

# Religion, Identity and Citizenship

## The Predicament of Shia Fundamentalism in Bahrain

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In 2011, Bahrain witnessed an unprecedented wave of political protests that came within a chain of protest movements in other Arab countries, which later came to be known as the “Arab Spring.” Irrespective of the difference in the appellations given to these protests, their occurrence in Bahrain in particular poses a number of questions, some of which touch upon the social and political roots of this movement, especially that they started in Bahrain, a Gulf state that has witnessed numerous political reformation movements and democratic transformations that have enhanced the country’s social and cultural openness in public and political life. Despite this pro-democratic environment, the political movement rooted in Shi’a origins persisted in developing various forms of political extremism and violence, raising concerns among Sunni and other communities. This work evaluates the origins of Shi’a extremism in Bahrain.

*Keywords: Middle East, Bahrain, Shi’a fundamentalism, Islam, Arab Spring, violence, Iran*

In the course of the year 2011, Bahrain witnessed an unprecedented wave of political protests,<sup>1</sup> and that came within a chain of protest movements in other Arab countries, which later came to be known as the “Arab Spring”. The names that have been, and are still being, given to the Bahrain protests were widely varied: “revolution,” “terror,” “uprising,” “ordeal,” “protests,” “crisis,” depending on the political perspec-



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tive of the speaker or writer; fresh names are still coming up on a daily basis.<sup>2</sup> Irrespective of the difference in the appellations given to these protests, their occurrence in Bahrain in particular poses a number of questions, some of which touch upon the social and political roots of this movement, especially that they started in Bahrain, the Gulf state that has witnessed since the beginning of the first decade of the third millennium numerous serious reformation and democratic transformations. Bahrain, a country normally known for social and cultural openness, has witnessed an atmosphere of a noticeable degree of democratic and liberal practices in both the public and political life.

However, the fact that is worthy of considerable attention is that, despite all this atmosphere of political openness that has characterized that decade, and continues to do so, the political movement rooted in Shi'a origins persisted in practicing various forms of political extremism and violence. Thus, with the start of the protests of the "Arab Spring" in other Arab countries, extremist Shi'a organizations started their protests in the streets of Manama. They were soon joined by the chief Shi'a movement, *al-Wefaq* and some other prominent Shi'a clerics known for their fundamentalist leanings.<sup>3</sup> Then, some prominent leading Shi'a figures in the leftist and nationalist movement found themselves standing on the side of the religious fundamentalist Shi'a leaders. With the passage of time, this protest movement went deeper in acquiring a sectarian character, thus establishing its Shi'a identity and belonging, and came to be led by the religious leaders of Shi'a fundamentalism.

Despite all forms of political and media activities, within and outside Bahrain, this movement remained far from gaining acceptance amongst the Sunni community and with varied sections of the Shi'a community itself; it rather triggered opposing extremist trends in the midst of the Sunni community, which were opposed to all demands of those protests.<sup>4</sup> This study, then, seeks to shed some light on the contradictions experienced by this protest movement in Bahrain, by presenting an anthropological perspective on the social roots of the Shi'a fundamentalism movement standing behind these protests. The purpose of that would be to show the effect of the Shi'a fundamentalism on the experience of religion, identity and citizenship in the Bahrain society, in general, and in the Shi'a constituent in particular. This essay will examine all that, by firstly, providing a critique on some

social sciences scholarship which conducted research in Bahrain's society, culture and politics. Secondly, it will throw some light on Bahrain's major social constituents, with particular emphasis on the Shi'a ones, and on the major socio-political transformations which took place within and among these constituents. Thirdly, it will bring some observations from the field on the practice of Shi'a fundamentalism among Shi'a constituents, on its hegemony and terror practice over the years, on the resistance to that practice, and on its effect on the identity and citizenship crisis it has created among the Shi'a. Finally, this essay will try to contribute for better understanding of the problem by suggesting some proposals and recommendations for ways of getting out of that crisis.

### **Academic Morality and Politics: A Critique**

A number of anthropological studies, in addition to other studies belonging to diverse field of inquiries, such as: political sciences, international relations, history and sociology, have come out at the beginning of the third millennium, which made the Bahrain's society, culture and politics, its main subject of study and analysis. Despite the seriousness, originality, and good scholarly status of some of these studies, and despite the good scholarly conclusions they came up with, some of them were characterized by scholarly weakness and unacceptable bias, even to the degree of lack of academic ethical standards; the studies in this latter kind will be the subject of our discussion in this section of the present paper.

Despite the diversity of their subjects matter, quite a large number of these studies, however, have failed in making a fair and objective reading of the society, culture and history of Bahrain. For some of these studies have either started from extremely biased and prejudiced standpoints, or depended profoundly on publications that were overwhelmingly far from accuracy and truth.<sup>5</sup> Worst among these publications, however, were media materials produced by media sources belonging to politico-religious formations related to the Shi'a religious fundamentalist movement in Bahrain, under diverse appellations.<sup>6</sup> It is no secret nowadays that this media machine is backed by the information platform of the Iranian government and Hezbollah in Lebanon. This media machine has filled the Internet with numerous fabricated

and falsified pieces of information, as part of its ideological and political warfare on the state and the society in Bahrain since the 1990s, and is still playing the same role.<sup>7</sup> These misinformed data included falsehoods, such as: the Bahraini population comprises a Shi'a majority of 60-70% and a Sunni minority of no more than 30-40%; and that the "Shi'a majority has been struggling for democracy and freedom against the Sunni minority that runs the country through ruling dynasties opposed to both the Shi'a majority and democracy."<sup>8</sup>

Another example of misinformation is that: "the political reform that has been accomplished in Bahrain since the beginning of the third millennium, is nothing but the result of the struggle of the Shi'a majority, and the Sunni community has had nothing to do with it; it can be said that the king of Bahrain was forced to make these reforms." Thus, the social and political life in Bahrain is depicted as being "under the rule of a tyrannical dictatorial authority, reflecting the spirit and culture of the Sunni hegemonic minority."

Looking at these studies would lead any serious observer to find out that they reiterate, naively, the negative typified picture of Bahrain, which is now crowding the provocative political media platforms opposed to the Bahrain government, without the least effort on the part of the writers to check the accuracy of that information. Thus it is clear that most of the writers of those studies have hastily started searching for data and examples, some of which are ethnographic in nature while others are sociological, which was the result of a conscious effort on the part of some, and unconscious on the part of others, so that to avoid going out of that typified framework and picture, which was considered by them a betrayal to "the solid objective facts" or mere opinions of other researchers." It will also be seen that some of those studies have, in accordance with this Bahraini context, placed what they called the "persecution of Bahraini Shi'a" within a more generalized context, that of the "persecution of Arab Shi'a," and consequently it will be seen as a part of the "Islamic Shi'a awakening" or the "Shi'a rise" in the Arab world.<sup>9</sup> It will also be found that, starting from this misinformed typified perspective leaked by the fundamentalist Shi'a information machine to European and American universities and research institutes, one of the serious results of this state of affairs was depicting all Sunni fundamentalist activities, specifically after September 11th, as reactionary terroristic activities, antagonistic

to the West and to modernity and democracy. On the other hand, Shi'a fundamentalism was portrayed as a "popular movement struggling for freedom and democracy against the hegemonic Sunni fundamentalism and its arrogant and overbearing tyrants like Saddam Hussain in Iraq, the Saudi dynasty in Saudi Arabia, and the al-Khalifa dynasty in Bahrain, and so on."<sup>10</sup> That is why it is not bewildering any more to find out that most of these kind of researchers who came to Bahrain to conduct their studies were, immediately upon setting foot in Bahrain, connected to friends and activists from the Shi'a community. They even favoured staying in Shi'a villages and city neighbourhoods, enjoying incomparable hospitality and cooperation from those activists and their relatives, who made sure that the pens, cameras, and recorders of those researchers would carry the "facts" as seen by those narrators and commentators. Thus, according to the narration of those modern day researchers, the *'Ashurā* rituals that had been performed by Muslim Shi'a for years and years, became an expression of the "tyranny and persecution" suffered by contemporary Shi'a, which extended back in history to the time of the martyrdom of al-Imam al-Hussain.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, we have come to see those researchers as if being possessed by an obsessional ritualistic state of persecution complex implanted in the mind of the Shi'a individual, whom we believe is a victim himself of clergy persecution; so much so that some of those researchers sounded more Shi'a Imamite than the Shi'a themselves.<sup>12</sup>

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Even a brief look at these studies would show clearly how remote they are from scholarly objectivity in their look at the society and culture of their subject matter, the Bahraini society in the case at hand.<sup>13</sup> These studies ignore the dangerous sectarian dimension of this fundamentalist Shi'a movement, which probably matches now the Sunni fundamentalist movement in its apex years, and how it was able to carry most of the Shi'a community away from the rational route towards a better life based on the values and principles of modernism and enlightenment on the grounds of justice, freedom, and equality.<sup>14</sup> One says in the occasion, that these studies have regrettably contributed to the attestation of this typified image based on the persecution complex that the Shi'a clergy is trying to plant in the Shi'a mindset, confirming the concepts of hate and exacting vengeance against the killers of al-Imam al-Hussain. The Iranian Shi'a clergy has placed most Shi'a adherents within a hateful cocoon hostile to modernism and enlight-

enment, confirming many of the false myths and superstitions, making the individual Shi'a in the position of either latent or active hostility awaiting vengeance against the killers of al-Imam al-Hussain.<sup>15</sup>

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Researchers in those studies have deliberately, and with surprising insistence, thrown intensive investigative light on the subject of “social drama,” which Shi'a fundamentalism has tried to establish as a lived status quo in Shi'a villages and urban neighbourhoods,<sup>16</sup> whether through celebrating all-year-round religious festivals or through employing and exploiting social occasions like marriages or deaths to ruminate tragedy and persecution feelings and establishing them as everyday life routine. It has become, in the words of one of those researchers, a “culture of tears.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, those researchers visiting Bahrain had in front of them a “social drama” enacted on the socio-religious level, represented in the religious rituals held on the day of *'Ashurā*, and other occasions observed continually all year round for the birth or death days of one of the twelve Imams or the female descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The other social drama, however, has a political nature, concentrating on exploiting the religious occasions through projecting the religious past on the daily experienced political presence. The scenes of this drama are often concluded by instigating confrontations and clashes with law-enforcement forces by breaking laws and regulations.

