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Illustrating an Islamic Childhood in Syria: Pious Subjects and Religious Authority in Twelver Shi'i Children's Books

Edith Szanto

Shi'i children's books have only recently proliferated in the dozen or so small bookstores surrounding the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, located approximately fifteen kilometers south of Damascus. Although Syria does not have a large Twelver Shi'i population, religious bookstores serve a wide readership because the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab receives up to 2 million visitors annually.[1] Customers include Shi'is from Lebanon, Iraq, and South Asia, vacationers from the Eastern Arabian Gulf, Arab expatriates on religious tours, and the occasional researcher.

Most of the religious Shi'i children's books for sale in Syria are imported from Lebanon. There are a couple from Iran (one ritual-legal manual and one series),[2] one series of booklets from Iraq,[3] and one Syrian children's prayer manual.[4] Syria produces few Shi'i books as its Syrian Shi'i population constitutes no more than a few percent. However, as a miscellany of Shi'i piety and authority, the market in Syria is an especially interesting place to study Shi'i children's books, as Syria resells Arabic and English Shi'i books from all over the region. The children's books in particular all share the same general pious themes, including the general goal of cultivating pious subjects. However, the books also differ with regard to the age ranges of their target audiences, their artistic styles, and their invocation and portrayal of religious authority.

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1. See Michelle Zimney, "History in the Making: The Sayyida Zaynab Shrine in Damascus," 19 *Aram* (2007): 695.

2. See Hassan 'Abd al-Husayn Al-'Abudi, *Al-Fiqh li-l-Nasha'in* (*Islamic Jurisprudence for Young People*) (Qum, Iran: Bakiyat Publications, 2006); and Syed Mehdi Ayatullahi, *The Introduction to Infallibles*, 14 vols. (Qum, Iran: Ansaryan Publications, 2001).

3. See 'Ali Sa'd al-Najafi, ed., *Al-Imam al-Gha'ib*, Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya (*The Hidden Imam*, Mahdian Childhood Series) (Najaf, Iraq: Mahdi Publications, 2006); 'Ali Sa'd al-Najafi, ed. *Al-Imam al-Mahdi*, Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya (*Imam Mahdi*, Mahdian Childhood Series) (Najaf, Iraq: Mahdi Publications, 2006); 'Ali Sa'd al-Najafi, ed. *Al-Imam al-Shahid*, Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya (*The Martyr Imam*, Mahdian Childhood Series) (Najaf, Iraq: Mahdi Publications, 2006); 'Ali Sa'd al-Najafi, ed., *Imam al-'Asr*, Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya (*Imam of the Age*, Mahdian Childhood Series) (Najaf, Iraq: Mahdi Publications, 2006); and 'Ali Sa'd al-Najafi, ed., *Khalifat Allah*, Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya (*The Caliph of God*, Mahdian Childhood Series) (Najaf, Iraq: Mahdi Publications, 2006).

4. See R'ad Al-Qazaz, ed., *Al-Salat al-Yawmiyya al-Musawwara* (*The Illustrated Daily Prayer*) (Sayyida Zaynab, Syria: 'Ashura Publications, n.d.). The barely twenty-page booklet (including front and back covers) is organized into one to two page sections, which summarize Twelver Shi'i doctrine and practice. On the last two pages it enumerates Gregorian and Islamic months, and then lists the birth and death dates and places for each of the Fourteen Infallibles. The Fourteen Infallibles include the twelve imams, the Prophet, and the Prophet's daughter Fatima. The first of the twelve imams is 'Ali, Fatima's husband. The second and third imams, Hasan and Husayn, are both the children of Fatima and 'Ali. All subsequent imams are male descendants of Husayn.

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This article examines a selection of Shi'i children's books bought from vendors at Sayyida Zaynab. The collection is roughly representative of those for sale at Sayyida Zaynab and includes one Arabic primer series, several series on the lives of the *ahl al-bayt* in both English and Arabic,[5] an ongoing Arabic series on the immanence of the Mahdi (the hidden twelfth imam who is expected to return at the end of time), several ritual and prayer manuals, abridged and illustrated versions of canonical texts,[6] and four out of a six-booklet set on *al-Wilaya* (spiritual governance).[7] Except for the primer series, the books are intended for roughly eight- to sixteen-year-old children.[8] The books were all published in the last decade and many include glossy, colorful pictures. Their high quality makes them a bit pricey, limiting their accessibility and readership to those families who can afford to purchase them.[9] They are sold as either a complete series of thinner paperback booklets or as hardback compilations containing similar collections of shorter sections. Each series is organized around a central theme—and themes such as ritual, doctrine, or the lives of the *ahl al-bayt* are often repeated, such that readers reencounter the same basic stories from a variety of perspectives.

As transnational religious literature, the children's books participate in a larger prescriptive discourse on contemporary Shiism, pious subject formation, and religious authority. But how exactly do Shi'i children's books visually and textually educate readers? How do they illustrate and enable the emergence of pious subjects? How do they compel children to adopt and inhabit pious norms? How do they depict and construct religious authority? And how do the differences in the books' attitudes toward religious authority affect their approaches and views of pious subjects and reflect the specificities of their countries of origin? To answer these questions, the following analysis draws on the philosophical works of Judith Butler and Alasdair MacIntyre (and through him, Aristotle), as well as anthropological literature by Saba Mahmood, because all three of these scholars address the cultivation of the self and the construction of authority.

Besides sharing in the project of making children into pious Shi'is, the books reflect religious discourses prevalent in their countries of publication. For instance, the books published in Iran (or by publishers with close Iranian ties) strongly emphasize guidance and authority, whether fallible or infallible.[10] The Iraqi children's book series highlights the authority and mediatory function of elders, such as grandparents and teachers, and the imminent return of the Mahdi, who symbolizes their hope for a savior figure and a better future. Lebanese children's books constitute the majority of children's books for sale in Sayyida Zaynab and range from primers to illustrated and abridged canonical texts.[11] At the elementary level, Lebanese books do not underline either

5. Literally, the *ahl al-bayt* are the "people of the house," i.e., the family of Prophet Muhammad. For Twelver Shi'is specifically, the *ahl al-bayt* designates primarily the Fourteen Infallibles, as well as their kin and descendants. See, e.g., Mehdi Ayatullahi, *The Introduction to Infallibles*; Muhammad Nur al-Din, *Silsilat Sayyidat Bayt al-Nubuwwah* (*Series on the Ladies of the Prophetic Household)* (Beirut: al-Aalami Est., 2003); *Riwa'a Qisas al-M'asumin (as)* (*Stories about the Infallibles*) (Beirut: Al-Fajr Publications, 2007); and *Silsilat al-Sabaya* (*Series on the Young Ladies*), 10 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Huda, 2002).

