

Western Studies of Shi'i Islam

Liyakat Takim

Abstract

This paper will examine the historical study of Shi'ism in the western academy and argue that until the last two decades, western scholarship looked at it primarily through a Sunni lens. This changed during the 1980s due to various socio-political factors, among them Iran's Islamic revolution, Hizbollah's emergence in Lebanon, and the American invasion and occupation of Iraq, forced western scholars to look at it in different light. Consequently, they began to examine different facets of this branch of Islam, ranging from its concept of centralized authority during the Twelfth Imam's Greater Occultation to liturgies, rituals, and political theory.

Introduction

In discussing the matrix of forms through which Islam has been studied, one has to realize that medieval European scholars posited a monolithic Islam and thereby ignored the mosaic of diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural groups that comprised the Muslim community. In fact, until fairly recently western scholarship on Shi'ism was conducted primarily through a Sunni lens. The dearth of primary Shi'i sources translated into western languages, which affected research up to the second half of the twentieth century, contributed to the lack of an accurate academic understanding on this branch of Islam's history, law, and doctrines. As Frederick Denny states:

Liyakat Takim is the Sharjah Chair in Global Islam at McMaster University in Hamilton, Canada. He teaches a wide range of courses on Islam and offers a course on comparative religions. He is the author of *The Heirs of the Prophet: Charisma and Religious Authority in Shi'ite Islam* (New York: SUNY Press, 2006) and *Shi'ism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009). He is currently working on *Ijtihad and Reformation in Islam*.

Islamic studies in the West and in the greater part of the Islamic world itself have long shared a bias that Sunni Islam is the normative tradition, whereas Shi'ism is at best heterodoxy and at worst heresy... This myth of the silent center has given Sunnis a sense of being heirs to a providential dispensation in ruling most Muslim domains, even where, as in Iraq and Lebanon, Shi'ites comprise a major part of the population.¹

Earlier, Henry Corbin (d. 1978) had pointed to the western penchant to look at Shi'ism² through Sunni texts. He claimed that the Shi'i discourse had yet to be heard in the West.³ In his *The Theology of Shaykh al-Mufid* (1978), Martin J. McDermott expressed similar reservations, as did Seyyid Hossein Nasr who, in the 1980s, complained that “[u]ntil now Shi'ism has received little attention; and when it has been discussed, it has been relegated to the secondary or peripheral status of a religio-political ‘sect,’ a herodoxy or even a heresy.”⁴

Medieval European Studies of Shi'ism

The West came to know of Islam from the eighth century onward. Among the earliest European accounts of the Prophet is that of St. John of Damascus (c. 650-750), who claimed that Muhammad was a great deceiver and an epileptic.⁵ His *Pege gnoseos* also contains a chapter on heresy, which presents the Prophet as being among the “pseudoprophets.” It should be remembered that these images and depictions were also determined by socio-political events of that milieu. The Crusaders, for example, wanted to portray Islam in very negative terms. Many of the chroniclers of the First Crusade (1095-99) imagined that their Saracen enemies were idolaters who had erected a statue of their god Mahomet in the “temple of the lord” (i.e., the Dome of the Rock).⁶ Most of this era's sources denigrate Islam and the Prophet and have nothing to say about Shi'ism.

The rise of the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) and its pervasive influence in the Middle East meant that Europe's initial encounter with Shi'ism came through the Fatimids. For example, Archbishop William of Tyre (1130-86) speaks only of Sunni and Fatimid Islam. It would appear that he had no knowledge of Twelver Shi'ism. He also cites a belief espoused by an extremist Shi'i group that Gabriel had erred by delivering the revelation to Muhammad; it had been meant for Ali (d. 661). Its adherents were called *ghurabīyah*, due to their belief that the Prophet and Ali resembled each other more than two crows.⁷

Jacques de Vitry, another Crusader historian and Archbishop of Acre (1216-28) demonstrates his ignorance of Shi'ism by stating the Shi'a “belief”

that God had spoken to Ali in a more intimate manner than He had to the Prophet. According to him, Ali and his associates had slandered the Prophet and attacked his laws.⁸

Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) *Divine Comedy* (1308-20) is one of the first publications in a European vernacular language to mention the Prophet and Ali. While taking the reader on a tour of heaven and hell, he depicts the Prophet and Ali with their bodies split from head to waist in the eighth circle of hell. The Prophet is seen as tearing his breast apart to indicate that he was among those damned souls who had brought schism to the Christian religion. It is important to remember that many people of that time, among them Dante himself, were responding to the last Crusade, which the Muslims defeated in 1291.⁹ Although he mentions the Prophet and Ali, Dante says nothing about the Shi'is or their beliefs.

After the Crusades, Shi'ism continued to remain largely unknown in European academic circles, because the latter's main point of contact was the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Europeans became familiar with some aspects of Shi'ism only after 1501, when the Safavid dynasty established itself in Iran. Most of their information was predicated upon the accounts and notes of diplomats, missionaries, and merchants who either visited or were based there. For example Pere Raphael Du Mans (d. 1696), who headed a monastery in Isfahan and authored *State of Persia*, describes some Shi'i doctrines, legal practices, and festivals and also refers to contemporaneous scholars like Muhammad Taqi al-Majlisi (d. 1659).¹⁰

Others, like Jean Chardin, visited and wrote about Persia between 1664-70 and 1671-77. He describes Mashhad's clerical hierarchy and the earthquake that occurred while he was there. It is to be noted that the Safavids paid great respect to the Shi'i 'ulama and had convinced them to join their courts. Thus the scholars' religious and political authority increased considerably during this period. In his work, Chardin mentions the *mujtahids*' political role.¹¹

Subsequent travelers provided additional insights. Humayun's *Illustrated Documents of Europeans from Iran* features it more than any other Middle Eastern country. Of the 147 itineraries mentioned during the second part of the seventeenth century, fifty-two featured Iran. These journeys were primarily for political and economic reasons; however, interest in the Orient, religious propaganda, the desire to learn Middle Eastern languages, and other factors also contributed to their travels.¹²

As European influence and dominance increased during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, more Europeans travelled to the Orient, including Iran. The eclectic diplomat Joseph Arthur comte de Gobineau (d. 1882), who

wrote *Trois ans en Asie* (1859) and *Religions et philosophies de l'Asie central* (1865), are important to note. He witnessed and wrote on the Shaykhi movement, as well as on the Akhbari and *mujtahid* (*uṣūlī*) dispute, and provides detailed accounts of the passion plays held during Muharram. However, his works contain many misconceptions and gross simplifications. For example, he portrays Shi'ism as alien to "true" Islam due to its adherents' veneration of the Imams and the authority of the Persian mullahs. In the latter work, he goes so far as to equate Shi'ism with Persian nationalism.¹³

This was also the period of Orientalism's provenance. Oriental studies have impacted how Shi'ism was perceived in the West, especially as scholars who wrote on it did so primarily through the lens of such Sunni heresiographers as al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 1071), Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), and al-Shahrastani (d. 1153).¹⁴ Inevitably, such depictions presented a hostile and, at times, distorted view, as one can clearly see in a work by Ibn Hazm, which he entitled *The Heterodoxies of the Shi'ites*.

During the medieval period, very few Shi'i texts could be found in European libraries. The exceptions were Tusi's (d. 1067) *Fihrist*, Allama Hilli's (d. 1325) *Tahrīr al-Aḥkām*, and Muhaqqiq al-Hilli's (d. 1277) *Sharā'ī al-Islām*.¹⁵ As scholars came to learn more about Islam, during the nineteenth century more academic writings were devoted to this particular branch of Islam. This can be discerned by studying the works listed in Garcin de Tassy's edition and translation of a "Shi'i" chapter of the Qur'an (1842) and Ignaz Goldziher's *Beitrage zur Literaturgeschichte der Shia und der sunnitischen Polemik* (1874), a treatise on Sunni-Shi'i polemics. In many ways, Goldziher was a pioneer in European studies on Islam. Although it was not his area of specialization, he was interested enough in Shi'ism to include a section on it in his *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (1910). Despite the difficulty involved in accessing primary Shi'i texts, Goldziher was able to correct some misconceptions and discredit the widely held view that Shi'ism emerged because of Iranian influence and that its adherents rejected the Prophet's Sunnah.

