1   Trajectories of Shiʿis in the Gulf and Their Presence in Europe

The Shiʿi ritual practices as performed, perceived, and described by the women I have interviewed since 2009 are embedded within the women's political, religious, socioeconomic, and geographic locales as well as transnational contexts. Before analyzing how these contexts are articulated by the women within their ritual practices, an overview of the situatedness of the Shiʿi population in the Middle East and in Europe is essential. This chapter illustrates the power relations between Sunnis and Shiʿis as expressed in the ruling structures in the countries covered in this book but also within the wider context of the Arab Gulf and the relationship to Iran in the region.[1] The illustration of the political and socioeconomic context of the countries covered is important as the ritual and discursive practices as well as textual productions of Shiʿi women are connected to the ongoing geopolitical developments and the position of Shiʿism. These practices and productions are in response to the geopolitical context in the Middle East and its impact on the Shiʿi population in Europe. There is a reciprocal relationship between the context, ritual practices, and Shiʿi women's empowerment. The power dynamics within this triangulation is not linear or constant but is changing continuously, reflecting the unsettled political situation of the region as a whole. The illustrated political references in this book only include the geopolitical context of the region up until 2018 and do not intend to present a comprehensive history of the presence of the Shiʿi population in the

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[1] For more on sectarian tensions in the Middle East, see among others: Vali Nasr, *The Shiʿa Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (London: Norton, 2007); Yitzhak Nakash, "The Shiʿites and the Future of Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 4 (July–August 2003), 17–26; Michael Scott Doran, "The Heirs of Nasser: Who Will Benefit from the Second Arab Revolution?" *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (2011), 17–25; Yitzhak Nakash, *Reaching for Power: The Shiʿa in the Modern Arab World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Thomas Brandt Fibiger, "Sectarian Non-Entrepreneurs: The Experience of Everyday Sectarianism in Bahrain and Kuwait," *Middle East Critique* 27, no. 3 (2018), 303–316.

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Gulf.[2] Rather, the aim is to provide the reader with a general picture of the power dynamics between the Shiʿi population and the ruling elites and their impact on the relationship of Shiʿis to their states in the Gulf. This is important to understand the empirical examples and case studies discussed in the chapters to follow.

1.1   Arab Shiʿis in the Gulf

The world's Muslim population is estimated at around 1.8 billion, with Shiʿis constituting 10–13 percent of the overall Muslim population.[3] In the Gulf region, there are numerous distinct sects and groupings (Figure 1.1).[4] After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the various nation-states in the twentieth century, the Shiʿi population in the Arab Gulf had to construct new identities and to "redefine their relations with newly emerging states, and to non-Shiʿi ruling elites backed by Western powers."[5] The degree of the new Arab nation-states' accommodation and acceptance of their Shiʿi populations has varied according to geopolitical changes in the region. In countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, the Shiʿi population is

[2] On the history of the presence of the Shiʿi population in the Gulf, see Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015). See also Haidar Said, ed., *Al-Shīʿa al-ʿArab: Al-Hawiyya wa-l-Muāṭṭana* [translated by the editor as: *The Arab Shiites: Identity and Citizenship*, www.dohainstitute.org/ar/BooksAndJournals/Pages/The-Arab-Shiites-Identity-and-Citizenship.aspx] (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2019).

[3] See the individual chapters: for Afghanistan, Andreas Dittmann and André Staarmann, 13–28; for Iraq, Andreas Dittmann and André Staarmann, 151–170; for Pakistan, Andreas Dittmann, 389–404; for Bahrain, Wolfgang Gieler, 49–62; for Saudi Arabia, Louisa Sofie Kropp and Natalja Geringer, 417–434; for Syria, Wolf-Dieter Lassotta and Martin Schwarz, 471–488; for Lebanon, Wolf-Dieter Lassotta and Schirin Vahle, 305–316; for Yemen, Markus Mess, 223–232; for United Arab Emirates, Bruno Munoz-Perez and Mohammed Zarouni, 557–566; for Iran, André Staarmann, 171–188, and for Kuwait, Zeynep Yilmaz, 287–296. In addition, for Saudi Arabia see: www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/saudi-arabia/#people-and-society and for Syria see: www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society

[4] Some sources estimate between 10 and 20 percent. See various sources: Pew Research Center, "The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010–2030," www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/#:~:text=The%20world%E2%80%99s%20Muslim%20population%20is%20expected%20to%20increase,Research%20Center%E2%80%99s%20Forum%20on%20Religion%20%26%20Public%20Life; Toby Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf: Bahrain, Saudi Arabic, and the Arab Spring That Wasn't* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Briefs, an Imprint of Stanford University Press, 2013); CIA factbook: www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/world/

[5] Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprising and the Rebirth of the Shia–Sunni Divide* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship online, 2017), 2.
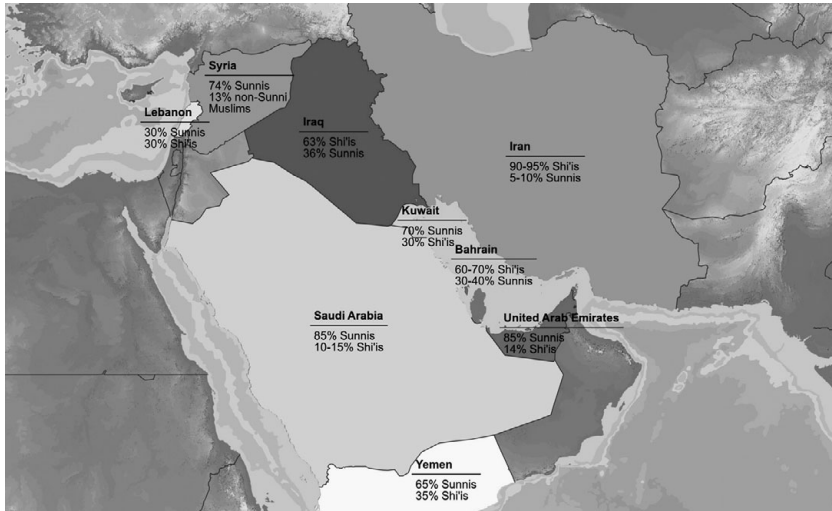
Figure 1.1 Distribution of Shiʿis and Sunnis in the Middle East
All data taken from Wolfgang Gieler and Sabine Wege, *Staatenlexikon Asien: Geographie, Geschichte, Kultur, Politik und Wirtschaft* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).[6]

significant and "ha[s] been afflicted with varying levels of political marginalisation, economic deprivation, and religious discrimination."[7] The Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 not only shifted the Sunni–Shiʿi power dynamics in the area, placing the Shiʿis at the center of political discourses in the Middle East, but also impacted on inner-Shiʿi power relations through the establishment of Iran's Islamic Republic and the consequent increase of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's (d. 1989) political and religious power, particularly within the global Shiʿi clerical leadership structures (*marjaʿiyya*). The most important seminary institutions of Twelver Shiʿism, which also hosted the most senior clerical authorities in Shiʿism, were based at that time in Najaf in Iraq. The Iranian Revolution consolidated the shift of the center of Shiʿi Islam and of Shiʿi clerical authority from Najaf to Qom in Iran – a trend that had started thirty years earlier.[8] The Islamic Revolution in Iran significantly

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[6] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 7.

[7] Frederic M. Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 16.

[8] Nakash argues that the establishment of the Sunni-dominated Iraqi state in 1921 led Najaf to a "socioeconomic and intellectual decline, and in the middle of the twentieth century was superseded by Qum in Iran as the major Shiʿi academic center [and] … became the center for disseminating Shiʿi ideas." See Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 19.

transformed the dynamics of transnational Shiʿi politics. Qom has developed into a, if not the, major transnational center of Shiʿi learning. Sectarian hostilities in the region were further fueled through the mobilization of Shiʿis in Iran's neighboring countries.[9] Until the late 1980s, the political leadership of the Islamic Republic sought to export the Islamic Revolution, toppling neighboring regimes by mobilizing local Shiʿi communities. The Iranian-backed Hizbullah in Lebanon is one of the most successful examples of Shiʿi political mobilization – it is the most powerful political movement in contemporary Lebanon and has been central to the political mobilization of Shiʿis within the country. The increasing power of Iran in the Gulf has influenced the relationship between Iraqi parties and movements and the Iranian regime, with the former having been eager to maintain their independence from Iranian political control and financial reliance.[10] The Islamic Revolution and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 contributed to an increase in religious discrimination against Arab Gulf Shiʿis. Saddam's fall further shifted sectarian power dynamics in the region, allowing the rise of the so-called Shiʿi crescent.[11] Saudi Arabia deployed a Salafi and anti-Shiʿi discourse as part of its countermobilization strategy against the increasing power of Shiʿi political actors in the region, who are often portrayed as collaborating with Iran.[12] The post-Baʿthist period in Iraq, during which Shiʿi Islamist parties have gained in power, has also been perceived as a challenge to countries such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, which feared their Shiʿi populations would be inspired by the Iraqi change of sectarian power dynamics.

