Legalised Pedigrees: Sayyids and Shi'i Islam in Pakistan



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Abstract

This article draws on a wide range of Shi'i periodicals and monographs from the 1950s until the present day to investigate debates on the status of Sayyids in Pakistan. I argue that the discussion by reformist and traditionalist Shi'i scholars ('ulama) *and popular preachers has remained remarkably stable over this time period. Both 'camps' have avoided talking about any theological or miracle-working role of the Prophet's kin. This phenomenon is remarkable, given the fact that Sayyids share their pedigree with the Shi'i Imams, who are credited with superhuman qualities. Instead, Shi'i reformists and traditionalists have discussed Sayyids predominantly as a specific legal category. They are merely entitled to a distinct treatment as far as their claims to charity, patterns of marriage, and deference in daily life is concerned. I hold that this reductionist and largely legalising reading of Sayyids has to do with the intense competition over religious authority in post-Partition Pakistan. For both traditionalist and reformist Shi'i authors,* 'ulama, *and preachers, there was no room to acknowledge Sayyids as potential further competitors in their efforts to convince the Shi'i public about the proper 'orthodoxy' of their specific views.*

Keywords: status of Sayyids; religious authority in post-Partition Pakistan; ahl al-bait; Shi'i Islam

Bashir Husain Najafi is an oddity. Today's most prominent Pakistani Shi'i scholar is counted among Najaf's four leading Grand Ayatollahs.[1] Yet, when he left Pakistan for Iraq in 1965 in order to pursue higher religious education, the deck was heavily stacked against him. Husain Najafi does not belong to any of the renowned and transnationally active Shi'i families, such as the al-Sadrs, the al-Hakims, or the al-Khu'is.[2] What is even more remarkable is his

[1]See, for example, M. Fayyad, '*Al-Marji'iyya al-shi'a mundhu "al-ghayba al-kubra" hatta al-Najaf*', *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (25 March 2005), available at http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?article=289991&issueno=9614 (accessed July 2019). "Throughout this article, I use the established Arabic transliteration for terms such as 'guardianship' (*wilaya*) but render these in their Urdu or Persian form in case they are taken from a particular Urdu text (e.g. *vilayat-i takvini*, denoting 'creational guardianship)."

[2]This is not to say that Bashir Husain Najafi did not have role models to draw on. Both his grandfather and one of his uncles were Shi'i scholars. On his biographical background, see S. H. 'A. Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i imamiyyah-i Pakistan* (Mashhad, 1991), pp. 60–61. On Najaf's prominent scholarly families and their transnational connections, see E. Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism. Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh, 2015).

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genealogy as a non-Sayyid.[3] In the wider Arab-Iranian world, Husain Najafi's lack of 'Sayyid-ness' would have been a serious obstacle to scholarly authority. Raffaele Mauriello has emphasised the "centrality of the Family of the Prophet for the religious, political and social leadership of Shi'i communities in Lebanon, Iraq and Iran".[4] Hailing from a family of 'Alid descent is a major criterion for achieving respect and status in the setting of Shi'i seminaries and learning. Outside the Middle East, this observation has significant explanatory power, too. South Asia's leading Shi'i *'ulama* have a Sayyid background. Lucknow's famed *khandan-i ijtihad* (lit. 'the family of independent legal reasoning') traces their connection to the Prophet Muhammad through the tenth Shi'i Imam 'Ali al-Hadi (d. 868). Jurists of the highest order (*mujtahids*) belonging to the family have dominated scholarly circles in North India and beyond since the eighteenth century.[5]

In post-Partition Pakistan, the high visibility of Sayyids continues unabated, too, even beyond an exclusively Shi'i environment. It has been argued that the failure of land-reforms "has perpetuated Syed power in rural and tribal Pakistan longer than in India".[6] This phenomenon is amply reflected in the set-up of Pakistan's National Assembly (NA) after the 2018 general elections, for example. While out of 272 male Muslim deputies, only 21 (or roughly 8 per cent) are Sayyids, a different picture emerges when we consider the Pakistan's People Party (PPP), which is traditionally strong in rural Sindh.[7] The PPP currently has 43 male Muslim members in the NA, 11 (or more than 25 per cent) of whom belong to the Prophet's kin.[8] If we consider the narrower context of Shi'i learning, Sayyids form an even more impressive group. Sayyid Husain 'Arif Naqvi's biographical dictionary of Shi'i *'ulama* and popular preachers in Pakistan lists 481 personalities — 172 (or 36 per cent) of whom are Sayyids.[9] Sayyid 'Arif Husain al-Husaini, Pakistan's most prominent Shi'i political leader of the 1980s, was a descendant of the Prophet through the latter's grandson and Third Shi'i Imam al-Husain (d. 661).[10] Al-Husaini, in turn, was president of the *Tahrik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Ja'fariyya* (Movement for the Implementation of Shi'i Law, TNFJ), Pakistan's most influential Shi'i organisation of the time with complex ties to the revolutionary government in Iran. As Olivier Roy has pointed

[3]Najafi shares this achievement with one further Najaf-based Grand Ayatollah, the Afghan Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyad. For more information on him, see al-Fayyad's official website www.alfayadh.org (accessed July 2019).

[4]R. Mauriello, 'Genealogical Prestige and Marriage Strategy among the Ahl al-Bayt: The Case of the al-Sadr Family in Recent Times', in *Genealogy and Knowledge in Muslim Societies: Understanding the Past*, (eds.) S. B. Savant and H. de Felipe (Edinburgh, 2014), p. 134. Compare also R. Mauriello, *Descendants of the Family of the Prophet in Contemporary History: A Case Study, the Šī'ī Religious Establishment of al-Naǧaf (Iraq)* (Rome, 2011).

[5]On the family, see J. Jones, 'Khandan-i-Ijtihad: Genealogy, History and Authority in a Household of 'Ulama in Modern South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies*, published online 28 October 2019, doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X18000598. See also for the establishment of Usuli authority in Awadh, J. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shī'ism in Iran and Iraq. Religion and State in Awadh, 1722–1859* (Berkeley, 1988).

[6]T. P. Wright Jr, 'The Changing Role of the Sādāt in India and Pakistan', *Oriente Moderno* (Nuova Serie), 18, 2 (1999), pp. 656–658. Compare also A. F. Buehler, 'Trends of ashrāfization in India', in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies: the Living Links to the Prophet*, (ed.) K. Morimoto (London, 2012), pp. 231–246.

[7]In total, Pakistan's fifteenth NA has 342 seats. Of these, 60 are reserved for women and ten for minority representatives. Interestingly, none of the female Muslim deputies has a Sayyid pedigree. See http://na.gov.pk/en/all_members.php (accessed July 2019).

[8]*Ibid*. For the PPP's strength in Sindh, see https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/444350-Election-2018-PPP-continues-to-hold-Sindh (accessed July 2019). In this article, I am not concerned with critically examining the accuracy of claims to Sayyid-ness but simply accept this self-designation as a telling social phenomenon.

[9]See Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i imamiyyah-i Pakistan*, pp. cahar-sizdah.

[10]See S.W. Fuchs, 'Third Wave Shi'ism: Sayyid 'Arif Husain al-Husaini and the Islamic Revolution in Pakistan', *Modern Asian Studies* 24, 3 (2014), pp. 493–510.