Around the same time, the German scholar Rudolph Strothmann's (d. 1960) book *Die Zwölfer-Schia* (1926) and his entries for the first edition of the *Encyclopedie de l'Islam* provided excellent samples of early scholarship on Twelver and other forms of Shi'ism such as Zaydism and Ismailism.¹⁶ Goldziher's above-mentioned 1874 study was not followed by a corresponding flow of studies on Shi'ism. Nonetheless, some important works composed in different research centers should be mentioned here. Italian historians Sabino Moscati ("Per una storia dell'antica Shi'a," 1955, 251-67) and Laura

Veccia Vaglieri (“Sul ‘Nahj al-balagha’ e il suo compilatore ash-Sharif ar-Radi,” 1958, 1-46) made informed contributions to various aspects of early Shi‘ism.¹⁷ Overall, there was a paucity of reliable works on Shi‘ism, a fact that is confirmed by a study of Parson’s *Index Islamicus* (vol. 1: 1906-55), the main bibliographical index for Islamic studies.

A more sympathetic understanding started with the French scholar Louis Massignon (d. 1962), who served as a military officer in Iraq. He focused on Shi‘ism’s mystical dimension in works such as his *Die Ursprunge und die Bedeutung des Gnostizismus im Islam* and *Der gnostische Kult der Fatima im Shiitischen Islam*.¹⁸ As he was trying to understand Shi‘ism from within, his treatment of its various facets was far more sympathetic and accurate than that of his predecessors. His contribution to Shi‘i studies is significant because he initiated Henry Corbin (d. 1978) into the field of Shi‘i mysticism. Initially, Corbin was in touch with Iranian Shi‘ism at the Sorbonne as a young phenomenologist and also in Tehran, as the director of the French Institute of Iranian Studies, and founder of the series *Bibliothèque iranienne*. He collected, edited, and translated some of the most important works on Shi‘i theology, philosophy, and gnosis.¹⁹ Due to his focus on and alleged bias toward Shi‘ism, his objectivity was sometimes questioned.

So far I have discussed scholarship on Shi‘ism by European scholars. One of the most important scholars on Shi‘ism in the past fifty years has been the Iranian scholar Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933), who has written extensively on Shi‘ism in general and Shi‘i philosophy in particular. His works range from the relationship between Shi‘ism and Sufism to works on ecology, Mulla Sadra (d. 1641), and the general doctrines and principles of Shi‘i thought. An important milestone was his translation of Allama Tabatabai’s (d. 1981) *Shi‘ite Islam*. Perhaps for the first time, the western academic audience heard the voice of a prominent contemporary Shi‘i scholar writing from the Shi‘i seminary in Qum.

Western research on Shi‘i studies improved considerably toward the end of the 1960s, when, in 1968, a gathering on Shi‘ism was convened at the Colloque de Strasbourg. Some of the leading experts in the field attended this round table discussion: Corbin, Nasr, Francesco Gabrieli, Wilfred Madelung, and the Lebanese cleric Musa Sadr.²⁰ Most western studies at this time were undertaken by historians like Dwight Donaldson, Montgomery Watt, and Marshall Hodgson. Donaldson’s major contribution was *The Shi‘ite Religion* (1923) and his articles published in the *Muslim World*, among them “Salman the Persian” (1929), “The Idea of the Imamate (Spiritual Leadership) according to Shi‘i Thinking” (1921/31), and “The New Iranian Law”

(1934). *The Shi'ite Religion* was very important because, for the first time, all of the Twelve Imams' lives were profiled for and made available to the western academic audience. The work also discussed Shi'i political history, bibliography, extremist sects, and some important theological debates.