6. These canonical text span a wide variety of topics, from exegetical works on prayers of the imams (Husayn Al-'Alami, *Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya al-Muyassira* [*The Abridged Pages of Imam al-Sajjad*] [Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., 2006]) to illustrated medical treatises (Lana Husayn Baluq, *Silsilat Tibb al-Nabi wa-l-A'imma* [*'alayhum salam*] *li-l-Atfal* [*Series on the Medicine of the Prophet and the Imams for Children*] [Beirut: Dar al-Bayda', n.d.]).

7. On the cover, the word *wilaya* appears without short vowels and thus, the term could even be read as *walaya*. Both terms are contiguous in their range of meanings and can refer to sovereign power, rule, guardianship, or friendship. For a discussion of these terms, see Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 1100; and Vincent Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), xix–xx. For Twelver Shi'is, moreover, the term *wilaya* carries special significance, as the third stanza of the Shi'i *shahada*, or affirmation of faith, attests. Sunnis and Shi'is agree on the first two stanzas: There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God. The third specifically Shi'i stanza reads: And 'Ali is the *wali* (friend) of God. See Liyakat Takim, "From Bid'a to Sunna: The Wilaya of 'Ali in the Shi'i Adhan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120 (2000): 166–77.

8. The books differ in their target age group. As Pamela Karimi and Christiane Gruber point out in the introduction to this special section, Arabic employs different terms for children of different ages. Some Shi'i children's books use such terms to target specific age groups (e.g., *nashi'in* refers to adolescents), and *fiqh* (or legal) manuals even define their target age group (fifteen-year-old boys and nine-year-old girls). See, e.g., *Al-Fiqh al-Muyassar: Sinn al-Taklif* (*The Abridged Islamic Jurisprudence: Age of Responsibility*) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., 2005), 7.

9. The booklets cost between 100 to 200 Syrian liras, which is approximately 2 to 4 US dollars. The hardback books run around 500 Syrian liras or approximately 10 US dollars.

10. In Iran, the ayatollahs, such as Ayatollah Khamana'i, are fallible guides whereas the imams are infallible guides.

11. There are two predominant Lebanese presses. The first, Dar al-Bayda', also publishes adult literature that endorses the religious views of the late Ayatollah Muhammad Shirazi whose seminary bookstore is one of the largest distributers in the Syrian shrine-town of Sayyida Zaynab. The other Lebanese press, al-Aalami

social or educational hierarchies of authority, but rather depict children instructing other children. Finally, the books that summarize and illustrate classical, canonical texts (which are authoritative independent of any particular *marja' al-taqlid*) imply an abstract, institutionalized authority.[12]

The analysis begins with a primer for four- to eight-year-old children. The overarching question here is how the primer compels children to respond and, thus, identify as Shi'is emotionally. Next, this study looks at how Shi'i books convey religious doctrine and exemplary ethical behavior by situating them metaphorically and pictorially in the realm of the familial by invoking close personal relationships, such as those between a mother and a daughter or between a little boy and his grandfather. It is within this familial realm that fictional pious elders cite the moral examples of Prophet Muhammad's family, the *ahl al-bayt*, and thereby introduce the *ahl al-bayt* as intimately knowable. The elders' performances constitute pious norms as both "habituated effects" and as "productive power" generative of pious subjects.[13] Fictional others thus compel young readers to cite the *ahl al-bayt*, perform pious practices, and become recognizable as pious subjects. In Butler's terms, the books inaugurate the pious subject while grounding ethics within relationality, the subject's inherent openness to others.[14] By locating pious performance in the social sphere, Shi'i children's books direct social relations toward the *ahl al-bayt* and implicitly spell out the terms of an ideal, cross-generational pious community.

Ethical Responsiveness and the Emerging Subject

According to Shi'i *fiqh*, or jurisprudence, children are not required to perform rituals such as daily prayers until they have reached the "age of responsibility," which is nine for girls and fifteen for boys. Yet their early exposure to various religious events is still encouraged.[15] Primer booklets such as *Munasibat Khalidah* (*Eternal Proprieties*) address children with a triple command on their cover: "Read! Memorize! Color!"[16] Below the command, the cover page reveals some of the pictures to come (fig. 1). The booklets promote children's participation by illustrating and explaining how the pious should relate and respond to the various historical events and holidays that punctuate the Shi'i calendar, including 'Ashura, 'Id al-Ghadir, and 'Id al-Adha.[17]

While *Munasibat Khalidah* does not provide detailed background information about each of the noted events, it nevertheless clearly demonstrates whether observing a particular event is obligatory or simply *mustahabb* (preferred, but not obligatory) and whether it is a joyous or a heartrending occasion. Each page includes a short text and two images, a small colorful picture in the upper-right-hand corner and a larger drawing in the bottom left, which children must color in. Each image also comprises two parts: an item (such as the Koran) or a scene depicting a particular event and a Shi'i child responding to the signified event with an appropriate facial expression. On most pages, the child is foregrounded and thus superimposed onto the historical events, as if to symbolize the appropriateness of contemplating the past in the present. Furthermore, the child is always in the bottom left, which signifies submission and reverence. The accompanying text explains the importance of the depicted event and describes the appropriate physical and emotional reaction.

The first page of the booklet shows a young boy pointing his finger at the minaret of a mosque. On the upper-left side appear the

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Est., may be affiliated with the late Ayatollah Fadlallah, as its only children's *fiqh* book explicitly follows Fadlallah.

