnic and clericalist concepts of Shiite statehood. It involves local appeals to 'participatory citizenship' and the grooming of secular allies for global sectarian conflict. Extolling European 'freedom,' it has gradually revealed the contours of a proto-state mission that aims to assert sovereignty along the Gulf. The British-Kuwaiti sheykh emerges thus as another Shiite cleric whose religio-political authority is forged through transnational in-betweenness.³³ The conclusion finds heuristic value in Fadakism's comparison with Zionism (as does Ḥabīb himself), centred on the question of the role of assimilation—in the shape more of outward pressure in the second and of an elective affinity in the first.

Shiite territory

Twelver Shiism more than Sunni Islam has often appeared deterritorialized—because of, among other reasons, clerical cross-border back-and-forth spanning Iranian and Iraqi seminary (*howze*) cities; its geographically dispersed high religious authority

³¹Ibid., 20.

³²van der Veer, 'Nation, Politics, Religion', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7–21, 9–10.

³³See Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism. Sacred authority and transnational family networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); cf. Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty. Political exiles in the age of the nation-state* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1989). The preceding development in the region most obviously relevant to the case of this article concerns Khomeyni's transformative ideological work as an expatriate in Iraq, where he formulated a blueprint of the Shiite-Islamic state (e.g., see Elvire Corboz, 'Khomeini in Najaf: The Religious and Political Leadership of an Exiled Ayatollah', *Die Welt des Islams* 55, no. 2 (2015): 221–48), and that of his many Shiite acolytes in the West, particularly in student societies, who helped prepare his return to Iran and would be instrumental in the success of his mission there (e.g., Hamid Algar, *Anjoman-e mazhabi*. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, 2 (London [etc.]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987); Matthijs van den Bos, "'European Islam" in the Iranian Etehadieh', in *Shi'i Islam and Identity: Religion, Politics and Change in the Global Muslim Community*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeon (London: Routledge, 2012), 64–92).

(*marja'iyat*); Shi'a minorities practicing 'emulation' (*taqlid*) beyond national borders in Sunni-majority countries; its popular piety of regional pilgrimage; and topical aspects of Shi'a religiosity. When it comes to territorializations of the faith as in the dyadic concept of *dār al-islām/dār al-ḥarb*, Shiite Sufis have similarly '[shifted] the coordinates of the discourse from the geographical/juridical to the spiritual/metaphysical'.³⁴ However, Shiite tradition has also featured definite and sometimes distinct conceptions of territoriality.

While *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* have not been an important duality in Shiite juridical or *ḥadīth* literature, the opposite holds for the kindred distinction of friends and enemies of the 'people of the household' (*ahl-e beyt*)—that is, the Shiite Muslims.³⁵ It is particular to Shiite Islam, moreover, that its jurists, through al-Mufid (d.413/1022) following Kulaynī,³⁶ established 'a third category of territory, *dār al-īmān* (realm of faith), defined by prevailing acceptance of the imāms among its people [...]. Greater theoretical importance was given to the opposition between this realm and *dār al-Eslām* than to that between *dār al-Eslām* and *dār al-ḥarb*'.³⁷

Sectarian territoriality, in other words, has trumped the solidarities of Islam facing non-Muslim space in these aspects of Shiite tradition. Modern echoes of *dār al-īmān* thinking were heard, for instance, in the argument for the 'border of belief [*e-teqād*] and religious school [*mazhab*]' as a foreign policy orientation in post-revolutionary Iran during the presidency of Aḥmadinezhād.³⁸ After the revolution of 1978–1979, moreover, *dār al-islām/dār al-ḥarb* theory was re-examined in Iran, whereby one reading proposed to equate *dār al-ḥarb* with the countries that 'the Islamic state' (i.e., the Islamic Republic) was in actual conflict with³⁹—putting the jurists' state, that is, in the place occupied elsewhere by the benchmark of religious affiliation. The Khomeynist state, furthermore, has presented itself as a transsectarian project, both ecumenical and universalist,⁴⁰ i.e., seemingly inverting the traditional prevalence in Shiism of sectarian territoriality.

According to the Grand Āyatollāh 'Abdollāh Javādī-Āmolī, a pivotal figure in the world of seminary learning as well as in regimist politics and its fundamentalist currents in Iran, Islam provides clear principles for international relations.⁴¹ Islamic international relations in his ecumenist perspective, that is, without special provision for the *dār al-īmān*, reflects degrees of amity and enmity relative to Islam in foreign countries, plotted on a scale with four categories: Muslim nations (*mellathā-ye mosalmān*), monotheistic nations (*mellathā-ye towḥīdī*), non-monotheistic nations (*mellathā-ye gheyr-e movaḥḥed*), and colonialist regimes (*nezāmhā-ye este'mārī*).⁴² In short, the four-tiered categorization gave an

³⁴Alessandro Cancian, 'Faith as Territory: *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* in Modern Shi'i Sufism', in *Dār al-islām/dār al-ḥarb. Territories, People, Identities*, eds. Giovanna Calasso and Giuliano Lancioni (Leiden [etc.]: Brill, 2017), 293–312: 297, 295.

³⁵Ibid., 297.

³⁶Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam. Religion, political order and societal change in Shiite Iran from the beginning to 1890* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 61–62.

³⁷Hamid Algar, *DĀR AL-HARB*. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, 6 (London [etc.]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2011 [1993]).

³⁸*Doktrin-e mahdaviyat; moqaddame-ī bar doktrin-e ma'sūmin dar sākht-e siyāsāt-e khārejī* (speech by Ḥasan Abbāsī, Head of the Revolutionary Guards-affiliated 'Centre for Strategic Studies and Doctrine of Security Without Borders', dated 8 tīr 1392/29 June 2013 and available on the presidential website (<http://www.ourpresident.ir>), accessed 2 June 2015).

³⁹Algar, *DĀR AL-HARB*.

⁴⁰E.g., see Matthijs van den Bos, 'The Balance of Ecumenism and Sectarianism. Rethinking Religion and Foreign Policy in Iran', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 1 (2018): 30–53.

⁴¹Abdollāh Javādī-Āmolī, 'Oṣūl-e ḥākem bar ravābet-e beynolmelal-e nezām-e eslāmī', *Ḥokūmat-e eslāmī* 13, no. 2 (2008/1387): 5–36, 1–7.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 7–8ff.

Islamic scale for nearness in foreign relations, specifying anathemas, preferences and requirements—and only implicitly placed the Shiite state on top.

The thread in regimist conceptions of ecumenist rapprochement (*taqrīb*), however, is Shiite leadership, derived from divinely ordained Imamic authority. At its basis lies *pars pro toto* thinking, as seen in Javādi-Āmolī's statement that '[i]f the Muslim community truly adheres to Ahl ul-Bayt [...] there will be no discord among the Muslim Ummah [...]. According to Quranic verses, all Muslims are obliged to maintain friendly relationships with one another as a result of their love for the Ahl ul-Bayt'.⁴³ Iran's enduring foreign policy doctrine of *omm ol-qorā* or 'mother of the cities' reflects the theme: Iran's defence is to be prioritized, because the *umma* depends on it.⁴⁴ An unguarded statement by the leader of the 'rapprochement society' (*majma'at-e taqrīb*), lastly, ventured 'that Iran's Shi'is have a legitimate, historical right to exert political and intellectual-religious leadership over Muslims worldwide'.⁴⁵ For all effort at cross-sectarian outreach, then, Iran's de facto alliances have primarily been with Shiite parties.⁴⁶

The Iranian state created four decades ago was conceived not only as transectarian but also as a global religious vanguard—that Iranians lived there, and a majority of ethnic Persians, was immaterial to its constitution. State formation in the Islamic Republic, therefore, has seen a paradox: it represented on the one hand a step change in Shiism's territorialization, while tending simultaneously to devalue the homeland in a revolutionary drive aimed at establishing extramural religious authority. Its officials ventured views of Shiite land in Lebanon, for instance, as part of the Iran-led, transnational Islamist state. December 1982 saw the proclamation at Baalbek of the Islamic Republic of Lebanon.⁴⁷ Its draft constitution from 1985 held that 'in the absence of the Hidden Imām [...] the Virtuous Jurist [...] will appoint the chairman of the Lebanese Governance of the Jurist Commission, a local ayatollah'.⁴⁸ Within months of the Tā'if accord of October 1989, stipulating Lebanese deconfessionalization, Iran's ambassador to Syria 'stressed that Iranian officials regard Lebanon, especially the Islamic area of it, as part of the Islamic Republic'.⁴⁹ Even the reports of martyrs' reburials in Iran from the late 1980s from the Western zones of the war with Iraq, seen credibly as a socialization of the national landscape,⁵⁰ do not imply the bounded hallowing per se of national territory. Transnational views of the Shiite Islamist state have guided Iran long since its 'moderation.'

⁴³Ayatollah Javadi Amoli: Adherence to Ahlul Bayt fosters Muslims' unity', *ABNA* 2016, <https://en.abna24.com/service/grand-ayatollahs/archive/2016/10/30/788755/story.html> (accessed 28 October 2019).

⁴⁴Cf. Abdolamir Nabavi, 'The Range in Iran's Idealistic Foreign Policy: Ebbs and Tides', *International Politics* 2, no. 3 (2009): <http://www.int-politics.com/Articles/No3/ablolamir%20nabavi.pdf>, 7.

⁴⁵Wilfried Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000), 51.

⁴⁶See van den Bos, 'The Balance of Ecumenism and Sectarianism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 1 (2018): 30–53.