Not only the historical influence of the Iranian regime in the Gulf and its eagerness to control the Shiʿi transnational sphere religiously, ideologically, and politically but also the uprisings during the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 influenced the wider sociopolitical and economic position of the Shiʿi population in the Gulf.[13] The anti-government protests and armed rebellion that spread across much of the Arab world during these uprisings were increasingly unsettling, particularly for Gulf regimes, undermining their legitimacy and threatening their power in the region. Shiʿis in the Gulf have used familial and clerical links to other Shiʿis in the Middle East

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[9] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 31.

[10] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*; as well as Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 69–75.

[11] King Abdullah of Jordan warned in 2004 about the spread of Iranian influence from Beirut to the Persian Gulf, describing it as the rise of a "Shiʿi crescent".

[12] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 17 and 18.

[13] For a discussion on Arab Shiʿism, see Rola El-Husseini and Mara Leichtman, "Arab Shiʿism and the Shiʿa of Lebanon: New Approaches to Modern History, Contemporary Politics, and Religion," *Welt des Islams* 59, no. 3–4 (2019), 253–281; Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*; Mona Harb, "Politics, Culture, Religion: How Hizbullah Is Constructing an Islamic Milieu in Lebanon," *Review of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2009), 198–206.

but also in the European diaspora to increase their political and religious empowerment in their own nation-states, thereby challenging the ruling monarchies' status quo by demanding more rights for their Shiʿi populations. These transnational ties also include the transnational religious authority of the sources of emulation (*marjaʿ al-taqlīd*) among senior Shiʿi clerics, who provide followers with religious, juridical, and also, in certain cases, sociopolitical guidance. Clerical leadership in Shiʿi Islam has oscillated between political and nonpolitical clerical participation.

The Shiʿi population in both the Arab Gulf and in the European diaspora is ethnically, socioeconomically, and also religiously diverse. They follow a wide range of Shiʿi religious authorities and different supreme sources of emulation (*marjaʿ al-taqlīd*), to whom they pay religious taxes (*zakāt* and *khums*). These taxes are redistributed across their networks for charitable and educational purposes, thereby building a social system of their own. Numerous clerics, based mainly in Qom and Najaf, compete over the allegiance of lay Shiʿis as it provides the clerics with religious, social, and economic capital.[14]

The following sections offer an overview of the environment in which Shiʿi communities live in Kuwait and Bahrain and their transnational links to Shiʿis in the European diaspora. The integration of the Shiʿi population within wider Arab Gulf societies, their acceptance, and the degree of their involvement in the various political and governmental sectors of each nation-state differs. Whereas in Kuwait the Shiʿi population is generally not seen as a threat to the ruling regime, the case is different in Bahrain, where Shiʿi political groups have been perceived as a major threat to the existing political order and regularly linked to the Iranian regime.

1.2   Kuwait

In Kuwait, the 20–30 percent[15] Shiʿi population forms a minority within a Sunni state ruled by the Al Sabah family.[16] Kuwaiti Shiʿis are one of the most diverse and distinct Shiʿi groups in the region in terms of their

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[14] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986); Pierre Bourdieu and Loic J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[15] Some estimations are higher than 30–40 percent. See Graham E. Fuller and Rend Rahim Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa: The Forgotten Muslims* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 159.

[16] Falah al-Mdaires, *Islamic Extremism in Kuwait: From the Muslim Brotherhood to Al-Qaeda and Other Islamic Political Groups* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 76.

ethnic, economic, political, and ideological backgrounds.[17] Living in Kuwait since the eighteenth century, Kuwaiti Shiʿis are divided according to (a) different ethnic compositions between Arabs (originally coming from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, named al-Ahsa, and Bahrain) and ʿAjamis (Shiʿis of Iranian origin);[18] and (b) political groups such as the National Islamic Alliance (NIA) (*al-Tahāluf al-Islāmī al-Waṭanī*) and the Assembly of Justice and Peace (*Tajammuʿ al-'Adāla wa-l-Salām*).[19] These various groups follow different *marājiʿ*: for example, the National Islamic Alliance (NIA) follows Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (b. 1939), and before him his predecessor Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–89), accepting, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, Khamenei's political leadership. The Assembly of Justice and Peace follows Ayatollah Sadiq al-Shirazi (b. 1942), and before him his brother Muhammad al-Shirazi (1928–2001). Whereas since the Iranian Revolution in 1979 the first group has predominantly been politically active and has developed into one of the most influential Shiʿi groups in Kuwait, the Shirazis have focused more on religious activities since the 1970s. Rivalries between these two groups go back to the 1980s. At the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Muhammad al-Shirazi was a great supporter of Khomeini, but he later disagreed with the autocratic direction Iran took, which caused disputes between them lasting until today.[20]

Kuwait is one of the most liberal states in the Gulf, with free elections for parliament allowing different political groups to compete and a fairly free press, which also includes media outlets of diverse groups such as

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[17] *Hasāwi* and *Baḥārna* are Arabs mainly from southern Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain, *Aḥwāz* come from southwest Iran (Arabistan), and *ʿAjam* are Kuwaitis of Iranian descent. For a more detailed description of the background of Kuwaiti Shiʿis, see Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 157–158; Anh Nga Longva, *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion and Society in Kuwait* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

[18] For more on the historical development of the various Shiʿi schools in the region, see Toby Matthiesen, "Mysticism, Migration and Clerical Networks: Ahmad al-Ahsaʾi and the Shaykhis of al-Ahsa, Kuwait and Basra," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 34, no. 4 (2014), 386–409; Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 41–40.

[19] Hamad H. Albloshi, "Sectarianism and the Arab Spring: The Case of the Kuwaiti Shia," *The Muslim World* 106, no. 1 *Special Issue: Overcoming Sectarian Faultlines after the Arab Uprisings: Sources, Symptoms and Solutions* (2016), 109–126. For a discussion on the *ḥaḍar/badū* divide, see Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 94; Anh Nga Longva, "Nationalism in Pre-Modern Guise: The Discourse on Hadhar and Badu in Kuwait," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006), 171–187; Claire Beaugrand, *Stateless in the Gulf: Migration, Nationality and Society in Kuwait* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); and Farah al-Nakib, "Revisiting Hadar and Badu in Kuwait: Citizenship, Housing and the Construction of a Dichotomy," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014), 5–30; Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 41–43.

[20] Oliver Scharbrodt, "Creating Shia Spaces in British Society: The Role of Transnational Twelver Shia Networks in North-West London," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 31, no. 1 (2020), 23–40.

Shiʿis. The Shiʿis are therefore generally supportive of the ruling Al Sabah family. However, some political incidents have caused certain Shiʿi groups to dissociate themselves from the ruling regime: for example, Kuwaiti authorities denied Khomeini entry when he tried to find refuge in Kuwait after his deportation from Iraq. Another reason relates to Khomeini becoming more critical of existing regimes in the Gulf and their attitude toward Shiʿis in their countries after the success of the Islamic Revolution. These two reasons have led his followers in Kuwait in the late 1970s and beginning of the 1980s to shift allegiance away from the regime, demanding more influence within the government and a change in Kuwait's political discourse toward Shiʿis in the Gulf more generally.[21] The later activism of Shiʿis in the 1980s, however, was due to "the Iranian revolution, … the decimation of the Iraqi Daʿwa party, many of whose members fled to Kuwait; the emergence of Islamic Amal and Hezbollah in Lebanon; and above all, the strong support given by the Kuwaiti government to Iraq in the Iran–Iraq war."[22] The Iran–Iraq war worsened the relationship between the Shiʿi groups and the Kuwaiti regime. The Kuwaiti government supported Saddam Hussein, as it feared the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region and its intention to export the revolution to other regimes in the Gulf. Within these ongoing sectarian conflicts and Shiʿi activism, some Shiʿis were imprisoned, their nationalities were revoked, or they were deported from Kuwait.[23]

The sectarian tensions in Kuwait witnessed a shift when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. Most Shiʿi political groups and business elites supported Al Sabah and remained loyal to the ruling family, articulating their allegiance to the Kuwaiti state and its ruling family – an act that supported the acceptance of Shiʿis into Kuwaiti society.[24] Fuller and Francke explain: "the shared ordeal of the Iraqi occupation helped create a stronger feeling of nationhood among Kuwaitis than one can find in most Arab countries today."[25] In contrast to Bahrain, the Al Sabah family allowed Kuwaiti Shiʿis to play significant roles in the political and economic sectors,[26] holding important positions in the army and the police force. Shiʿis are generally not regarded as a threat

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[21] Albloshi, "Sectarianism and the Arab Spring," 113.
[22] Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 155–156. See also similar observations in al-Mdaires, *Islamic Extremism in Kuwait*.
[23] Albloshi, "Sectarianism and the Arab Spring," 114.
[24] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 38.   [25] Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 156.
[26] Some held influential positions in the oil industry, and in the mid-1970s a Shiʿi became minister of oil. See Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 42.