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out, well-educated Sayyids with a background in medicine and engineering played a dominant role within its structure.[11] Sayyids are also overrepresented among the directors of Pakistan's most important Shi'i religious institutions. A telling case in point is Sayyid Safdar Husain Najafi, who headed Lahore's *Jami'at al-Muntazar* from 1967 until his death in 1989.[12]

Yet, this undeniable over-representation and visibility of Sayyids is not further discussed in publications by Pakistani Shi'is. For this article, I have scrutinised a wide range of periodicals and monographs that reflect the internal diversity of Shi'i religious thought and span the time period from the 1950s until more or less the present. As I explain in more detail below, the community in Pakistan is split in particular along reformist/traditionalist lines and regarding questions of religious authority. In order to capture these controversial positions, I have studied the explicitly reformist periodicals *al-Muballigh* from Sargodha and *al-Hujjat* from Peshawar, the 'mainstream' but *'ulama*-focused magazines *al-Muntazar* and *Payam-i 'Amal* from Lahore, and the traditionalist journals *Zulfiqar* from Peshawar and *Asad* from Lahore. While searching for contributions on Sayyids, I was most of all struck by the one-sided, 'reductionist' character of the debate. Even authors who themselves belonged to the Prophet's kin showed a remarkable reluctance to explore the implications of Sayyids' cosmological or theological status. When the question of Sayyid-ness is touched upon at all, Shi'i authors instead apply an exclusively legal lens to the issue. This means that we encounter elucidations of financial privileges for Sayyids, rules pertaining to marriage, and general instructions on how to interact with the Prophet's offspring. There is a significant silence, however, with regard to debates on Sayyids' (potentially) special position with God and their consequent claims to leadership. This lack of ***any*** theological consideration or exploration of their esoteric standing is by no means a trivial, purely academic, or farfetched matter. Sayyids are, after all, descendants of both the Prophet and the Shi'i Imams. Given the elaborate and emotional Shi'i veneration of the *ahl al-bait* (family of the Prophet) what does it in turn mean to be attached to their bloodline?[13] Since many Shi'i authors highlight the miracle-working capabilities of these "Infallibles" (*ma'sumin*) and affirm their supernatural status, how does such an illustrious pedigree reflect on the position of Sayyids in Pakistani society and beyond?

In the light of these questions, the main argument of this article can be summed up as follows. I hold that Sayyids are nothing less than a problem, both for Shi'i reformists and traditionalists figures in the midst of an ongoing, intense struggle over religious authority in Pakistan that has been taking place since the country's inception. Both sides reduce Sayyids to a mere legal category and avoid talking in too detailed terms about any further role that they might have in contemporary society. This is because reformists and traditionalists were (and are) not willing to accept any potential alternative personalities of religious guidance that would have interfered with their specific interpretation of Shi'ism. Sayyids could have potentially constituted such a rival source of influence and guidance.

The model advocated by the reformists reflects the established Shi'i Usuli scholarly hierarchy, which centres on one or several overarching 'sources of emulation' (*maraji' al-taqlid*),

[11]O. Roy, 'L'impact de la révolution iranienne au Moyen-Orient,' in *Les mondes chiites et l'Iran*, (ed.) S. Mervin (Paris, 2007), pp. 34-45.

[12]On him, see Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i imamiyyah-i Pakistan*, pp. 136-137.

[13]On Shi'i rituals and public veneration in a South Asian context, see V. J. Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam. Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia, 1993).

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who are acknowledged by the common Shi'is. According to Twelver Shi'i orthodoxy, the commoners accept one of these Grand Ayatollahs as the 'most learned' (*a'lam*) and 'emulate' him in their daily conduct, thus becoming his *muqallids*.[14] This process underlines that Shi'i authority with its global centres in Iran and Iraq crosses the limits of the nation state and is in most cases a mediated form of religious leadership. For this reason, the representatives of the *maraji'* have come to play an important role as the recipients of religious taxes on behalf of the Grand Ayatollahs and as 'transmission belts' of religious rulings during the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[15] While representatives and Grand Ayatollahs often ***are*** Sayyids, this status is subordinate for the reformists to proper *madrasa* training and expertise in the field of jurisprudence. Being a Sayyid alone does not grant someone a rank within the scholarly hierarchy. In order to push for their understanding of religious authority, reformists thus had tangible reason to avoid exploring in too much detail what it means to be related to the Prophet in order not to open the floodgates of alternative conceptions.

The traditionalists, on the other hand, were keen to promote direct access to the creational authority of the Shi'i Imams (*vilayat-i takvini*), highlighting these—according to Shi'i belief—divinely ordained successors to the Prophet Muhammad as being preexistent and thus a part of God's 'first creation'. In the view of these preachers and *'ulama*, God was an utterly transcendent being. The removed character of the divinity made it necessary that the Imams acted as mediators between God and humanity. In this effort to 'democratise' Shi'ism by launching attacks on the scholarly hierarchy, it was necessary to highlight that all Shi'is had in effect the same chances of experiencing the Imams' intervention in their lives as 'removers of problems' (*mushkilkusha*), for example. The only important criterion was the quality of love an individual had for the *ahl al-bait*. The Prophet and the first eleven Imams had died a this-worldly death but could still be approached while the Twelfth, Hidden Imam, was temporarily in a status of occultation.[16] Granting special prerogatives to directly approachable, living Sayyids who also carried part of the Prophet's lineage would have meant complicating the traditionalists' position in their ongoing competition with the reformists to relocate the centre of Shi'i authority away from the *maraji'* toward the Imams.[17]

Sayyids and the supremacy of the legal discussion

In this section, I will substantiate my claims by demonstrating that there is no significant difference in the characterisations of Sayyids in both 'reformist' and 'traditionalist' Shi'i publications in Pakistan since the early 1950s. All authors under consideration here treat Sayyids in

[14]See A. K. Moussavi, 'The Establishment of the Position of Marja'iyyt-i [*sic*] Taqlid in the Twelver-Shi'i Community', *Iranian Studies* 18, 1 (1985), pp. 35–51.

[15]Due to the increased possibility to directly access the *maraji'* even from remote locations, this relationship and the importance of the role of representative is changing of course. For some of these dynamics, see M. Clarke, 'Neo-Calligraphy: Religious Authority and Media Technology in Contemporary Shiite Islam', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52, 2 (2010), pp. 351–383, and also Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism*, pp. 48–72.

[16]This is also the main thrust of reformist critique – namely, that the traditionalists would disregard or even deny essential requirements of the *shari'a*. See for such a reasoning, M. H. al-Najafi Dhakko, *Islah al-rusum al-zahira bi-kalam al-'itra al-tahira al-ma'ruf bi asli Islam aur rasmi Islam* (Sargodha, 2009), p. 9.

[17]For a more detailed discussion of the dimensions of conflict between traditionalists and reformists and the identity of the two 'camps', see A. Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan. An Assertive and Beleaguered Minority* (London, 2015), pp. 124–132, and S.W. Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land. Shi'ism between Pakistan and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, 2019), pp. 53–94.

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a remarkably stable fashion as merely a legal category when discussing their privileges and specific standing in society. This acknowledgment does not translate into granting them any particular social role or even a position of religious influence.