Scholars like Watt and Hodgson have written a number of important articles on Shi'ism. Watt's "Shi'ism under the Umayyads" (1960) and "The Rafidites: A Preliminary Study" (1970) were important insofar as they discussed the early period of Shi'i history and outlined some of its movements. Hodgson wrote an equally important article "How Did the Early Shi'a Become Sectarian?" (1955) and included an important section on Shi'ism in his *Venture of Islam*.

Due to political and economic reasons, western scholarship has increased considerably since the 1970s. Among these, Seyyed Husayn M. Jafri's *The Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam* (1979) discusses this branch's doctrinal history and formative period; Mojan Momen's *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (1985) provides an account of its history from the beginning to recent times; and Heinz Halm's *Die Schia* (1988) examines Shi'i history, doctrines, and practices. I. K. Howard's translation of Shaykh Mufid's *Kitāb al-Irshād* was a major milestone in that, for the first time, a tenth-century scholar's biographical and, at times, hagiographical account, of the Imams was translated into English.

Western Study of Shi'ism in Recent Times

The 1980s onward witnessed a greater interest in Shi'i studies, especially as Shi'i sources became more accessible. This precipitated a proliferation of writings by scholars like Etan Kohlberg, Colin Turner, Andrew J. Newman, Norman Calder, Juan Cole, Robert Gleave, and Lynda Clarke. Their writings have also refuted such major western and Sunni misconceptions that Shi'ism's origins can be traced to Abd Allah b. Saba, an alleged Jew, or to Persia. They also dispelled some *ghulūw* (exaggerated beliefs) regarding Shi'ism by distancing Twelver Shi'ism from extremist groups like the afore-mentioned *ghurabīyah*, Druzes, and Nusayris.

The 1980s also witnessed a generation of Shi'i scholars based in the West entering the academy. Many of them were trained in Shi'i seminaries and in the West, and thus could provide an "insider" and an "outsider" approach. Scholars like Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (*The Divine Guides*), Hossein Modarresi Tabatabai (*Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam*), Abdulaziz Sachedina (*Islamic Messianism*), and Mahmoud

Ayoub (*Redemptive Suffering*) have all contributed immensely to western scholarship on Shi‘ism.

In the last twenty years, Shi‘ism has also been studied from various political, sociological, ritual, and anthropological perspectives. This is seen in the books of Nikki Keddie, Hamid Algar, Said Amir Arjomand, Farhad Khosrokhavar, Micheal J. Fischer, Oliver Beaman, Roy Mottahedeh (social history), and other authors.²¹ An important work in this context is Lynda Clarke’s edited *The Shi‘ite Heritage*, to which a number of specialists in Shi‘ism, both western and those trained in the traditional seminaries, contributed their expertise in different fields within Shi‘i studies.

Shi‘i rituals, especially those conducted during Muharram, have been studied within the theoretical framework of ritual studies. Scholars like Schubel (*Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam*) and David Pinault (*The Shi‘ites* and *The Horse of Kerbala*) have focused on how South Asian Shi‘is conduct their Muharram rituals. During the past twenty years, more academic books have been published on a variety of Shi‘i topics – jurisprudence, history, biographical literature, philosophy, esotericism, and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) – than ever before.

The Impact of the Iranian Revolution

The Iranian revolution and the establishment of an Islamic republic premised on the principle of *wilāyat al-faqīh* (the authority of the jurist) created a greater awareness of Shi‘ism. One of the most important compositions in this field is Hamid Algar’s *Islam and Revolution*, which includes an interview with Ayatullah Khomeini and his theory of an Islamic government. This revolution not only engendered an increased awareness of Shi‘ism, but also its association with Iran. Other important contributions were Arjomand’s *The Shadow of God on Earth*, Vanessa Martin’s *Creating an Islamic State*, Keddie’s *Religion and Politics in Iran*, and Algar’s *Religion and State in Iran 1785-1906*.