12. A *marja' al-taqlid* is a high-ranking Shi'i jurisconsult whose followers must comply by his rulings.

13. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–3, 10, 14. The pious community contains, constructs, and circumscribes the pious norm, because according to Butler the pious norm is both stabilized and destabilized through the temporal process of performative construction.

14. See Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 39.

15. See Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 104.

16. The imperative to read ("*Iqra*!") echoes the Koranic command to read or to recite (96:1). The command is popularly considered to have been the first instance of revelation to Prophet Muhammad.

17. See *Munasibat Khalidah*, Silsilat al-Feta al-Muslim (*Eternal Proprieties*, Series for Muslim Boys) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., n.d.). See also *Ahl al-Bayt (a)*, Silsilat al-Feta al-Muslim (*Family of the Prophet*, Series for Muslim Boys) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., n.d.); *Al-Salat 'Umud al-Din*, Silsilat al-Feta al-Muslim (*Prayer is the Pillar of Religion*, Series for Muslim Boys) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., n.d.); and *Kayfa natwada'*, Silsilat al-Feta al-Muslim (*How We Perform Ritual Ablution*, Series for Muslim Boys) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., n.d.).

first two stanzas of the *adhan* (call to prayer) and below a boy explains, "We are hearing the *adhan*, the call invites us to prayer." Another page is dedicated to the feast of Ghadir, which celebrates the day Prophet Muhammad appointed 'Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, as his successor.[18] The images reveal two robed figures, one holding up the arm of the other, as the Prophet elects Imam 'Ali, making him *wali*, or patron, over all Muslims. Below to the left, a smiling boy dressed in red, surrounded by flowers, is clearly delighted by this occasion. The next page depicts the same boy dressed in black, his hand raised to his chest suggesting chest-beating, a form of ritual self-flagellation whereby Shi'is mourn the deaths of the imams. The boy looks up with wide-eyed sadness unto a scene depicting Husayn, 'Ali's son, lying in a pool of blood on the desert plains of Karbala.[19] The accompanying text explains that attending Muharram mourning gatherings is among the most important *mustahabb* practices a Shi'i Muslim should perform.



Figure 1: The cover-page of *Munasibat Khalidah* (*Eternal Proprieties*) shows seven religious events: the moon-sighting indicates the end of Ramadan; the Prophet holding up 'Ali's arm symbolizes 'Id al-Ghadir; the al-Aqsa Mosque is noted as a holy site; the Ka'bah represents pilgrimage; a boy looking at a scene from the Battle of Karbala denotes 'Ashura; a girl gazing at a silhouette of a camel and rider symbolizes the Hijra; and the last picture on the bottom right represents the concept of jihad. *Munasibat Khalidah*, Silsilat al-Feta al-Muslim (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., n.d.), cover page. Book acquired by author in Sayyida Zaynab, Syria, in 2008.

According to Butler, the emerging subject (i.e., the child) must appropriate social norms in order to become intelligible.[20] Children's books such as *Munasibat Khalidah* aid children in becoming recognizable as pious subjects by compelling children to read, memorize, color, and enact religious practices. For instance, by adopting the prescribed gestural responses in 'Ashura commemorations, children become intelligible as pious Shi'is through both learning and acting.[21]

Notably, this primer does not depict parent-child relationships, which are prominent in many of the other children's books from Lebanon. Rather, it shows other children speaking in the first-person singular, the inclusive "we," as it explains how young children should react emotionally and physically to religious occasions. Yet one may assume that most small children would not read a religious primer on their own, and, as such, a parental mediatory figure is implied. By reading the text of the primer to their children, parents speak in the voice of another child. This de-emphasizes parental authority and instead mimics sibling or peer relationships.

18. According to Shi'is, Prophet Muhammad declared 'Ali patron or *mawla* (as one who has *wilaya*) over all Muslims at Ghadir Khumm. See Kamran Scot Aghaie, "The Origins of the Sunnite-Shi'ite Divide and the Emergence of the Ta'ziyeh Tradition," *TDR (1988–)* 49, no. 4, Special Issue on Ta'ziyeh (2005): 42–47.

19. The third imam, Husayn, was killed at the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE by Umayyad forces. Since then, Shi'is commemorate Husayn's death annually on the tenth day ('Ashura) of the Islamic month Muharram. See Ali J. Hussain, "The Mourning of History and the History of Mourning: The Evolution of Ritual Commemoration of the Battle of Karbala," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25 (2005): 78–88.

20. See Butler, *Giving an Account*, 27–28.

21. The other books from the primer series fall into two types: instructional manuals and hagiographies. The instructional manuals include one booklet on *wudu'* (ritual ablution) and the other on *salah* (the five daily prayers). The hagiographies include one booklet on the *ahl al-bayt* and one on the prophets who preceded the Prophet Muhammad. Each of the booklets includes two pictures per page, one colored and one for children to fill in.

Children encounter norms through primary social relations, such as parents or peers, who compel them to appropriate and perform norms in order to become intelligible subjects. Primary relations thus "form lasting and recurrent impressions on the history of [the subject's] life."[22] The subject is conditioned by his primary relations, such that his vulnerability and openness to others foreclose any possibility of ever fully recuperating an autonomous, original self. Taking as a starting point the idea that the subject always remains partially opaque to himself, Butler theorizes that ethical agency must be grounded in the subject's vulnerability to others. For her, ethical responsibility should be judged in terms of a subject's responsiveness to others.[23] The subject's openness to others becomes the condition for ethical practice: he becomes ethically "responsible" when recognizing his vulnerability to others.[24] The sympathetic or emulative responses depicted in booklets such as *Munasibat Khalidah* can therefore be described as primers on Shi'i ethical practices because they constitute modes of maintaining responsive, and thus living, relations with the *ahl al-bayt*.