The question of zakat *and* khums

An important aspect in this regard is that Sayyids are not eligible to receive *zakat*, the obligatory charity payment in Islam, from non-Sayyid Muslims. The reformist figure Muhammad Husain al-Najafi Dhakko marshalled in the early 1960s the Shi'i scholarly tradition to underline this position, quoting the fourteenth-century scholar al-'Allamah al-Hilli (d. 1325).[18] Dhakko pointed out the unanimous ban on any non-Sayyid Muslims from handing over their *zakat* to a Sayyid if this was paid on wealth (*mal*) or in conjunction with the Feast of Breaking the Fast (*'id al-fitr*).[19] The Pakistani scholar did not provide a detailed rational for his reasoning. He only attributed this impermissibility to the "greatness and exaltedness" (*'azmat o jalala*) of the Sayyids. Yet, in relying on such vague adjectives, Dhakko definitely went further than many other contributions in *'ulama*-led periodicals, which referred in a matter of fact tone to Sayyids without any additional qualifications or embellishments.[20] While some religious scholars, notably also the Iraqi Muhsin al-Hakim (d. 1970), the leading global *mujtahid* of the 1960s, made room for certain exceptional obligatory payments that could be transferred to the Prophet's kin, Dhakko preferred to refrain "out of caution" (*ihtiyat se*) from allowing these donations to be accepted by the "great Sayyids" (*sadat-i 'izam*).[21] This restriction did explicitly not apply to voluntary contributions. Dhakko quoted several sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, who had emphasised that on the Last Day he would certainly reward such voluntary acts of kindness and generosity (*ihsan*, *neki*, *a'mal-i khair*) towards his descendants (*ba-ruz-i qiyamat use ki mukafat dunga*).[22]

The reformist journal *al-Hujjat*, published from Peshawar by Mirza Safdar Husain al-Mashhadi (d. 1980), followed a similar line of reasoning.[23] It underlined the divinely prescribed character of *khums* (lit. the fifth), the tax of 20 per cent on their income that observing Shi'is are supposed to pay. This special contribution ensured that "the Muhammadan movement can be successful and that the mission of the *ahl al-bait* can make progress" (*ki uske zari'e tahrik-i muhammadiyya kamiyab ho sakti* [*sic*] *aur ahl-i bait ka mission taraqqi kar sakta hai*).[24] *Khums* was subdivided into two equal portions. The first, termed the "portion of the Sayyids" (*sahm al-sadat*), was supposed to provide material and financial assistance to poor members of the Prophet's kin in lieu of the *zakat*.[25] The second half, called the "portion of the Imam" (*sahm al-Imam*), was earmarked for tasks such as "spreading religion" (*din*

[18]On Dhakko, see Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 129–133. On al-Hilli, see S. Schmidtke, *The Theology of al-'Allama al-Hilli (d. 726/1325)* (Berlin, 1991).

[19]Compare also A. Sachedina, 'Al-Khums: The Fifth in the Imāmī Shī'ī Legal System', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39, 4 (1980), p. 276.

[20]Compare, for example, S. M. Ja'far, '*Khums*', *Payam-i 'Amal* 21, 4, (June 1977), pp. 32–33.

[21]See M. H. al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Bab al-istifsarat*', *al-Muballigh* 6, 9 (October 1962), p. 6. For a similar focus on caution, see S. M. Ja'far, '*'Aqiqah-i ghair sayyid aur sadat*', *al-Muntazar* 13, 21–22 (January 1972), p. 23.

[22]al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Bab al-istifsarat*', *al-Muballigh* 6, 9 (October 1962), p. 7.

[23]On Mashhadi, see Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land*, pp. 104–105.

[24]M. Zaman, '*Khums se ghaflat aur khums hi ki zarurat*', *al-Hujjat* 3, 2 (February 1963), p. 20.

[25]*Al-Hujjat* thus follows the "standard view of the present day *Imāmī* mujtahids". See Sachedina, 'Al-Khums', p. 289.

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ki tausi' o isha'at) and the propagation of the *shari'a*.[26] Importantly, the distribution of the funds was supposed to be channelled through the hands of a proper Source of Emulation and his representatives. The *mujtahid* was free to spend the "portion of the Imam" according to his own discretion.[27] *Al-Hujjat* cautioned that it was not up to the Shi'i community to take a shortcut to this centralised collection of *khums*. Shi'is were not allowed to rely on their "self-made" and independent estimate when distributing their mandatory charitable contributions.[28] As Muhammad Husain al-Najafi Dhakko put it, to discharge of one's *khums* in this way without receiving a proper receipt and lacking suitable oversight could be compared to conducting one's obligatory daily prayers without paying attention to how often one bowed down.[29] Shi'i organisations in Pakistan, such as the Imamia Mission in Lahore, pointed out that several Iranian and Iraqi had authorised them to collect (and spend) the funds on their behalf.[30]

Such arguments were not exchanged on a mere theoretical plane, void of any practical implications for Pakistan's Shi'i community. Some traditionalist scholars openly challenged the *mujtahid*s' prerogatives. Starting from the 1950s, they made a front against the collection of *khums* on behalf of the *maraji'*. Muhammad Isma'il (d. 1976), an influential convert from Deobandi Islam and known in the Shi'i community as *muballigh-i a'zam* (the Greatest Preacher), went into full attack mode. In a series of articles published in his journal *Sadaqat*, Isma'il argued that this religious tax was the *exclusive* right of needy Sayyids.[31] He was in particular opposed to using the *khums* to fund new *madrasa*s.[32] A similar approach can be discerned in Mirza Yusuf Husain's (d. 1988) work *Kitab al-khums*, which appeared after Muhammad Isma'il's contributions.[33] Mirza Yusuf Husain held that the aim of *khums* was primarily to satisfy the requirements of those Sayyids who were orphans, poor or travelling.[34] In case the *sahm al-sadat* was not sufficient to meet their specific needs, it was obligatory on the Imam to tap into "his" portion in order to provide the remaining funds. As a next step, he was obliged to take into view the ordinary struggling Muslims. Since he was the Imam of the entire *ummah* and held far-reaching responsibilities for its welfare (*sari ummat ke imam hain aur sari ummat ke zimmadariyan aur hava'ij un se vabastah hain*), it was mandatory for him to also step in should the *zakat* collection for non-Sayyids prove to be

[26]Zaman, '*Khums se ghaflat*', p. 20.

[27]Compare also Sachedina, 'Al-Khums', p. 288.

[28]Zaman, '*Khums se ghaflat*', p. 24. For similar arguments, see also S. M. Ja'far, '*Payam-i 'amal men 'amal ka paigham*', *Payam-i 'Amal* 14, 8 (October 1970), pp. 7–8.

[29]Al-Najafi Dhakko, *Islah al-rusum al-zahira*, pp. 136–137.

[30]'*Faridah-i khums aur uski ahamiyyat o afadiyyat*', *Payam-i 'Amal* 18, 1–2 (March and April 1974), p. 37

[31]See A. Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 124–125. For more background on Muhammad Isma'il, see Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i Imamiyyah-i Pakistan*, pp. 260–264.

[32]On the spread of Shi'i educational institutions in Pakistan, see S. M. Saqalain Kazimi (ed.), *Imamiyyah dini madaris-i Pakistan* (Lahore, 2004).

[33]The work is not dated but my estimate of its year of publication, based on the book's layout and the haptic perception of its paper, is corroborated by Sayyid 'Arif Naqvi, *Barr-i saghir ke Imamiyyah musannifin ki matbu'ah tasanif aur tarajim* (Islamabad, 1997), ii, pp. 29–30. On Mirza Yusuf Husain's biography, see Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i imamiyyah-i Pakistan*, p. 393.

[34]M. Y. Husain, *Kitab al-khums* (Mianwali, n. d.), p. 136. This tripartition of deserving groups is related to Q2:215: "They will question thee concerning what they should expend. Say: 'Whatsoever good you expend is for parents and kinsmen, orphans, the needy, and the traveller; and whatever good you may do, God has knowledge of it'".