What role is there for those new researchers with their studies during the uproar incidents of these social drama? It can be said that most of these researchers have directed their attention in their studies to either the socio-religious drama or to the socio-political one. Now, the researcher feels that he has a “religious showcase” through which he observes dramatic scenes and increasingly climactic ritual rhetoric, increasingly interspersed with grief speeches, to move on gradually to a wave of weeping and wailing, to self torment by beating chests with fists, beating backs with metal chains, concluding with beating heads with canes and swords to draw blood. After observing this religious drama, a researcher would move on to the “political showcase,” guided by one of his village sponsors, or reporters, to unearth the relationship between the historico-religious personas that performed their positive or negative roles in history and other characters in the present revealed through insinuation by the mullah, the orator, or the reciter throughout the rituals of *'Ashurā* or other occasions; or to observe the

consequences of that political drama whose scenes would be enacted in the form of confrontations championed by the youths who had taken part in the drama, but this time, the confrontations and skirmishes would be with the security forces at village entrances. A few hours later, the researcher, happy with his observations in spite of being exposed to some tear gas during the confrontations, accompanied by his companions and reporters, some of whom had taken part in the scenes of that social, religious, and political drama, to be provided with the necessary explanations of the scenes and what lies beyond the scenes. These sittings could probably be attended by clerics with their white or black turbans to add a touch of joy and charm to the sitting, and we would see the researcher dutifully scribbling what is being said, and even dictated, to him.<sup>18</sup>

The question that comes to one's mind after this intended description of a stereotype field-experience encountered by those researchers is: where does the moral responsibility towards Bahrain's society and culture, which they claim to be studying, lie? The first problem that faces those studies and their writers is that they confirm a typified image of Muslim Shi'a void of scholarly objectivity; they, rather, do great harm to this social constituent of Bahrain. Those researchers have also deliberately turned a blind eye to the real sufferings of this constituent, whether in cities or villages, through the control and hegemony practiced by religious fundamentalism on them through its diverse political, religious, and even social organizations. It can be clearly seen that this practice has the aim of imposing a certain specific cultural identity and way of life derived its general framework and its details from the pattern imposed by the mullahs and the clergy in Islamic Iran, which was subsequently exported to villages and urban quarters in Lebanon and Iraq, which have fallen under the control of pro-Iran Shi'a fundamentalist organizations like Hezbollah, for instance.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of the Bahraini example at hand, those researchers seem to deliberately ignore the state of sharp contradiction the Bahraini Shi'a nationals experience under the predominant control of Shi'a fundamentalism in villages and in the outskirts of towns,<sup>20</sup> amid the teachings of the clergy, social puritanism, cultural deprivation, and the absence of any aspect of leisure and recreation. For instance, there is not even a single shop in these villages and neighbourhoods to sell modern songs and music tapes or CDs; while, on the other hand, these

places abound with tapes of religious speeches and chants known as “*al-Rawadid*” (religious chants mourning the martyrdom of al-Imam al-Hussain) and mobile phone ringing tones, which have become of a religious nature in their majority.<sup>21</sup> Those Western researchers indeed go far in ignoring developments in contemporary social and cultural life in most streets and cities of Bahrain and proceed to picture the state of the Shi’a neighbourhoods as a testimony of the “state of deprivation imposed on the population of the Shi’a villages and quarters,” without, naturally, making any objective remark about who is responsible for that state of deprivation. The burden of responsibility for this is on the shoulders of the Shi’a fundamentalist movement here in Bahrain, which repeats similar experiences made by similar movements in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, as well as experiences by other fundamentalist movements of a different nature in Egypt, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Those researchers seem to insistently keep hidden the fact that a great many of the populace of those villages and quarters, from among those who do not subscribe to the predominant fundamentalist trend, find it necessary to travel abroad during those religious festivals, which are official holidays. They travel to neighbouring Gulf states to escape the miserable state they find themselves in or the confrontations that activists of these fundamentalist movements instigate with the security forces.<sup>23</sup>

### Social Constituents and Transformation:

For research purposes, we shall suppose that the main constituents of the Bahrain society, from the social and cultural viewpoints, in the sociological sense, are: 1) the first constituent known as *al-‘Arab al-Suna* (the Sunni Arabs), 2) the second known as *al-Baḥarna* (the Arab Shi’a), and 3) the third known as *al-‘Ajam* (Shi’a of Persian origin).<sup>24</sup>

*al-‘Arab al-Suna*: It can be noticed that the social transformations experienced by Bahrain ever since the beginning of the twentieth century have contributed to the integration of the Sunni Arab constituent, in all its varieties, in the melting pot of the mother Arab civilization and in its local, cultural symbols embodied in the Gulf identity.<sup>25</sup> We are here then facing a social constituent characterised by increasing internal harmony and perfect integration in the general Arab civilization melting pot as embodied in the Gulf culture and identity; subse-



quently, this constituent has had no problems in its society belonging to the mother one, that of the Arabian Peninsula. Neither does it see in its social or political system any abnormality; that is to say in envisaging the Arab conquest of the land, led by the Khalifa family, as the conquest that rededicated its belonging to the mother Arabian Peninsula, and putting an end to all forms of Persian attempts to dominate it.

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*al-Baharna* (sing. *Bahrani*): As for the second social constituent, customarily called *al-Baharna*, one notices that its speed of integration with local communities in cities and rural areas was accelerating, considering the great numbers of Shi'a Arabs emigrating to Bahrain from al-Qatif, al-Muhammara, and Southern Iraq during the last sixty years of the twentieth century. The most prominent attachment of this constituent was to the Arab civilization and to its mainstream Arabic culture, being led in this by the elites of the *Baharnat al-Manama* (the Baharna of Manama) comprising the traditional merchants, social notables, the intelligentsia, business men, and technocrats, who received their modern education in Bahrain and abroad. Those elites were characterised by the depth of their Arab attachment and by being involved in political action of Arab nationalist nature.<sup>26</sup> A look at the names of some of the political leaders would be enough to ascertain this historical briefing. But then, what happened?

This social constituent witnessed what looked like a social rebellion against its elites, following the Iranian revolution in 1979, which went hand in hand with an ebb in the Arab nationalist movement. This state of affairs led to what looked like the overthrow of the urban leading elite, to be supplanted by another religious elite attached to the rural areas.<sup>27</sup> The Iranian revolutionary leadership was able to absorb this new religious elite that was leading the Shi'a Arab constituent within its project for exporting its Islamic revolution and its project to revivify the Safavid ideology and its concept of *wilayat al-faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) as an alternative for the *Ja'fari* ideology with its *Akhbari* (traditional) school of jurisprudence.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, we have witnessed within the ranks of this Bahraini social constituent political movements and organizations gaining prominence and working side by side with traditional religious institutions, such as *hawzat* (sing. *hawza*, Shi'a religious training centres) and *matam* (mourning centres), towards deepening the gap between this social constituent and the Arab constituent related to the Arab civilization as embodied in the

culture of the Arabian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, and increasingly joining the projects of the new transnational sectarian attachment, embodied, this time, in Iran, the seat of the Guardian Jurist, and in the religious authorities in Iraq. Furthermore, it is worth noticing in this regard that all these transnational religious authorities endowed themselves a halo of exaggerated sanctity amount sometimes the limits of divinity. What impact did this state of affairs have on the constituent under study?

A new and different attachment and identity, based on sectarian belonging first and foremost and above all other considerations, including national attachment, was replacing the original national identity. This new state of affairs put this Arab Shi'a constituent in a state of deep identity crisis, and it was taking place despite the eye-opening calls of some Shi'a clerics as to the dangers latent in that state. That was why it was not surprising to read and hear about the state of "abduction" experienced by members of the Shi'a sect in Bahrain as well as elsewhere, causing much suffering to many of its elites and intellectuals; so much so that the current state is becoming a serious threat to their existence, in the present as well as in the future.