If pious subjects are created through relationships, which are prescribed, enabled, and sustained by children's relationships, then the "others," to whom pious subjects are made sensitive, include parents, peers, members of the *ahl al-bayt*, and Shi'i scholars. Shi'i children's books depict and invoke primary relationships by setting instructive stories in the context of fictional pious families. They also create such relations by demanding emotional responses from readers to events that occurred in the lives of the Prophet Muhammad and his family. By describing and illustrating appropriate responses, the books define Shi'i love and loyalty, which are co-constitutive of Shi'i piety.[25] Much like Shi'i Muharram mourning gatherings, storybooks about the lives of the *ahl al-bayt* help create emotional attachments to figures of Shi'i sacred history through highly formulaic textual narratives and visual representations.[26]

A good example of an emotionally demanding storybook is the fifth booklet in the Iranian series titled *Introduction to Infallibles*, published in Iran in 2001 and aimed at children and youth. The booklet recounts the life of the third imam, Husayn. It begins with an angel telling the Prophet Muhammad that his newborn grandchild should be named "Husayn."[27] In his early years, Husayn enjoyed the loving devotion of his parents and grandfather, though his good fortunes were soon reversed and his mother died shortly after her own father, the Prophet, passed away. Meanwhile, his father, Imam 'Ali, was denied of his right to lead and rule the Muslim community. After his father was killed, Husayn was oppressed by Mu'awiyah, the Umayyad caliph, and later by Yazid I, Mu'awiyah's son and successor. An outspoken critic of the Umayyads, Husayn was invited in approximately 680 CE by the people of Kufa, a city in present-day southern Iraq, to lead their rebellion against Yazid. Once duly convinced of the Kufans' support, Husayn decided to heed their request for help and left Medina for Kufa. However, the caliph learned of the imminent revolt in time and dispatched an army: first, in order to intimidate the Kufans, and second, to intercept Husayn. When Husayn reached the desert plains of Karbala, around eighty kilometers from Kufa, he was met and outnumbered by Yazid's army. The Kufans never came to help and, after several days of fierce fighting, Husayn was killed on 'Ashura, the tenth day of the Islamic month Muharram. According to the *Introduction to Infallibles*, Husayn had intended "to disgrace Yazid's regime" and to restore justice to the Islamic empire (14). The text explains that Husayn was not defeated, even though he died, because success means "achieving one's . . . goals and aspirations and ideology [even if] one is killed. Defeat does not mean being killed. . . . it means the death and annihilation of objective, aspira-

22. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 39.

23. See ibid., 19, 88–93.

24. See ibid., 91.

25. See Toby M. Howarth, *The Twelver Shi'a as a Muslim Minority in India: Pulpit of Tears* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 151; and Vernon James Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1993), 16–17.

26. See Howarth, *Twelver Shi'a*, 136–49; and Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 23.

27. Syed Mehdi Ayatullahi, *The Introduction to Infallibles*, no. 5, *Hazrat-i Imam Husayn (s.a.)* (*The Great Imam Husayn [Peace Be upon Him]*) (Qum, Iran: Ansaryan Publications, 2001), 3–4.

tion, and belief" (30). The story then ends with a description of how "people" (i.e., the Shi'is) express their love and allegiance to the *ahl al-bayt* by visiting their shrines, praising their virtues, cherishing their memories, and cursing their enemies (32).

Both the content and the structure of these stories are emotionally compelling: the juxtaposition of an imam's virtues and his tragic death evokes moral outrage. Following Butler, this outrage must be understood as an ethical response because it is based in the relationality of the subject. The account of Husayn's tragedy compels the subject to act upon his openness to the *ahl al-bayt*; in this respect, the booklet is both demanding and instructive. The booklet demands devotion, tears, and outrage, and it idealizes self-sacrifice for God, the *ahl al-bayt*, and the Shi'i community. These responses, which the story requires of pious readers, constitute an ethical capacity expressed as loyalty and love for the Prophet and his family. A child's emotional response, his outrage, signals his appropriation of pious norms and underpins the primary relations that constitute his own subjectivity in its relationality.

Ec-Static Inaugurations

By presenting a predetermined, normative, and hence intelligible response, primary relationships "displace" the emerging subject in that they change the subject irreversibly. In other words, the subject emerges through two related and simultaneous processes: first, the subject's own relational self allows for and is even constituted by an irreversible impingement and displacement by others (including elders, peers, and fictional characters). Second, the subject is compelled by others and by his desire to be recognized by others to appropriate religious norms.[28] In short, the subject's relationality fundamentally impinges upon the subject, "displacing" him, and compelling him to adopt recognizable norms of belief and behavior in order to become intelligible to others.

An example, wherein the subject's relationality "displaces" him, causing him to adopt pious norms, is found in the story "al-Hijab" ("The Headscarf"), one of five stories in a Lebanese hardback for girls. In the story, a mother carefully broaches the implications of her daughter's upcoming "age of responsibility," her ninth lunar birthday.[29] With a piece of *hilwa* (a sweetmeat), the mother explains that maturity requires commitment to *hijab*, or modest dress and, more specifically, a headscarf.[30] At first the daughter, Maryam, remains ambivalent, afraid the scarf will not suit her face. Assuring her that the *hijab* will only enhance her beauty, the mother tells her that veiling is not a "family rule," but constitutes an act of worship that pleases God. Maryam asks for proof and her mother quotes a verse from the Koran and explains that God commanded it for the protection of individuals and families.[31] Confused, Maryam goes to her room and reflects on her mother's words, but soon sleep overtakes her. In her dream, Maryam imagines herself sitting in a garden and sees an *al-khayr* (angel) descending, offering her a gift: a pink *hijab* (fig. 2). The angel calls her a *fatah saliha* (virtuous girl) and tells her that she deserves the gift, which will protect and suit her pure face well. Then Maryam hears another voice: an *al-sharr* (black demon) tries to persuade her not to cover her beauty. The angel warns the curious girl: "He is completely evil, don't be convinced by his words." The devil defends himself: "I am your friend and only want what is best for you." The angel insists: "Do not listen to the whispering devil, which will only lower your favor with God. Your beauty lies in knowing you, not in your adornments."[32]

At this Maryam wakes up and calls for her mother, asking: "Are you going to the market today? I would like to buy a *hijab*."[33] Remembering her daughter's initial reluctance, the mother is curious about the sudden change of mind. Maryam explains that in the realm of visions, she has witnessed the battle between "good" and "evil" and has recognized that the *hijab* is

28. See ibid., 27–30.

29. "al-Hijab" ("The Headscarf"), in *Silsilat Bint al-Huda al-Qisasiyya li-l-Nashi'a* (*Bint al-Huda Series of Stories for Young Girls*) (Beirut: Dar al-Mahajja al-Bayda', n.d.), 4.