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insufficient.[35] Only if his kin and his other "slaves" had been provided for, was there room to invest in religious education, preaching or purchasing weapons for defence against enemies of the faith.[36] This logic, according to Mirza Yusuf Husain, would continue to apply during the Occultation, which had commenced with the Twelfth Imam's final inaccessibility in 941.[37] Husain did not express a controversial statement when claiming that the Imam's role during this time had been transferred to the *'ulama*. He qualified this mainstream view, however, by insisting that the scholars were only qualified to act as representatives if they did not give in to their own desires, remained obedient to God, and would not divert the *khums* to their personal benefit.[38]

These attempts to redefine Shi'i charity were barely disguised efforts by traditionalist scholars to defend their dominating position in the Shi'i community, which hinged in particular on their grip on Shi'i mourning ceremonies. This position would have faced significant challenges if more *'ulama* were educated in *khums*-funded reformist *madrasa* and continued their studies in Iran and Iraq, a phenomenon that saw a significant increase from the 1960s.[39] At the time of Partition, traditionalists had still largely dominated the Shi'i scene in Pakistan because many influential Usuli scholars had stayed behind in India where the overwhelming majority of the subcontinent's Shi'i educational institutions were located.

Since substantial amounts of money are involved, the controversy did not die down until the early 2000s. While not attacking the well-established and divinely sanctioned concept of *khums* per se, traditionalist authors continue to criticise the 'evil' practice of even non-Sayyid *mutjahid*s to collect the funds on behalf of the Prophet's kin.[40] These 'miserable people' (*bad-bakht*) not only claim for themselves the power to certify who can be regarded as a descendant of the Prophet. They also further 'violate' the Sayyids' self-esteem (*'izzat-i nafs ko majruh kiya jata hai*) by making them queue for their *sahm*. Sayyids would only receive extremely trivial amounts of charity instead of having substantial aid delivered directly to their doors.[41] Reformist authors, in turn, keep voicing their rejection of the practice that *khums* changes hands informally and without any accountability. In their eyes, the popular preachers are the main beneficiaries of these funds, instead of the proper group, namely the descendants of the Prophet.[42] Yet, we once again notice a surprising lack of detail. Regardless of the passionate tone of these clashes, none of the two sides have elaborated further on the precise nature of Sayyids' distinctiveness. It remains entirely unclear what their differing charity treatment should imply beyond the invocation of vague notions of honour and respect.[43] For both sides, the Sayyids' entitlement to the fifth was predominantly a legal problem.

[35]Husain, *Kitab al-khums*, p. 137.
[36]*Ibid*., p. 138.
[37]For a more detailed discussion of the intellectual labor that the Shi'i community invested in conceptually dealing with this development, see H. Modarressi Tabtaba'i, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam. Abū Ja'far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and his Contribution to Imāmite Shī'ite Thought* (Princeton, 1993).
[38]Husain, *Kitab al-khums*, p. 140.
[39]See Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 200–201.
[40]S. B. Nisar Zaidi, *Kashf al-Haqa'iq* (Karachi, 2004), pp. 323–324.
[41]*Ibid*., p. 395.
[42]S. A. S. Musavi 'Aliabadi, *'Aqa'id o rusumat-i shi'ah* (Karachi, 2004), p. 116, and al-Najafi Dhakko, *Islah al-rusum*, p. 142.
[43]'*Bani Hashim ko sadaqa nahin diya ja sakta*', *Zulfiqar* 13, 22 (16 July 1984), p. 5.

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The problem of marriages

The question of whether Sayyids could marry non-Sayyids is a further issue discussed in Shi'i publications. The traditionalist journal *Zulfiqar* in November 1988 lambasted the ruling by a Hanafi *mufti* (religious legal expert) in Pakistan. The scholar had issued a legal opinion in favour of such a union, arguing that a ban was in violation of the Qu'ran, the *sunna*, and the unequivocal opinion of Hanafi *fuqaha* (jurisprudents).[44] The journal fundamentally disagreed. *Zulfiqar* in its answer drew exclusively on Sunni sources and argued that there was no equivalence and compatibility (*kafa'a*) in marriage between a female Sayyida (*sayyidzadi*) and a non-Sayyid.[45] The reason for this unsuitability was once again not further specified but came down mostly to the issue of obligatory charity (*sadaqa*) that was not permissible for her as a sign of distinction. A further fact that set a Sayyida apart was that her period (*mahwari*) would continue to recur until she was sixty years old, as compared to ordinary women, who usually entered the menopause at the age of fifty. The author of the article, Sayyid Zuhur al-Hasan Kauthari, made the case that his argument was built solidly on the Sunni tradition. He quoted inter alia Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505), who had suggested that there was no compatibility between the Prophet and his family, on the one hand, and the remainder of creation, on the other (*la yukafi'him fi-l-nikah ahad min al-khalq*).[46]

For the reformists, this issue does not seem to have played a significant role. Muhammad Husain al-Najafi Dhakko and others insisted that Pakistan's Shi'i community needed to fundamentally reform its marriage ceremonies. In their view, these occasions betrayed too many 'Hindu' as well as reprehensible Western influences related to dress, singing, and mixing of the sexes. Weddings were also celebrated with undue pomp and circumstances. Yet, the reformists did not address the question of Sayyids marrying non-Sayyids at all.[47] Without further evidence, we can only speculate that this silence perhaps reflects a reluctance to spell out why Sayyids were set apart regarding their *kafa'a* in the first place. Be that as it may, intervening in this field was clearly not a priority for the reformists who boldly fought on many fronts related to custom and belief.

Honouring Sayyids

A similarly one-sided elaboration, even though this time with regard to silence on the traditionalist side, becomes visible if we consider further discussions on the necessity to honour Sayyids qua their genealogical lineage. The pioneering reformist figure Husain Bakhsh Jara (d. 1990) put it rather bluntly, asking what necessity was there at all for providing an

[44]S. Z. al-H. Kauthari, '*Sayyidzadi ka nikah ghair Sayyid se*?', *Zulfiqar* 18, 5 (1 November 1988), p. 2. For the social implications in contemporary Pakistan of such views, compare also https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/35245/being-a-syed-zaadi-wasnt-a-matter-of-pride-for-me-it-was-a-curse/ (accessed July 2019).

[45]The term *kafa'a* in Islam denotes a wide-ranging parity between future spouses that should encompass equivalence of birth, social status, wealth and professions of husband and father-in-law. Compare F. J. Ziadeh, 'Equality (kafā'ah) in the Muslim Law of Marriage', *American Journal of Comparative Law* 6 (1957), pp. 503-517; M. Siddiqui, 'Law and the Desire for Social Control: an Insight into the Hanafi Concept of Kafa'a with Reference to the Fatawa 'Alamgiri (1664-1672)' in *Feminism and Islam: legal and literary perspectives*, (ed.) M. Yamani (Reading, 1996), pp. 49-68; N. Samin, '*Kafā'a fī l-Nasab* in Saudi Arabia: Islamic Law, Tribal Custom, and Social Change', *Journal of Arabian Studies* 2, 2 (2012), pp. 109-126.

[46]*Ibid*. On al-Suyuti, see R. Hernandez, *The Legal Thought of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. Authority and Legacy* (Oxford, 2017).

[47]Al-Najafi Dhakko, *Islah al-rusum*, pp. 213-224.