With the emergence of the *wilāyat al-faqīh* concept, more studies focused on the question of authority in contemporary Shi‘ism. Studies on the history and development of *marjī‘īyah*,²² *taqlīd*, and *‘alamīyah*²³ have emerged most notably in Sachedina’s *The Just Ruler* and Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi’s *Religious Authority in Shi‘ite Islam*. Others have examined the socio-political ramifications of this institution, as can be seen in Linda Walbridge’s edited work *The Most Learned of the Shi‘a*. Scholars have also analyzed the authority of the Imams, their disciples, and the jurists based on Max Weber’s notion of

charisma. Hamid Dabashi's *Authority in Islam*, Maria Dakake's *The Charismatic Community*, and Liyakat Takim's *The Heirs of the Prophet* have all made valuable contributions in the field of charismatic authority.

Closely related to the authority of the jurist are works on Shi'i political theory. In this field, Hamid Mavani's recent *Religious Authority and Political Thought in Twelver Shi'ism* is important, especially because he examines the theories of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Fadlallah, and Shams al-Din on the types of political authority that should characterize a modern Shi'i state. Closely intertwined with the issue of the authority of the *marji'*, an important field that has been neglected for a long time, is the internal juristic debate among Shi'i religious scholars. The conflict between the Akhbaris (traditionalists) and the Usulis (rationalists) represents one of the main lines of research. A number of scholars, among them Robert Gleave (*Scripturalist Islam*), Andrew J. Newman, "The Nature of the Akhbari/Usuli Dispute in late Safavid Iran," and others have subjected it to close scrutiny.²⁴

Since the 1990s, scholars have explored even newer fields. Gleave (*Inevitable Doubt*), Amirhassan Boozari (*Shi'i Jurisprudence and Constitution*) and, more recently, Alireza Bhojani (*Moral Rationalism and Shari'a*), have discussed Shi'i legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) extensively. There have also been increasing calls for a reformation. For example, Shi'i scholars like Mohsen Kadivar, Mohaqiq Damad, Mujtahid Shabistari, Abd l-Karim Soroush, Mavani, Takim, and others have written numerous articles and encyclopedic entries on *ijtihād* (reasoning) and the need to elaborate on and invoke hermeneutical devices when applying Islamic law, especially for Muslims living in the diaspora. Some articles have voiced the calls for *ijtihād* made by such traditional Shi'i scholars as Ayatullah Khumayni, Sanei, Fadlallah, Bojnourdi, and Jannati.

Most discussions about Islam in America have focused on Sunni Muslims, thereby neglecting the experience of Shi'i Muslims. As a matter of fact, even in academic discourses most studies equate Islam in America with Sunnism in America. This monolithic view has obscured the proper recognition and understanding of a significant religious minority's religious experience. Scholars like Lynda Walbridge (*Not Without the Imam*) and Takim (*Shi'ism in America*) have contributed extensively to this field. Others like Oliver Scharbrodt are researching Shi'ism in the United Kingdom.

Mulla Sadra's theosophical works have been more closely studied in the West by Shi'i scholars like Sajjad Rizvi (*Mulla Sadra and the Later Islamic Philosophical Tradition* and *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics*) and Mohammed Rustom (*The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulla Sadra*).

Other scholars, among them Ziba Mir-Hosseini, have delved into Shi'ism and gender studies. Her works include *Men in Charge? Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* and *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Modern Iran*. Mutahhari's apologetics on *Women in Islam* have been translated by various scholars, whereas Shi'i laws related to women have been critiqued by Shahla Haeri (*Law of Desire*) and the edited work of Lois Beck and Guity Nashat: *Women in Iran* (vol. 1: *From the Rise of Islam to 1800* and vol. 2: *1800 to the Islamic Republic*).

Some scholars have focused on iconic Shi'i female figures like Fatima and Zaynab. These include Mary Thurkill's *Chosen among Women*, Nadia Abu Zahra's *The Pure and Powerful*, and Christopher Clohessy's *Fatima, Daughter of Muhammad*. Other scholars have delved into Shi'i spirituality. Of particular note are Dabashi's *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam* and William Chittick's *The Psalms of Islam*, a translation of the Fourth Imam's supplications. In their co-authored *Roman Catholic and Shi'i Muslims*, James Bill and John Alden Williams discussed attempts by Shi'is to reach out to the Vatican.