30. Ibid., 6.

31. See ibid., 6–12.

32. Ibid., 15. "Whispering devil" is an allusion to a well-known Koranic expression (see Koran 114:4).

33. Ibid., 17.



Figure 2: An angel offers a pink headscarf to Maryam. "al-Hijab" ("The Headscarf"), in *Silsilat Bint al-Huda al-Qisasiyya li-l-Nashi'a* (Beirut: Dar al-Mahajja al-Bayda', n.d.), 13. Book acquired by author in Sayyida Zaynab, Syria, in 2008.

the superior, or ethical, choice (*'arafatu in al-hijab fadila*), especially since she desires to please and be recognized by God as a pious subject. Ultimately, the daughter's relationships with others and her self-reflection compel her to adopt pious norms, in this case the scarf, whereby she becomes recognizable as a God-loving subject capable of ethical practice. At first, she remains ambivalent. Then, upon encouragement by her mother and an angel in a dream, she appropriates pious norms. Maryam's desire to be recognized as a "good girl" by members of her family and community, a result of her openness, allows her to be displaced, to use Butler's term, and to be shaped.[34]

The notion of displacement as a consequence of impingement by others is common throughout Shi'i children's literature. The displacing encounter with an elder is a particularly important theme throughout the Iraqi series titled *al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya* (*The Mahdian Childhood*), wherein the characters change although the plot generally remains the same: a child seeks out her grandfather, her aunt, an elderly neighbor, or a teacher and asks questions regarding the Mahdi, the twelfth hidden imam.[35] For example, the booklet *Imam al-'Asr* (*Imam of the Age*) recounts the story of Huda. One evening, Huda's grandfather finds her at her desk, contemplating a question her father has posed to her about the importance of the Imam al-Mahdi. She finds herself unable to answer and thus asks her grandfather why it is incumbent on "us" (herself, her family, and the reader) to know the Imam al-Mahdi. Her grandfather offers an analogy: If your class went on a school fieldtrip and your teacher asked you to drive the bus, what would you say? Huda replies that she would be unable to do so, since she does not know how to drive. Her grandfather continues: What would happen if there were two bus-drivers? Huda responds: The two would disagree and cause and an accident! Her grandfather concludes: Therefore, you need one knowledgeable driver. Similarly, human beings need one authoritative and knowledgeable

34. Maryam's coming of age and her desire for *hijab* are analogous to Butler's notion of the emerging subject who appropriates norms. See Butler, *Giving an Account*, 20–21.

35. See, e.g., *Al-Imam al-Gha'ib*, 6–7; *Al-Imam al-Mahdi*, 5–6; and *Imam al-'Asr*, 9–10.

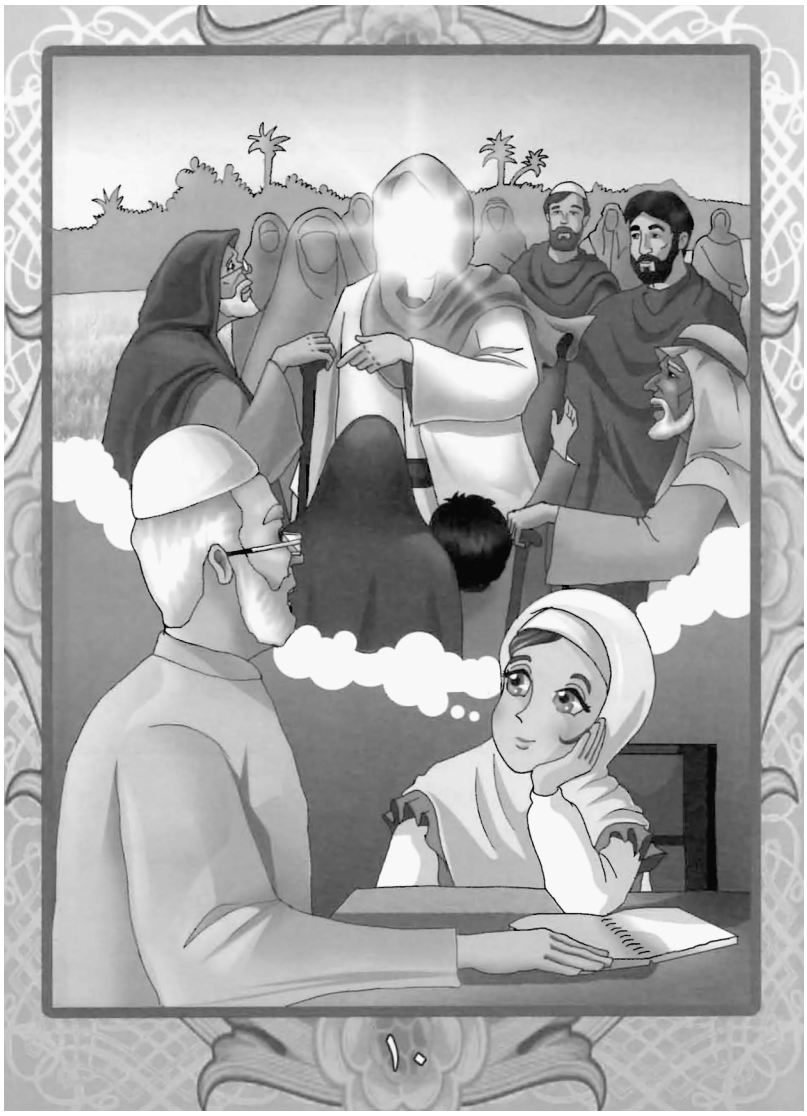


Figure 3: A grandfather explains that human beings need an infallible guide, while Huda listens and imagines a scene wherein the Mahdi, whose face glows with divine light, teaches men, women, and children. 'Ali Sa'd al-Najafi, ed., *Imam al-'Asr* (*Imam of the Age*), Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya (Najaf, Iraq: Mahdi Publications, 2006), 10. Book acquired by author in Sayyida Zaynab, Syria, in 2008.