Let us come closer to that state of affairs, by providing some eyewitness experience of the form of hegemonic practices which have been carried out in the Shi'a communities by fundamentalists. In an interview with him in one of the national newspapers, Sheikh Mohsin Ibn Abdul-Hussain Al-Asfoor, a very well known cleric from *Akhbari* school, documents the following: "throughout the last seventeen years, *al-Wafaq* terrorist leaders have bullied and harassed the nonpartisan people who did not show loyalty to them, besides they isolated them in their communities. They have brought the opportunists, that is to say those who follow their ideas and dogma, more closer to them; later they dressed them up with turbans and instituted them as leaders of disorder and terror in the villages ... On the other hand, they fought against the elites and notables in every village and eliminated their social and political role, and instead of that they ordained their loyalist followers as leaders in those communities".<sup>29</sup>

The second testimony in this context, provided by Hassan Abdullah Al-Madni, who is a civic writer; originally comes from Jedhafaz village, and also belongs to the same sect: "The political facades of so many *mawātim*, (*mātam* sing., Shi'a religious centre) are taking the colour-

ings of political parties, the most prominent of which being the posters of Bahraini, Iranian, Iraqi, and Lebanese religio-political leaders, pointing to the political orientation of the organizers and attenders of these gatherings. The battle grew increasingly fiercer in the 1990s between the organizers of these gatherings, which served as a political platform for them, and the opponents to this direction of politicizing this originally religious institution.”<sup>30</sup>

It has become obvious that the diversified methods, coupling solicitations and threats, employed by the new religious and political elites that have taken charge of this social constituent since the Iranian revolution, have worked towards placing that constituent in a state of mythical oppression complex for which the contemporary Arab history and civilization can in no way be held responsible. Iranian revolutionary clerics have been working towards creating a myth of *ahal al-bait* (Prophet Muhammad’s close kins) in an attempt to create a common space between the Persian historical oppression complex used historically to justify the establishment of Safavid Shi’asim and the ideology of the *wilayat al-faqih*. The state of abduction experienced by this social constituent, attempting to divert it from its Arab attachment and identity and deprive it from its inborn right to genuine citizenship, has led to it losing its educated, secular and nationalist, leaderships and elites, a great number of which had had the honour of participating in the building of the modern state ever since the beginnings of the twentieth century. One of the jeopardy of this state of abduction and the absence of civil educated elites has been the possession on the part of the new leaders of the political Shi’a street and public, departing from the villages and moving to the cities, and pushing them into frequent confrontations with the state, on one side, and with other social constituents, on the other. Many of these confrontations, some of which had the character of attempting to create political crises while others tended to mere violence and street fights and terrorism, were steps in a serialized scheme aiming to gradually exhaust the state, weaken its structure, and spread corruption in it, facilitating a final assault at a later stage, emulating similar projects in other Arab societies. The clearest illustration of the current state of this social constituent in Bahrain is probably what happened during the “February Ordeal”, where this social constituent was forcibly pushed into this ordeal in the wake of its abduction by its new elites which put the sectarian loy-

alty and attachment in place of their national belonging. The individual in this social constituent found himself in a state of shock, facing a wall of the other social constituents, wondering whether he was supposed to persevere with his isolationist policy under the effect of the state of mythical oppression complex dedicating sectarian loyalty at the expense of genuine citizenship and national belonging. This constituent now faces a crucial choice and has a dire need, much like other similar Arab social constituents of the Shi'a belonging, to perform full integration in the Arab culture and society, and to stay away from states and powers opposed to the Arab culture and identity that abuse their policies on racial hatred and contempt to the Arabs, especially theocratic state like Iran.

*al- 'Ajam* (**sing.** *'Ajami*): Coming to the third social constituent of the Bahraini society, we can define it as the Shi'a constituent of Persian descent, locally known as *al- 'Ajam*. Unlike the other constituents, *al- 'Ajam* are characterised by a shared and unified ethnic identity, but only in appearance, belonging to ancestors descending from various regions of Iran.<sup>31</sup> However, in factual terms, this constituent is widely diversified and torn by internal differences, due to class-related diverse backgrounds, and ethnic and kinship differentiations. This has made this constituent the least homogeneous and internally integrated of all in Bahrain. The ethnic, sectarian and cultural background of this constituent played a role in making the first generations of its migrants less amenable to integration in the mainstream and overwhelming social constituent. One of the reasons for this lack of integration was the tense and hostile relationship between the country of destination, Bahrain, as a new home country, and the country of origin, Iran, as the old home country. The aggressive and expansionist policies of the various governments that came to power successively in Iran played a role in making this Bahraini social constituent live in a state of doubt in view of the animosity between the old home and the new home countries. This fact is quite obvious to any student of history, that this particular problem has been created by the political recklessness and idiotic policies of the regimes in Iran, starting with the establishment of the Safavid state in the days of Shah Ismael Ibn Haidar in the early sixteenth century, up to the problems created by the present regime of clerics and mullahs. This comes after decades of losing wars with neighbouring states like the Ottomans and the Afghans during the past centuries, through the expansionist ambitions during the Pahlavi

Shah monarchy in the twentieth century, up to new expansionist ambitions of the present regime clothed with the mottos of the Islamic revolution working through the projects for exporting the model of the Islamic revolution of Iran to Arab and Muslim countries, especially those containing Shi'a populations. The question arises here: what does this historical background have to do with the integration problems of this third social constituent in Bahrain?

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In view of these historical problems, the social leaders of the early generations of this constituent chose to follow the practice of isolation and maintained distance from local public affairs in an attempt to keep away from harm. With the passage of time, this attitude helped in entrenching the social and cultural seclusion of the local people of this constituent, contributing further to the slowing of the process of integration in the Arabic cultural milieu of the new home country, thus creating a rift in the cultural conscience, sense of belonging, attachment and cultural identity of this constituent; with a sense of torn citizenship. In view of the historical and social state that this constituent found itself in, thus it has been noticed that the case of ruptured belonging and double identity was transmitted from one generation to another, despite the involvement of later generations in educational programmes and projects sponsored by the state and their joining the employment of public as well as private institutions. In spite of all of this activity, however, a great sector of this constituent remained emotionally distanced from the spiritual and cultural fabric of the Arab culture to which their home country belonged. An indicative sign of this isolationist attitude and practice, and favouring the culture of the ancient ancestors is the leaning towards using the Persian language, in its diverse dialects, over the Arabic tongue; and the continued isolation from Arabic art forms in music and singing generally, and the local forms in particular. This has resulted, for instance, in lack of interest in these forms reaching the extent of aversion towards them. This seclusion, originated by hesitancy and lack of integration, was exacerbated by the elders discouraging their offspring from involvement in these arts, in practice and creation. This is why the student of society and culture in Bahrain will notice the absence of artists and singers practising these arts, whether from the *al-Baḥarna* or *al-'Ajam*.

It would be unfair and unscholarly to generalise in this case without taking into consideration certain individual, and even collective, efforts from members of this constituent to escape the shackles of so-

cial and cultural seclusion, especially keeping in mind that the history of the Bahraini society has been free from bitter racial and sectarian tensions and struggles of the kind experienced by certain societies in the world. On the contrary, the Bahraini society has been governed by friendly relationships among its diverse constituents in the past as well as in the present. Directing this exhaustive light on the details of the integration problems of this constituent, however, only aims to investigate the problems that it suffers from in issues of identity and belonging, and how they reflect in its individuals practising genuine citizenship. We shall notice the negative impact of these problems in certain sectors of this constituent being dragged into sectarian defensive positions with the Shi'a political movement led by the new elite, propounding the idea of a new state taking its inspiration from the Iranian pattern of theocratic rule which is based on the concept of the *wilayat al-faqih*. We shall notice also that the isolationist practice of this Shi'a constituent of Persian origins, keeping its distance from Arabic culture, and its extolling the social and cultural values of the Persian culture, has contributed through successive generations to making it take the same position taken by the other Shi'a constituent, that of Arab origins, in marching behind the projects of the new religious elite taking inspiration from the model of sectarian ideology of the *wilayat al-faqih* and endeavouring towards its implementation on the ground. That was why we saw that the attempts to topple the established elites and values of the traditional Bahraini society taking place in the Arab Shi'a constituent were carried out in the midst of this constituent as well. Thus the same Shi'a religious elite, emanating from the Iranian clerical system, which had taken over the Arab Shi'a constituent, was in control in this constituent as well, despite the mutual historical animosity and contempt between *al-Baharna* and *al-'Ajam*. Thus the transnational and trans-ethnic Safavid religious clergy was put firmly in power in the ranks of both constituents through the ideology of the *wilayat al-faqih* of the emulated jurist. Subsequently, these constituents were linked together to a hierarchical network of clerics headed by the guardian jurist.

### Resisting Fundamentalism

It is worth considering in this respect, having examined the social and historical roots of these constituents of the contemporary Bahraini so-

ciety, to pause and investigate the resistance activities carried out by members of the Shi'a constituents of the Bahraini society, *al-Baharina* as well as *al-'Ajam*, against the hegemonic policies practised by the Iranian clergy through its new elites trained and put in control by the religious training centres (*hawzat*) in Iran and elsewhere. This resistance took various forms: some Arab Shi'a families stood up to the attempts to control the *mātam* that they had worked towards establishing for decades, such as the families of Al-Arayed, Bin Rajab, Al-Mudaif, Al-Asfoor, and other prominent Shi'a families of Manama.<sup>32</sup>