There has also been increasing interest in area studies, as evidenced by Imranali Panjwani's edited *The Shi'a of Samarra*, Shaery-Eisenlohr's *Shi'ite Lebanon*, Rodger Shanahan's *The Shi'a of Lebanon*, Faleh Jabbar's *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, Titzhak Nakash's *The Shi'is of Iraq*, and Graham Fuller and Rend Francke's co-authored *The Arab Shi'a* are all major contributions. Other scholars have focused on a more militant version of Shi'ism, most notably Hizbullah in Lebanon. Among the most outstanding publications here are Naim Qassem's *Hizbullah*; Augustus Norton's *Hezbollah*, and Judith Harek's *Hezbollah*. Others, like Jamal Sankari, have focused on more politically oriented Shi'i clerics like Fadlallah. The increased interest in Shi'i studies in the West can be discerned from Colin Turner and Paul Luft's co-edited *Shi'ism* (2007), a four-volume work that provides an excellent collection of articles on diverse facets of Shi'ism written by scholars over the last fifty years. Other works in this genre are Kohlberg's *Shi'ism* and Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda's co-edited *The Study of Shi'i Islam* (2014).

Shi'i Studies in the Post-9/11 World

In the post-9/11 world, projects, conferences, and centers focusing on Shi'ism in general or on specific aspects of Shi'ism have increased exponentially. More panels on Shi'ism are being offered at the American Academy of Religion's annual conference than ever before. The British Academy-funded project on "Authority in Shi'ism" (www.thehawzaproject.net) seeks to create a broad

network of scholars working on this theme and improving the status of research on this branch of Islam.

This increased interest is not restricted to monographs and articles.²⁵ For example, Shi'is in North America have digitized some of their most important texts and sources, as can be seen on the Shi'i-run website www.al-islam.org, which contains many valuable primary Shi'i sources and links, as well as scholarly and non-scholarly articles and e-books. Two Shi'i journals have been produced since 9/11: the *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* and, for a while, the *International Journal of Shi'i Studies*. In addition, a number of CDs on Shi'i hadith, *fiqh*, *uṣūl*, ethics, and *tafsīr* are now available; they are being marketed and produced by Noor software in Iran. However, none of the four major Shi'i texts of Kulayni, Tusi, or Saduq have yet been translated into English, which is also the case with some of the most important works on Shi'i law, history, biography, philosophy, and gnosis.

There are a few chaired positions in Islam in North American universities: the Prince al-Waleed chair, the 'Umar al-Khattab chair, and the Sharjah Chair in Global Islam (all in Canada), and the King Faisal Chair, to name a few. So far only one chair, the Imam Ali Chair for Shi'a Studies and Dialogue among Islamic Legal Schools," has been established at Hartford Seminary. When I raised this issue with Ayatullah Seestani in 2013, he insisted that such a chair should only be established with the provision that the courses offered would be based on "correct" Shi'i beliefs and practices. Moreover, universities offer few courses on Shi'ism, which reflects a major problem in this regard: the dearth of scholars who are qualified enough to offer such courses.

The Challenge of Shi'i Self-Representation

The events of 9/11 caused a definitive shift in the traditional Shi'i attitude toward public engagement. Increased government surveillance and other measures have forced Shi'is to abandon their former ambivalence toward the West. They have finally come to realize that participating in the North American socio-political order is the only way to overcome their former invisibility. They need to be integrated into mainstream society and to voice their socio-political concerns, which can only happen if they become active in all social sectors.

In addition, the Shi'i community now has the opportunity to challenge the myth of a homogeneous Muslim entity. Shi'is have felt the need to move from being the "other" within the "Muslim other" to becoming a more visible and vocal minority group in North America. They now must represent them-

selves, rather than letting the Sunni majority do so. Especially after the American invasion and occupation of Iraq and the concomitant awareness of Shi'ism, Shi'is have worked hard to counter the media's negative images about Islam.