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elaborate reasoning that "'Ali's children" should be treated with esteem? Since they are related by blood to the Prophet, there was simply no possible objection to the "duty of respect" (*ihtiram ke vujub*).[48] In January 1963, the journal *al-Muballigh* carried the legal opinion that expressing one's respect for the Prophet's kin functioned in an analogous fashion to the Islamic principle that Muslims should honour their fathers and mothers, even if they did not practice their faith, or had not (yet) converted to Islam at all.[49] This obedience to one's parents only found its limit in actions that would turn the daughter or son into a polytheist. In the same vein, even a non-practicing (*be 'amal*) Sayyid who skirted fundamental obligations such as praying and fasting did not lose his status as being related to the Prophet. He still deserved being honoured (*tauqir o ta'zim ka istihqaq rakhta hai)* by non-Sayyids.[50] Muhammad Husain al-Najafi Dhakko relied on a *hadith* discussed by the Safavid scholar Mir Damad (d. 1631) to underline this point. The Prophet had compared those among his descendants who displayed a pious and good conduct (*salih o nik kirdar*) to the clear verses of the Qur'an (*muhkamat*).[51] It was necessary to both respect and also follow them as sources of prosperity (*najah o falah*). Those Sayyids who manifested corruption (*talih o bad kirdar*), by contrast, were like the abrogated verses of the Qur'an (*ayat-i mansukhah*).[52] While they should still be honoured (*ta'zim o takrim*), it was impermissible to apply these verses to one's life. Yet, in typical fashion, the author avoided talking about the precise meaning of this status or what it would mean to "follow" the Sayyids or to be "obedient" to them. Instead, he once again made the (circular) argument that the distinction could be inferred from their differing treatment as far as *zakat* and *khums* are concerned.[53] The issue was not really clarified by further references to Muhammad b. Yaqub al-Kulaini's (d. 941) Shi'i *hadith* collection *Usul al-Kafi*. In this work, we find traditions that Sayyids are held to stricter standards by God. They receive a double punishment for sins and a double reward for good deeds. While thus opening the door for respect, *al-Muballigh* tried at the same time to dispel any notion that this would imply the necessity for public veneration or even a position of religious authority exerted by Sayyids. The article made it clear that Sayyids were not allowed to cash in on their special status and demand being honoured by their fellow human beings.[54] Instead, they should take heed of the example set by the fourth Shi'i Imam, Zain al-'Abidin (d. 713). When he embarked on the hajj, he always chose to travel with "foreign" pilgrims, who were unaware of his identity. This way, he could also contribute the labour of his hands and eat with the other pilgrims without them making any special accommodations for him.[55]

In a comparable vein, an article in *Payam-i 'Amal* in September 1978 underlined that Islam indeed acknowledges the importance of both *hasab* (personal achievement) and *nasab*

[48]H. B. Jara, *Lum'at al-anwar fi 'aqa'id al-abrar*, 3rd edition (Sargodha, 1992), pp. 324–325. For Jara's biography, see Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i imamiyyah*, pp. 83–85.

[49]See M. H. al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Bab al-Istifsarat*', *al-Muballigh* 6, 12 (January 1963), p. 36.

[50]*Ibid*.

[51]On the *muhkamat*, see L. Kinberg, '*Muḥkamāt* and *Mutashābihāt* (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis', *Arabica* 35, 2 (1988), pp. 143–172.

[52]On Islamic theories of abrogation, see W. B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories* (Cambridge 1997), pp. 68–74.

[53]al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Bab al-Istifsarat*', p. 37.

[54]Unfortunately, the author does not spell out whether Sayyids are in fact engaged in any such practices by providing amulets etc. More anthropological research is required to help illuminate this issue.

[55]al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Bab al-Istifsarat*', p. 37.

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(genealogy).[56] According to this contribution, young Pakistanis who are only nominally Muslim but rather fully emulate the West (*mazhab-i maghrib ki kuranah-i taqlid karne vale nau javan*) promoted instead the idea of absolute equality and thus fell prey to a discredited concept that had already been pushed by the Umayyad dynasty to sideline the *ahl al-bait*.[57] The author instead made the case for Islam's differing understanding of equality in society. The latter pertained to uniformity of rights (*huquq ki jaksaniyyat*) and attempts to "lift up" debased people to an acceptable moral standard. Yet, a truly religious society could calmly and generously embrace the existence of certain "categories [of people] who obtain high levels, (*in tabaqon jo buland darajat par fa'iz hain*)". This elite should not be brought down to the level of vile (*past*) human beings. Instead, Islam accepted their honour (*sharaf*) without the slightest envy.[58] The article reminded its readers that Sayyids were not singled out due to their own achievements but rather as descendants to whom other rules applied, the ban on *zakat* among them. Drawing on modern principles of science (*science usulon ki roshni men*), the piece went on to add some more contemporary arguments by claiming that European researchers confirmed the importance of genetically transmitted and hence inherited qualities.[59] In case of the Banu Hashim, it was their outstanding bravery that had originated with ʿAli and continued to be handed down from generation to generation.[60] Yet, the author was quick to point out that Sayyids could never rest on their genetic laurels alone. In order to really deserve being honoured, they were required to repent from their sins and reform their ways. He encouraged Sayyids to present such an impressive example of high morals that "the world itself would be forced to think of us [the Shiʿi Muslims], due to our relations [with the Sayyids and hence the Prophet]" (*keh dunya khud hamari nisbaton se hamen yad karne par majbur ho ja'e*) and that, consequently, Muhammad's name would be illuminated.[61]

Several examples of physical distinctions such as the female period and bravery notwithstanding, the concept of Sayyids and their esoteric and exoteric standing remains curiously ill-defined in the material examined. The authors, writing during a period of more than fifty years, are all in agreement that Sayyids are direct descendants of the *ahl al-bait*. Reformist and traditionalist authors do not seem to be willing, however, to venture beyond very vague notions of honouring Sayyids or spelling out the extent of their leadership for the Shiʿi community. Why is this the case? I suggest that the key to make sense of this phenomenon has to be sought within the intense struggle over the question of religious authority in Pakistan, as the next section will demonstrate in some detail.

[56]T. Bukhari, '*Fazilat-i nasab*', *Payam-i ʿAmal* 22, 7 (September 1978), p. 9.
[57]*Ibid.*, p. 11.
[58]*Ibid.*, p. 11.
[59]For the appropriation of scientific thought in modern Shiʿi Islam, compare S. W. Fuchs, 'Failing Transnationally: Local Intersections of Science, Medicine, and Sectarianism in Modernist Shiʿi Writings', *Modern Asian Studies* 48, 2 (2014), pp. 433-467.
[60]Bukhari, '*Fazilat-i nasab*', pp. 12-13.
[61]*Ibid.*, p. 13.