⁴⁷See Gilles Kepel, *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2002), 126–27; Marius Deeb, 'Shia Movements in Lebanon: Their Formation, Ideology, Social Basis, and Links with Iran and Syria', *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1988): 683–98, 292, 297; Eric Hooglund, 'Iranian Views of the Arab-Israeli Conflict', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (1995): 86–95, 92; Maryam Panah, *The Islamic Republic and the World. Global Dimensions of the Iranian Revolution* (London [etc.]: Pluto Press, 2007), 74.

⁴⁸Emanuel Sivan, 'The Islamic Resurgence: Civil Society Strikes Back', *Journal of Contemporary History* 25, no. 2/3 (1990): 353–64, 363.

⁴⁹BBC/SWB/ME/0631/A/1, 5 December 1989, cf. John Calabrese, 'Iran II: The Damascus Connection', *The World Today* 46, no. 10 (1990): 188–90, 189.

⁵⁰E.g., Rose Wellman, 'Regenerating the Islamic Republic: Commemorating Martyrs in Provincial Iran', *The Muslim World* 105, no. 4 (2015): 561–81; cf. Pedram Khosronejad, 'Introduction: Unburied Memories', in *Unburied Memories: The Politics of Bodies of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran*, ed. Pedram Khosronejad (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 1–21.

The special presidential aid ʿAlī Yūnesī stated in March 2015 that ‘our borders are artificial,’ lauding ‘greater Iran’ (*Īrān-e bozorg*). If that statement left the door open for a secular-nationalist interpretation, the Shiite connotation is unavoidable in his subsequent point that ‘Iran has become an empire [...] and its current capital is Baghdad’.⁵¹ Another feature besides persistence, the sectarian affinities in the foreign policy of the Islamist state have been surprisingly unparticular—i.e., ecumenist beyond *oṣūlī* Twelverism. After the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the close advisor to the Supreme Leader ʿAlī Khāmeneʿī, Mehdī Ṭāʿeb, declared that ‘Syria is Iran’s 35th province’.⁵² In another case of synecdochic reason, during his Friday sermon in July 2011 the chairman of the Guardian Council Āyatollāh Aḥmad Jannatī called for ‘Bahrain to be “conquered by Islam and the Muslims”’.⁵³ After the Zaydī Hūthīs captured Sana’a in September 2014, an Iranian member of parliament close to Khāmeneʿī boasted that the city was the fourth Arab capital to fall into Iranian hands.⁵⁴ Western academics may dismiss the ‘Shiite crescent’ as an Orientalist trope but it motivated Qāsem Soleymānī,⁵⁵ the pivotal figure in Iran’s cross-border deployment and among the region’s most powerful military operators until his assassination in Baghdad in January 2020.

The transnational projection of Iran as a religious state and of kindred movements such as Hizballāh in Lebanon has been marked by the centrality of juristic understandings to their politico-religious identities. Elsewhere, the Shiites’ politico-religious identity formation has derived more from perceptions of common land or ancestry—i.e., the religious articulation of ethnic as opposed to civic nationalism. A recent manifestation of the ethnic tendency came to the fore in the aftermath of the Iraq war, with the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq or SCIRI. In 2004, SCIRI led the campaign for the creation of ‘a separate Shia state in the south’,⁵⁶ which idea had expanded by the next year to ‘a nine province, oil-rich “Shiastan”’.⁵⁷ In August 2005, SCIRI’s leader ʿAbdul-ʿAzīz al-Ḥakīm cited two grounds: the history of oppression they had faced and ‘the existence of commonalities between the inhabitants of these regions’.⁵⁸ By 2009, his successor ʿAmmār reiterated ‘the perception [...] in the Southern regions that are involved in a unified culture that [they could] participate in one region’.⁵⁹ For all vagaries of ‘unified culture,’ the sentiment reflected distinct demographic facts: the massive religious conversions in the Centre and the South accompanying the Ottoman undertaking of tribal settlement, which had first made Shiism majoritarian in Iraq.⁶⁰

⁵¹ *Khabargozāri-ye Mehr*, 9 March 2015/18 *esfand* 1393; Ali Khederi, ‘Iraq in Pieces. Breaking Up to Stay Together’, *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 6 (2015): 33–41.

⁵² Karim Sadjadpour, ‘Iran’s Real Enemy in Syria’, *The Atlantic*, 16 April 2018.

⁵³ Hasan Tariq Alhasan, ‘The Role of Iran in the failed Coup of 1981: The IFLB in Bahrain’, *Middle East Journal* 65, no. 4 (2011): 603–17, 613.

⁵⁴ Thomas Erdbrink, ‘Populaire generaal symboliseert nieuwe zelfvertrouwen in Iran’, *NRC Handelsblad* 11 December 2014 (14).

⁵⁵ Reza Haghighatnejad, ‘Lebanon’s border with Israel is Iran’s new defensive line’, *IranWire* 6 May 2014, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/340> (accessed 21 February 2019).

⁵⁶ Benjamin Isakhan, ‘Succeeding and Seceding in Iraq. The Case for a Shiite State’, in *Territorial Separatism in Global Politics: Causes, Outcomes and Resolution*, eds. Damien Kingsbury and Costas Laoutides (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 139–52: 143.

⁵⁷ Reidar Visser, ‘The Two Regions of Southern Iraq’, in *An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?*, eds. Reidar Visser and Gareth Stansfield (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 27–51: 47.

⁵⁸ Isakhan, ‘Succeeding and Seceding in Iraq’ 144–145.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶⁰ Yitzhak Nakash, ‘The Conversion of Iraq’s Tribes to Shiʿism’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 3 (1994): 443–63, 443, 449.

There are more pronounced cases still. Louër observed that ‘[i]n contemporary Bahrain, the name “Bahrani” (pl. Baharna) designates the Arab Shias who consider themselves as the original inhabitants of the country’.⁶¹ Shiites in Saudi Arabia, in addition, use the label to refer to their co-religionists in the country’s Eastern Province.⁶² In both countries, ‘Shias like to point out that, under the name of “Ancient Bahrain” (*al-Bahrain al-qadim*) or Greater Bahrain (*al-Bahrain al-kubra*), present-day Bahrain and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia used to be one’.⁶³ The area described under the latter label stretched from ‘Bahrain over the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia toward Kuwait and even Basra in southern Iraq’.⁶⁴ The felt commonality between Bahraini and Saudi Shiites was reinforced by the fact that they spoke the same type of colloquial Arabic, distinguishing them from their Sunni surroundings.⁶⁵ During the Arab Spring, the myth of the Ancient or Greater Bahrain made a dramatic entrance into political imaginaries. Saudi protesters in Qatif in the Eastern Province were ‘chanting “free Bahrain” and “one people, not two people” in an apparent reference to the unity of the Bahraini and Saudi (Eastern Province) “people”’.⁶⁶ Bahraini nativism ‘increasingly made inroads into the protesters’ discourse in the Eastern Province’ while having become ‘a key driving force of the uprising in Bahrain’.⁶⁷ A similar focus of land, but here as sacred geography, has motivated Shiite thought on Fadak.

The land of Fadak

Fadak was ‘an ancient small town in the Northern Hijāz, near Khaybar’ to the North of Medina on the Arabian Peninsula.⁶⁸ Its religious significance lies in the religious narrative of the seventh-century usurpation by the first caliph, Abū Bakr (d.634), and subsequent Sunni leaders, of this peninsular land promised by the Prophet Muḥammad to his daughter Fātima (d.632).⁶⁹ Fadak was inhabited by Jews who had become alarmed at Muḥammad’s victorious march on Jewish Khaybar.⁷⁰ Among the Prophet’s commanders was his cousin and son-in-law, °Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.661), who had led an expedition to Fadak in the preceding year (6/627-8) to quell resistance against the Muslims’ advances.⁷¹ The siege of Khaybar led to discussion with the Jews of Fadak and the agreement was reached that they ‘were to remain [...] while giving up half their lands and half the produce of the Oasis.’ Fadak thus

⁶¹Cf. Juan Cole, ‘Rival Empires of Trade and Shi’ism in Eastern Arabia’, in *Sacred Space and Holy War. The Politics, Culture and History of Shi’ite Islam* (London [etc.]: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 31–57; 216–21: 32.

⁶²Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics. Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (London; Paris: Hurst & Co; Centre d’études et de recherches internationales, 2008), 11.

⁶³Ibid., 12.

⁶⁴Toby Matthiesen, ‘The Shi’a of Saudi Arabia at a Crossroads’, *Middle East Report* 2009, <https://merip.org/2009/05/the-shia-of-saudi-arabia-at-a-crossroads/> (accessed 26 February 2019).

⁶⁵Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 12.

⁶⁶Toby Matthiesen, ‘A “Saudi Spring?”: The Shi’a Protest Movement in the Eastern Province 2011–2012’, *The Middle East Journal* 66, no. 4 (2012): 628–59, 637.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸L. Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* (Leiden: Brill, 1965) 725.

⁶⁹Rachel Kantz Feder, ‘Fatima’s Revolutionary Image in *Fadak fi al-Ta’rikh* (1955): The Inception of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr’s Activism’, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 79–96, 81.

⁷⁰Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*, 725.

⁷¹See Al-Wāqidi, Muhammad ibn ‘Umar, *The life of Muḥammad. Al-Wāqidi’s Kitāb al-maghāzī* (London: Routledge, 2013), 276; cf. Heinz Halm, *Shi’ism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 11; Arzina R. Lalani, *Early Shi’i Thought. The doctrines of Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2000), 5.