Conclusion

In today's world, data flow in greater volumes, at higher speeds, and over greater distances to larger audiences than ever before. And yet the result has not been any greater understanding or enlightenment. In fact, it has often been just the reverse. The information explosion has sometimes created more hatred and prejudice. By convening seminars, entering the academy, publishing books and articles in journals, making themselves more visible on the Internet, and delivering lectures at conventions and workshops, Shi'is have begun to alter the perceptions about North America and themselves. As the "old world" or "back-home" mentality gradually fades, as it largely did in the mid-1980s and early 1990s, organizations are shifting Shi'i academic and civil discourses in the United States to how they can interact with North Americans while maintaining their own distinctive identity.

As Muslims continue to experience intimidation, discrimination, misunderstanding, and even hatred, they must continue to inform North Americans about Islam, correct some of the media's anti-Islamic stereotypical images, and protect the Muslim community's interests. The challenge for Shi'is is manifold: They need to introduce distinctly Shi'i themes and figures in their discourses, make the public aware of what it means to be a Shi'i Muslim in North America, and explain their distinctive beliefs and practices. Of course, they must point also out that the demonization of Islam, increased surveillance of Muslims, and restriction of civil liberties have been extremely painful for all Muslims. And then there is the final challenge: to excel and intellectually articulate their distinctive ethos in the academy.

Endnotes

1. Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press), ix.
2. In this paper, the term *Shi'is* refers only to Twelver Shi'is.
3. Jallal al-Din Ashtiyani, *An Introduction to the Iranian and Shi'i Studies of H. Corbin. The Paper Collection of the Vare Council for Studying Iranology*, ed. Ali Mousavi Garmaroudi (The Publication Center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 30.

4. Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Shi'ite Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1975), 1.
5. Minou Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe: A Thousand Years of Myth-Making* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 84.
6. John Tolan, *Cambridge Companion to Muhammad* (Cambridge: 2013). See also Liyakat Takim, "Western Depictions of Muhammad," in *Mohammed in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, 2 vols., ed. C. Fitzpatrick and A. Walker (ABC-CLIO: 2014).
7. Etan Kohlberg, "Western Studies of Shi'a Islam," in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. Martin Kramer (Boulder: Westview, 1987), 31-32.
8. *Ibid.*, 32.
9. Liyakat Takim, "Western Depictions of Muhammad."
10. *Ibid.*, 33.
11. *Ibid.* See also Abbas Ahmadvand, "An Iranian Point of View of Shi'i Studies in the West," *International Journal of Shi'i Studies* 5, no. 1 (2007): 15.
12. *Ibid.*, 12.
13. Etan Kohlberg, "Western Studies of Shi'a Islam," 35.
14. *Ibid.*, 34.
15. *Ibid.*, 34-35.
16. *Ibid.*, 40.
17. Alessandro Cancian, "Shi'ism," in *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms - Methods - Trends*, ed. A. Classen, 3 vols. (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 97.
18. *Ibid.*, 96-97.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Etan Kohlberg, "Western Studies of Shi'a Islam," 41.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Shi'a religious leadership is predicated on a highly stratified hierarchical system called the *marja' al-taqlid* or *marji'iyah*. This term refers to the most learned juridical authority in the Shi'a community, one whose rulings on Islamic law are followed by those who acknowledge him as their source of reference (*marja'*). The followers base their religious practices in accordance with his judicial opinions. *The marja'* is responsible for re-interpreting Islamic laws so that they will be relevant to the modern era and is imbued with the authority to issue religious edicts that will influence the religious and social lives of his followers all over the world.
23. Following the juridical edicts of the most learned jurist (*ā'lim*) is called *taqlid* (literally, imitation or emulation). In Shi'a jurisprudence, this term denotes a commitment to accept and adhere to the Shari'ah's rulings as deduced by a qualified and pious jurist.
24. Alessandro Cancian, "Shi'ism," 102.
25. *Ibid.*, 104.