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Two alternative forms of religious authority

I would like to argue that Sayyids constituted a veritable problem for reformists and traditionalists alike. The inception of Pakistan gave rise to an intense competition within Shi'i Islam, which led both camps to eagerly bolster their particular conceptions of religious authority. In each of these typologies, there was no room for descendants of the Prophet as alternative centres. The reformists, for example, operated with a four-fold differentiation of the Shi'i community (*qaum*), as an article in *al-Muballigh* from 1968 demonstrates.[62] The periodical distinguished the simple believers (*'amm mu'minin*), who have imbibed from their childhood the principles of religion (*usul-i din*). Their faith was to a significant extent built on emotional appeal and their love for the *ahl al-bait*. They attended Shi'i mourning sessions (*majalis*) and were moved by narrations of the virtues (*fada'il*) and afflictions (*masa'ib*) of the Shi'i Imams.[63] Second, there was the group of the popular preachers, the *zakir*s and *wa'izin*. They fulfilled the crucial service of leading these *majalis* (Shi'i mourning gatherings) and elucidating the precise roles and life histories of the *ahl al-bait*.[64] Third, we also find a further group of essentially political leaders of the *qaum*. Their task was to protect the Shi'i community by fighting for its rights against infringements on behalf of the government. They were supposed to ensure, for example, that Shi'i religious education was provided for in the school curriculum.[65] Finally, however, there was the most important group, the teachers in religious schools and the great *mujtahid*s. This transnational community of scholars in both Pakistan and the Middle East laid the cornerstone of Islam since they made it clear to all other three groups what the boundaries of permissible (*halal*) and impermissible (*haram*) actions were. They thus constructed the edifice of the *shari'a*, in which Shi'i piety and its more emotional aspects could safely operate, and dug the well from which all others drank.[66] The journal *al-Hujjat* had—a couple of years earlier—approached this issue with an even more hierarchical typology. It made the case that in each age only one overarching *marji' al-taqlid* existed. This outstanding personality was the head of a tightly-organised network of representatives (*wukala*). These men, ideally *mujtahid*s themselves, had exclusive duties for each region of the globe and functioned in this setting as leaders for the Shi'is. Below them, the journal located those religious scholars who had not yet reached the level of *ijtihad* but could be trusted in transmitting legal rulings. The popular preachers took the lowest rank in this pyramid. As we see, once again religious learning and *shari'a*-focused competence is the main currency in this context. There is no room envisioned for Sayyids qua Sayyids, meaning without *madrasa* training, nor is their (potential) role discussed at all.[67]

For the traditionalists, by contrast, the pinnacle of authority was not the *mujtahid* of the age, who was supposedly the representative of the Hidden Imam in the Usuli understanding.

[62]See M. H. al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Qaum-i shi'ah ke arba'ah anasir*', *al-Muballigh* 12, 2 (March 1968), p. 13.
[63]*Ibid*., p. 13.
[64]In this context, this mostly means the Imams. Dhakko foregrounded the tremendous influence of the popular preachers and admonished them to stick to authentic narrations. *Ibid*., pp. 13-14.
[65]*Ibid*. pp. 14-15. Dhakko in this article was highly critical of existing Shi'i organisations. Their lack of effectiveness, in his view, was inter alia reflected in the dire state of the Shi'i press. According to Dhakko, there was not a single Shi'i daily newspaper or weekly that could convey the community's demands to the government. On these aspects of Shi'i political activism, see Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 114-123.
[66]See al-Najafi Dhakko, '*Qaum-i shi'ah ke arba'ah anasir*', pp. 14-15.
[67]See Fuchs, *In a Pure Muslim Land*, pp. 104-105.

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Instead, proponents of this camp made the case that the Occultation of the Twelfth Shiʿi Imam did not mean that the *ahl al-bait* were no longer accessible.[68] Such an approach comes to the fore in a speech that Aqil Turabi (d. 2009), second son of the famous poet and *majlis* leader Rashid Turabi (d. 1973), held in April 1982. He had just been elected as the new president of the Imamia Council, a body that considered itself to be a traditionalist counterpart to the *Tahrik-i Nifaz-i Fiqh-i Jaʿfariyya* (TNFJ). The TNFJ was the main organisation of Pakistani Shiʿi political activism during the 1980 and led by *ʿulama* who were inspired by the Iranian Revolution. The TNFJ president Mufti Jaʿfar Husain (d. 1983) won a decisive Shiʿi victory in early 1980. He had steadfastly opposed the Pakistani government's attempt at deducting *zakat* directly from bank accounts.[69] As an expression of Mufti Jaʿfar's authority, the crowd addressed him at rallies with slogans such as "*Ek hi qa'id, ek hi rahbar, Mufti Ja'far, Mufti Ja'far*" (Only one leader [*qa'id*, Arabic], only one leader [*rahbar*, Persian], Mufi Jaʿfar, Mufti Jaʿfar).[70] Aqil Turabi deliberately rejected such terms. He implored his audience that they should never call him with either designation. The only *qa'id* or *rahbar* worthy of such an address was ʿAli b. Abi Talib, the first Shiʿi Imam. Turabi called him the *shahanshah-i vilayat mushkilkusha*, the King of Kings of the Guardianship, the Solver of Problems. Besides him, there was no other leader.[71] Similarly, the contemporary Karachi-based *zakir* Sayyid Zamir Akhtar Naqvi relies on Urdu poetry to express ʿAli's exaltedness:

> Counting the drops in rain showers is easy
> But it is impossible, oh king, to ever numerate your virtues
> (*qatrah-i baran ka ho shumar asan hai*
> *par nahin mumkin shaha tere faza'il ka shumar*).[72]

Traditionalist publications repeatedly pointed out that the Imams only outwardly appeared to us in human form. In reality, they were of a different substance altogether, created out of light and preexistent.[73] Such a view is intimately connected with the esoteric notion of the Imams' "creational guardianship" (*vilayat-i takvini*). According to this view, God had delegated far-reaching powers over creation to the Infallibles. Human beings could not directly approach God since He was the absolute other, an utterly transcendent being. The Imams, by contrast, were approachable by all and served as the crucial connection (*vasila*) between the Creator and his creation. Some went even so far as to claim that the true originators of our earthly existence were the Imams themselves because God had even delegated this task.[74] The influential Shiʿi preacher and former member of the Council of Islamic Ideology Sayyid

[68]S. ʿA. Zaidi, '*Ahl al-bait ʿalayhi al-salam*', *Zulfiqar* 13, 16 (April 1984), pp. 4–5.

[69]On the confrontation in 1980 that led to the so-called Islamabad agreement, see Rieck, *The Shias of Pakistan*, pp. 207–219.

[70]I. H. Baluc, 'Islamabad Convention', *Rah-i ʿAmal* 13–14 (1980), p. 6.

[71]'*ʿAlam-i Islam ko mutahhid ho kar la-diniyyat aur sahyuniyyat ka muqabalah karna cahiye*', *Zulfiqar* 11, 16 (16 April 1982), p. 7.

[72]S. Z. Akhtar Naqvi, *Vilayat-i ʿAli b. Abi Talib. ʿAsharah majalis* (Karachi, 2012), p. 203.

[73]M. Latif Najafi, '*Anvar-i ilahi ka libas-i bashari men zuhur*', *Zulfiqar* 16, 7 (1 December 1986), p. 5. See also, for example, M. Ismaʿil, *Khutbat-i muballigh-i aʿzam. Majmuʿah-i taqarir* (Lahore, 2010), pp. 146–147.

[74]A. al-H. Carney, 'The Theos Agnostos: Ismaili and Shaykhi Perspectives', *Journal for Islamic Studies* 23 (2003), pp. 3–35.