'was allocated to Muḥammad' and its revenues spent on needy travellers and 'the least rich' members of the Prophet's tribe, the Banū Hāshim.⁷²

After Muḥammad's death in 632, Fāṭima—at the instigation of her husband, ʿAlī—claimed Fadak as its heiress.⁷³ Abū Bakr, however, who had prevailed in his designation as successor over ʿAlī, Moḥammad's protégé, held that the Prophet 'had stated that he would have no heirs' and that Fadak should remain 'public property used for benevolent purposes'.⁷⁴ The Shiites have found injustice in Fāṭima's treatment by Abū Bakr (but not in the manner in which Fadak was acquired for the Prophet of Islam), countering, for instance, that 'Muhammad obtained the land through a peace agreement and therefore it did not constitute booty; it was Muhammad's personal property and he was free to bequeath it'.⁷⁵ After Fāṭima's death, however, aged sixteen or seventeen, ʿAlī 'renounced the claims to Fadak.' Under the second Caliph ʿUmar (d.644) the Jews were expelled from the Northern Ḥijāz, and the Jews of Fadak were given an indemnity.⁷⁶ While ʿUmar did not credit Fāṭima's claim, he did employ ʿAlī among Fadak's administrators. Details of the ʿAlids' relation with Fadak under ʿUthmān (d.656) remain obscure⁷⁷, and ʿAlī did not see fit to reclaim Fadak during his own caliphate. A Letter in the 'Path of Eloquence' cites the Commander of the Faithful thus:

Verily under the sky we had only Fidak as our personal property but we were deprived of it; it tempted them, they took forcible possession of it and we had to bear the wrench patiently and cheerfully; the best judge is the Lord Almighty. What was I going to do with Fidak or any other worldly possession. I never wanted them for myself. I know that tomorrow my lodging will be my grave.

Nahj al-Balāgha, *Letter 45* (in *Nahjul Balagha of Hazrat Ali, 1982, p. 242*)

Since the demise of the Shiites' first imām, Fadak has for short periods been in ʿAlid hands, facilitated, respectively, by the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar II (d.720)⁷⁸; the first ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Saffāḥ (d.754)⁷⁹; the seventh ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Maʿmūn (d.833), in 826⁸⁰; and, reportedly, the eleventh ʿAbbāsīd caliph al-Muntaṣir (d.862).⁸¹ The conflict over Fadak 'is recounted in the Sunni hadith collections of Bukhari and Muslim'⁸² and became 'a major theme of Shiite historiography'.⁸³ In later times, one meets the theme of 'the return of Fadak' in the apocryphal story of the nineteenth-century Isfahani scholar Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Shaftī. Shaftī had supposedly established friendly relations with the Pasha of Egypt in 1813 and 'received the garden (-oasis) Fadak from him and returned it to

⁷²Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*, 725.

⁷³Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad. A study of the early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 632.

⁷⁴Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*, 725.

⁷⁵Kantz Feder, 'Fatima's Revolutionary Image in *Fadak fi al-Ta'rikh* (1955)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 79–96, 81.

⁷⁶Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*, 725.

⁷⁷E.g. see *ibid.*, p. 726.

⁷⁸W.F. Madelung, 'The *Hāshimīyyāt* of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shi'ism', *Studia Islamica* 70(1989): 5–26, 17.

⁷⁹Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*, 726.

⁸⁰Simonetta Calderini, *Fatima Bint Muhammad*. In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸¹Veccia Vaglieri, *Fadak*, 726.

⁸²Karen Ruffle, 'May You Learn from Their Model: The Exemplary Father-Daughter Relationship of Mohammad and Fatima in South Asian Shi'ism', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 4, no. 1 (2011): 12–29, 25.

⁸³Werner Ende, 'The *Nakhāwila*, a Shiite Community in Medina Past and Present', *Die Welt des Islams* 37, no. 3 (1997): 263–348, 301.

the *sayyids* of Medina [i.e.,] the descendants of ʿAlī and Fāṭima'.⁸⁴ Ende judges the story of Shaftī 'most probably [...] pure fiction [and] the reflexion of a wide-spread sentiment among (Shiite and crypto-Shiite) Sayyid families [...] that Fadak was-and still is-their inheritance by right.' Fadak's usurpation has been a major theme, moreover, 'to some extent also for prominent modern Shiite scholars'.⁸⁵

As the dispute over Fadak was intertwined with the struggle over the succession of the Prophet and embodied the ʿAlīds' claim to religio-political legitimacy as the 'people of the household' (*ahl-e beyt*), it became an important sectarian marker. But it appears to have only been in the twentieth century that the dominant mode of Fadak's interpretation emphasizing passive suffering was exchanged for one of revolutionary activism and a belligerent Fāṭima. The transformation is associated with the Iraqi cleric Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr (d.1980) and his first work from 1955, *Fadak fi al-Tārikh* or 'Fadak in History'.⁸⁶ Later activist articulations of Shiism such as that of the Iranian ʿAlī Shariʿatī in the 1970s (e.g., in his *Fāṭeme, Fāṭeme ast* or 'Fāṭima is Fāṭima') built on Ṣadr's text.⁸⁷ Shariʿatī generalized the message of Fadak in writing that '[a]fter her death, [Fāṭima] started a new life in history [...] Everywhere in the history of [...] dispossessed masses, [she] is the source of [...] justice seeking'.⁸⁸ *Fadak fi al-Tārikh* has similarly been read as an historical transposition: a call to opposition against Iraq's monarchical regime (which lasted until 1958). Tellingly reorienting the focus on the political iniquities of the Iraqi here and now, it 'likens Fatima's struggle for the Fadak to "the echo of nationalization [*ta'mim*] as we call it nowadays", [asserting] that the "nationalization of the prophet's inheritance" was unprecedented'.⁸⁹ Neither project rallies around Shiite irredentism.

Fadak is a minor theme only in the discourse of state authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and framed even more strongly in either desectarianized or deterritorialized fashion. In June 2008, the Chairman of the Assembly of Experts Akbar Hāshemī Rafsanjānī visited Fadak, and later reflected thus: 'I would like to say that what happened at Fadak can be discussed further without it causing differences. They can result in unity' (Tehran Friday prayers, 27 June 2008). 'In view of the fact that you are the first Shi'i scholar to walk in a place where Her Holiness Fatima al-Zahra walked, how do you feel?' a reporter queried Rafsanjānī in Fadak itself. He responded that '[f]irst of all, there is no difference between the Shi'is and the Sunnis' (on Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 1, 29 July 2008).

For new irredentist conceptions of the heritage of Fadak, the name of the Kuwait-born sheykh Yāsir al-Habīb has recently loomed large. The modern setting for his at times archaic-sounding politico-religious claims includes both the Western trajectory of Shīrāzī Shiism turned against its Khomeynist patrons and the post-imperial era dominated by the norm and reality of territorial (nation-)states. Here surfaces the essential 'transformation of religious notions when they are transferred from a [...] religious context to the sphere of national politics'.⁹⁰ In terms of

⁸⁴Ibid., 300.

⁸⁵Ibid., 301.

⁸⁶Kantz Feder, 'Fatima's Revolutionary Image in *Fadak fi al-Ta'rikh* (1955)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 79–96, 83.

⁸⁷Ibid., 81–82.

⁸⁸ʿAlī Shariʿatī, *Fāṭeme, Fāṭeme ast* ([Tehran]: Hoṣeyniye-ye Ershād, 1350/1971), accessed 4 July 2019, via <https://fa.shafaqna.com/news/338424>.

⁸⁹Kantz Feder, 'Fatima's Revolutionary Image in *Fadak fi al-Ta'rikh* (1955)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 1 (2014): 79–96, 96, 89.

⁹⁰Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (eds.), *Nation and Religion. Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7.

orthopraxy, Ḥabīb presents the anti-thesis of Ṣadrian modernism, but he has shared, paradoxically, in its geopolitical realism, weaponizing Fadak for Shiism's political self-realization beyond the narrow focus on the Oasis proper. Specifically, Fadak provides him with a religious anchor for the homeland of a Shiite nation. His activism towards it depends furthermore on the 'triangulation' of 'home' and 'host' states and audiences through media operations as an adopted refugee in Britain. These operations are undertaken from a territory to the northeast of London named 'the Minor Land of Fadak' (*arḍ Fadak al-ṣuḡhrā*). The following section examines the connections in Ḥabīb's world between the minor and the 'larger' lands of Fadak.

Yāsir al-Ḥabīb

When the young Shiite cleric Yāsir al-Ḥabīb (b.1979)⁹¹ settled in Britain in 2005, having been 'in hiding in London since December 2004',⁹² he had already left behind a trail of religio-political conflict in his native Kuwait. His new domicile would soon see the pattern repeated. After the invasion of Iraq in March-May 2003, Ḥabīb had 'called for an independent Shi'a state',⁹³ the particulars of which will be investigated below. In November of that year, he was arrested and in January 2004, sentenced to one year in prison and a fine, convicted, reportedly, of 'insulting [...] Mohammed's companions, abusing a religious sect and distributing an audiotape without a licence'.⁹⁴ The next month, 'he was released under an annual pardon announced by the Amir of Kuwait [...], but his rearrest was ordered a few days later. The public prosecutor said the release had been an error'.⁹⁵ Ḥabīb then went into hiding—moving first to Iraq and then Iran, before seeking asylum in Britain.⁹⁶ In May 2004, he was tried in absentia and sentenced to ten years imprisonment.⁹⁷ According to unconfirmed information, "reported Amnesty, the charges 'included seeking to overthrow the state' in addition to 'belonging to an organization that seeks to overthrow the state'.⁹⁸

London-based, the fugitive sheykh expanded his anti-Sunni propagation,⁹⁹ upping the sectarian ante in September 2010 by calling Muḥammad's wife ʿĀʿisha an 'enemy of God'.¹⁰⁰ As a result, he was stripped of his Kuwaiti citizenship.¹⁰¹ In October that year, Iran's spiritual leader and head of state ʿAlī Khāmeneʿī responded to religio-legal questions with a *fatwā* forbidding the cursing of the 'symbols of the Sunni brothers' (*nemādhā-ye barādarān-e ahl-e sonnat*), including ʿĀʿisha.¹⁰²

Ḥabīb is a singular presence in the world of Twelver Shiism but emerges from the Shirāzī tendency of sectarian traditionalists. A self-portrayal mentions that he 'used to

⁹¹Marius Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 7.