The resistance movement also took religious forms. In one of its forms the *Akhbari* school, traditionally predominant amongst Shi'a Arabs in the eastern Arabian Peninsula, stood up to the hegemony of the *Uṣuli* school (Fundamentalist School), which is known for its Iranian influence which is based on the ideology of the *wilayat al-faqih* as a chief pillar of the *al-ithna 'ashariyyah* (Twelver) Shi'a sect. From among these experiences we mention the stance of the jurists and scholars of the *Akhbari* Ja'fari school in Bahrain, belonging prominent families, such as those clerics from of Al-Asfoor and Al-Mubarak families, and the outstanding role played by Sheikh Salman Al-Madani, and the society of which he was president, Al-Rabi'a Al-Islamiyya (Islamic Association),<sup>33</sup> and the role still being played by Sheikh Mohsin Ibn Abdul-Hussain Al-Asfoor, grandson of the Sheikh Khalaf Al-Asfoor (d. 1934), historically known as one of the senior and most renowned cleric among the *Akhbari* school in Bahrain and the eastern Peninsula.<sup>34</sup> Sheikh Mohsin announced his opposition to the role played by the fundamentalist Shi'a movement represented by Sheikh Issa Qasem and the al-Wefaq society during the incidents of the February Ordeal, viewing it as a representative of Iranian interests and responsible for the sectarian division in the country. He asserted, "Nobody was supposed to be killed, but they created the right atmosphere for the killings then exploited the blood of those who were killed for their own benefit." Consequently, he announced his intention to form an alternative movement that would, in his opinion, be expressive of the Shi'a community.<sup>35</sup> Another obvious example of this resistance movement can be seen in the attitude of an ex-cleric of the Shi'a clergy, Sayyed Dīaa Al-Musawi, who waged severe public criticism against the principles and policies of the Shi'a fundamentalist action on all levels, in Bahrain and elsewhere. He even went to the extent of giving up his religious role as a cleric and adopted an absolutely civil role.<sup>36</sup> These

resistance experiences derived inspiration from such prominent Shi'a clerics as the Lebanese Sheikh Mohsin Al-Amin, Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shamsuddin, Sheikh Ali Al-Amin and Sheikh Subhi Al-Tufyli besides other religious figures in Iraq and Iran. All these experiences were attempts to stand up to the centralized authoritarianism and hegemony practised in Bahrain through the hierarchy on top of which sits the guardian jurist, followed by political and religious organizations that may vary in terms of size and political and religious extremism, but move all in the orbit of the Iranian mullahs and clergy dedicated to the Safavid version of Shi'asim through the system of the *wilayat al-faqih*. In this regard, I quote the testimony of Hassan Abdullah Al-Madani, a writer and son of the late Abdullah Al-Madani, brother of the late Sheikh Suleiman Al-Madani, as cited in his aforementioned article, where he describes the bitterness of his experience: "The struggle reached its peak with the setting fire of the *mātām* of al-Qaaem (al-Imam al-Mahdi) in the neighbourhood of Jadhafs, against the background of the administration of the *mātām* refusing to hand it over to the group that was attempting to get control over the Shi'a street during the 1990s. That incident was alien to the culture of the Bahraini society; in spite of that no Shi'a group condemned it except the group related to Sheikh Suleiman Al-Madani God rest his soul, in addition to a number of Sunni clerics."<sup>37</sup> He proceeds to say in the same article, "The ravishing and abducting of the *mātām* did not stop at the clear religio-political facades taking over, like pure political parties, but, rather, the Hussaini *mātām* platform was shifted to become a propaganda centre for certain political groupings at home as well as abroad, and inciting hatred towards the state and towards independent religious symbols."<sup>38</sup>

Let us move now to a discussion of the other social Shi'a constituent, *al-'Ajam*, to throw light on its experience with this religious tyranny and hegemony. Different forms of resistance have been clearly noticed among *al-'Ajam* constituent against the religious authoritarianism led by the new religious elites and leaders after removing the traditional *al-'Ajam*'s leaders and notables. From among the early experiences of this resistance, we mention that of Kazem Hussain Bushehri, the prominent member of the community, known then as the custodian of *mātām*, confronted the attempts of the *Shirazi* movement, under the leadership of El-Sayyed Hadi Al-Madrassi, in the beginning of



the 1970s, to gain control over the Grand 'Ajam Mātām, thus using it for the religio-political activities of his movement. Kazem Hussain Bushehri stood up to Al-Madrassi and his movement, stating that the *mātām* was a religious place, a *mātām* for Al-Hussain not for politics.<sup>39</sup> The Grand 'Ajam Mātām persisted in its resistance to that hegemony by removing in 1981 all the posters and pictures of religious and political leaders that the Shirazi movement tried to post on the inner walls of the *mātām*.<sup>40</sup>

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The few past decades have witnessed numerous similar experiences, with varied degrees of success and failure, by groups and individuals from other *mātām* attached to the 'Ajam community, in Manama and Muharraq, to stand up to religious hegemony and tyranny imposed upon by the new religious elites. This resistance can also be seen in the outright attitudes expressed by the traditional 'Ajam families, known for their loyalty to the monarchy and the royal family, boycotting all activities held by Shi'a religious and political associations under the control of the new religious elites.<sup>41</sup>

In this regard, we may also mention the work of the Danish anthropologist Thomas Fibiger in his recently published study of *a'shura* in Bahrain. Fibiger is considered one of the numbered European anthropologists who did field anthropological work in the present millennium. In his study, he observes the bitterness experienced by some *mātām* custodians as a result of facing up to the Shi'a fundamentalist organizations and their leaders aiming to exploit their mourning and religious occasions for the benefit of their own anti-state projects, which was putting in jeopardy the religious freedoms enjoyed by the Bahraini Shi'a in practising their rituals, compared to other Gulf States. One of the custodians of these *mātām* says: "I am opposed to using political causes during these occasions ... The opposition here in Bahrain seeks to exploit this occasion to promote its political agenda during a'shura; this is gross error. I have talked with them asking them to leave the ten days of the month of Muharram for al-Imam al-Hussain, they have the rest of the year, 355 days; leave these ten days to us (for mourning and devotions)."<sup>42</sup> In another instance, Fibiger records the manner by which this fundamentalism exploits the incident of the killing of al-Imam Al-Hussain politically by projecting it onto the social and political situation in Bahrain, through using sectarian feelings based on casting the Sunni community, represented by the al-Khalifa

ruling dynasty, as an extension to Mu‘awiya and his son Yazid, misappropriating authority from Shi’a in Bahrain and exposing them to the state of oppression they experience, in the sense that the Shi’a community of Bahrain are an extension to al-Imam Ali and his son al-Hussain!<sup>43</sup>

The Shi’a fundamentalist movement, represented by its new religious elites, has been using all forms of intimidation and inducement against all other Shi’a groupings in Bahrain who challenged the projects of appropriating religious beliefs. Thus we notice that while the Shi’a groups in Bahrain witnessed a recession in moderate orientations based essentially on the roots of attachment to the Arab civilisation and identity, in its strategic depth represented by the Arab Peninsular culture; they experienced a rise in the religious and political militant extremist orientations based on dedicating the authoritarian rule of a single Shi’a reference point related directly with the head of the Iranian hierarchy, the guardian jurist.

### Belonging and Aspired Citizenship

Presently, having had a look at the social roots of the crisis experienced by some social constituents of Bahrain in their belonging and identity and seen what confused practices in citizenship ensue as a result, we face the question: what next? Some of the problems experienced by Bahrain are exported from abroad, and in this case these problems are represented by ideologies and ambitions that come under the broad notion of exporting the Islamic revolution. These are some of the problems that have an adverse impact on Bahrain and other societies that are targeted by the theological regime in Iran for exporting their revolution. In this case, we envisage three types of solution: national, regional, and international, in an attempt to minimize the threat caused by the Iranian regime to the Bahraini society and other Gulf and Arab societies as well.<sup>44</sup>

As for the other Bahraini social constituents, namely the Shi’a, it is about time to work through their educated elites to make a thorough understanding, and a rational awareness too, of the extreme importance of the Arab dimension of the Bahraini identity and the other strategic ones symbolized by the Gulf Cooperation Council headed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the political and historical geography

of Bahrain. Coming to an awareness of this fact would necessarily be followed by another one: that Bahrain, by identity, attachment, and history, belongs to the Arab society and culture, whose as eminent principle has been clearly delineated in the Bahrain constitution. It follows that the Bahraini social constituents should realize that the Arab identity and belonging are the solid bases on which the Bahraini identity are constituted, in addition to the all-embracing Gulf identity that drives its roots. Based on this fact, it is the responsibility of the members of the educated elites of the *Baharna* and 'Ajam social constituents, that were subjected in the last few decades to several attempts to sweep them away from the natural state of the constants of the Arab Gulf society, and on which Bahrain has been established; it is their responsibility to liberate themselves from the captivation of the theological hegemony of the clergy and mullahs in Iran. It is this later regime which is trying to use any Shi'a group in the Gulf, or the Arab World, in its power and regional struggle, and its exhausted plans to export its version of Islamic revolution.

The Arab nation, to which the Bahraini society belongs, expects from all its social constituents to continue their contribution to the ingenuity of Arab culture and civilization with creative production in the fields of thought, literature, art, and culture, exactly as has been the case since the ancient times: Bahrain will never be, anything other than an Arab and a Gulf nation; whoever chooses to take residence on its land will have to accept this reality and constants; which will continue to shape the basic feature of the Bahraini personality and identity, and to be the chief condition for genuine citizenship in it.

## Conclusion

One of the consequence of the February Ordeal is probably the self examination that all Bahraini social constituents should undertake, aiming to assess their role in the building of the modern state in general, and in the political and democratic reform process embarked on some decade ago in particular. The February Ordeal not only proved the orderliness of the democratic process based on the principles of justice, freedom, and equality, but also demonstrated the fact that there is no way to accomplish all this and to safeguard the people's gains without a firm security system that would protect both society and state.<sup>45</sup>

The ten years that have elapsed of the democracy and the reform process have shown some failures and shortcomings in implementation, which calls for revision and quick intervention to rectify the process. Some of these failures could have provided the reason for, or justification for the continuation of, the members of these constituents and their elites reneging on the constants of the Bahraini society and the main pillars agreed upon by all constituents of the Bahraini society as represented in either the National Charter Action or the constitution. It is worth our while to cite some of these revisions and historically indispensable positions:

First: the need of the Bahraini people, in all its constituents, to proceed with peaceful coexistence in the light of the National Charter Action and the constitution through the coming decades, thus to plant firmly through practice and across successive generations the values of freedom, justice, and equality; in addition to the practice of genuine citizenship. It should be noted also that this state could not be attained and securely achieved without a firm security system to safeguard the gains of the society and provide safety and decent living to all the constituents of the society.