to the Kuwaiti regime.[27] The positive attitude of the Sunni ruling family in Kuwait toward the Shiʿi population led Kuwaiti Shiʿis to establish a supportive relationship with the ruling family, helping the government in efforts to counter the political influence of Sunni Islamists, such as the Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood.[28]

This, however, has caused an increase in the Sunni–Shiʿi divide in the country. Yasser al-Habib, for example, is a well-known Shiʿi cleric who at the beginning of the twenty-first century attracted public attention through a series of sectarian anti-Sunni statements. In 2003, al-Habib was arrested and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment for his disparaging remarks about the first two caliphs and the Prophet Muhammad's wife Aisha.[29] He was, however, pardoned by the Kuwaiti emir a year later.[30] Before he could be rearrested he fled to London, where he continues his anti-Sunni rhetoric, stirring sectarian tensions in Kuwait and the wider Gulf region. Habib's political transnational activities are expressed through his UK-based satellite TV network, *al-Fadak*, and various other media outlets that he regards as "the step towards a revolutionary Shiʿi mediascape"[31] and through which he mobilizes transnational political activism. The majority of Kuwaiti Shiʿis I talked to disassociated themselves from al-Habib and rather highlighted the privileged situation of Shiʿis in Kuwait compared to other Gulf countries.

In 2011, intensive anti-Iranian and anti-Shiʿi rhetoric was also employed by Sunni politicians, who used social media outlets to heighten the Sunni–Shiʿi divide in the public sphere.[32] Although not to the same extent as the uprisings in Bahrain, Kuwait also witnessed a political uprising in 2012. A blog and a Twitter account were active under the name *karāmat waṭan* (Dignity of the Nation)[33] and called for mass demonstrations against the government's plans for changes in the electoral system that were considered to reduce the opportunity for opposition parties to constitute a majority in the National Assembly.[34] Not all Shiʿis supported such reform movements, criticizing the sectarian discourse of some figures in the movement and arguing for a wider aim of such movements beyond a Shiʿi–Sunni dichotomy.[35] The movement was

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[27] Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 161.
[28] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 38; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 69.
[29] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*.   [30] Ibid., 207.
[31] Own translation, see elaph.com/Web/news/2010/9/597933.html?entry=articleRelatedArticle
[32] See for example the Shiʿi tweeter Nasser Abul. For more see Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 244.
[33] A similar movement in 2009 was named *irḥal: nastaḥiq al-afḍal* (get lost: we deserve better). See Albloshi, "Sectarianism and the Arab Spring," 119.
[34] Ibid.   [35] Ibid., 123.

however contained by the authorities soon after, by revoking citizenship and deporting or persecuting Shiʿi activists.[36]

The increased sectarian rivalries in the public space presented a challenge to the security situation in Kuwait. There was a rise in militant anti-Shiʿi movements such as ISIS, which conducted several attacks on Shiʿis in Kuwait. In 2015, ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack on the Shiʿi al-Imam al-Sadiq Mosque, one of the oldest mosques in Kuwait, which caused the deaths of around twenty-seven and injured hundreds of Shiʿi worshippers. In response, several security measures were in place during the time I conducted fieldwork in Kuwait in 2015. This was particularly the case in public Shiʿi centers but also at semi-private religious gatherings, where metal detectors were used and large handbags were not permitted. The atmosphere was tense, as people were worried about further attacks. Women I talked to had faith in the Kuwaiti government and authorities to control the situation; generally speaking, they feel protected by the government from militant actions by radical Sunnis.[37] The response of the government contributed to Shiʿis feeling secure in Kuwait: Sabah Al Sabah, the then emir of Kuwait, visited the site after the attack,[38] offered free treatment to the injured, attended the funerals of the victims, and a year later reopened the mosque with a number of government officials present.[39] The government's hands-on attitude provided, to a certain extent, Kuwaiti Shiʿis with an additional sense of reassurance and contributed to a narrative of the national inclusion of Kuwaiti Shiʿis, which the government is also eager to foster.

1.3   Bahrain

The situation is very different in Bahrain, where Shiʿis constitute the majority of the population (60–70 percent) but are discriminated against in various political, economic, and educational sectors.[40] In contrast to Kuwait, whose ruling family views the Shiʿi population as allies, particularly since Saddam's invasion in 1990, Al Khalifa, the ruling Sunni

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[36] Ibid., 124.   [37] See similar observations in Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 164.

[38] alwatan.kuwait.tt/articledetails.aspx?id=440699

[39] gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/ kuwait-mosque-ravaged-by-daesh-bomb-reopens-1 .1846540

[40] See also Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*. Most of the grievances listed by Fuller and Francke have been mentioned by Bahraini Shiʿis and also Sunni women I interviewed in Bahrain, such as harassment of Shiʿi communities, imprisonment of Shiʿi activists without fair trial, discrimination in housing benefits as well as in university education (university places as well as scholarships). See ibid., 136–137.

family in Bahrain, relies on foreign powers and international financial aid to secure its authority within a Shiʿi majority country.[41] By the end of the eighteenth century, Al Khalifa had to invite Sunni tribes to settle in Bahrain in order to stabilize the Shiʿi–Sunni balance on the island.[42] As Nakash explains, "[t]he newcomers regarded social standing as a matter of tribal lineage … and looked down on the Shiʿi cultivators, pearl divers, and fishermen as a nontribal population."[43] The Sunni population enjoyed preferred status in Bahrain, whereas the Shiʿis benefited less from state support. Bahrain established a close political and military alliance with Saudi Arabia to protect itself from invasion by Iran. The decline of oil revenues also led Bahrain to rely on Saudi financial support, which, by the end of the twentieth century, had risen to 45 percent.[44] The Al Khalifa had to employ a large number of foreign workers in the economy and the bureaucracy, as well as in the army and security services, attempting "to prevent the rise of political organizations and labor unions that cut across regional and sectarian lines."[45] The increase in expatriates in the workforce, particularly in the security and economic sectors in Bahrain, not only caused high unemployment particularly among the Shiʿi population, with some sources estimating it as high as 30 percent,[46] but also impacted on Bahrainis' understanding of their national identity and relationship to the state.

In 1981, the Shiʿi Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, led by foreign clerics such as Iraqi-born Hadi al-Mudarressi (b. 1957) and the Iranian Sadiq Ruhani (b. 1926), attempted a coup, which was unsuccessful but caused lasting effects in the relationship between the Sunni ruling family and the Shiʿi population.[47] Similar to Kuwait, certain Shiʿi and Sunni opposition parties have since the early 1990s worked together

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[41] See ibid., 120–154 and 161–162.

[42] See also ibid., 120–125; Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shiʿa Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shiʿism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 145; Omar H. al-Shehabi, "Contested Modernity: Divided Rule and the Birth of Sectarianism, Nationalism, and Absolutism in Bahrain," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017), 333–355; Omar H. al-Shehabi, *Contested Modernity: Sectarianism, Nationalism, and Colonialism in Bahrain* (London: One World Academic, 2019); Fuad Khuri, *Tribe and State in Bahrain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Mahdi Abdalla al-Tajir, *Bahrain 1920–1945: Britain, the Shaikh and the Administration* (London: CroomHelm, 1987).

[43] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 47.

[44] See ibid., 46. See also Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 152; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*; Safran Nadav, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985).

[45] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 48.

[46] See ibid., 49; as well as Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 137–138.

[47] See Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 125–127.

to demand more political transparency, a reduction in the number of foreign workers, the return of exiles, and release of political prisoners (to name only a few). Although the Al Khalifa originally promised negotiations with these parties after the opposition uprisings in 1994, the family accused the Shiʿi groups of collaborating with Iran and attempting another coup.[48] The promised fundamental reforms were not implemented and, in order to strengthen his power in the country even more, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa declared himself king, changing the State of Bahrain to the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2002.[49] The now king, together with his son Salman, the crown prince, increased their own authority by changing the structure and the power of the parliament. The king presides over the Bahrain National Assembly (*al-Majlis al-Waṭanī al-Baḥraynī*). It now consists of two chambers: the elected Council of Representatives (*majlis al-nuwwāb*) and the appointed Consultative Council (*majlis al-shūrā*). Before 2002, based on the 1973 constitution, there was only the democratically elected Council of Representatives.[50] After 2002, the king introduced the Consultative Council, which is entirely appointed by him, and significantly curtailed the power of the elected Council of Representatives: they each have forty members; therefore, with forty loyal members in the appointed Consultative Council and sufficient loyal parties in the elected Council of Representatives, the parliament does not pose a serious threat to the ruling family and the government. The majority of Shiʿi political parties opposed this significant decrease in the power of the elected chamber of parliament, which further disenfranchised the country's Shiʿi majority population.[51]