⁹²Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf. From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 188.

⁹³Ibid., 211.

⁹⁴Amnesty International, 'Annual Report for Kuwait', 25 May 2005.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

⁹⁷See AFP, 'Kuwait strips Shiite activist of citizenship', *The San Diego Union-Tribune* 20 September 2010.

⁹⁸Amnesty International, 'Annual Report for Kuwait', 25 May 2005.

⁹⁹Cf. Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 10.

¹⁰⁰Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 188.

¹⁰¹Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 7.

¹⁰²See <http://irandatatportal.syr.edu/fatwa-banning-the-insulting-of-aisha-or-any-other-sunni-figures> (accessed 6 December 2018).

edit the news for a famous Kuwaiti newspaper at a young age'.¹⁰³ An Iranian outlet reveals that he contributed to a range of Kuwaiti newspapers, among which *Ṣawt al-Kuwayt*, *Al-Waṭan*, and *Al-Rā'y al-ʿāmm*.¹⁰⁴ The regimist website in question mentions also that in 1996, as a 17-year old, after a meeting with the Grand Āyatollāh Muḥammad al-Husaynī al-Shīrāzī (d. 2001), he had travelled to Qom where he was taught by the latter's son,¹⁰⁵ Sayyid Muḥammad-Riḍā al-Husaynī al-Shīrāzī (d. 2008).¹⁰⁶ It was several years later, at 21, that Ḥabīb 'first attracted public attention'¹⁰⁷ in Kuwait. This was in 2000, when he reportedly founded a *hay'at* or assembly named Khuddām al-Mahdī ('Servants of the Redeemer') and the magazine *Al-Minbar*.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Ḥabīb ranks as a political science graduate from Kuwait University.¹⁰⁹

Grand Āyatollāh Ṣādiq al-Husaynī al-Shīrāzī (b.1942), brother of the late Muḥammad al-Husaynī al-Shīrāzī and scion of the family,¹¹⁰ is reportedly 'among the few [living] Shiite scholars that [Ḥabīb] approves of'.¹¹¹ Moreover, Ḥabīb is 'son-in-law to Sadegh Shirazi's brother, Ayatollah Mojtaba Shirazi'.¹¹² A UK resident like Ḥabīb, Mujtabā al-Husaynī al-Shīrāzī is similarly known for verbally attacking the Islamic Republic. This penchant shows in the self-released video 'wherein he ritually curses Khamenei for unveiling and beating Shirazi women' who had 'organized mourning ceremony on the anniversary of Muhammad Shirazi's death'.¹¹³ There seem to be no glaring points of theological divergence between Ḥabīb and his Shīrāzī teachers, but the former has taken their sectarian confrontation to a new level, relishing in stepping up the fight with the Sunni other generally and taking it public.¹¹⁴

Sectarianism marked Ḥabīb's activism in London as it had in Kuwait, but it assumed specific forms in his adoptive country, relating particularly to its framing as participatory citizenship. Citizenship has been among the 'traditional symbols of nationhood'¹¹⁵ and informs Western self-understandings in other ways. It 'originally emerged in the context of the emergence of free associations in the autonomous European cities,' reminds Delanty,¹¹⁶

¹⁰³English Researcher interviews Sheikh Yasser al-Habib in the Minor Land of Fadak', *Alqatrah* 2014, <http://www.alqatrah.net/en/ns205> (accessed 12 July 2019).

¹⁰⁴Yāser al-Habīb; ākhūnd-e landan-neshīn/dīrūz dar shabake-ye "fadak," emrūz dar "sawt al-ṣitra", *Khabargozārī-ye Tasnim/Tasnim News* 1392/2014, [https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1392/10/23/248228/\[...\]](https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1392/10/23/248228/[...]) (accessed 8 June 2020).

¹⁰⁵Sarbaz Roohulla Rezvi and Hussian Homazadeh, 'British supported Shia!', *Al-Mogawama* 2014, <http://almoqawama.org/?lang=en&a=content.q&q=al-habib> (accessed 23 February 2019); cited in Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 7.

¹⁰⁶Yāser al-Habīb; ākhūnd-e landan-neshīn. 1392/2014.

¹⁰⁷Frederic Michael Wehrey, *The Politics of Sectarianism in the Gulf. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, 2003–2011* (2012), 146.

¹⁰⁸Yāser al-Habīb; ākhūnd-e landan-neshīn. 1392/2014.

¹⁰⁹Amir al-Hantūlī, 'Yāsir al-Habīb: Hādhihi qissa khurūjī min al-sijn.. wa al-mustaqbal al-tashayyūc', *Elaph* 2010, <https://elaph.com/Web/news/2010/11/614420.html> (accessed 23 February 2019).

¹¹⁰Arash Azizi, 'Iran targets "M16 Shiites"', *AL Monitor* 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/04/iran-shia-shirazi-movement-secterian.html> (accessed 27 September 2016).

¹¹¹Rezvi and Homazadeh. 2014. *British supported Shia*; cited in Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 7.

¹¹²Arash Azizi, 'What do we Know About the Shia Group that Attacked the Embassy in London?', *IranWire* 2018, <https://iranwire.com/en/features/5216> (accessed 23 February 2019).

¹¹³Edith Szanto Ali-Dib, *Following Sayyida Zaynab: Twelver Shi'ism in Contemporary Syria* (2012), 10.

¹¹⁴Cf. Azizi. 2018. *What do we Know [...]*; Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 7.

¹¹⁵Patricia Hogwood and Geoffrey K. Roberts, *European Politics Today* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 239.

¹¹⁶Gerard Delanty, 'Models of Citizenship. Defining European identity and citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 1, no. 3 (1997): 285–303, 300.

echoing Deutsch's identification of the 'long-lasting autonomy of many smaller groups' as a benchmark of the Western world region.¹¹⁷ Aspects of citizenship as an analytical category, moreover, show 'in the dichotomy of self and other which constitutes the discourse of European identity'.¹¹⁸ Here, the author ventured, in a point that many others have also made,¹¹⁹ 'Europeanness is constructed in opposition with the non-European, in particular Islam'.¹²⁰ Shiite (post-)migrants in Europe, then, encounter the idea of citizenship in several of its understandings as a 'symbol of the other' (like 'justice' or *ʿadl*, inversely, remains a core symbol of Shiite self, reflected historically in Shiism's designation as the *ʿAdliya*).¹²¹ Their referencing of 'citizenship' in the European West can be expected, therefore, to involve an intense scrutiny of self-other relations—as it has in the case of Ḥabīb.

Some of Ḥabīb's local phrasings were found in *The Shia Newspaper*, published irregularly from the mid-2000s by the 'Servants of the Redeemer' or Khuddām al-Mahdī /Khoddam al-Mahdi, who echoed his eponymous Kuwaiti organization.¹²² The Newspaper, freely available online and distributed during religious events, attained notoriety among British Shiites for its abrasive writing—matched stylistically by the prolific use of exclamation marks. It took the fight both to intra-denominational matters (e.g., denouncing Bahrain's 'pirates' rule' and Saudi Arabia's 'Kingdom of Evil' (no.2) for the repression of Shiites in these countries), and intra-sectarian issues (censuring viewpoints and practices deemed deviant, such as Khāmeneʿī's negative ruling on the permissibility of *muwāsāt* (no.2), 'which means imitating and sharing some of [Imām Ḥusayn's] pain,' explained Ḥabīb,¹²³ or Faḍlallāh's alleged wishing of 'Allah's pleasure' on the first caliph, Abū Bakr, which implied the late Āyatollāh's apostasy (no.3)). The Newspaper's fourth issue from 2016 exposed Hizballāh's kidnapping in Beirut in December of the previous year of a Shiite cleric, Muḥammad-ʿAlī al-Mūsawī, who had rejected the Khomeynist regime and supported Ḥabīb's sectarian campaign through regular appearances on his satellite channel—see further below.¹²⁴

But the Shiite Newspaper simultaneously couches its views in terms that speak to the British context, adopting the voice of integrated Shiite selves. The Newspaper holds itself to express 'the voice of the British Shia who are seeking to serve their homeland,' by which it is meant, Britain. It was service to the 'homeland' that apparently motivated its online survey labelled 'Is Shi'ism good for Britain?'.¹²⁵ Moreover, the Newspaper aimed to present 'our visions for a better future for our homeland',¹²⁶ and from this activist conception of 'citizenship as participation'¹²⁷ followed recommendations based on an Islamic vision of the common good. Thus, it reported on a study by the Institute for Public Policy Research

¹¹⁷Karl W. Deutsch, 'On Nationalism, World Regions, and the Nature of the West', in *Mobilization, Center-Periphery Structures, and Nation Building*, ed. Per Torkvik (Bergen [etc.]: Universitetsforlaget, 1981), 51–93: 77.