Second: working towards the revision of the standing law of political associations, in the light of the failures in implementation during the past ten years, especially with regard to allowing the establishing of political associations on religious or sectarian bases. It follows from this that the current law should be amended, or a new law should be enacted to put an end to the obstructive state of affairs we have reached; the new legislation should prohibit mixing political and religious activity.

Third: quick measures have to be taken to put an end to all forms of practices going against laws and regulations governing the public opinion institutions, which have led to the establishing of media institutions on religious or sectarian grounds, and working to put firm legislations criminalizing such practices. Fourth: revising various legislations concerned with religious institutions to subject them to clear legal regulations in terms of their numbers and areas of activity besides the scope and places of practising religious devotions. Probably the most prominent field that has to be kept under close scrutiny is that related to the content of the religious discourse and the extent of its commitment to the constants and national values of the society and the laws and regulations in the kingdom, to ensure keeping this

discourse away from the ongoing conflicts and from intervening in the public life and the civil liberties of citizens and expatriates abiding by laws and regulations.



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## Notes

- 1 A great part of this paper has been based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in many places in Bahrain, and among various social constituencies, during the years between 2002-11. I take this opportunity to thank all men and women from those constituencies: 'Arab Suuni, Baharna, and 'Ajam, who have been very helpful and generous to me, and above all patient enough to answer my demanding questions. I would also like to express my gratitude to my colleagues at the Centre for Historical Studies, University of Bahrain, and many other friends from outside the University, whose remarks and comments on this paper during its different phases, were of the utmost importance in the development of its arguments. However, the responsibility for everything being said or expressed in the paper is solely mine.
- 2 Unlike those commonly used terms mentioned above, the author inclines to use the term «February Ordeal», *aḥdath febrayer*, since it is the one which has been widely used by all members of social constituents in Bahrain. The author's usage of the term in this context is based on an anthropological perspective, which gives preference to the indigenous views and culture. As such, the usage in this context transcends those widely used terms in contemporary writings, of which their political, ideological and media intentions are neither hidden, nor ambiguous for the critical readers.
- 3 *al-Wafaq* is short term for *Jam'iyat al-Wifāq al-Watānī al-Islāmīyah*, (Al-Wafaq National Islamic Society). Other Shi'a political groups in Bahrain include: *Haq, al-Wafa, Amal, al-Khalas*.
- 4 For an illustration of the Sunni constituent's reaction to the February Ordeal, see the study carried out by Tora Tyssen on Sahwat al-Fateh: Tora S.Tyssen (2012), *The Awakening of a Sunni Street A Study of Causes and Consequences of Sunni Muslim Street Mobilization in Bahrain*, MA Thesis: University of Oslo.
- 5 One should draw attention to an exception in this respect which is the scholarly effort made by Baqquer Salman Al-Najjar, a sociologist from Bahrain, whose early studies and research in the Islamic movements and groups in the Arabian Gulf region played an important role in revealing significant aspects of its social and political role. Also, one should mention the recent scholarly effort made by Mitchell, a European scholar, on studying the impacts of Shi'a Fundamentalism on the political development and democracy in Bahrain, see: Baqer S. Al-Najjar (2007), *alḥarkat al-dynīah fī al-khaleej al-a'rabi* (Religious

Movements in the Arabian Gulf), Beirut: Dar al-Saqi; (2009) *al-Bahrain fi zil al-niza aldhi yahīṭah* ((Bahrain in Light of the Surrounded Conflicts), Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.

Mitchell A. Belfer (2014), *Small State, Dangerous Region: A Strategic Assessment of Bahrain*, Frankfurt and Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford.

- 6 Regarding methods of spreading and promotion of false and fictitious information, and politically employing them in the media, see Belfer' study on how Shi'a fundamentalism in Bahrain and its political associations, such as *al-wafaq* and others, as well as its editors and journalists in the local press, continue to tell lies about the demographic structure of Bahrain and thus claiming superiority number as compared to the Sunnis'. Also, to disseminate a distorted information on the persecution of Shi'ite "majority" by the Sunni "minority", besides the policies and acts of discrimination "committed against them". We have a typical example provided here by Belfer in the role played for example by Mansoor al-Jamri, the editor-in-chief of Al-Wasat newspaper, who according to Belfer played a very damaging role in disseminating sectarian ideas and values which were very harmful to the present and future relations between known continuities and social fabrics in Bahrain, see:

Mitchell A. Belfer (2013) 'Demographic Warfare: Editor's Policy Analysis.' *Central European Journal of International & Security Studies*, 7, 1: 4-19.

Mansoor Al-Jamri (2010), 'Shia and the State in Bahrain: Integration and Tensions,' *Alternative Politics*. Special Issue, 1: 1-24.

- 7 See in this regard, the view which has been expressed by some Western researchers, e.g. Mitchell Belfer and Ali Alfoneh, and also that of Bahraini authors e.g. Tariq Al-Amer and Khalid Hejres, on the systematic media role played by the Iranian government and Hezbollah in Lebanon against Bahrain state and society during February Ordeal, until current days, and the relationship between those activities and Shi'a fundamentalism and its leaders in Bahrain.

Mitchell A. Belfer (2014), *Small State, Dangerous Region: A Strategic Assessment of Bahrain*, Frankfurt and Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford.

Mitchell A. Belfer (2011), 'Iran's Bahraini Ambitions', *The Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2011.

Ali Alfoneh (2012), 'Between Reform and Revolution: Sheikh Qassim, the Bahraini Shi'a, and Iran,' *American Enterprise Institute for Public Research*, No. 4, July 2012.

Tariq Al-Amer and Khalid Hejres (2011), *ab 'ād al-ḥaqīqa: arb 'ta 'shar Febrayr, ukdhubat thawra*, (Dimensions of Truth: 14th February, a False Revolution, Bahrain: Manama Printing.

- 8 In this regard, one should draw attention, for example, to the work published by the Arab-American anthropologist, el-Sayed el-Aswad, who although contributed significantly to the anthropology of ritual symbolism among the Shi'a of Bahrain, his article, on the other hand, can be considered as an example when it comes to the misinformed historical statements which he reiterates. By relying on some misleading materials recently published by some of his Western sources, he, and some of his colleagues, relied on falsified information such as stating: "that the Arab pop-

ulation of Bahrain were exclusively Shi'a, and were conquered by a Sunni dynasty; the family of Al-Khalifa in the year 1783, who removed them from power." It is immensely surprising here that these historical fallacies are cited in this work, and in other works too, despite the availability of credible, reliable and well-known historical sources such as: John G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*; Fuad I. Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain*. Especially that el-Aswad had already quoted them in other occasions. For those later works speak directly about the Arab ruler, Sheikh Nasser Al-Madhkur, from al-Matareesh, an Arab tribal leader who happened to reside at that time in Bushehr, a coastal town in Fars province in Iran. As a matter of fact, none of the well known and widely recognized historical sources have mentioned that Bahrain was governed by an Arab Shi'a ruler, *Bahrani*, from Bahrain?! See:

el-Sayed el-Aswad (2010), 'The Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology: Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 5,2, p. 61.

Louary Bahry (2000), 'The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain,' *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 1, 3, p. 133.

Clive Holes (2005), *Dialect, Culture, and Society in Eastern Arabia* (Volume 2: Ethnographic Texts. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, p. 145.

Laurence Louër (2008), *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 16.

John G. Lorimer (1908-15), *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing (republished by Gregg International, Westmead, England, 1970).

Fuad I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in a Arab State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 23-34.

- 9 It is believed that works, such as: *The Shia Revival*, *Transnational Shia Politics* and *Reaching for Power*, are among the most influential ones which have been consulted for quite a few years in making Western foreign policy, and researchers, toward Shi'a politics in the Gulf and Arab World, see:

Vali Nasr (2007), *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, New York: Norton.

Laurence Louër (2008), *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Yitzhak Nakash (2006), *Reaching for Power: The Shi'a in the Modern Arab World*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Louary Bahry (2000), 'The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain,' *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 1, No. 3: 129-143.

- 10 The two most noteworthy works in this regard, which are frequently quoted by other researchers, are:

Vali Nasr (2007), *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, New York: Norton., and Laurence Louër (2008), *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press.

With regard to researchers in the Gulf area, attention is to be drawn to the works of Madawi Al-Rashid, a Saudi anthropologist, who, in her writings and studies, drifted to side with the Islamic fundamentalist movements, Sunni as well as Shi'a, especially those antagonistic to the Saudi ruling fam-

ily and government, without the least scholarly objectivity expected from a well-known researcher like her; so much so that her writings came to reflect what can be described as a politically neurosis one. Among the recent argument and widely established in the Western media, which has been adopted too by Al-Rashid, is the one which contends that the ruling families and governments in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain resorted to sectarianism as a weapon against any form of uprising during the «Arab Spring» waves which swept the Arab World. Thus, according to Al-Rashid and Western media, the the regimes in these countries have used the fear of Suni of the Shi'a, by threatening the former of the later's religious and sectarian relationship with the theological regime in Iran!!

As a result of these kind of arguments, Al-Rashid has found herself becoming more and more as advocate and instigator of any «revolution» against the Saudi government and ruling family, al-Saud, rather than supposedly objective and sober anthropologist and academic. See for example her publications on the Shi'a fundamentalism in the eastern region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as compared to a more objective ones, such as that of Al-Ibrahim and Sadiq's:

Madawi Al-Rasheed (2011), 'Sectarianism as Counter-Revolution: Saudi Responses to the Arab Spring', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 11, 3: 513-526; (1998), 'The Shia of Saudi Arabia: A Minority in Search of Cultural Authenticity', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25, 1: 121-138.