The attitudes of Bahraini Shiʿis toward citizenship and their understanding of Bahraini identity was questioned when in 2011 the Al Khalifa once again invited Sunnis from Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Jordan, among others, to settle in Bahrain to alter the Sunni– Shiʿi demographic balance

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[48] "Bahraini Shiʿis argued that the Al Khalifa invoked Iran in order to undermine the nationalist credentials of Shiʿis, to pose as 'the guardian of the Sunnis,' and to undercut the demands for job opportunities and political reform." See Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 53; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 37; Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 130–131; Munira A. Fakhro, "The Uprising in Bahrain: An Assessment," in *The Persian Gulf at the Millennium: Essays in Politics, Economy, Security and Religion*, edited by Lawrence G. Potter and Gary Sick (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), 167–188 (182–183); Laurence Louër, "Sectarianism and Coup-Proofing Strategies in Bahrain," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, no. 2 (2013), 245–260.
[49] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 31–32; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 15.
[50] For which women did not have voting rights.
[51] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 32.

in the country.[52] These newcomers "were granted citizenship and housing, and their children were enrolled in special schools."[53] Bahraini Shiʿis are not only underrepresented in key government ministries but are also prohibited from certain professions, including in Bahrain's security and military services. The recent Arab immigrants were recruited to serve in the security services and made responsible for protecting the regime.[54] Many women I interviewed for this study criticized the fact that the Al Khalifa granted these Sunni newcomers not only social benefits but also citizenship rights. The women repeatedly mentioned the existence of a group of Bahrainis of Iranian origin (also known as *ʿAjam*)[55] who were born in Bahrain but do not have Bahraini citizenship (also referred to as *bidūn*, meaning "without citizenship"). Granting outsiders Bahraini citizenship but denying it to other Bahrainis, is, for many Bahraini Shiʿi women I talked to, a clear declaration of sectarian ostracism, as one woman explains:

Can you imagine, the government refuses to give people Bahraini nationality – people who have been living here for centuries, but those who just came yesterday are given Bahraini citizenship immediately. The problem is that these people seriously think they are now Bahrainis and live this lie even by suddenly feeling a moral obligation to serve the king and protect his kingdom. This is unbelievable but it is the reality for so many people who are literally stateless. The problem is however that their stateless situation has been imposed on them by their own state!

In our conversations women referred to the *Baḥārna*, who are, I was told, those Bahrainis who lived in Bahrain before the Al Khalifa conquered Bahrain in the late eighteenth century: "In the Shiʿa collective memory … the Al Khalifa and their tribal allies are frequently described as usurpers and conquerors."[56] *Baḥārna* are regarded as the original inhabitants of Bahrain and are predominantly Shiʿi.[57] This "nativist argument" or "nationalist myth,"[58] as Matthiesen calls it, separates the Al Khalifa ruling family from the "true" Bahrainis.[59] Naturalized Bahrainis,

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[52] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 33; Laurence Louër, "The Political Impact of Labor Migration in Bahrain," *City & Society* 20, no. 1 (2008), 32–53; Frances S. Hasso, "The Sect–Sex–Police Nexus and Politics in Bahrain's Pearl Revolution," in *Freedom without Permission: Bodies and Space in the Arab Revolutions*, edited by Frances S. Hasso and Zakia Salime (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 105–137.

[53] Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, 54. See also Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 108–109.

[54] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 33.   [55] Ibid., 34.   [56] Ibid., 33.

[57] ʿAjam are those Bahraini Shiʿis who originally come from Iran. For very similar observations see Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 29–30. See also Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 120–121.

[58] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 30–31.

[59] See very similar observations by Fuller and Francke, who argue that Bahraini Shiʿis "tend to view the al-Khalifa to this day as outside Sunni conquerors and oppressors, and modern events have done little to change this mindset." Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 122. See also Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 30.

Figure 1.2 A cemetery in which a number of the Bahrain victims of the 2011 uprisings are buried (Bahrain 2015)

originating from Jordan or Syria, have been given positions in the security sector and are responsible for violence exercised against Bahraini Shiʿis, their torture in prison and eventual killing, as explained by one of my interviewees in Bahrain: "A fellow Bahraini will never kill his own brother even if that person was a Shiʿi. They [the ruling elite] had to bring people from outside to gain control over their population" (Figure 1.2).[60]

The constant pressure in the form of denial, discrimination, and repression of the Shiʿi population caused in 2011 a wave of mass protests against the authoritarian rule of the Al Khalifa government – as part of the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East. On February 16, 2011, demonstrators rushed to the Pearl Monument[61] in the capital city of Manama. At the start, this attempted revolution was not characterized as a Shiʿi revolt but rather as a Sunni–Shiʿi opposition similar to that in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first.[62] As Matthiesen – who observed the 2011 uprisings in Bahrain –

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[60] For very similar observations, see Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 30. The BBC also reported similar observations: "Later that year, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa brought in troops from neighbouring Sunni-led Gulf states to restore order and crush dissent. The unrest left at least 30 civilians and five policemen dead." See www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36578000
[61] Also referred to as Pearl Square.
[62] See Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*; Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*; Marc Valeri, "Contentious Politics in Bahrain: Opposition Cooperation between Regime Manipulation and Youth Radicalisation," in *The Dynamics of Opposition Cooperation in*

reports, the slogans, posters, and paintings on the tents which were placed in the sit-in demonstration at the Pearl roundabout increasingly gained Shiʿi references. Through linking the political situation in Bahrain with the historic and sociopolitical narrative of Karbala, pointing to political prisoners, political exiles, and the suppression of the Shiʿis in general, the revolution increasingly turned into a Shiʿi uprising. The situation intensified when supporters of the Shirazis held up slogans for political reform during the demonstrations. Through the Shirazis' trans-national connectedness, other Shirazis in the Eastern Province in Saudi Arabia joined protests in their own localities:[63] "The Shirazis are not key in the protests, they represent a minority, but their political views and activities in the roundabout are diverse and – together with Hadi al-Mudarrissi's speeches from abroad – may well lead to a confrontation with the government."[64]

When I visited Bahrain in 2015, protests were still ongoing, particularly in Shiʿi-dominated villages. The Bahraini regime tolerates these protests to a certain extent, as long as they do not spread to the capital Manama and are not seen by Bahraini Sunnis or international mainstream media,[65] as Fuller and Francke also explain:

The villages demonstrate the degree to which Shiʿite communities are now living in almost total isolation, cut off from the rest of the island by security forces and under heavy police guard. Poverty and poor conditions are widespread; houses are poorly built and in a state of serious disrepair.[66]

Many of these villages were either partially or completely under siege – blocked off entirely by checkpoints guarded by police cars and army tanks (Figure 1.3).[67]

One particular village, Draz,[68] has been under siege for years as it is the village of Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Ahmed Qassim (1937),[69] the spiritual

the Arab World: Contentious Politics in Times of Change, edited by Hendrik Kraetzschmar (New York: Routledge, 2012), 129–149.

[63] Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 19.

[64] Hadi al-Mudarrissi is a very well-respected religious figure among Bahraini Shiʿis across the board. He also was the leader of the 1982 failed coup in Bahrain. For more, see ibid., 34.

[65] Ibid., 45.   [66] Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 139.

[67] Mass collective punishment of entire villages began in Bahrain in 1997 to control serious unrest between 1994 and 1999. For more, see Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 34–35.

[68] Some write it as Diraz or Duraz. I will refer to it in the way the Bahrainis I talked to have pronounced it.

[69] Similar actions were taken in Saudi Arabia against the cleric Shaykh Nimr al-Nimr, leading to his arrest in 2009. Al-Nimr was known for his anti-Saud and anti-Salafi rhetoric that gained a lot of supporters in his village of al-ʿAwamiya as well as internationally. His arrest sparked international attention and solidarity. On

Figure 1.3 Example of a partially besieged village border
(Bahrain 2015)

leader of the political Shiʿi Islamic opposition party al-Wifaq.[70] Al-Wifaq is the largest Shiʿi Islamist political party.[71] It tried to work within the government and occupied eighteen out of forty elected seats in the Council of Deputies before its withdrawal during the 2011 uprisings,[72] when the party was declared illegal and the citizenship of its members revoked, including that of Sheikh Isa.[73] Al-Wifaq has been accused by the government of promoting sectarianism and causing a threat to the

transnational solidarity over the arrest of Shaykh Nimr al-Nimr, see Shanneik, "Moving into Shia Islam," 130–151.

[70] Sheikh Isa is also regarded as the spiritual leader of the Shiʿi community as a whole. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36578000. See further Sajjad H. Rizvi, "Shiʿism in Bahrain: Marjaʿiyya and Politics," *Orient* 4 (2009), 16–24.