¹¹⁸Delanty, 'Models of Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 1, no. 3 (1997): 285–303, 286.

¹¹⁹E.g., Said, *Orientalism*, 1–2; Robert D. Kaplan, 'How Islam Created Europe', *The Atlantic*, May 2016.

¹²⁰Delanty, 'Models of Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 1, no. 3 (1997): 285–303, 298.

¹²¹E.g., see the glossary in Ja'far Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam. A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices* (London: I. B.Tauris; The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 222.

¹²²See al-Hantūli. 2010. *Yāsir al-Ḥabīb*.

¹²³'Would Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) really want us to punish ourselves for him?!', *Alqatrah* 2010, <http://www.alqatrah.net/en/an44> (accessed 18 January 2019).

¹²⁴<https://www.facebook.com/Supporters-of-Sayed-M-Ali-Al-Musawi-450923821783371/>; <https://www.hra-news.org/letters/a-305/>; <http://www.fadak.tv/index.php?id=39> [as observed between 21.30 and 22.30] (accessed 19 January 2019).

¹²⁵<https://web.archive.org/web/20110202021111/http://shianewspaper.com/> (accessed 29 January 2019).

¹²⁶[Colophon], *The Shia Newspaper* (2), n.d.: 7.

¹²⁷Delanty, 'Models of Citizenship', *Citizenship Studies* 1, no. 3 (1997): 285–303, 290–91.

that revealed ‘British Adolescents’ behaviour Worst in Europe!’ due to drugs and alcohol addiction, impacting negatively on society and contributing to the decline of family life. ‘This makes it obligatory that we ring the alarm bell for reviewing the wrong policies being practiced in our country [...] When shall our Kingdom regain its virtues?’¹²⁸

Fine-tuned to the pluralist sensibilities of the purported homeland, the Newspaper claimed representation of British Shiites aspiring to work ‘along with [...] fellow citizens from different groups and backgrounds.’ It stated: ‘We believe in the necessity of presenting [...] our beliefs, our culture and the discussion of beliefs and cultures of the others in an atmosphere of [...] mutual respect.’ It was ‘[i]n addition,’ i.e., in the afterthought of secondary rank which a secular order reserves for such views, that ‘from our religious and national responsibility [...] we offer our visions for a better future for this dear homeland, believing that it will be better and more wonderful and free from [...] problems with its commitment to the noble values of Islam.’¹²⁹ The ‘modest proposal,’ then, was based on the recognition of what Bloemraad and Wright labelled ‘demographic multiculturalism.’¹³⁰ It also suggested, however, that the Newspaper might not perceive socio-political pluralism as elementary to political order in Britain, reflecting the common self-image in Western Europe,¹³¹ but rather as an obstacle to the success of its mission.

The point emerges with greater clarity when examining the Newspaper’s solutions and their perception of self-other relations in Britain. More than other troubling issues—including, besides restless youths, such phenomena as Darwinism, the impact of secular and feminist media, pornography, and the dangers of chat rooms—the Newspaper identified national threats in relation with Islam. ‘We believe that the greatest challenge that we face as British citizens, is the terrorism resulting from the falsified Islam that the terrorists have exploited for the achievement of their evil aims.’¹³² It further emerges from the Newspaper that ‘the falsified Islam’ does not refer only to Salafist appropriations of the religion, but to that of Sunni Islam generally, whose adherents the Newspaper regularly referred to, in reference to the first caliph, as ‘the Bakri sect’: ‘Those who turned against the Prophet [...] after his death are the ones who created this false version which justifies acts of violence and terrorism’.¹³³ Here shows a glimpse of the darker mood, a nationalism of *ressentiment* underlying Ḥabīb’s crisp language of societal integration.¹³⁴

Newspapers are often seen as a privileged vehicle for nationalism¹³⁵ and are intimately bound up with national-democratic self-understanding (‘the role of the media in UK politics,’ typically explains the BBC, under the heading of ‘Democracy in the UK,’ ‘is to inform the public on important issues that affect them’).¹³⁶ In exhibiting civic virtues, the Shia Newspaper lays claim to national participation in that second understanding, but an alternative nationalism shines through the boundary-crossing operations of its publisher. The Khuddām al-Mahdī Organization has engaged in spectacular activism in Britain and

¹²⁸ ‘British Adolescents’ [B]ehaviour Worst in Europe!, *The Shia Newspaper* (2), n.d.: 31.

¹²⁹ [Colophon], *The Shia Newspaper* (2), n.d.: 7.

¹³⁰ Irene Bloemraad and Matthew Wright, ‘“Utter Failure” or Unity out of Diversity? Debating and Evaluating Policies of Multiculturalism’, *International Migration Review* 48, no. 51 (2014): 292–334, 294.

¹³¹ Hogwood and Roberts, *European Politics Today*, 38.

¹³² [Colophon], *The Shia Newspaper* (2), n.d.: 7.

¹³³ ‘Sorry! There is violence but in “Another Islam”’, *The Shia Newspaper* (4), n.d.: 2–3, 2.

¹³⁴ See Greenfeld and Eastwood, ‘Nationalism in Comparative Perspective’, 260.

¹³⁵ E.g., Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹³⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/guides/zwwqtfr/revision/10> (accessed 27 February 2019).

reportedly abroad. In March 2018, for instance, after the arrest in Iran of Husayn Shirāzī, Sādiq's son, a group of Ḥabīb's supporters climbed the balcony of the Iranian embassy in London and occupied it for several hours, bringing down the flag of the Islamic Republic and planting their own.¹³⁷ Regarding foreign adventures, '[t]here is evidence that they've also played a role in Iraq's civil war, with Servants of Mahdi's blue flag being flown on the fronts of the military campaign against ISIS'.¹³⁸ Both of these cases exemplify not civic integration but the pursuit of independent international policy.

A third case of boundary crossing relative to the territorial subordination of British citizenship derives more narrowly from Ḥabīb himself, in his exercise of religious authority. In July 2012, the Iran-based traditionalist Grand Āyatollāh Muḥammad Sādiq al-Ḥusaynī al-Rūḥānī had issued a fatwa against the Lebanon-based Salafī sheykh 'Abd al-Raḥman Dimashqīyya, for opinions deemed blasphemous, declaring that the latter's blood could be shed with impunity. The offence had concerned commentary involving Fāṭima.¹³⁹ By then, a war of words had ensued between Naṣrallāh, the Lebanese Ḥizballāh chief, and Ḥabīb, featuring the portrayal of Ḥabīb as a British agent and Naṣrallāh's invoking a code of honour to silence sectarian slanderers.¹⁴⁰ Ḥabīb, however, turned the ethic back on Naṣrallāh, goading him to mobilize forces to punish Dimashqīyya. '[P]ush them and order them to seize this son of adultery whose name is dimasqiya[,] the subtitles of a video registration say. Failing this course of action, Naṣrallāh could not be considered a man.'¹⁴¹ Ḥabīb joins a substantial list of Shiite clerics who dispense or seek to implement their religious law of life and death across the borders of sovereign states. But none, as far as I am aware, has done so while presenting themselves as eager subjects of a state whose secular Law their legal ideology is anathema to.

Looking back at the institutionalization of Ḥabīb's operations in Britain brings the long game of his political project into focus. The Shia Newspaper, as noted, stems from the mid-2000s. By the time of my interview with him in May 2009, Ḥabīb claimed additional offices in Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, and Iran, but legality only in London.¹⁴² The London office, by that year, contained an assembly space named *ḥusayniyat ash-shuhadā'*. 'KHODAM AL MAHDI ORGANISATION' was registered as a charity in July 2010 (but associated with the Newspaper, as indicated, then spelled Khoddam Almahdi organization, since several years earlier).¹⁴³ The theme of the promised Shiite land had come to the fore by then in Ḥabīb's British enterprises.

¹³⁷ Azizi. 2018. *What do we Know* [...].

¹³⁸ Ibid. Such is suggested, for instance, by an obituary in the name of the 'Iraq branch' of the organization dated 26 May 2018, commemorating two individuals mentioned as its 'members' who had been slaughtered by Islamic State in Kirkuk, which circulates on the Internet since 28 May 2018 via the Facebook of Aḥmad al-Mūsawī (accessed on 10 July 2019), who mentions Ḥabīb's al-Muḥassin mosque as his alma mater. Another indication is the English voiceover of Ḥabīb's lecture, Twittered on 26 April 2016 at alhabib_en, stating: '[W]hen the fatwa came from the *marja'*, the soldiers went from us, as much as we could, we sent them' [1.56.45»] (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qa3HXqh_3U, accessed 11 July 2019).

¹³⁹ <http://selm.ir/5253/> (accessed 28 February 2019).

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.shiatv.net/video/3e0e2233801f82486b33> (dated 22 July 2012, accessed 10 July 2019).

¹⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW6X9x3nUiM> [5:16»] (accessed 28 February 2019). An English-language report of the episode on Ḥabīb's website (<http://alqatrah.net/en/ns149>, dated 1 August 2012, accessed on 28 February 2019) is considerably more moderately phrased.

¹⁴² Presumably the sheykh did not intend to include Iraq in his point on illegality.

¹⁴³ <https://beta.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1,137,000&subid=0> (accessed 1 April 2019). The Organization was established, reportedly, in London (Wehrey *Politics of Sectarianism in the Gulf*, 146); it is also the case that prior to his emigration, at the time of his arrest, Ḥabīb had been involved with an eponymous organization in Kuwait (see al-Hantūli. 2010. *Yāsir al-Ḥabīb*).