Bader Al-Ibrahim and Al-Sadiq Muhammad (2013), *al-hiraq al-shi'yi fi al-Sa'udiya* (Shia' Mobility in Saudi), Bierut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing.

- 11 Probably among the oldest anthropological studies containing such misleading generalizations, coupled with gross historical and ethnological inaccuracies, was the study which was conducted by the Danish anthropologist, Henny Hansen, on the status of women in the Bahraini village of Sar in the beginning of 1960s. From among the inaccuracies in this study was the statement that the population of Sar descend from Persian origins, coming to Bahrain during the Sassanid period! See my critical study of Hansen's work in this regard, and my other studies on the Danish anthropological experiences in the Arabian Gulf. As for the contemporary studies which, in turn, have produced and spread similar, incorrect sociological and historical generalizations, we may mentioned the ones of el-Sayed el-Aswad, Thomas Fibiger, Anke Reichenbach & Fatema Hashem, Laurence Louër, Louary Bahry, and Toby Mattiesen. As for the most obvious of these sort of studies, is the one of Justin Gengler, for despite its effort to present itself as objective and sober academic, the reality was different: it adopted and defended all the political agenda of the Shi'a fundantalism, see:

Henny H. Hansen (1968), *Investigations in a Shi'a Village in Bahrain*, Copenhagen: The National Museum of Denmark.

Abdullah A. Yateem (2005), 'al-anthropologiyon al-dinamarkyn fi al-khaleej al-'Aabi: Haney Hensen namudjan,' (Danish Anthropologists in the Arabian Gulf: The Case of Henny Harald Hansen), *Journal of Social Affairs*. (UAE). Vol. 22, No. 88: 101-138.

Abdullah A. Yateem (2010), *al-anthropologiya al-urubya wa al-sharq al-aw-sat: al-namudhaj al-dinamarky*,



(European Anthropology and the Middle East: The Danish Example), *Journal of Social Affairs*. (UAE). Vol. 27, No. 107: 37-64.

el-Sayed el-Aswad (2010), 'The Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology: Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 5,2: 59-76.

Thomas Fibiger (2010), 'Ashura in Bahrain: Analyses of an Analytical Event', *Social Analysis*, 54, 3: 29-46.

Anke Reichenbach and Fatema Hashem (2005), "'Only a Third of a Banana". Dirty Joking as an Attempt to Maintain dignity', *Anthropos*. Bd. 100, H. 1: 73-89.

Laurence Louër (2008), *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Louary Bahry (2000), 'The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shiite Opposition in Bahrain,' *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 1, No. 3: 129-143.

Toby Mattesen (2013), *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Spring That Was'nt*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Justin Gengler (2001), *Ethnic Conflict and Political Mobilization in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf*, Diss, The University of Michigan.

- 12 Unlike Baqer Al-Najjar's scholarly effort, mentioned earlier, on observing the effect of Shi'a fundamentalism on Bahrain's society and culture and its negative consequences, others authors such as Nader Kazem and Ali Al-Dairy, have also tried to understand that problem; each of course in his own way. There were hopes that these two authors would make use of their academic and critical tools to bring about a useful critique on the thought and practice of the Shi'a fundamentalism and its role in the daily life of the ordinary Shi'a. The result, however, was a very disappointing one. Nader, for instance, has unfortunately presented in his (*isti' malat al-dhakira*) a historical perspective based on aggravating that historical persecution complex of the Shi'a individual in Bahrain throughout history; however, his writings do not include any critical reading of the Shi'a clergy. Whereas, Al-Dairy, on the other hand, has kept muddling in (*kharij al-tayfa*) with his existential experience with his own Shi'a sect, avoiding any serious engagement with problems created by the fundamentalists for the ordinary Shi'a; either at the sectarian, identity and citizenship levels. Having learned much from well known thinkers such as Muhammad Arkon and Ali Shari'ti, it was expected that Al-Dairy would establish his own critique by tackling the political experience left over by these religious movements in their way to gain more power and authority, so that to confront the identity and citizenship at the national level. He, instead, went in hurry to blame the state "for not letting the religious and sectarian groups live alone with their own culture and lives". He thought, it would have been better had the state left the Shi'a with their own "exceptional culture and sentiment"!!

There is still hope that these two serious academic writers, would present a rather more useful critical standpoint in this regard. For further details, see my elaborate critique in this regard:

Abdullah A. Yateem (2013), *al-Uşulya al-Shi'a fi al-Bahrain: man yajru 'alā naqdah?'* (The Shi'a

Fundamentalism in Bahrain: Who Dares to Criticize it?, *Al-Ayam*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 8896-8897, 18-19 August 2013.

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Nader Kazem (2008), *isti' malat al-dhakira fi mujtama' ta' addudi muhtala bil tarikh* (Usages of Memory in a Pluralistic Society Afflicted by History), Bahrain: Maktabat Fakhrawi.

Ali A. Al-Dairy (2011), *kharij al-ṭayfa* (Out of the Sect), Madarik: Dubai.

- 13 These studies, for example, erroneously repeat circular information taken from each other, without the least effort to check new states of affairs or the transformations that took place in the Bahraini Shi'a community. For instance, they assert that the «traditional Akhbari jurisdiction school» is dominant in the Bahraini Shi'a community; which does not conform to the actual state of affairs going on for more than three decades, as this school has been removed from dominance by the «Uṣuli/ fundamentalist school» supported by the clergy in Iran and Iraq that holds up the concept of *wilayat al-faqih*. Worthy of notice here is the fact that most of these studies derive their information from the study of Fuad Khuri, the Lebanese anthropologist, who did his field work in Bahrain in the early years of 1970s. This shows how such pieces of information are regurgitated without taking the trouble of checking their accuracy, see:

el-Sayed el-Aswad (2010), "The Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology: Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a", *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 5, 2: p. 61.

Fuad I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in a Arab State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bahry, L. "The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shia Opposition in Bahrain," (2000).

Laurence Louër (2008), *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 19.

- 14 Attention is to be drawn here to the attempts of the Bahraini Shi'a cleric Sheikh Issa Qasem – supported by fundamentalist Shi'a organizations, such as: *al-Wafaq*, *Amal*, *Haq*, *al-Khalas*, *al-Wafa*, and also the Islamic Scholars Council, *al-Majlis al-Almaay* – in placing all kind of obstacles against the Parliament and the Supreme Council for Women towards issuing new and modern legislations concerning woman's rights and family affairs, known as the «family law.» To be noted here also is the fact that the role being played by Sheikh Issa Qasem, currently, is a continuation of his past reactionary attitudes since the 1970s when he was a member of parliament where he fought hard towards issuing legislations prohibiting mixing between male and female university students, and prohibiting women seeking medical treatment with male doctors. He even, along with his colleagues in the religious block, stood against the presence of women in the *al-Wafaq* administrative council, or even allowing women to stand for general elections. In this regard, see the works of Baqer S. Al-Najjar and the study by Jane Kinninmonta, which documented the roles played by sheikh Issa Qasem and other clerics from the Shi'a fundamentalist movement, like Sayyed Alawi Al-Gharifi, Sayyed Abdullah Al-Gharifi, Hussain Najati, and Sayyed Jawad Al-Wada'i, in standing against the attempts to issue a unified national family law in Bahrain. Other studies, such as that of Alfoneh and Bahrainliberals, have also documented the role of Issa Qasem and other clerics, supported by Shi'a clergies in Iran, in hijacking the liberal and democratic transformations in Bahrain since the 1970s and converting its movements and mobility into a sectarian direction:

- Baqer S. Al-Najjar (2007), *alḥarkat al-dyniah fi al-khaleej al-a‘rabi* (Religious Movements in the Arabian Gulf), Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.
- Jane Kinninmonta (2011), 'Framing the Family Law: A Case Study of Bahrain's Identity Politics', *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 1,1: 53-68.
- Ali Alfoneh (2012), 'Between Reform and Revolution: Sheikh Qassim, the Bahraini Shi'a, and Iran,' *American Enterprise Institute for Public Research*, No. 4, July 2012. Bahrainliberals (2013), 'Shaikh Isa Qassim and the 1970s' Syndrome,' <http://bahrainliberals.com/editorial-team/shaikh-isa-qassim-and-the-1970s-syndrome/26/7/2013>.
- 15 The reader may refer to the most obvious studies in this regard:  
el-Sayed el-Aswad (2010), 'The Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology: Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 5, 2: 59-76.  
Thomas Fibiger (2010), 'Ashura in Bahrain: Analyses of an Analytical Event', *Social Analysis*, 54, 3: 29-46.  
Laurence Louër (2008), *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, New York: Columbia University Press.  
Bahry, L., "The Socioeconomic Foundations of the Shia Opposition in Bahrain," (2000).
- 16 My discussion of the concept of «social drama» in this context is based on the anthropological concept formulated by Victor Turner, see:  
Victor Turner (1974), *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 17 In this regard, see: el-Sayed el-Aswad (2010), 'The Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology: Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 5, 2, p. 68.
- 18 Attention is drawn in this regard to some new, serious and critical efforts which have recently provided a different scholarly perspective, compared with stereotype ones on the Bahrain case and on the role of Shi'a fundamentalism, see in this matter Belfer's study:  
Mitchell A. Belfer (2014), *Small State, Dangerous Region: A Strategic Assessment of Bahrain*, Frankfurt and Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford.
- 19 This being the case, it should not be surprising to see Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as the guardian jurist, and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, standing by Shi'a fundamentalism in Bahrain in its spearheading of the violence and destruction campaign during the «Bahrain February Ordeal.» This movement was also supported by the Iraqi religious authority Ayatollah Ali Sistani, along with others, who refrained from showing any support to the popular movements demanding democracy in either Syria or Iran. For details on this, see:  
Al-Sayyed Zahra (2011), *Iran wa al-Bahrain ... ḥudud al-lu'ba* (Iran and Bahrain ... Frontiers of the Game), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12198, 16 August 2011.  
Mehdi Khalaji (2011), 'Iran's Policy Confusion About Bahrain', *Real Clear World*, Jun 28. <http://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2011/06/28>.
- 20 In contradiction with these researchers and their studies, we see the critical conclusions of the Bahraini sociologist Baqer S. Al-Najjar, in which he criticizes the dangerous socio-political roles played by Shi'a fundamentalism in Bahrain, whether through their known religious leaders or through

their political and religious organizations such as: *al-Wefaq*, *Amal*, and other extremist movements like *Haq* and *al-Wafa*, *al-Khalas*, and also the Islamic Scholars Council, *al-Majlis al- 'Almaay* in his article «*al-Islam al-siyasi al-Shi'a: qiraat al-hala al-Bahrainia*» (Shi'a Political Islam: A Reading in the Bahraini Case), in:

Baqer S. Al-Najjar (2007), *al-harkat al-dyniah fi al-khaleej al-a' rabi* (Religious Movements in the Arabian Gulf), Beirut: Dar al-Saqi, pp. 62-84.