[71] See Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 68; Fouad Gehad Marei and Yafa Shanneik, "Lamenting Karbala in Europe: Husayni Liturgy and Discourses of Dissent amongst Diasporic Bahraini and Lebanese Shiis," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 32, no. 1 (2021), doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1827341

[72] Haqq and the February 14 Youth Coalition are other Shiʿi political movements in Bahrain that were more critical toward the Bahraini monarchy. For more details, see Elisheva Machlis, "Al-Wefaq and the February 14 Uprising: Islam, Nationalism and Democracy – The Shiʿi–Bahraini Discourse," *Middle Eastern Studies* 52, no. 6 (2016), 978–995.

[73] Human Rights Watch, "Bahrain: Hundreds Stripped of Citizenship: Bahrainis Deported from Homeland" (2018), www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/27/bahrain-hundreds-stripped-citizenship

interests and security of Bahrain.[74] Sheikh Isa was under house arrest from 2011, until he was taken to hospital in London for medical treatment in 2018.[75] The Bahraini minister of interior justified actions against Sheikh Isa by accusing him of serving foreign interests, mainly Iran, and promoting "sectarianism and violence"[76] through adopting "theocracy and stress[ing] the absolute allegiance to the clergy."[77] Some of the al-Wifaq MPs and their families I met in London during religious gatherings made the situation in Bahrain the focus of discussion. The wife of one of these MPs explains:

My husband was in London when the government of Bahrain decided to strip his citizenship off him. I was in Bahrain with our children. We were unable to see him for months. He had no passport and was stuck here in London. Now after eight months I am able to see my husband again. He has not seen his children yet.[78]

The situation of these MPs' families was challenging as their salaries were cut off, their assets were frozen, and any government benefits such as scholarships for their children were stopped. The wife continues: "We lost everything. The government tries everything they can to make our lives hard and to humiliate us. Yes, we are Shiʿis but we are Bahrainis and we have the right to stay Bahrainis." The Bahraini citizenship law, however, allows the government to revoke citizenship of anyone who is believed to cause harm to the interests and security of the Bahraini kingdom.[79] The inhabitants of Draz as well as other Shiʿi groups I met in other areas in Bahrain strongly support Sheikh Isa and are willing to protect him: "Draz is like Karbala but we are not Kufans. We will protect every single person, old, young, man, woman, children in Draz. Yes, they besieged Draz but they will never dare to enter it because they know that all Shiʿis in Bahrain will stand against them." This particular woman was referring to the betrayal by the people of Kufa, who – according to the Shiʿi tradition – did not help Imam Husayn, despite their numerous assurances they would support him in his revolt against the Umayyads.[80] The Bahraini families I met who live in Draz describe their village as the "Gaza of Bahrain." As one of the women describes it:

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[74] www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/06/bahrain-strips-religious-leader-nationality-160620122338238.html
[75] Sondoss al-Asaad, "Bahrain's Ayatollah Qassim Treated in London," en.mehrnews.com/news/135714/Bahrain-s-Ayatollah-Qassim-treated-in-London
[76] www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-36578000   [77] Ibid.   [78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid. See also Matthiesen, *Sectarian Gulf*, 46.
[80] One of the women explains further, saying "Banu Umayya is everywhere here and next door and next door and next door all targeting Shiʿis but they can wait long. Shiʿis will

Similar to Israeli checkpoints, we have here Bahraini checkpoints. Like people of Gaza who are humiliated by their Israeli colonizers, we in Draz are humiliated every single day.[81] Every day when going to work our cars need to be checked, making the journey to work ten times longer than it would usually take. It all also depends on the […] soldier at the checkpoint; it could take sometimes for ever until we are out.

The women described how Draz has become a prison:

[I]f you are not from the village, you are not allowed to get in. You, for example, would not be able to enter as my guest or visitor. We are completely cut off. The government does not want to allow anyone in so their violation of our human rights is not reported outside of Bahrain.

The Drazis had to be in their village by a certain time. Depending on the security forces at the checkpoint, they can be refused entry. After having dinner with a group of Drazi women, they were very keen to finish early in order to get home: "if we come late, the officer at the checkpoint might not allow us to get back to our families and children. They would order us to turn our cars, drive away, and spend the night outside." As these women are al-Wifaq members and mainly from the *Baḥārna*, they represent a strong nativist stand: they stressed that those officers at the checkpoints are not from Bahrain but rather foreigners, brought in from outside:

[T]hey are not Bahrainis. A Bahraini would never tell a group of women to spend the night outside and not allow them to go back to their families. The government played it well. They knew that Bahrainis would never treat other Bahrainis in such a cruel way even if they are Shiʿis. Instead they brought these savages in, allowed them to hold our passports and take our benefits.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the toppling of Saddam Hussein and Shiʿi political empowerment after 2003, and the events and regional repercussions of the 2011 Arab uprisings posed a threat to the Gulf security system, particularly to those states with a high Shiʿi population such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, which feared sectarian upheaval within their borders. As Wehrey explains, Shiʿis in these countries possess "a strong revolutionary potential, rooted in frustrated expectations for economic improvement, political marginalization, and

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never surrender. Our heads have been up since the battle of Karbala and will stay until the appearance of the Mahdi."

[81] Another woman compared the Israeli settlers with the Al Khalifa family who settled in Bahrain at the end of the eighteenth century, saying "They [Al Khalifa] are not *Baḥārna*. They are settlers. They forced themselves in and now are ruling over us through force. Al Khalifa are *ṣahaynat Baḥrayn*."

growing cultural discrimination."[82] Shiʿi political activists and protesters in these countries supported each other by exchanging experiences and strategies for reform and change. As the following chapters will illustrate, Bahrainis in the European diaspora feel responsible for bringing the Bahraini political context to the *majālis* held in London in order to raise awareness of the Bahraini situation, which, they believe, has not gained much international attention due to the lack of access to the country.[83] The women's transnational connectedness with various Bahrainis in exile as well as in Bahrain itself enables them to spread the Bahraini political case to Shiʿi communities around Europe. As this book will demonstrate, expressions of solidarity from Shiʿis in the diaspora in support of Arab Gulf Shiʿis more generally in their demands for more sociopolitical and economic rights contribute to transnational political mobilization. As one Iraqi Shiʿi in Dublin explains: "Our brothers and sisters in the Gulf need to know that they are not alone in their fight for freedom and equality. We are there for them. We will support them in any way or form." Events in the homeland thus influence and affect diasporic communities abroad in the way they define themselves but also in their relationship toward their homeland and other co-religionists. Such events influence diasporic communities' strategic choices and political actions locally as well as transnationally. Political changes in the Middle East empower and mobilize Shiʿis in the diaspora, urging them to undertake political action across transnational spaces.

1.4   Shiʿis in Europe

The Muslim population in Europe is highly diverse in its ethnic, socio-economic, educational, and religio-sectarian background.[84] Its presence goes back to the time of Muslims' occupation of al-Andalus and other parts of Europe during the Ottoman Empire, as well as European

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[82] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 48.

[83] For more on transnational Bahraini politics in London, see Marei and Shanneik, "Lamenting Karbala in Europe."

[84] This part relies extensively on the special issue of the *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2, *Special Edition on Mapping Shia Muslim Communities in Europe: Local and Transnational Dimensions* (2017), edited by Yafa Shanneik, Zahra Ali and Chris Heinhold. For more on Shiʿi communities in Europe, see Oliver Scharbrodt, Samim Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić, Jørgen S. Nielsen, and Egdunas Račius, *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2016). On transnational Shiʿi authority, see Edith Szanto, "Challenging Transnational Shiʿi Authority in Baʿth Syria," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 45, no. 1 (2018), 95–110. On a discussion of Shiʿi law in the West, see Liakat Takim, "Reinterpreation or Reformation? Shiʿa Law in the West," *Journal of Shiʿa Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2010), 143–144.

colonization of various Muslim territories.[85] The Shiʿi population in Europe constitutes indigenous Shiʿi communities such as Alevis, mainly from Turkey, but also Azeri Shiʿis Eastern European countries that were part of the Soviet Union. Shiʿi-oriented Bektashi Sufis in Anatolia and the Balkans have influenced the Shiʿi presence in Greece, particularly in its northeastern region.[86] The Shiʿi presence in Europe is primarily also due to various migratory patterns going back to the nineteenth century, such as students of South Asian background moving to the United Kingdom to study.[87] However, it was predominantly in the mid-twentieth century that Shiʿis moved to Europe, either as students or migrants and later as asylum seekers, representing a wide diversity in terms of nationality, cultural and ethnic background, as well as religious affiliation, ideology and practices, but also educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the United Kingdom, for example, a wave of students came from countries such as Uganda (Khoja Shiʿis), Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan in the 1970s, along with a number of businesspeople from Iran and other Gulf countries.[88] Turkish Alevi and Azeri labor migrants, as well as asylum seekers[89] from Pakistan and Afghanistan,

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[85] Veit Bader, "The Governance of Islam in Europe: The Perils of Modelling," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 6 (2007), 871–886.