The Fadak TV satellite channel was founded in June 2010.¹⁴⁴ It was initiated in the name of Khoddam al-Mahdi Organization and its funds were said to come mostly from Kuwaiti Shiites.¹⁴⁵ By 2017, Fadak TV had become Fadak Media Broadcasts and run into trouble not only for regulator investigations of offensive broadcast content but embezzlement from the company by a former director, amounting to hundreds of thousands of pounds.¹⁴⁶ Khoddam al-Mahdi Organization served another project featuring the theme of promised land: to raise funds for a terrain outside London that was to include a mosque. Another investigation by the Charity Commission followed when it emerged that the eponymous charitable company had been dissolved since April 2012 but funds were still raised in its name.¹⁴⁷ Ḥabīb nevertheless succeeded in his objective to overcome the bounds of Cricklewood. He has operated since June 2013 from an estate in Fulmer, Buckinghamshire containing the Muḥassin mosque, after ‘the martyr, Al-Muhassin ibn Ali [. . .], the unborn son of Lady Fatima Al-Zahra’—whose miscarriage and subsequent death are attributed by traditional Shiites to ‘Umar’s violent entry of her house, acting on Abū Bakr’s behalf in the struggle over the Prophet’s succession. The estate was named ‘the Minor Land of Fadak’.¹⁴⁸

The contours of a proto-state project in Ḥabīb’s European activities begin to appear with greater clarity through the Minor Fadak. His activism, as sketched above, was associated with a militia fighting sectarian enemies in Iraq; a newspaper engaged as much in sectarian othering as in communal representation; ‘foreign policy’ militancy breaching Iranian sovereignty in London; and a claim directed towards Beirut to alternative, global Shiite jurisdiction. The Fulmer estate added a land base to all these elements. Footage of the goings-on at the Minor Fadak include a video clip of some two dozen military-clad devotees involved in a soldiers’ drill on the parking lot (with red-tiled houses in the background), for a ‘Ceremony of the Renewal of the Raising of the Flag of Khuddām al-Mahdī on the Minor Land of Fadak.’ One of them salutes Ḥabīb with a raised sword. A turbaned cleric is presented with a flag before it is raised. Martial singing accompanies the video registration. It ends with a solemn, manly voice exclaiming preparedness for sacrifice, *labayk yā Mahdī!*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴<https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/07271856> (accessed 5 March 2019); cf. Linge, ‘Sunni-Shiite Polemics in Norway’, *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 7.

¹⁴⁵«Hezbollah» Kidnaps Their Opposing Religious Cleric: Sayed M. Ali Al-Musawi’, *The Shia Newspaper* (4), n.d.: 4; Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

¹⁴⁶*The Independent* reported in June 2013—evasively, giving readers not a clue of the intensity of the sheikh’s discourse—that it had ‘learned that Sheikh Habib and Fadak TV [...] were investigated last year by the communications regulator Ofcom for a televised sermon in which he questioned the sexuality of a Sunni successor to the Prophet Muhammad, Umar Ibn Al Khattab’ (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sunni-vs-shia-in-gerrards-cross-new-mosque-highlights-growing-tensions-among-british-muslims-86719-69.html>, accessed 1 April 2019); (fraud) Document 31 March 2017 (<http://apps.charitycom—mission.gov.uk/Showcharity/RegisterOfCharities/CharityWithoutPartB.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=1165143&SubsidiaryNumber=0>, accessed 5 March 2019).

¹⁴⁷<https://www.sloughobserver.co.uk/news/13437220.charity-watchdog-launches-investigation-into-dissolved-charity-behind-controversial-fulmer-mosque/> (accessed 1 March 2019); <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/charity-commission-opens-statutory-inquiry-whether-dissolved-charity-raised-spent-funds/governance/article/1289112> (accessed 5 March 2019).

¹⁴⁸<http://www.almuhassin.org/> (accessed 1 March 2019); ‘The dream has finally come true! The flag of Khoddam al-Mehdi peace be upon him is hoisted on the Minor Land of Fadak’, *Alqatrah* 2013, <http://www.alqatrah.net/en/ns180> (accessed 11 February 2019); Arthur F. Buehler, ‘Fatima’, in *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, eds. Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam Hani Walker (Santa Barbara, CA.: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 182–86: 186; Zayn Kassam and Bridget Blomfield, ‘Remembering Fatima and Zaynab: Gender in Perspective’, in *The Shi’i World. Pathways in Tradition and Modernity*, eds. Farhad Daftary, Aryn Sajoo and Shainool Jiwa (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 211–28: 212.

¹⁴⁹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RW04FsvwgMc> (accessed 4 April 2019).

While Britain enabled Ḥabīb's media operations, which domesticated Western political order in their pitch for participatory citizenship, the pivot of their moral geography lay elsewhere. The larger aim of the Khoddam al-Mahdi Organization, it was explained to me in the 2009 interview, was for 'a Shiite Arab state in the Gulf'.¹⁵⁰ Some of its contours were known by then, as the sheykh had stated after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 that it would be 'comprising the Eastern Province, Kuwait, Bahrain and Basra'.¹⁵¹ In 2009, furthermore, Ḥabīb "made several speeches exhorting the Shi'a of the Eastern Province to declare their independence and merge with Kuwait and Bahrain as part of a 'Greater Bahrain'.¹⁵² The area extended to the United Arab Emirates and Oman.¹⁵³

After the establishment of 'the Minor Land of Fadak' in 2013, however, different features came to light. The Minor Land in Fulmer was 'to pave the way to open the Islamic countries, especially Mecca, the holy city of Madinah, and the Major Land of Fadak,' Ḥabīb's website proclaimed in the same year.¹⁵⁴ His territorial project, then, far exceeded the 'Greater Bahrain,' adding Shiite irredentism of a different kind. The maximum stretch of his religio-political project now vaguely extended to the Islamic world at large while at minimum it included, as its core component, the parts of the Saudi national territory on the Arabian Peninsula that harboured the holy places of the Ḥijāz. Ḥabīb's new articulation connected the earlier claim to land based on its current or previous inhabitation by Shiites—hitherto unretracted—to one theologically grounded, i.e., to the sacred geography of a promised land.

In other aspects too, the quest for the Greater Bahrain related to but did not begin to exhaust the meaning of Fadakism. By 2009, Ḥabīb had couched the quest for his Shiite state, among other features, in ethnic terms. Unlike the transnational project of the revolutionary Iranian state, Ḥabīb's entity was to be an 'Arab' state—a phrasing reminiscent of but far exceeding the bounds of Bahraini nativism, possibly invoking the earliest Islamic polity in Medina (i.e., a city central to Fadakism's geography). Moreover, his project was perceived as religious land reclamation. Shiites had been a majority in Kuwait until 1965, declared Ḥabīb, after which their seventy per cent majority had dwindled to forty per cent: 'an invasion' allowed by 'Bakrī' government policy.¹⁵⁵ Ḥabīb would seek to invert the sturdy demographic facts on the ground through the conversion of Sunnis to Shiism—peacefully, he specified.¹⁵⁶ The Fadakist project proceeds thus by means of religious exclusion, which was similarly seen to lie at the basis of nationalist state formation in France, Spain, and England.¹⁵⁷

A different pillar altogether of the Fadakian state related not to the nature of its inhabitants but the principles of its rule. Whereas Bahraini Shiites over time had become majority-*akhbārī* Twelvers, i.e., against independent legal reasoning and the laity's jurist emulation,¹⁵⁸ Ḥabībīan politics is marked by the *oṣūlī* heritage emphasizing clerical authority. The 2009 interview with Ḥabīb dwelled for some time on the repressive nature

¹⁵⁰Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

¹⁵¹Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 211.

¹⁵²Wehrey *Politics of Sectarianism in the Gulf*, 146.

¹⁵³<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jgkqJ78w-U> [0:15–3:26] (accessed 11 July 2019).

¹⁵⁴*Dream has finally come true!* 2013.

¹⁵⁵Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷Marx, *Faith in Nation*.

¹⁵⁸Cole, 'Rival Empires of Trade and Shi'ism in Eastern Arabia', 31, 41.

of the Iranian Islamic Republic, but his objections did not extend to jurists' political power per se. In the Fadakian state, jurists would not rule, as in Iran, but laws would be subject to scrutiny by a Council of 'Olamā with veto right.¹⁵⁹ The idea fits neatly within the Shīrāzī current. Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī's doctrine of 'the government of the religious jurists' (*ḥukūmat al-fuqahā'*), worked out in a 1963 book by his brother, 'was reformulated after the Islamic Revolution as "the council of the jurisprudents"' (*shūrāt al-fuqahā'*).¹⁶⁰

Where in Ḥabīb's world, then, did these opposed political principles, of socio-political pluralism and ethno-religious purification, meet? It was in his view of 'the main social gain in Europe,' which, he stated, 'is Freedom'—currently under threat by restrictions on free speech, in the West as much as elsewhere, driving citizens to extremism.¹⁶¹ He substantiated his first point with the recent refusal at the UK border (in February 2009) of the Dutch radical politician Geert Wilders, which he rejected. Ḥabīb, who would eagerly incite retribution on Dimashqiyya, withheld judgement of the Dutch MP and maker of the movie *Fitna*, equating Islam and terrorism, which contrasted the alarm of organized Shiite opinion in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. (The *Overkoepelende Shiitische Vereniging*, for example, both rejected 'criticism of Islam' and took part in the 'Cairo mission' of March 2008, which aimed to prevent 'anti-Dutch measures').¹⁶² Ignoring the furore over *Fitna*, he presented Wilders' rebuff as Western self-contradiction, exclaiming that 'the Bakris rule Europe'.¹⁶³