Baqer S. Al-Najjar (2011), *taqdim, Ali Ahmed Al-Dairy, kharij al-tayfa* ("Introduction" to Ali Ahmed Al-Dairy, *Out of the Sect*), pp. 11-22.

- 21 It is worth noticing here the refraining of most of the cultural writers, from among Shi'a adherents, while belonging to modernist trends in thought and literature in the Bahraini press, from standing up to the religious clergy, or even writing about it, so as to enlighten the public about its social and political intimidation for the public life. To be excepted from such stance, however, is the significant role played by some progressive writers like Aqil Siwar and Samira Rajab. Also, some others writers who emerged from the furnace of experiences of facing the tyranny of the fundamentalist Shi'a clergy, such as Hassan Abdullah Al-Madani and Sayyed Daa Al-Musawi. See authors' treatment of this phenomenon in the Bahraini context:

Yateem, A. A., *al-Uşulya al-Shi'a fi al-Bahrain: man yajru ' 'alā naqdah?* (The Shi'a Fundamentalism in Bahrain: Who Dares to Criticize it?), (2013).

- 22 It is important to pause here for a while, and look at the social and political catastrophic consequences resulted from, e.g. the ruling clerical oligarchy on the Iranian society and state, or that of the Hezbollah's experience in ruling some towns and districts which came under his direct control during the civil war in Lebanon. See, for instance, the social and cultural remains of that experience in B'alabak, the most renowned city of its time.

Saeed Rahnema (2011), 'Retreat and Return of the Secular in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 31, 1: 34-45.

Daryoush Ashouri (2011), 'Creeping Secularism,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. 31, 1: 46-52.

Hazem Saghiyeh and Besan al-Shaikh (2013), 'Ba' labak: bawabat Suriya wa harbah,' (B'alabak: A Gateway for Syria and its Wars), *al-Hayat*, Newspaper: London, 30-31 July & 1 August 2013.

- 23 Worthy of consideration here is the perspective held by one of the Arab Sunni leaders, Sheikh Abul-Latif Al-Mahmoud, of the trend of events during the 'February Ordeal,' indicating the negative state of affairs created by the leaders of what is termed 'creative anarchy' by aggravating the problematic of citizenship, belonging, and identity amongst some components of the Bahraini community. I refer the interested reader to the views and writings of some Sunni writers and activists who published their views in the crisis, see:

Abdul-Latif Al-Mahmoud (2011), '*muqabala ma'a shaikh Abdul-Latif Al-Mahmoud hawal awadh' fi*

*al-Bahrainin fi Febrayir wa fikrat insha tajmua' al-wuhih al-wataniya,* ( Interview with Sheikh Dr Abdul-Latif Al-Mahmoud on the Conditions in Bahrain in February and the Idea of Establishing the National Unity Gathering", *Al-qyam*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 8057, 2 May 2011.

Al-Amer, T., & Hejres, K, *ab 'ād al-ḥaqiqa: arb 'ta 'shar Febrayir, ukdhubat*

*thawra*,

(Dimensions of Truth: 14th February, a False Revolution, (2011).

Ghasan Al-Shahabi (2013), *ḥarak al-Bahrain, fi: al-Khalij we al-rabi' al-'Arabi*, ("Political Mobility in Bahrain", in The Gulf and the Arab Spring: Religion and Politics.

- 24 Despite the fact that there are no published official percentage estimates of these constituents, according to a private unpublished study done by a research team in the Central Informatics Organization on the population structure of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the estimated percentage for Sunni Bahrainis stood at 51% and that of the Shi'a at 49%, see: Central Informatics Organization (2011), '*al-tarkiba al-sukkaniyya fi mam-lakat al-bahrain: dirasa baḥṯhiyya ḥawl al-takwin al-ṭaaifi*,' (Population structure in the Kingdom of Bahrain: A Research study on the Sectarian Composition), *Al-ayam*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 8121, 5 July 2011.
- 25 For further socio-historical details on the Arabi Sunni, see: Abdullah A. Yateem (2013), '*al-judhur al-ijtima'iyya lil nukhab al-bahrainia: muqaraba thropologiyya*,' (The Social Roots of Bahraini Elites: A Historical Anthropology Perspective), *Al-Bahrain Al-Thaqafia*. Bahrain. Vol. 20, No. 71: 9-30.
- 26 In this regard, see some of the information about the *Baharana* elites of Manama cited in the works of Fuad Khuri and Abdul-Karim Al-'Arid: Fuad I. Khuri (1980), *Tribe and State in Bahrain: The Transformation of Social and Political Authority in a Arab State*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Abdulkarim A. Al-Arayed (2007), *madinat al-manama khilal khamsat qoroun* (The City of Manama during Five Centuries), Bahrain & Beirut: *wazart al-ia'lam wa almuasash al-'rbia lildirasat wa al-nashar*. Abdulkarim A. Al-Arayed, *nafidha a'la al-ṭarikh: bait al-a'rayed* (A Window to History: The Household of Al-Arid), Bahrain, n.d.
- 27 Kazem, N., *isti'malat al-dhakira fi mujtama' ta'addudi muftala bil tarikh* (Usages of Memory in a Society Afflicted by History), (2008), p. 149.
- 28 For a detailed account, see: Al-Najjar, B. S., *al-Bahrain fi zil al-niza' aldhi yahitah* (Bahrain in Light of the Surrounded Conflicts), (2009).
- 29 See the interview with: Sheik Mohsin Al-Asfoor (2013), '*harabat al-Wafaq al-wajaha and wa al-ayan fi kul qarya wa qdat ala durhim fi al-hayat al-siyyh wa al-ejtima ya*,' (*al-Wafaq* bullied and harassed the elites and notables in every village and eliminated their social and political role), *Al-ayam*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No. 8851, 4 July 2013.
- 30 Hassan A. Al-Madani (2011), *al-mātaem laisat dakakin siyasiya aw hizbiyyeh*, (Mourning Gatherings are not Political or Party Shop Houses), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12095, 5 May 2011. Noteworthy in this regard also are data and references in the anthropological study cited below, which may not have been purposefully meant by the researcher, but, nevertheless, reveal the actual role played by this kind of religious culture in the real life, through the festivities of 'Ashurā and other occasions, in spreading feelings of hatred against the «other,» through displaying the oppressiveness suffered by the Shi'a sect in its entirety, starting with the martyrdom of Al-Hussain, and is still going on today. It is the «culture of tears» in the words of one of the witnesses, El-Sayed el-Aswad, see: el-Sayed el-Aswad (2010), 'The Perceptibility of the Invisible Cosmology:

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Yateem

- Religious Rituals and Embodied Spirituality among the Bahraini Shi'a', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, 5, 2, p. 68.
- 31 For socio-historical description of the Persian immigrant community, in general, and the *al-'Ajam* social constituent, in particular, in Manama, see: Nelida Fuccaro (2005), 'Mapping the Transnational Community: Persians and the Space of the City in Bahrain, c. 1869-1937', In Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.) *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*, London: Routledge, pp. 39-58.
- James Onley (2005), 'Transnational Merchants in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf: The Case of the Safar Family', In Madawi Al-Rasheed (ed.), *Transnational Connections and the Arab Gulf*. London: Routledge, pp. 59-90.
- 32 These resistance experiences against the hegemonic and tyrannical practices by the Shi'a fundamentalist movement in Bahrain over villages and popular neighborhoods in Bahrain are not much different from similar experiences in Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq. In this regard, see the summaries of the prominent American anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, the sociologist Baqer S. Al-Najjar, and the Lebanese writer Hazem Saghiyeh: Marshall Sahlins (2011), 'Iraq: The State-of-Nature Effect', *Anthropology Today*, 27,3: 26-31.
- Baqer S. Al-Najjar (2007), *alḥarkat al-dyniah fi al-khaleej al-a' rabi* (Religious Movements in the Arabian Gulf), Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.
- Hazem Saghiyeh (2009), *nawaṣeb wa rawafed: mulahazat 'amma fi al-siyasa* (Sunnis and Shia': General Remarks in Politics), Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.
- Hazem Saghiyeh (2011), '*tajjanub ayyi Iraq?*' (Avoiding Which Iraq?), *al-Hayat*, Newspaper: London, Issue No 17658, 9 August 2011.
- 33 For more details and illustrations of the resistance movements against religious tyranny, see the following sources:
- Al-Najjar, B. S., *al-Bahrain fi zil al-niza' aldhi yaḥiṭah* ((Bahrain in Light of the Surrounded Conflicts), (2009).
- Al-Najjar, B. S., *alḥarkat al-dyniah fi alkhaleej al-'arabi* (Religious Movements in the Arabian Gulf), (2007).
- Hassan A. Al-Madani (2011), *raḥal Al-Madani ... man yajru al-yawm ala 'la-kalam*, (Al-Madani Has Departed ... Who Dares to Speak Today), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12052, 23 March 2011.
- Hassan A. Al-Madani (2011), *mata nashab al-bisat min taht arjul al-mutajirin bi alamina*, (When Shall We Pull the Rug from under the Feet of those Who Exploit Our Pains), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12081, 21 April 2011.
- Rasool Hujair (2001), '*laqad fashiltum, fastaqilou*, (You Have Failed, So Step Down), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12082, 22 April 2011.
- 34 During the months after the February 2011 events, the number of Shi'a clerics opposed to fundamentalist Shi'a ideology multiplied in Bahrain; in addition to Sheikh Mohsin Al-Asfoor, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Muqabi intensified his resistance to this fundamentalism, especially that represented by the hegemonic power of Sheikh Issa Qasem and other Shi'a fundamentalist organizations attached to the *Shirazi* movement, most extreme fundamentalist group belonging to *Uṣuli* school which is pro-Iran and adhering to the ideology of the *wilayat al-faqih*, such as: *Al-Wefaq, Amal, Haq, al-*