[86] Marios Chatziprokopiou and Panos Hatziprokopiou, "Between the Politics of Difference and the Poetics of Similarity: Performing Ashura in Piraeus," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017), 198–215; Yafa Shanneik, Chris Heinhold, and Zahra Ali. *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2, Special Edition on *Mapping Shia Muslim Communities in Europe: Local and Transnational Dimensions* (2017), 145–157.

[87] Humayun Ansari, *"The Infidel Within": Muslims in Britain since 1800* (London: Hurst, 2004). See also Sufyan Abid Dogra, "Karbala in London: Battle of Expressions of Ashura Ritual Commemorations among Twelver Shia Muslims of South Asian Background," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2, Special Edition on *Mapping Shia Muslim Communities in Europe: Local and Transnational Dimensions* (2017), 158–178. South African students from an Indian ethnic background were one of the largest international student groups at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin until the late 1960s. See Oliver Scharbrodt, "Muslim Immigration to Ireland after World War II," in *Muslims in Ireland: Past and Present*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 49–75.

[88] Karin Hesse-Lehmann and Kathryn Spellman, "Iranische transnationale religiöse Institutionen in London und Hamburg," in *Zuwanderung und Integration. Kulturwissenschaftliche Zugänge und soziale Praxis*, edited by Christoph Köck, Alois Moosmüller, and Klaus Roth (Münster: Waxmann, 2004), 141–162; Matthijs Van den Bos, "'European Shiism? Counterpoints from Shiites' Organization in Britain and the Netherlands," *Ethnicities* 12, no. 5 (2012), 556–580; Reza Gholami, *Secularism and Identity: Non-Islamiosity in the Iranian Diaspora* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

[89] The Shiʿi Muslim presence in Norway first started as labor migration, but later consisted mainly of refugees and asylum seekers from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Syria, Lebanon, and Bahrain. Marianne Bøe and Ingvild Flaskerud,

headed to countries such as Austria[90], Belgium[91], Germany[92], Italy[93], and the Netherlands.[94] The so-called Celtic Tiger period beginning of the 1990s in the Republic of Ireland attracted many Shiʿi migrants and asylum seekers, particularly from Iraq.[95] There are large Iranian and Iraqi diaspora communities in the rest of Europe due to the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the oppression and persecution of Iraqi Shiʿis during the rule of the Baʿth regime, the 1990 Gulf War, and the increase of sectarian conflicts after Saddam Hussein's fall in 2003.[96] The number of migrants coming from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, mainly from Pakistan, significantly increased the Shiʿi population in Greece from the mid-2000s, peaking after the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring in 2011. As the main gateway to the EU, the majority of migrants were only passing through Greece, heading to northern European countries to seek asylum.

"A Minority in the Making: The Shia Muslim Community in Norway," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2, *Special Edition on Mapping Shia Muslim Communities in Europe: Local and Transnational Dimensions* (2017), 179–197. The authors highlight the difficulty in stating the number of Shiʿis in Norway. However, they have estimated around 40,000. As the authors highlight, a similar estimation has been made in Sweden, see Göran Larsson and David Thurfjell, *Shia muslimer i Sverige: En kortfattad översikt. Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfunds (SST) skriftserie* 3 (Stockholm: SST, Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund, 2013), 23, https://docplayer.se/23767850-Shia-muslimer-i-sverige-en-kortfattad-oversikt.html.

[90] See Lise Jamila Abid, "Muslims in Austria: Integration through Participation in Austrian Society," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 2 (2006), 263–278; Sabine Kroissenbrunner, "Islam and Muslim Immigrants in Austria: Socio-Political Networks and Muslim Leadership of Turkish Immigrants," *Immigrants and Minorities* 22, nos. 2–3 (2003), 188–207; Halima Hadciz, *Der Moslemische Sozialdienst* (Vienna: Safinah, 2013).

[91] There is an estimate of 8,000 to 10,000 Moroccan Belgium Shiʿis. For more, see Iman Lechkar, "Being a 'True' Shiʿite: The Poetics of Emotions among Belgian-Moroccan Shiites," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2 (2017), 241–259.

[92] See Robert Langer and Benjamin Weineck, "Shiite 'Communities of Practice' in Germany: Researching Multi-Local, Heterogeneous Actors in Transnational Space," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2, *Special Edition on Mapping Shia Muslim Communities in Europe: Local and Transnational Dimensions* (2017), 216–240.

[93] Minoo Mirshahvalad, "How an Italian Amorphous Space became a Twelver Shiʿa Mosque," *Working Papers Series* 5 (2018), 105–128.

[94] Annemeik Schlatmann, "Towards a United Shia Youth Community: A 'Dutch' Muharram Gathering," *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 6, no. 2, *Special Edition on Mapping Shia Muslim Communities in Europe: Local and Transnational Dimensions* (2017), 260–276.

[95] See Oliver Scharbrodt, Tuula Sakaranaho, Adil Hussein Khan, Yafa Shanneik, and Vivian Ibrahim, *Muslims in Ireland Past and Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 113–138.

[96] See Katherine Spellmann-Poots and Reza Gholami, "Integration, Cultural Production, and Challenges of Identity Construction: Iranians in Great Britain," in *The Iranian Diaspora: Challenges, Negotiations, and Transformations*, edited by Mohsen Mostafavi Mobasher (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 93–124.

With the increase of the Shiʿi population in Europe due to their widespread persecution in the Middle East,[97] more Shiʿi institutions developed. Chain migration of Shiʿis to the United Kingdom was common among Iraqis and also Iranians, who joined their family members and friends, particularly in London.[98] London thus developed into the "Shiʿi hub" of Europe, with a number of Shiʿi centers (ḥusayniyya) representing various religious and political factions within contemporary Shiʿism.[99] A number of Shiʿi religious and political figures also established their headquarters or liaison offices in London. These offices started to develop a Shiʿi "infrastructure"[100] to cater for the diverse Shiʿi presence, not just in the United Kingdom but in the whole of Europe. Bahraini Shiʿis also contributed to this infrastructure through their own community centers: the Dar Alhekma Trust and Abrar Islamic Foundation in London have developed into key diasporic venues for political debates. They regularly invite local and international academics and political and human rights activists to speak on various political topics concerning the Middle East with the aim of raising public awareness on the sectarian situation in the Gulf in particular. In Dublin, the major Shiʿi center, the Ahlul-Bayt Islamic Centre in South Dublin and the Pakistani Azakhana-e Zahra in Blanchardstown, north of Dublin, are both closely linked to various Shiʿi institutions in London. In Germany, the Iran-funded Islamic Centre in the northern city of Hamburg became the major reference for Shiʿis in Germany with links to institutions in

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[97] There is an increasing number of Europeans converting to Twelver Shiʿi Islam. See Shanneik, "Moving into Shia Islam," 130–151. See also Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Linda S. Walbridge, ed., *The Most Learned of the Shiʿa: The Institution of the Marjaʿi Taqlid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[98] Oula Kadhum, "Diasporic Interventions: State-Building in Iraq Following the 2003 Iraq War," (PhD Dissertation, Warwick University, 2017); Oliver Scharbrodt, "A Minority within a Minority? The Complexity and Multilocality of Transnational Twelver Shia Networks in Britain," *Contemporary Islam* 13 (2019), 287–305; Cameron McAuliffe, "Transnationalism within: Internal Diversity in the Iranian Diaspora," *Australian Geographer* 39, no. 1 (March 2008), 63–80; Halleh Ghorashi and Kees Boersma, "The 'Iranian Diaspora' and the New Media: From Political Action to Humanitarian Help," *Development and Change* 40, no. 4 (2009), 667–691; Cameron McAuliffe, "A Home Far Away? Religious Identity and Transnational Relations in the Iranian Diaspora," *Global Networks* 7, no. 3 (July 2007), 307–327; Gholami, *Secularism and Identity*.

[99] See Scharbrodt, "A Minority within a Minority?," 1–19.

[100] For more on the Muslim infrastructure in Europe, see Tomas Gerholm and Yngve Georg Lithman, eds, *The New Islamic Presence in Western Europe* (London: Mansell Publishing, 1988); Stefano Allievi, "The Muslim Community in Italy," in *Muslim Communities in the New Europe*, edited by Gerd Nonneman, Tim Niblock, and Bogdan Szajkowski (Reading, NY: Ithaca Press, 1996), 315–327; Jørgen Nielsen, *Towards a European Islam* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Ralph Grillo, "Islam and Transnationalism," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 5 (2004), 861–878.