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Irfan Haidar ʿAbidi (d. 1998) did not openly adopt such an extreme position.[75] He confirmed that God is the creator but stressed that the *ahl al-bait* had real power. While God's true self was hidden, His nature was revealed through the Prophet Muhammad and his descendants (*makhfi zat us ki magar zahir ho Muhammad o Al-i Muhammad* […] *ke zari'e*). Among these, it was the Imams who provided proper guidance and intervened in the world on their own authority.[76] To foreground their views, traditionalist authors in Pakistan relied heavily on Shiʿi *hadith* material, which amply confirms the supernatural abilities of the Imams. According to these sources, the Imams are inter alia conversant in all language, leave no trace when walking over soft soil, and cast no shadow.[77] Pakistani writers claimed that the Sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (d. 765), had confirmed that ʿAli would show himself to every child on the planet and visit every dying human being—he had this power according to God's decision (*yeh taqat ba-hukm-i khuda maujud hai*).[78] For the believers facing death, the vision of ʿAli would be glad tidings and would enable them to face their mortality in a calm and peaceful manner.[79] With their miracle working powers, the *ma'sumin* (Infallibles) were thus highly responsive to human suffering. The polemicist Bashir Ansari (d. 1983), for example, laid out in detail how his trust in the Imams' intervention, in combination with uttering the heartfelt words of *Ya 'Ali madad* (Help, oh ʿAli), had protected his sons in the midst of a terrible accident, had healed one of his children from gout, and had caused a dangerous tumour in his throat to retreat without him having to go through the therapy advised by foreign-educated doctors.[80] These interventions, it is important to point out, do not hinge on the fact of whether the supplicant who implores the Shiʿi Imams is a Sayyid or not. Bashir Ansari himself was not of this rank.

Given his conceptualisation of the Imams, Bashir Ansari also advocated for a different hierarchy among scholars. Ansari put gnostic knowledge (*ma'rifa*) center stage. Accordingly, those *'ulama* who only dealt with purely legal questions such as *khums*, *zakat*, or purity were inferior to those—such as he himself—who paid attention to God's unicity (*tawhid*), the mission of the Prophets and the Imams, as well as their authority (*wilaya*):

> In the same way, the *faqih* who has attained a high position in the branches (*furu'*) of religion and has already reached the highest level of *ijtihad* and extraction (*istinbat*) is inferior compared to the scholar who is fully conversant (*'ubur hasil hai*) with questions of the articles of faith (*'aqai'd*), belief (*iman*), and the principles of religion (*usul-i din*) .[The latter is the one] who shows through his knowledge the way of truth (*rah-i haqq*) to those who are lost. He also inflicts a defeat on the enemies of God and the Prophet and the opponents of the pure Imams (on them be peace).

[75]On him, see A. H. Caman, *Meri yadgar mulaqaten: Mihrab o minbar ki namvar shakhsiyat se mulaqat va marasim ki un kahi aur dilcasp hikayat* (Islamabad, 2000), pp. 268–286.

[76]S. ʿI. H. ʿAbidi, *Tamancah bar rukhsar-i munkar-i vilayat-i 'Ali* (Lahore, 2009), pp. 80–81.

[77]M. H. al-Sabiqi, *Qawa'id al-shari'a fi 'aqa'id al-shi'a bi-javab usul al-shari'a fi 'aqa'id al-shi'a* (Multan, 1989), pp. 402–407. Ali Rahnema has dismissed this material as 'superstitious'. He has argued that it was 'rediscovered' under the Safavids with the clear goal of justifying their rule. See A. Rahnema, *Superstition as Ideology. From Majlesi to Ahmadinejad* (New York, 2015), p. 17.

[78]S. Z. Hasnain Zaidi, *Mushkil kusha'-yi 'alam* (Lahore, n.d.), pp. 154–155.

[79]*Ibid*., pp. 156–157. By contrast, for the hypocrite (*munafiq*), that is the non-Shiʿi Muslim who had denied the authority (*wilaya*) held by the Imams, ʿAli's appearance would mean clarity of hell and God's curse (*khuda ki la'nat*). Compare also S. H. Dogar, *Ta'yid-i ma'sum dar javab-i Islah al-rusum* (Lahore, 1996), p. 315.

[80]B. Ansari, *Haqa'iq al-wasa'it ya'ni Ma'rifat-i Muhammad o Al-i Muhammad bi-javab-i Usul al-shari'a* (Gujrat, 2013), pp. 118–121. For Ansari's biography, see Naqvi, *Tazkirah-i 'ulama'-i imamiyyah-i Pakistan*, pp. 276–279.

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> The branches of religion have only been made obligatory (*vajib*) for this reason that through them the foundations of religion are remembered (*yad tazah rahe*). Therefore, the ʿulama of gnostic knowledge (*ʿulama'-i ma'rifat*) are several stages better than the ʿulama of religious rituals (*ʿulama'-i ʿamal*).[81]

Sayyids had no space or role in such an alternative ranking. For this reason, they should regard the Hidden Imam as their "tribal chief", who shared their rights. They should direct their own veneration to him under the guidance of the esoterically-minded *ʿulama*, whom al-Zaman did not require to be Sayyids themselves.[82]

To underline the fact that even a fervent veneration of the Imams does not preclude this-worldly political activism, we also find traditionalist voices that connect the achievement of Pakistan in an intimate fashion with the Infallibles. They emphasise that passionate love for the Imams can unleash real consequences on the ground, without conceding, however, that Sayyids would be playing any role in this regard either. The traditionalist scholars try to refute the accusation that their 'apolitical' worldview would imply passivity during the time of the Occultation, with them being focused only bloody mourning ceremonies.[83] In presenting themselves as activists, too, they sought to reclaim the original idea of Pakistan as Shiʿi utopia and thus to challenge Sunni sectarian actors, who aim at turning Shiʿis into a non-Muslim minority. Such a step would, among other forms of discrimination, exclude Shiʿis from the collective reasoning of what Pakistan should mean for the South Asia and the world.[84] Arguments about the Imams' political salience become visible in the recollections of Sayyid Hakim Mahmud Gilani, a former *Ahl-i Hadith* activist and editor of the group's journal for almost thirty years.[85] In 1958, he converted to Shiʿi Islam and became a prolific pro-Shiʿi voice until his death on 1 August 1982.[86] Gilani recalled that before the 1946 elections in the Punjab, the prospects for victory at the ballot box grew increasingly dimmer for the Muslim League (ML). The party faced the combined opposition of the Ahrar, the Congress and the Unionists.[87] The ML leadership, now in full panic mode,

[81]Ansari, *Haqa'iq al-wasa'it*, p. 55.

[82]S. M. Jaʿfar al-Zaman Naqvi, *Tariq al-muntazirin dar fara'id-i mu'minin* (Karachi, n.d.), p. 6.

[83]S. M. Jaʿfar-uz-Zaman Naqvi, *The Last Great Reformer of the World as Highlighted by Prophets* (Karachi, 2003), pp. 122–124.

[84]For anti-Shiʿi sectarianism in Pakistan and the competition over the idea of Pakistan, see M. Q. Zaman, 'Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shiʿi and Sunni Identities', *Modern Asian Studies* 32, 3 (1998), pp. 689–716, and S. W. Fuchs, 'The Long Shadow of the State: The Iranian Revolution, Saudi Influence, and the Shifting Arguments of Anti-Shiʿi Sectarianism in Pakistan', in *Pan-Islamic Connections: Transnational Networks between South Asia and the Gulf*, (eds.) L. Louër and C. Jaffrelot (London, 2017), pp. 217–232 and pp. 290–300.