guide to lead them in the religious matters. From the beginning of creation, God has been sending prophets and imams, who teach their followers right from wrong. Figure 3 depicts Huda and her grandfather at the moment of "ec-static inauguration." Huda imagines an imam, sent by God, teaching the people. She is inaugurated as a pious subject at the moment in which she gains insight into the necessity of having an imam of the age (fig. 3).[36]

Similar to *Imam al-'Asr*, the other booklets of the Mahdian Childhood series contain pictures illustrating moments of "ec-static inauguration," which show a child and her mentor underneath a second image, enclosed in a bubble that depicts the topic of their conversation. As the mentor conveys a lesson, the child responds. She becomes "displaced" or "ec-static" through a primary impingement that displaces her irreversibly.[37] Her ecstasy or displacement makes her content, eager to follow. Through her displacement, she is compelled to respond, and thus she emerges as a pious subject, a product of pious norms. By adopting norms through which she herself becomes intelligible, others—especially the *ahl al-bayt*—become cognitively and emotionally known to her, bound together into a single, transhistorical pious community.

36. *Imam al-'Asr*, 9–10.

37. Butler, *Giving an Account*, 115.

Habituating Piety

In Shi'i children's literature, impingement and displacement by pious others remain an important element in pious formation, even for older children who have reached the "age of responsibility."[38] For example, the following excerpt from a Syrian children's legal manual tells girls above the age of nine and boys over the age of fifteen that they must seek the guidance of those who are pious and knowledgeable:

> Islam commands us to perform religious duties and prohibits committing forbidden deeds. As Muslims, we [should] act according to the best of our knowledge. Even though we know the principles of our religion, [such as] how to pray and fast, we do not know everything. Sometimes we encounter new situations, wherein we do not know how to act. In such cases it is important to know that there is a correct Islamic response to every situation, and that there are those who specialize in religion and study and ponder such issues (*darasu wa hafathu wa tafaqqahu fi tilk al-ahkam*) and who know more than we or others know. We need those who study and bear the responsibility for our actions in front of God (*yatahammal al-mas'uliyya 'amalna amam Allah*). We need to follow (*nahtaj ila taqlid*) those who have studied and it is best to follow the most knowledgeable among them.[39]

The Shi'i legal concept of *taqlid*, or ritual emulation, is based on presumed relationality and responsiveness. The religious scholars' responsibility presupposes responsiveness on the part of pious subjects, as scholars only bear responsibility for the actions of those who follow them regularly and habitually. Citing scholars' decisions, however, does not mean that adolescent pious subjects lack moral agency. Indeed, Mahmood explains that "agency [is] not simply a synonym for resistance to relations of [unjust] domination, but . . . a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable."[40] Mahmood echoes Butler, who argues that agency constitutes "a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power."[41] In other words, agency is made possible through the appropriation of norms, such that Shi'is become agents by cultivating proper responsiveness to and relationships with religious scholars (especially a *marja' al-taqlid*).[42]

Children's legal manuals emphasize that maturity requires a specific kind of responsibility. As the analysis of the Lebanese primer *Munasibat Khalidah* demonstrates, small children learn to respond emotionally and ritually to pious events. Elementary schoolchildren learn from parents, grandparents, and schoolteachers. Adulthood, in the Shi'i legal sense, is generally defined as beginning with the onset of puberty and requires maturing subjects to respond and follow (*yuqallid*) institutionalized religious authority figures. Emerging subjects respond to an increasingly distant and authoritative other. At first the responses are mainly affective. Later on, the responsiveness Shi'is cultivate becomes more complex and multilayered. Emotional responsiveness remains important as legal manuals teach lay Shi'is how to perform daily rituals.

Beyond affect, standardized introductions to *fiqh* (or legal) manuals—whether they are aimed at adolescents or adults—usually begin with an explanation of the importance and purpose of the institution of the *marja'iyya* (the institutionalized scholarly elite of Twelver Shiism).[43] They encourage lay Shi'is to seek out the most knowledgeable from among a handful of *maraja' al-taqlid* while highlighting the eminence of the author. Once a Shi'i has decided to follow a particular *marja'*, he is encouraged to study the *marja's* views, trust his opinions, heed his warnings, and seek to always return (*yirja'*) to his *wilaya* (guidance). The stipulation that

38. "The age of responsibility" refers to puberty, which has been set by Shi'i *maraja' al-taqlid* (the top-ranking and most followed ayatollahs living at a time). It is the age at which children are legally considered to be fully mature adults. Girls become mature at nine lunar years; boys become mature at fifteen lunar years. In the case of boys, it is important to note that boys from the age of four solar years are no longer allowed to join women's *majalis* (ritual mourning gatherings) and are hence acknowledged as at least potentially sexually mature (though not legally mature).

39. This is an abridged translation of the original: *Al-Fiqh al-Muyassar: Sinn al-Taklif*, 7.

40. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 18.

41. Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 15.

42. The highest-ranking Shi'i jurisconsults are referred to as "*maraja' al-taqlid*" (plural of "*marja' al-taqlid*") or points of emulation. The institution of the *marja'iyya* arose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See Said Amir Arjomand, ed., *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

43. For a detailed discussion of this topic, see Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq: The 'Ulama' of Najaf and Karbala* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



Figure 4: A young boy steps out of the door on his way to school. He is reciting the *du'a* (supplementary prayer) for leaving the house, which is printed in red. The black print renders the difficult passages in red in terms that are more comprehensible for children. *Mafatih al-Jinan al-Mubassat* (*The Abridged Keys of Paradise*) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., 2006), 4. Book acquired by author in Sayyida Zaynab, Syria, in 2008.

Shi'is must follow a contemporary, living *marja'* reinforces the importance of relationality in the performance of religious duties.