London.[101] Shiʿi communities and their institutions in Europe still have close ties with their societies of origin, particularly religious authorities and establishments, and political parties. The transnationalism of Shiʿis in Europe is closely linked to the transnational mobilization of (a) scholars visiting Shiʿi institutions in Europe, particularly during important religious events such as Muharram and Ramadan; and (b) assets funding these religious institutions either fully or partially, but also through the collection of the Shiʿi religious tax, *khums*.[102]

With the growing political instabilities in the Middle East since the 1970s, Europe has become an important space for opposition parties to develop, and this has impacted in various ways and degrees on political, social, and religious dynamics in the Middle Eastern region.[103] London in particular has developed into a center for political movements forming parties opposed to various governments in the Middle East.[104] The Islamic Daʿwa Party, the main Shiʿi Islamist party of Iraq, built a base in London and became one of the major hubs of diasporic politics, in particular around the *ḥusayniyya* of *Dar al-Islam*.[105] Contacts with Western governments were coordinated by Shiʿi political groups and institutions in London. The Clinton administration's Iraq Liberation Act (ILA) of 1998 symbolized a shift in Western policy toward Iraq and created the political momentum for the eventual removal of Saddam in 2003. With the fall of the Baʿth regime, Shiʿi Islamist groups had an opportunity to take power in Iraq, since the Western powers were

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[101] The Iran-funded Islamic Centre in Hamburg offers, in collaboration with Al-Mustafa University in Qom, a BA degree in Islamic Theology. See Langer and Weineck, "Shiite 'Communities of Practice' in Germany."

[102] Shiʿis are obliged to pay a religious tax to their *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* known as *khums*, which the *marjaʿ* redistributes across the networks that are associated with him for charitable and educational purposes.

[103] For a similar argument, see Nadje al-Ali and Khalid Koser, "Transnationalism, International Migration and Home," in *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home*, edited by Nadje al-Ali and Khalid Koser (London: Routledge, 2002), 1–14.

[104] The Bahraini Freedom Movement (BFM) also built a base for its oppositional activities in London. The movement is also referred to as "Bahrain Liberation Movement." In Arabic it is referred to as *Ḥarakat al-Baḥrayn al-Islāmiyya*. See Fuller and Francke, *The Arab Shiʿa*, 130 and 131. Kadhum explains that within the Iraqi diaspora: "Shia political transnationalism from London operated through transnational opposition networks and nodes in Iran, Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria," among others. See Oula Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet: Shiʿa Political Transnationalism over Time and Its Relationship to the Iraqi State," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2020), 7–45 (7); Sophia Pandya, "Women's Shiʿi Maʾatim in Bahrain," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 2 (2010), 31–58.

[105] See Scharbrodt, "A Minority within a Minority"; and Scharbrodt, "Khomeini and Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī."

now interested in cooperating with Iraqi Islamist groups.[106] The Iraqi Shiʿi Islamist opposition parties in exile, such as in London, collaborated with the US-led coalition in Iraq's new state-building project.

For Shiʿis more generally, the removal of Saddam carried the symbolic meaning of revenge for centuries-long Shiʿi victimhood, persecution, human rights violations, and displacement.[107] These political transnational links between London and Iraq paved the way for a new sectarian power system in the Gulf region shaped by new sectarian but also new inner-Shiʿi identity formations: "It was a way for us to flourish again. To be present and to mark our footprints in the new Gulf. It did not matter whether you are Iraqi or Bahraini. We are all Shiʿis fighting for the same goal: To be heard and respected," a Bahraini woman in London explains. Shiʿi communities in the European diaspora witnessed in Iraq the start of a new political reality in which long-exiled members of the Iraqi Shiʿi opposition in London gained increasing power in building a new Iraq. The diverse political and religious affiliations within the Shiʿi diaspora allowed a plethora of political alliances but also religious allegiances to various clerical authorities beyond the boundaries of nation-states. For Iraqis in the diaspora, it meant a form of "long-distance nationalism,"[108] and non-Iraqi Shiʿis expressed solidarity as an articulation of their affiliation to a global Shiʿism.

Shiʿi political transnationalism, however, changed its course following numerous terrorist attacks perpetrated by militant Sunni jihadi groups on Shiʿi holy shrines and cities – such as the attack on the Shiʿi Golden Mosque in Samarra in 2006; the fall of Mosul in 2014; and the attack on the Shiʿi al-Imam al-Sadiq Mosque in Kuwait in 2015.[109] Whereas Shiʿi transnational political mobilization after 2003 focused on increasing the political presence and power of Shiʿis in the region, since these attacks its efforts have been to ensure the protection of Shiʿis and their holy

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[106] Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 74; and Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet," 7.

[107] Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq*.

[108] See also Benedict Anderson, *Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Amsterdam: CASA, 1992). See also Zainab Saleh, "'Toppling' Saddam Hussein in London: Media, Meaning, and the Construction of an Iraqi Diasporic Community," *American Anthropologist* 120, no. 3 (2018), 512–522 (516).

[109] On intrasectarian clashes and tensions in Iraq in 2005, see Babak Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani and the Democratization of Post-Baʿathist Iraq," in *US Institute of Peace* (2007), www.usip.org/ publications/ 2007/ 06/ ayatollah-sistani-and-democratization-post-baathist-iraq

places by improving security provisions to protect against anti-Shiʿi militant groups.[110]

Such political events and the change in sectarian power dynamics in the Middle East have wide-ranging implications for the lived sociopolitical and religious reality of Shiʿis in the European diaspora. Shiʿi political transnationalism in Europe is not only articulated in the public sphere through demonstrations, marches, public talks, and lobbying governments but also through religious gatherings and community events. Religious rituals and practices in Europe have become *the* platform for the "emplotment" of diasporic Shiʿis into the new sectarian power dynamics in the Middle East. These sectarian tensions have developed as part of a metanarrative of a global Shiʿi consciousness allowing those Shiʿis in exile who are not allowed to return to their home countries to be part of a global cause. Bahrain, for example, is to a large extent closed off for Bahrainis in exile, leaving their transnational connectedness limited to their transnational networks with Bahrainis in Bahrain. As this book will demonstrate, this disconnect with the homeland generates a diasporic formation of Shiʿi unity through ritual aesthetics. The translocalization of sectarian politics[111] between the Middle East and Europe serves the aim of connecting marginalized and oppressed Shiʿis in the Middle East with co-religionists in Europe – offering a source of solidarity and support to both. It provides Shiʿis in Europe with a sense of belonging to a transnational and de-territorialized global Shiʿi identity.

1.5   Transnational Shirazi Network

This period of a new Shiʿi-centric political consciousness was also used by followers of Sayyid Muhammad al-Shirazi (1928–2001). The Shirazis are a prominent clerical family hailing from the Iraqi city of Karbala where the shrine of Imam Husayn is based – the Shirazis are therefore also referred to as the "Karbala group."[112] The Shirazis were always eager to gain recognition within the clerical establishment of Najaf but never quite achieved it. This led Muhammad al-Shirazi to build his own power base in Karbala in the early 1960s, with a strong local identification. Because of oppressive policies of the Baʿth regime, al-Shirazi left

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[110] Compare Rahimi, "Ayatollah Sistani"; Oula Kadhum, "Unpacking the Role of Religion in Political Transnationalism: The Case of the Shiʿa Iraqi Diaspora since 2003," *International Affairs* 96, no. 2 (2020), 305–322.

[111] See Marei and Shanneik, "Lamenting Karbala in Europe."

[112] For more on the Shiraziyyin, see Scharbrodt, "Creating Shia Spaces".

Iraq in 1971 and found a base initially in Lebanon and later in Kuwait before settling in Iran after the success of the Islamic Revolution. His exilic itinerary contributed to the establishment of a Shirazi transnational political network that also extends to Europe and particularly London, where the Shirazis established a base in the early 1980s. The aim was to build a visible Shirazi presence amidst the growing Iraqi Shi'i diasporic political activity in the city. The Shirazis are known to be in clear opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran and were never part of the mainstream Shi'i establishment. Yet they have been very keen to maintain a distinct factional profile and identity within the Shi'i diaspora and transnational Shi'i community, insisting on the performance of certain Shi'i religious practices. One of these is the highly controversial act of (self-)flagellation (*taṭbīr*).

In 2007, the wife of Ayatollah Mujtaba Husseini al-Shirazi (b. 1943), the younger brother of Muhammad al-Shirazi, announced the religious right of all women to practice *taṭbīr*.[113] This was a significant moment for Shirazis living in London as it marked a perspectival shift on the role women play in the commemoration and veneration of the killing of Imam Husayn. Whereas traditionally *taṭbīr* is performed by men, since 2007 an increasing number of Shi'i women have regarded the performance of *taṭbīr* as their religious obligation, to express their "true" Shi'i-ness locally as well as transnationally. The wide-scale practice of *taṭbīr* among women was thus first performed in London and then spread to the Middle East. As will be demonstrated in more detail in Chapter 4, Shirazis use the practice of *taṭbīr* among women to more clearly assert their opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose Supreme Leader Khamenei explicitly outlawed this practice and declared it prohibited (*ḥarām*) in 1994. In a period of high Shi'i political engagement in which the position of Shi'i Islam has been redefined in the Middle East post-Ba'thist period, the Shirazis use the controversial practice of *taṭbīr* as a symbolic marker to distinguish themselves from the increasing number of political movements emerging primarily from London – in particular those that are aligned to Iran.