More than the secular reference to its Western angle suggested, however, Ḥabīb's lauding of 'freedom' echoed the centrality of *ḥurriyat* in the religio-political doctrines of Muḥammad and Sādiq al-Shīrāzī.¹⁶⁴ While not forced out of Iran like they were, he had shared his European refuge with other Shīrāzī Shiites.¹⁶⁵ Just like other forms of Shiism that were side-lined since the revolution in Iran—e.g., that of the Mojāhedīn—the Shīrāzī-ism of the Kuwaiti sheykh had assumed an exilic identity, but of a fundamentalist-clericalist variety. Whether Ḥabīb was as truly high-minded with regard to unbelievers tearing into his religion as the page he took from secular-democratic reasoning or not, the Wilders controversy had involved a higher-order collision for him, affecting the proximate challenge of the Shiite state. Whether or not the sheykh actually believed it to be true that 'the Bakris rule Europe,' he stood for a sectarian reform of Shiism that was currently unimaginable in Islamic countries, he explained, its inception conceivable only in the West.¹⁶⁶

In the case of Kuwait's skewed religious demography, 'no-one spoke about it, no-one made any objection about it, because [of] *taqiye*' (pious concealment), declared Ḥabīb. And faced with this plight, he set himself to reform the application of *taqiye*, so that the Shiites would not legitimize cowardice; would defend themselves and—now voicing religious nationalism full throttle—'be a respected people in the world'.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁹Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

¹⁶⁰Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, 97.

¹⁶¹The vision of Sheikh al-Habib for the future in regards to the relation between freedom of speech and the freedom of beliefs', *Alqatrah* 2015, <http://www.alqatrah.net/en/ns210> (accessed 4 February 2019).

¹⁶²Sipco Vellenga and Gerard Wiegers, 'Polarization or Bridging? Responses of Muslim and non-Muslim organizations to criticism of Islam in the Netherlands', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24, no. 1 (2013): 111–28, 119, 125.

¹⁶³Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

¹⁶⁴E.g., Imam Muhammad Shirazi, *The Islamic System of Government* (London: Fountain Books, 2001 [2000]), vii, ch. 12, 61 (displayed on <http://www.english.shirazi.ir/>, 29 January 2019).

¹⁶⁵Cf. Laurence Louër, 'The Limits of Iranian Influence Among Gulf Shi'a', *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 5 (2009): 14–6, 14.

¹⁶⁶Interview al-Ḥabīb, 1 May 2009.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*

Correspondingly, Ḥabīb is on record advocating a ‘national homeland’ (*waṭan qaumi*) for the Shiites, noting that ‘the Jews did the same thing,’ having ‘united their words and [petitioned] the British Empire’.¹⁶⁸

(In spite of their radically opposed geopolitics, there is significant commonality in Ḥabīb’s and the Khomeynist recasting of *taqīye* to accommodate political activism. Like Ḥabīb, Khomeynī holds *taqīye* impermissible when used as an excuse to refrain from fighting tyrants.¹⁶⁹ They both identify a specific duty of courage for religious leaders and privilege *taqīye* as personal as opposed to communal acts.¹⁷⁰ But the two perspectives part ways when it comes to sectarianism. Khomeynī’s discussion of *taqīye* includes the category of *modārātiye*, which concerns the extension of friendliness to non-Shiites ‘for the sake of reducing tensions with [...] them’.¹⁷¹ This he held obligatory (*vājeb*) on occasions such as the *hajj*.¹⁷² The constitutional policy of Shiite-Sunni ‘rapprochement’ (*taqrīb*) in the Islamic Republic, more broadly, has been identified as one of its manifestations.¹⁷³ Ḥabīb, however, has presented praising or paying respect to the ‘enemies of the *ahl-e beyt*’ on the part of religious authorities as an insult to Shiism and an abuse of *taqīye*.¹⁷⁴)

Other Shīrāzīs also deemed to be radicals have proven willing—in their prioritization of irredentist sectarianism—to seek alliances with ‘unbelievers.’ Āyatollah Muḡtabā al-Ḥusaynī al-Shīrāzī, for example,¹⁷⁵ is known among Shiites for advocating that Mecca and Medina should be placed ‘under the control of the UN [because] the two cities would be better run by kuffar [and] under the control of kuffar the shia will have more freedom’.¹⁷⁶ Ḥabīb echoes and slightly inflects the line, calling on Shiites to show courage (i.e., invoking the reform of *taqīye*—as elaborated above), to ‘take back all the Islamic holy sites and have the two holy cities under international supervision.’ The Fadakian strategy centres explicitly on help from the West: Shiites needed to hire ‘[W]estern lawyers so that [...] legal action [could] be taken with national, European institutions and the United Nations against militant Salafī Wahabī ideology’—which, the sheykh took pains to explain, in English prose, lest his local audience miss a vital point, equated Nazism.¹⁷⁷ Ḥabīb’s vantage point has consistently been the promised Shiite oasis in the Gulf, while studying, blending in on the margins of, deriving benefit from and attempting to incite others in the gatekeeping European hostland to attain it.

Afterthoughts

Fadakism has eagerly delivered on the requirement for religious nationalism to nationalize its ancient materials.¹⁷⁸ Whereas the traditional Shiite self-conception is of

¹⁶⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jgkqJ78w-U> [0:15»] (accessed 11 July 2019).

¹⁶⁹Louis Medoff, *TAQIYA i. In Shi'ism*. In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London [etc.]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2015).

¹⁷⁰See, e.g., Yarden Mariuma, ‘Taqiyya as Polemic, Law and Knowledge: Following an Islamic Legal Term through the Worlds of Islamic Scholars, Ethnographers, Polemicists and Military Men’, *The Muslim World* 104, no. 1–2 (2014): 89–108, 94 for Khomeynī; and ‘Über das Rechtsprechen im Zustand des Zweifels und während dem Praktizieren des Taqiyyah’, *Alqatrah* 2013, <http://www.al-qatrah.net/de/al150> (accessed 9 June 2020) for Ḥabīb.

¹⁷¹Medoff, *Taqiya*.

¹⁷²Mohammad Mohsen Heydarī, ‘Taqīye-ye modārātī az negāh-e emām Khomeynī’, *Ḥozūr* 101 1396/2017-8, http://www.imam-khomeini.ir/fa/c202_143011/ [...] (accessed 9 June 2020) 126.

¹⁷³Medoff, *Taqiya*.

¹⁷⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TnXD0qc0Xal> [4.39»] (accessed 9 June 2020).

¹⁷⁵Cf. Azizi. 2018. *What do we Know [...]*.

¹⁷⁶<https://www.shiachat.com/forum/topic/234931661-mojtaba-shirazi-speaks-out/> (accessed 5 March 2019).

¹⁷⁷<http://www.alqatrah.net/en/ns148> (accessed 3 April 2019).

¹⁷⁸van der Veer, ‘Nation, Politics, Religion’, *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7–21, 9.

a ‘denomination’ (*tāʿifa*) in Islam,¹⁷⁹ for instance, Ḥabīb projects ‘a [...] people in the world.’ While the legend of Fadak has figured often in irredentist projects since ‘Alī’s demise, no previous cases are apparently known in Shiism of its use for the creation of a state, sectarian or other (congruent with the territorial (nation-)state norm and reality of the post-imperial era). Citizenship in the land of the Minor Fadak did not imply a ‘temporary homeland’ in Britain but the duty for ‘British Muslims’ to integrate and ‘defend it if need be’.¹⁸⁰ While Muḥammad’s Medinan polity was ethnically Arab, the insistence on ‘an Arab state’ after thirteen-plus centuries of Islam’s cross-ethnic expansion quite something else—reminiscent rather of the purification discourses associated with nationalist modernity.

The Ḥabībīan quest is an obvious taker for religious nationalism but it occupies a particular place with limited generalizability in the typology of Shiite Islamism. Statehood is an end-goal of Fadakism, whereas Ṣadriān politics took up the legacy of Fadak for the state’s moral chastisement. While deterritorialized understandings of the state remain significant to the Islamic Republic, Fadakism commits to the sacralization of place across the Arabian Peninsula. The Iranian state remains committed to transsectarian outreach as Ḥabīb provokes, cajoles, offends and spoils for sectarian others to take the bait. While Fadakism has ethno-sectarian markers, the ‘Major Fadak’ is not like the ‘Greater Bahrain.’ It speaks of an Arab state but pivots on its Shiite character. Whereas Bahrani nationalism organizes around the territorial image of once contiguous majoritarian habitation, Fadak’s significance to Ḥabīb derives essentially from its religious designation. While its differences with the Khomeynist project are by no means minor, the Shīrāzī-ism from which Fadakism stems has emerged in parallel and, for a time, in cooperation with it, and Ḥabīb’s, similarly, is a clericalist ideology.