[85]Sayyid Hakim Mahmud Gilani was born in 1908. His father was a scholar and poet employed by the Maharaja of Kashmir. Gilani finished his schooling in 1925 and, after a short stint in as a primary school teacher in Lahore, devoted himself to journalism. He worked for the journals *Islah* and *Shahab* before becoming the responsible editor of *Ahl-i Hadith*, a post which he held from 1928 until 1957. He continued to publish in other important newspapers and periodicals, such as *Zamindar*, *Siyasa* or the monthly *Musalman*, and wrote books from an *Ahl-i Hadith* perspective. After his conversion, this focus shifted to works from a Shiʿi angle. Gilani was hired as the assistant editor of the periodical *Ma'rifat-i Islami* and stayed with the publication from 1961 until 1975. He eventually founded of his own Shiʿi publishing house, the Idarah-i Tahqiqat-i Haidari. A glowing admirer of Khomeini, he was planning to write a substantial work on the Iranian Revolution at the end of his life. Due to a long illness, however, the task came to naught. See F. Vasti, '*Ta'arif-i muhaqqiq-i a'zam 'allamah Sayyid Mahmud Gilani*', *Zulfiqar* 12, 7 (1 December 1982), p. 6.

[86]*Ibid.*

[87]For the situation in the Punjab and the local strength of the Unionist Party, see N. Osman, 'Dancing with the Enemy: Sikander Hayat Khan, Jinnah and the Vexed Question of "Pakistan" in a Punjabi Unionist Context', in

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decided to completely revamp its message only a couple of days before election day.[88] Gilani remembered one campaign event in particular, held in the city of Sargodha. Present back then were the journalist Zafar Ali Khan (d. 1956) along with other important members of the League, such as Mian Mumtaz Daultana (d. 1995) and Iftikhar Husain Nawab Mamdot (d. 1969), who all repeated basically the 'same speech'. These non-Shi'i figures decided to pitch their message in a rather explicit Imami way. They equated the confrontation between the Muslim League and her opponents with the conflict between the Umayyad Caliph Yazid b. Mu'awiya (d. 683) and Husain. The context of Karbala meant that Islam as a whole had faced an extremely dangerous juncture. Through his brave fight and martyrdom, Husain had managed to save the religion of his grandfather from being overwhelmed by unbelief (*kufr*). Today, Muslims in the subcontinent during this "most critical time" (*is naziktarin vaqt men*) were supposedly confronted with an equally stark choice and threat. They were required to give their support to Husain and hence to God himself. The ML representatives delved even more deeply in Shi'i tradition, which holds up the bravery of 'Ali's daughter Zainab (d. 681) in confronting Yazid after she was marched to Damascus along with other captives from Karbala.[89] At the rally in Sargodha, the Muslim Leaguers called on the people to face the enemies of the League, whom they equated with enemies of religion itself, with the same faith-filled hearts as Zainab had exemplified in her encounter with the Caliph. Her conviction had made him tremble: "Oh sons and daughters of Islam! If you want to preserve the special religion (*din-i muta'ayyin*) of Husain and Zainab and aim at being assured to see it blossom, then be obedient to Husain and Zainab! Make the Muslim League successful and help her to bring about Pakistan!".[90] In Gilani's estimate, this new strategy helped to turn around the League's desperate situation and made Pakistan an unexpected reality. The tremendous religious passion unleashed in this way outmanoeuvred the League's opponents, even though they were 'spending money like water'.[91] Pakistan was, hence, not built on an abstract, generic idea of Islam but established in the name of Husain and Zainab. This way, its Muslim inhabitants can today "breath freely".[92] The potential for political mobilisation that Gilani attributes to widespread veneration of the *ahl al-bait* is remarkable. While recent revisionist accounts have shown that the discourse of the ML was much more infused with religious rhetoric than previously acknowledged, the focus has so far been on uncompromising Sunni figures, such as the Deobandi scholar Shabbir Ahmad 'Usmani (d. 1949).[93] His narrow and sectarian conception of Hanafi Islam that should rule supreme in future Pakistan unnerved Shi'is in Bombay and

Muslims against the Muslim League. Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan, (eds.) A. U. Qasmi and M. E. Robb (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 311–337.

[88]H. S. M. Gilani, '*Kya Pakistan Husain aur Zainab ke nam par hasil nahi kiya gaya?*', *al-Muballigh* 7, 12 (January 1964), p. 19.

[89]For a discussion, see S. A. Hyder, 'Sayyedah Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus and Beyond', in *The Women of Karbala. Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, (ed.) K. S. Aghaie (Austin, 2005), pp. 161–182.

[90]Gilani, '*Kya Pakistan Husain aur Zainab ke nam par hasil nahi kiya gaya?*', p. 20.

[91]*Ibid*., p. 21

[92]*Ibid*.

[93]V. Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina: State Power, Islam and the Quest for Pakistan in Late Colonial India* (New Delhi, 2015).

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Lucknow.[94] Yet, there are no other accounts of which I am aware that have stressed a particular utilisation of Shi'i symbols tapping into the cross-sectarian devotion to the Imams and the *ahl al-bait* in the run-up to Partition.[95] What we can perhaps glean from this substantial 'Imamophilia' is that both reformists and traditionalists were aware of the religious (and political) force of these ideas. Both camps were eager to channel these expressions of piety towards the *'ulama* or the Imams, respectively. They thus pre-empted the Sayyids themselves from potentially cashing in on the 'clout' of a direct affiliation with the *ahl al-bait* held in the Punjab and beyond.

Conclusion

These deeply-held convictions regarding the political potentials of the Imams and the love for the Prophet's kin bring me in this concluding section to a quote by Kazuo Morimoto. In his pioneering works on Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim societies, Morimoto has investigated accounts of a dream in which Sayyids feature prominently. He draws the following conclusion:

> Thus, just as the holy figures of the Prophet's family are presented as capable of intervening in the affairs of the stories' present-day events through dreams, sayyids/sharīfs are depicted as being able to prompt such ancestral interventions. It is this idea of the existence of a trans-temporal super-natural circuit between sayyids/sharīfs and their holy and affectionate forebears in all later times that underpins the edifying stories.[96]

But, as we have seen in the context of Pakistan, no such notions come to the fore in the material that I have investigated. Sayyids there are not credited with providing any particular shortcut to divine intervention. I have argued that both reformists and traditionalists have avoided talking about any theological or miracle-working role of the Prophet's kin. Instead, both sides have discussed Sayyids merely as a distinct legal category to which its own criteria apply as far as charity, marriage or honouring is concerned. I hold that this reductionist and legalising reading of Sayyids has to do with the intense competition over religious authority in post-Partition Pakistan. For both traditionalist and reformist Shi'i authors, *'ulama*, and preachers, there was no room to acknowledge Sayyids as potential further competitors in their efforts to convince the Shi'i public about the proper 'orthodoxy' of their specific views.

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[94]J. Jones, '"The Pakistan that is going to be Sunnistan": Indian Shi'a Responses to the Pakistan Movement', in *Muslims against the Muslim League. Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan*, (eds.) A.U. Qasmi and M. E. Robb (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 350-380.

[95]Whereas Venkat Dhulipala makes the case that in 1945 India's Shi'is replaced their Muharram slogans with calls for the establishment of Pakistan and displayed 'enthusiasm' for the new state, Justin Jones paints a more nuanced picture: he draws our attention to both substantial Shi'i reservations and simultaneous support by influential Shi'i figures within the Muslim League. Yet, both accounts do not offer a discussion of the League trying to appropriate Shi'i rhetoric. See Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina*, pp. 445-6, and Jones, '"The Pakistan that is going to be Sunnistan"'.

[96]K. Morimoto, 'How to Behave Toward *sayyids* and *sharīfs*. A Trans-Sectarian Tradition of Dream Accounts', in *Sayyids and Sharifs in Muslim Societies. The Living Links to the Prophet*, (ed.) K. Morimoto (London, 2012), p. 19.

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