- Khalas, al-Wafa, and al-Majlis al- 'Almaay.*
- 35 See Sheikh Mohsin Al-Asfoor's statements to Bahraini and foreign press: Sheik Mohsin Al-Asfoor (2011), 'Pro-government Cleric to start own Opposition Party in Bahrain', *The Washington Times*, August 9, 2011. Sheik Mohsin Al-Asfoor (2011), '*saaunshi haraka siyasiyya jadida taqoud al-intikhabat al-qadi ma, Al-Wefaq tumathil al-mithal sl-saleh lill-masaleh al-Iraniyya wa ladayha agen da tadmiriyya*,' (I will found a new political movement to participate in the coming elections, Al-Wefaq is the ideal representative for Iranian interests and has a destructive agenda), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12192, 10 August 2011. Sheik Mohsin Al-Asfoor (2012), '*tayyar Al-Wefaq majmu' t 'isabat tatafan-nan bi asalib al-tarhib wa al-takhrub wa al-baltaja*,' (The al-Wefaq current is a collection of gangs mastering the methods of bullying, destruction, and thuggery), *Al-Bilad*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 1447, 30 September 2012. Sheik Mohsin Al-Asfoor (2013), '*al-Wafaq telbas qina' al-tashya' likhida' al-buštaa*,' (The *al-Wefaq* wears the Shia mask so that can deceive the simple people), *Al-ayam*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 8848-8849-8850, 1-3 July 2013.
- Worthy of notice here is the fact that the extremist political and sectarian character of Al-Wefaq National Islamic Society that came out clearly during the Bahrain February Ordeal is but the outcome of ideological and political nature of that society that derives its teachings and instructions from the Bahraini Shi'a authority of Sheikh Issa Qasem, who, in his turn, is known for his attachment to the guardian jurist in Iran and its religious and political system. This same diagnosis of *Al-Wefaq* has been reached by one of the serious students of Shi'a Islam in Bahrain, see: Al-Najjar, B. S., *alḥarkat al-dyniah fi al-khaleej al- 'arabi* (Islamic movements in the Arabian Gulf), (2007), pp. 62-84.
- 36 Sayyed Diaa Al-Musawi totally relinquished his religious role and immersed in civil action as a cultural figure in protest against the Shi'a fundamentalist movement, to the degree of giving up his traditional religious attire, which distinguishes Shi'a clerics, and taking up a modern western outfit.
- 37 Hassan A. Al-Madani (2011), *al-mātaem laisat dakakin siyasiya aw hizbiyyeh*, (Mourning Gatherings are not Political or Party Shop Houses), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12095, 5 May 2011. It is worth mentioning on this occasion the fact that there are other separate incidents that exemplify the movement of Shi'a resistance against the new Shi'a fundamentalism. The experience of Sheikh Suleiman Al-Madani in standing up to the hegemony practised by Shi'a fundamentalism in Bahrain was a clear example of this struggle; it was also one of the facets of the struggle between the local traditional *Akhbari* school and the «imported» fundamentalism, represented in this case in the *Uṣuli* school. Another example of the ongoing struggle is the incident involving some leaders of the fundamentalist movement protesting against the appointment of Sheikh Moussa Al-Oraibi as imam of the mosque of the Tublee neighbourhood in

2004, in an attempt to take control of that mosque.

Through its militant Shirazi movement, the Shi'a fundamentalism has carried out similar hegemonic and bullying practices in the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia, such as al-Qatif, similar to those mentioned above. As a result several confrontations, similar to that of Bahrain's, took place between them and notables of Akhbari school, especially those followers of Imam al-Khoei of al-Najaf school, of Iraq. Other confrontations also occurred with leaders of leftists and liberal political groups, civil societies and clubs. In those confrontation, the Shirazi militants used extreme violent and terrorist actions against their adversaries. see:

Al-Najjar, B. S., *alḥarkat al-dyniah fi al-khaleej al-'arabi* (Religious Movements in the Arabian Gulf), (2007), p. 67.

Al-Ibrahim, B. & Al-Sadiq, M., *al-hiraq al-shi'yi fi al-Sa'udiya*, (Shi'a Mobility in Saudi), (2013), pp. 90-100, 129-136.

38 Ibid.

39 For more socio-historical information on the «Grand 'Ajam Mātam,» see Fuccaro, as for the Shirazi movement and its role in the Shi'a fundamentalism in Bahrain and the Arabian Gulf, and on the biographic background of its leaders, see Alfoneh's, Al-Amer & Hejres, and Bahrainliberals':

Fuccaro, N., "Mapping the Transnational Community: Persians and the Space of the City in Bahrain, c. 1869-1937", (2005), pp. 48-49.

Alfoneh, Ali. 2012. "Between Reform and Revolution: Sheikh Qassim, the Bahraini Shi'a, and Iran", (2012).

Al-Amer, T., & Hejres, K, *ab'ād al-ḥaqiqa: arb'ta'shar Febrayr, ukdhubat thawra*,

(Dimensions of Truth: 14th February, a False Revolution, (2011), pp. 236-285.

Bahrainliberals (2013), 'The Al-Rissaly International Network,' <http://bahrainliberals.com/editorial-team/the-al-rissaly-international-network/26/7/2013>;

"Bahrainliberals (2013), 'Ali Salman the Many Faces of Opposition,' <http://bahrainliberals.com/editorial-team/ali-salman-the-many-faces-of-opposition/26/7/2013>;

"Abdulahdi Al-Khawaja Radical or Reformer", (2013); Bahrainliberals (2013), Bahrainliberals, 'Saeed Al-Shehabi Bahrain-Iran-London,' <http://bahrainliberals.com/editorial-team/saeed-al-shehabi-bahrain-iran-london/26/7/2013>.

Bader Al-Ibrahim and Al-Sadiq Muhammad (2013), *al-hiraq al-shi'yi fi al-Sa'udiya* (Shia Mobility in Saudi), Bierut: Arab Network for Research and Publishing.

40 Such resistance to religious tyranny could possibly be counted as a facet of the passive resistance of the weak, as pointed by James Scott in his work: *Weapons of the Weak* , see:

James Scott (1985), *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

41 Increasing numbers of the Bahraini 'Ajam are coming up with varied strategies in facing up to the Shi'a fundamentalist hegemony over their daily public life. In recent years, some of them have been publishing their experiences on the Internet; see for example:



- Adel, Muhammad, "Memoirs of a Bahraini 'Ajami," 2011, (MS).
- 42 Thomas Fibiger (2010), 'Ashura in Bahrain: Analyses of an Analytical Event', *Social Analysis*, 54, 3, pp. 35-38.
- 43 Ibid, pp. 42-44
- 44 In providing evidence for the fact that the Shi'a fundamentalist movement in Bahrain is annexed to the regime of the *wilayat al-faqih* in Iran, we mention in this context the instance when a number of clerics, among the leaders of this movement, on 16 March 2011, addressed a letter, signed by followers of the grand ayatollah Khameni in Bahrain, to Ali Khameni, being the guardian jurist, and the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, calling for his intervention to help «his children and followers in Bahrain in any fitting way.» The letter was written in the wake of the failure of the protest movement during the «February Ordeal in Bahrain,» and was published in Iranian media, see:  
 Al-Sayyed Zahra (2011), *risalat al-haq wa al-sidq ila shi'at al-Bahrain*, (A Message of Truth and Right to the Shi'a of Bahrain), *Akhbar Al-Khalij*, Newspaper: Bahrain, Issue No 12198, 16 August 2011.  
 Khalaji, M, "Iran's Policy Confusion About Bahrain," (2011).  
 Alfoneh, Ali. 2012. "Between Reform and Revolution: Sheikh Qassim, the Bahraini Shi'a, and Iran", (2012).
- 45 It is worth mentioning in this respect what Marshall Sahlins, the American anthropologist, stated in his bitterly satirical article on the developments of the situation in Iraq, bringing to mind the bitter reality about narrow-minded beliefs in democracy and elections: «For those (American) who think that democracy is elections and that elections cure all, it is notable that the cycles of violence have been closely linked to the electoral process», see:  
 Marshall Sahlins (2011), 'Iraq: The State-of-Nature Effect', *Anthropology Today*, 27,3, p. 27.

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