If Fadakism’s intra-sectarian comparison renders only limited common ground, cases abound beyond the ‘Party of ‘Alī’ for the modern politicization of promised land. Smith’s study of Arab and Jewish nationalism, for instance, before the crystallization of his ethno-symbolist approach, establishes Zionism as an exchange of ‘Judaism for Jewry as the unit of solidarity’¹⁸¹ and Jewry’s ‘new group definition’ in the ‘nation’.¹⁸² This had followed an ‘ethnic re-definition of religion’ replacing the ‘religious definition of ethnicity’.¹⁸³ It would thus be an error to see Judaism as a national religion reflecting ‘the “nation” beneath’.¹⁸⁴ But the modernism is revised in Smith’s later work, which affirms that ‘the idea of the nation was well known in pre-modern epochs, and in the ancient world it had its religiously defined counterparts’.¹⁸⁵ It was ‘possible to find examples of social formations [...] even in antiquity, that [...] approximated to an inclusive definition of the concept of the “nation”, notably among the ancient Jews [...]’.¹⁸⁶

Specifics of the approach, then—i.e., the thesis of the secular nature of nationalism in the older work and of ancient religious nationhood in the new—might lead one to dismiss its use as an analytical tool to capture Fadakism, but it offers effective anchors for the thematization of

¹⁷⁹Halm, *Shiʿism*, 1–2; 15.

¹⁸⁰*English Researcher interviews* [...]. 2014.

¹⁸¹Anthony D. Smith, ‘Nationalism and Religion: The Role of Religious Reform in the Genesis of Arab and Jewish Nationalism’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 18, no. 35 (1973): 23–43, 42.

¹⁸²*Ibid.*, 36–7.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸⁵Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism. A critical survey of recent theories of nations and nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 168.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 190.

instrumentalized religion, religious reform, and the mirror of the West. Herzl, reminds Smith, 'conceded that the return to Zion must be preceded by the return to Judaism'.¹⁸⁷ That the former was a 'secular apostle of Zionism' is immaterial to the equivalence in Ḥabīb's foregrounding of Fadak to stir up religious nationalism among the Shiites. Rationalizing reform in Judaism had delivered nationalism from the ethnic religion¹⁸⁸ while Ḥabīb posed *taqīye's* rethinking as key to Shiite self-realization in the Major Fadak. Religious reform in Judaism was rooted in assimilationist pressure and the quest for emancipation.¹⁸⁹ The European context in Ḥabīb's case shines through in the pitch for participatory citizenship and his complex articulations of *hurriyat* discourse. There is a further parallel, lastly, in the European 'political Zionism [that] often proclaimed itself to be revolutionary in the course of Jewish history[,] having 'developed as a dynamic anti-status-quo force, negating passively awaiting Messianic times and the miraculous ingathering of Jews back into Zion'.¹⁹⁰ Ḥabīb's Servants of the Mahdī have not settled either for quietism, or ventured a defensive concept of their religio-political role, but upped the ante from British soil to remobilize Shiism—offensively—for their vision of Fadak.

It seems difficult to overestimate the impact of Ḥabīb's British base on the nature of his operations, making at first sight for a contradiction with the incisive argument from the Indian setting on the 'indigenous' nature of religious nationalism.¹⁹¹ Britain's free broadcasting regime allows for an escalation of scale in Fadakian outreach, for instance, as testified in Linge's report of its local foreign effects. Sectarian polemics in Norway were relatively recent, appearing 'as deterritorialized, particularly in digital spaces.' There, 'European-based polemicists such as [...] al-Ḥabīb offer sectarian and supranational Islamic identities to young Muslims of various origins, notably by making new sense of pre-modern Sunnite-Shiite polemics'.¹⁹² It is unlikely that Ḥabīb would have achieved similar results from Kuwait, which had cracked down on media freedom precisely since the sheykh had begun to escalate his propaganda from Britain.¹⁹³

A second aspect of impact concerns the conceptual dimension, as seen in the length to which the sheykh has gone to couch his message in terms—whether in the presentation of sectarian struggle as participatory citizenship or of Wahhabi Salafism as Nazism—calculated to compel significant political others in the audience to see reason to his cause. Ḥabīb's adoption of dominant tropes from the host society is not limited, however, to strategic communication alone. There is also the commonality in his world between cultural forms in which political self-realization depends on 'being allowed to say what needs to be said'—even though it appears as a self-contradictory identification (from the formal defence of Wilders to the expurgation of Dimashqiyya) when looking from the outside in. Thus, it is the 'elective' in the 'affinity' that reveals what crucially is indigenous to Ḥabīb' exilic project.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁷Smith, 'Nationalism and Religion', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 18, no. 35 (1973): 23–43, 42.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 23, 35.

¹⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 30, 31.

¹⁹⁰Allon Gal, 'Historical Ethno-symbols in the Emergence of the State of Israel', in *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism. History, culture and ethnicity in the formation of nations*, eds. Athena S. Leoussi and Stephen Grosby (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 221–30: 221.

¹⁹¹van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 20.

¹⁹²Linge, 'Sunnite-Shiite Polemics in Norway', *Fleks* 3, no. 1 (2016): 1–18, 15.

¹⁹³See Wehrey *Politics of Sectarianism in the Gulf*, 146.

¹⁹⁴This is another case challenging the Saidian narrative that portrays cultural exchange as foreign imposition. Ḥabīb claimed British protection, not long after the ending of Kuwait's Protectorate days in 1961, but *à la carte*. There is similarly a parallel of political convergence, with obvious caveats for contextual difference, in the 'Hindu nationalists

Judaism reformed and Zionism surfaced to the background of assimilatory pressure in Europe. But twenty-first century Europe has no ‘initial agent of change’ that enforces citizenship and the sacrifice of ethnocentric particularity on Sanhedrins.¹⁹⁵ Systemic pressure to assimilate is thus limited, and the agency of residents less constrained than in the era of Jewish reform, reflecting external demand less than ideological choice. Fadakism embodies very much a law unto its own—as seen in its pursuit of ‘foreign policy,’ militia operations, and the attempt to mete out religious punishment across sovereign borders.

Fadakism cannot be equated, moreover, to its adaptive framing in Britain. Its key ingredients gestated elsewhere, discrediting another theory of the ‘foreign hand’¹⁹⁶: the attack on Shīrāzī-ism by the Tehrani regime that portrays it as a backward ‘English Shiism.’ The selective English patronage of Shiism, it says, was part and parcel of a colonial plot since the days of British India to emasculate the Muslim world.¹⁹⁷ The ethnic component of Fadakism, however (demanding ‘an Arab state in the Gulf’), is rooted geographically in Bahraini nativism, whose politicization long predates Ḥabīb’s flight from Kuwait. Activist intellectuals in Saudi Arabia, for instance, articulated Bahraini nativism for the Eastern province in the early 1990s.¹⁹⁸ While the Arab Spring saw Shiite protest challenge Sunni sectarian rule, meanwhile, the British government stood by its traditional allies, the Sunni tribal leaders of the Gulf. The clerical component of Fadakism, too, originated elsewhere: in Karbala and revolutionary Iran. Shīrāzīs having spread to the Gulf ‘became the main subcontractors of exporting the revolution’ but by 1982 were ‘marginalized in Iran [. . .], when the Iranian regime began to establish its own network.’ Their protest against despotism in Iran mixed with religious criticism of Khomeynī and Khāmene’ī ‘as the sole leaders of the Shi’a world’.¹⁹⁹ Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī’s theory of the plural *shūrat al-fuqahā’* became the benchmark of their politico-religious schism—but it is equally a doctrine of jurist rule, and of Shiism reoriented towards the state.

Beyond the range of meanings to which its appearances have floatingly attached, Fadakism derives in the core from this recent religious schism within Twelver clericalism in the Khomeynist vein, involving geopolitical crossings and a corresponding escalation of scale. Here surfaces an additional sense, beyond the foregoing application of the idea in the analysis of Shiite territoriality, in which ‘the migratory experience can lead to more embracing identifications on the margin of the host society’.²⁰⁰ Ḥabīb’s Western presence, that is, presents his Khomeynist detractors with a case lending credence, in their eyes, to the narrative of Western depravity—associated with European expansion and a lust for power that seeks to divide clerics and subdue Islam.¹⁹⁷ More specifically, it provides them with an

[who] claim that science is part of India’s spiritual heritage, and [who] find support among Britain’s theosophists and spiritualists’ (Peter van der Veer, ‘Religion in South Asia’, *Annual review of anthropology* 31, no. 1 (2002b): 173–87, 180).

¹⁹⁵See Smith, ‘Nationalism and Religion’, *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 18, no. 35 (1973): 23–43, 30.

¹⁹⁶See van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 20.

¹⁹⁷One of the regimist websites seeking to expose ‘English Shiism’ (FETAN.IR) explained that the spread of *qame-zanī*—a bloodletting ritual associated with the Shīrāzīs—had been a British complot. Aiming to destroy Muslim power, the British had started to work on the Shiites in India because they were at great distance from the *marja’iyat* in Najaf. Abusing their ignorance and great love of Imām Ḥusayn, they had invented and taught them the practice of *shamshir* and *qame-zanī* to the forehead. The practice then penetrated Iran and Iraq, again through British colonialism (<http://www.fetan.ir/home/1628>, accessed 6 December 2018).

¹⁹⁸Laurence Louër, ‘The State and Sectarian Identities in the Persian Gulf Monarchies’, in *Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Lawrence G. Potter (Oxford [etc.]: Oxford University Press, 2014), 117–42, 131–132.

¹⁹⁹Louër, ‘The Limits of Iranian Influence Among Gulf Shi’a’, *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 5 (2009): 14–6, 14.

²⁰⁰van der Veer, ‘The Diasporic Imagination’, 7.

argument to refocus antagonism in Islam-West relations on the enemy's realm, even while the regional alliances of Ḥabīb's adoptive society have been inimical to his elementary aim—militating, that is, against the Shiite recovery of peninsular land. The radical Europe-based brethren of the anti-Khomeynist Shīrāzīs who once did the Iranians' bidding have thus cut deeper the wound of their revolution and its rejection of Western civilization.

Disclosure statement

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