Philosophically, the Shi'i concept of *taqlid* echoes the Aristotelian notion that moral agency is not a product of the critical faculty of reason.[44] Rather, it lies in the subject's capacity to inhabit norms and live, as MacIntyre writes, "a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life."[45] The apt practice of virtues and their repeated performance cultivate practical and emotional dispositions that enable practitioners to desire "the good."[46] In other words, moral agency is a habituated, "acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character of the person."[47]

Lebanese children's collections of canonical Shi'i texts reflect an Aristotelian view of virtue by helping to habituate piety in their readers through associating pious practices with the slow rhythms of ordinary life. For example, the children's version of the standard prayer manual, *Mafatih al-Jinan* (*The Keys of Paradise*), instills the virtue of reciting supplementary prayers by textually and pictorially demonstrating how to pray during everyday activities such as going to bed, leaving for school, and visiting the sick.[48] The book presents each prayer divided into segments: lines written in red are directly followed by lines in black, which constitute an explanatory and simplified version (i.e., a *tafsir* or exegetical commentary) of the lines in red (fig. 4). A colorful picture accompanies each of these segments. It encourages children to correlate specific *du'a* (non-obligatory, *mustahabb* prayers) with particular bodily movements, physical envi-

44. For a recent discussion on Aristotelian virtues and contemporary Islam, see Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 25.

45. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 149.

46. See Talal Asad, "Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 46–50.

47. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 136.

48. See *Mafatih al-Jinan al-Mubassat* (*The Abridged Keys of Paradise*) (Beirut: Al-Aalami Est., 2006).

ronments, and social encounters. To further aid memorization and habituation, longer prayers are reprinted, undivided after each illustrated and annotated version. Through repetition, the virtues of prayer can thus take root in ordinary existence.

Depicting Shi'i Authority

Shi'i children's books participate in the production of the pious community to the extent that they introduce and define pious norms, which include religious practices such as praying, mourning during Muharram, and, for girls above the age of nine, donning the headscarf. Like the narrators (the peers, parents, grandparents, and teachers), the children's books mediate and cite infallible and fallible religious authorities of which there are two kinds, both of whom appear as homogeneous and internally coherent groups: the *ahl al-bayt* and contemporary Shi'i scholars.[49]

Books meant for younger children, such as *Munasibat Khalidah*, do not mention scholars and focus exclusively on the *ahl al-bayt*, the prophets, general doctrine, and devotional behavior and practice. Even at the next stage, in Lebanese and Iraqi books for eight- to thirteen-year-olds, no scholars appear. Instead, elders consist of parents, teachers, grandparents, and members of the *ahl al-bayt*. In one of the other stories in the Lebanese hardback *Silsilat Bint al-Huda al-Qisasiyya li-l-Nashi'a* (*Bint al-Huda Series of Stories for Young Girls*) there is a *qari*, or ritual mourning performer, whose role does not necessarily designate a scholar.[50] Indeed, the entire Iraqi series does not depict any scholars. Pious grandparents provide grandchildren with guidance while recounting the teachings of the imams and the Mahdi. It is noteworthy that the Iraqi children's series does not pay any attention to scholars, given that Iraq is home to some of the oldest and most influential Shi'i seminaries. Perhaps the series avoids mentioning scholars in order to remain politically neutral in the unstable post-Saddam era, where most religious scholars also represent political factions.

Scholars' names and images appear in *fiqh* manuals and in abridged versions of canonical prayer manuals for pubescent Shi'i girls and boys. Interestingly, only Lebanese children's books depict and name specific contemporary high-ranking scholars. Two works (or sets of booklets), which were both published in Lebanon in 2005 and 2000 respectively, cite specific scholars. The manual *al-Fiqh al-Muyassar* (*Simplified Islamic Jurisprudence*) cites the independent jurist Sayyid 'Abd al-Karim Fadlallah.[51] The second work that explicitly engages with scholars is the *al-Wilaya* series.[52] It uses the same strategies employed in other Shi'i children's books to initiate Arabic speaking Shi'i children into a relationship with the Iranian Ayatollah Khamana'i.

The *al-Wilaya* series was probably written for older children or teenagers. The artistic style is realistic and the color palette muted. The text is relatively short and simple, but the content is serious: it ties together politics, relationality, and virtue. For example, the booklet titled *al-Qa'id al-Khamana'i* (*The Leader Khamana'i*) employs the same Butlerian "ec-static inauguration" as the *al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya* series. Here, a father hangs a portrait of Ayatollah Khamana'i on the wall (fig. 5). When his son inquires about the portrait, the father replies: "He is Sayyid 'Ali Khamana'i, the *wali al-'amr* [guardian of authority]; God has made it a duty for us to follow him." The son asks: "Why has God made it a duty for us to follow him?" The father answers:

49. Texts such as the Koran and canonical prayer manuals such as the *Mafatih al-Jinan* fall under the first category because they were transmitted by infallible religious authorities.

50. See "Du'a Kumayl," in *Silsilat Bint al-Huda al-Qisasiyya li-l-Nashi'a* (Beirut: Dar al-Mahajja al-Bayda', n.d.), 4–19.

51. According to Morgan Clarke, Sayyid 'Abd al-Karim Fadlallah does not follow the late Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hussayn Fadlallah (who was the spiritual head of Hezbollah and had strong ties to Iran). See Morgan Clarke, *Islam and New Kinship: Reproductive Technology and the Shariah in Lebanon* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 130.

52. The *al-Wilaya* series is composed of at least four booklets, each of which describes an exemplary practice by either Ayatollah Khomeini or Ayatollah Khamana'i. Crucially, the series was published in Lebanon, where Hezbollah considers Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamana'i important religio-political leaders. See *Al-Imam wa-l-Qa'id*, Silsilat al-Wilaya (*The Imam and the Leaders*, Guidance Series) (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2000); *Al-Imam wa-l-Salah*, Silsilat al-Wilaya (*The Imam and Prayer*, Guidance Series) (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2000); *Al-Qa'id al-Khamana'i*, Silsilat al-Wilaya *The Leader Khamana'i*, Guidance Series) (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2000); and *Al-Qa'id wa-l-Zuhd*, Silsilat al-Wilaya (*The Leader and Renunciation [or Discipline]*, Guidance Series) (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2000).