Similar to the impact Iraqi Shi'i political transnationalism has had in shaping a new Iraq,[114] Shirazis in London have formed a new understanding of Shi'ism: Shi'i Islam has taken a new direction in which sensory experiences are used to build new local and transnational Shi'i socialities. Different to the new Shi'i political direction that has taken

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[113] This information is based on numerous interviews conducted with Shirazi women in London.

[114] After all, four of Iraq's prime ministers since Saddam's fall were from the Iraqi diaspora.

place through diasporic Iraqis' transnational political engagements, Shirazis form new dynamics of community bonding through embodied aesthetic experiences and the material encounter with the transcendental through religious sensory practices. Bodily practices are used as self-cultivation methods to renegotiate a new Shiʿi self that is marked by aesthetic sensory practices and interwoven with Shiʿi traditional narratives around virtues and norms of *ahl al-bayt* (the family of the Prophet).

This new Shiʿi self, and in particular the "new Shiʿi woman," is used as a discourse to counter existing power relations within the various Shiʿi communities and the increase in power of Shiʿi Islamist parties in the diaspora. Instead of expressing one's Shiʿi-ness through political trans-national activism – as is the case among the Iraqi political elites in London – Shirazi Shiʿi women demonstrate their "true" Shiʿi-ness through bodily practices building new processes of social formations. Alternative distinct Shiʿi communities are formed that are not based on political transnationalism per se, but rather shaped by their performativity of the political through aesthetic formations that link the Shiʿi community in Europe to Shiʿis in the Gulf but, more importantly, position them closer to the transcendental – supporting thereby their narrative of being the "true" Shiʿis.

Transnational links between Shirazis in London and in other European cities as well as their wider networks in the Middle East allow this distinct, dynamic, and performative Shiʿi identity to spread to com-munities across the Gulf. The proliferation of technology and the rise of social media and other digital platforms enable Shirazi Shiʿi women to immerse themselves in global spaces.[115] Shirazis become active netizens and use their digital landscape to share their particular creative style of mourning with an aestheticization of politics that is expressed through their bodily expressions and sensory experiences. This public visibility and media attention are important for the positioning of the Shirazis in the wider political and religious arena – an arena from which historically they have been marginalized. As this book will demonstrate, this distinct Shiʿi identity and its mediatization is important for Shirazis' own pro-cesses of subjectification[116] as articulated through language, images, ritual practices, art, poetry, drama, posters, and banners. Local and

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[115] On digital diasporas and community building, see Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[116] Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations*, 10–11.

transnational socialities are produced through sensual and embodied experiences to strengthen a collective Shiʿi global consciousness.

Through their distinguishable presence, the Shirazis ensure that the Shiʿi presence is also mapped through their own defined political aesthetic performativity within the new geopolitical context of the Middle East. This is achieved, as will be illustrated in the following chapters, through Shirazi Shiʿi women's use of power on three different scales: communal, national, and transnational. By operating within these three levels, Shirazi women are able to redefine the center–periphery dynamics between the Middle East and Europe.

1.6   Conclusion

The increasing empowerment of Iran has had an impact on the positionality of the Shiʿi population in various Arab countries in the Gulf. Shiʿis in both Kuwait and Bahrain discussed in this book have experienced different degrees of socioeconomic and political encounters with the ruling state. To what extent the Shiʿi population in Kuwait and Bahrain has been accommodated within the nation-state has greatly depended on regional factors prevalent in the Gulf region but also domestic political, historic, and social power dynamics in each country. The relationship between the Shiʿi population and the governing elite, whether of support and acceptance or discrimination and suppression, has a long and complex history embedded within wider geopolitical and economic national as well as international interests. A new sectarianism has emerged in the region and a violence that has not previously existed in such a form. The fall of Saddam Hussein inspired other Arab Gulf Shiʿis to push for reform by reaching out to co-religionists in the Middle East and the European diaspora. However, the dominance of Sunni ruling elites in the Gulf has not been challenged. Opposition has either been suppressed or led to "cosmetic reforms and by stoking sectarianism – a bankrupt strategy that left a young generation of Shiʿis increasingly embittered and sparked the protests of early 2011."[117] As a consequence, Arab Shiʿis reached out, formally and/or informally, to transnational political and economic as well as religious support from Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq, but also to other Shiʿis in the European diaspora.

Sectarian tensions in the Middle East went viral, with various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram

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[117] Wehrey, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf*, 250.

becoming tools for expression of transnational solidarity among and between Shiʿis in the Gulf and the European diaspora. They proved to be a way for individuals, groups, and organizations to release their tensions, anxieties, and frustrations. However, as we have seen, these online spaces were also used by the Kuwaiti cleric Yasser al-Habib to inflame sectarian tensions further, using his exile in London to mobilize followers in Europe and the Middle East against the violence imposed by Sunni rulers against their Shiʿi populations in the Gulf. In other words, local political tensions in the Middle East are no longer local but rather have become global with a transnational, cross-border, and post-national reach. A global transnational Shiʿi consciousness developed, allowing Shiʿis in the European diaspora to reconnect and to express their solidarity with co-religionists in the Middle East as well as their support against anti-Shiʿi discrimination around the world.

This Shiʿi sociality was not only expressed through political and humanitarian channels, as is widely discussed in literature, but has also entered Shiʿi ritual spaces through the aestheticization of politics in the form of bodily practices and sensory expressions. As this book demonstrates, Shiʿi women have imported the narratives of rising sectarian violence into their religious spaces, *majālis*, constructing thereby a gendered form of resistance not only on the scale of women's involvement in Shiʿi ritual practices but also their increasing participation in the political discourses of Shiʿis in Europe and the Gulf.

Shiʿi women now living in Europe, whether from the first or the second generation, have close and increasing links with other Shiʿi women in various countries in the Gulf. Women exchange through social media, in particular, their religious experiences and views on political and social matters. Through their transnational links, Shiʿi women in the periphery of Europe influence not only religious practices performed in the Middle East, particularly in terms of the rituals women perform and how they are performed, but also impact on the gender dynamics within Shiʿi communities more generally. Shiʿi women's negotiations of resistance to existing political and gender structures in Europe influence societies in the Middle East. Through the displacement and growing presence of Shiʿis in Europe, in London in particular, a shift in power has taken place. Whereas in the past Muslim communities in Europe have been influenced by religiopolitical and social changes in the Middle East, currently the growing presence, religious literacy, and political self-awareness of especially younger Shiʿi communities in Europe influence religious and political dynamics in the Middle East.

Studies on sectarian power dynamics in the Middle East have so far ignored these aesthetic formations of individual and collective Shiʿi

subjectivities. This book provides a perspectival shift on the role Shiʿi women play in the transformation of gender power relations in the Middle East by examining the local and transnational mobilization of Shirazi women through their various aesthetic acts of resistance. Literature on political transnationalism focuses on the importance of the political system in empowering and mobilizing collective action of political actors in political movements through the formation of potential allies and coalitions.[118] Very few studies dealt with the transnational relationship between Shiʿis in the Gulf and the diasporic population in Europe.[119] For the most part they have focused on the religious and political transnational links of Shiʿi clerical and Islamist political party networks and their mobilization of members and followers in the diaspora. Discussion of religious transnational identity politics in this literature has focused mainly on how religious identity is evolving transnationally and is mobilized from the diaspora in the form of long-distance nationalism to fulfill specific political, civic, and humanitarian as well as religious goals within a particular national context.

This study, however, offers a different angle by analyzing how cross-national Shiʿi identities are interlinked with transnational Shiʿi practices embedded within ongoing political and sectarian changes in the Middle East. It focuses on the religious and political mobilization of Shiʿi women articulated through their transnational interrelationships and links to other Shiʿi communities in the Gulf beyond their own countries of origin. Different to other studies on ethno- and Shiʿi political (trans)nationalism which focus on a *single* national context, this study examines Shiʿi trans-nationalism articulated through aesthetic religious practices performed by women outside the boundaries of nation-states. It argues that the recent political transformations in the Middle East have contributed to the emergence of new modes of gendered political expressions, particularly since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and the increased

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[118] Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sidney G. Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Studies in Comparative Politics, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1995); Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet."

[119] Corboz, *Guardians of Shiʿism*; Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*; Kadhum, "Unpacking the Role of Religion in Political Transnationalism," 305–322; Kadhum, "Where Politics and Temporality Meet," 1–18; Emanuelle Degli Esposti, "The Aesthetics of Ritual – Contested Identities and Conflicting Performances in the Iraqi Shiʿa Diaspora: Ritual, Performance and Identity Change," *Politics* 38, no. 1 (2018), 68–83.

political and social instability caused since the 2011 Arab uprisings in the region. This book puts forward a new understanding of embodiment, individuality, and agency and shifts our understanding of political resistance movements and diaspora politics to incorporate gendered religious agency expressed in creative and aesthetic forms and practices neglected in the literature so far.