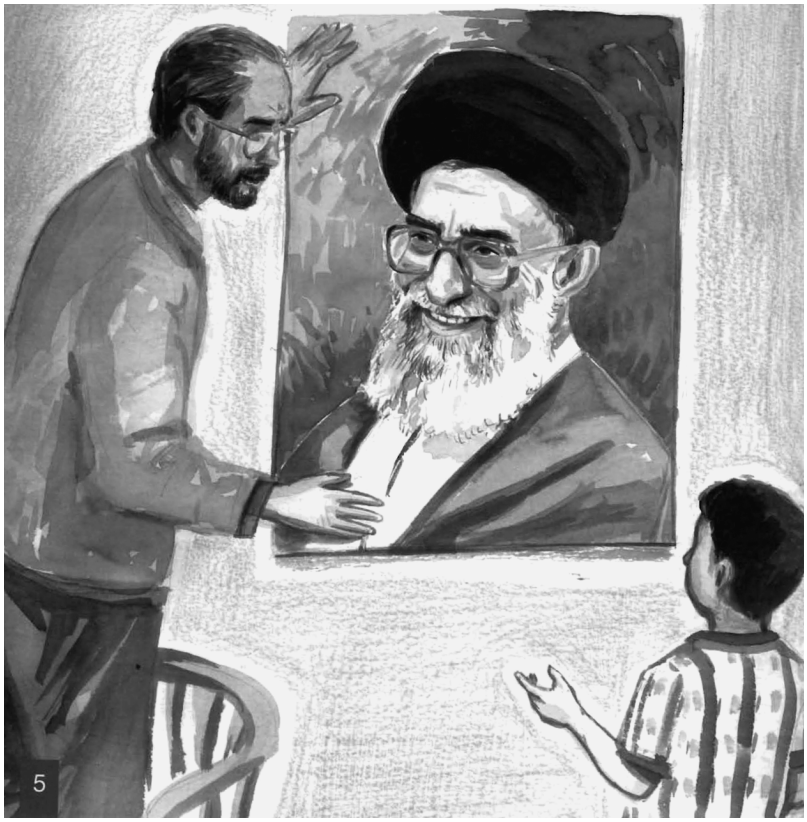


Figure 5: While a father hangs up a portrait of Ayatollah Khamana'i, Iran's supreme religious leader, he talks to his son about the importance of following the ayatollah. *al-Qa'id al-Khamana'i*, Silsilat al-Wilaya (*The Leader Khamana'i*, Guidance Series) (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2000), 5.

"Oh my son, God has not left his worshippers without ensuring that there is someone to direct their affairs. . . . People require a leader so that corruption does not spread in the land."[53] The difference between the *al-Wilaya* and the *al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya* series is that the former posits the hidden imam while the latter puts forward Ayatollah Khamana'i as the appropriate leader for Muslims. In both cases, however, an elder explains why "we" (fictional characters, as well as readers) must follow and relate to a religious authority figure.

The last four pages of the *al-Wilaya* booklet titled *Al-Qa'id wa-l-Zuhd* (*The Leader and Renunciation [or Discipline]*) directly engage readers. They encourage participation through activities that require reflection on the booklet's meanings and messages. The first of these pages lists questions that compel emerging subjects to allow themselves to be displaced. The questions include: "Do want to be humble like the leader? Which one is your favorite story regarding renunciation and humility? What did the leader say to the soldiers who offered him a meal?"[54] The questions are suggestive; they require readers to not only relate to but also identify with Ayatollah Khamana'i. As such, the booklets encourage children to view inhabiting norms as a form of agency and following Khamana'i as a desirable means to becoming virtuous.

Though scholars and members of the *ahl al-bayt* differ politically and historically, they are comparable with regard to their function. There exist various types of friendships, the most noble of which embodies a shared recognition and pursuit of a good.[55] As necessary others, who compel emerging subjects to affectively respond, assume ethical responsibility, and become intelligible as pious subjects, the *ahl al-bayt* function as the subject's like-minded, intimate friends. Affection, moreover, is a by-product that arises within a relationship defined in terms of a common allegiance to and a common pursuit of goods.[56] For Shi'is, affection arises as

53. *Al-Qa'id al-Khamana'i*, 4. See also Shervin Malekzadeh, "Children without Childhood, Adults without Adulthood: Changing Conceptions of the Iranian Child in Postrevolutionary Iranian Textbooks (1979–2008)," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32 (2012), 339–60.

54. *Al-Qa'id wa-l-Zuhd*, 20.

55. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 155, 158.

a by-product of their encounter with the *ahl al-bayt*. On the one hand, affection arises as a response to the *ahl al-bayt*'s virtues and undeserved suffering; on the other, it also grows as a consequence of their shared recognition and quest of a common good.

Physical and temporal distance, however, mean that the *ahl al-bayt* requires mediators for the transmission and teaching of apt performance. Shi'i children's books and their fictional elders serve as such intermediaries. Therefore, elders can be described as friends who share in and aid the children's pursuit of good, because they introduce children to the *ahl al-bayt* and instruct children how to respond ethically. They provide a "face," which the *ahl al-bayt* cannot. In all of the children's books, the faces of the prophets, the imams, and the adult women of the *ahl al-bayt* are depicted with glowing light and without features.[57] The women often wear *niqab* (face veils), and, in some cases, even the men wear them, albeit in green rather than black.[58] The emerging pious subject responds to the "face of the other." As the *ahl al-bayt* do not reveal their faces, it is first the literary and illustrated narrators (peers, parents, and elders) and later on scholars who provide a face for children to respond to as necessary others.[59]

Conclusion

Shi'i children's books participate in their readers' formation by explaining and illustrating pious norms in terms of emotional attachments, rituals, and prayers. By juxtaposing the *ahl al-bayt*'s virtues and their underserved suffering, children's books shape pious subjects emotionally by appealing to emerging subjects' openness to others. The books encourage, script, and demand Shi'is' affection for the *ahl al-bayt*, thereby grounding piety in the relational character of the subject. They foster affective relations among readers, elders, and members of the *ahl al-bayt*, which in turn set the scene for the subject's cultivation of responsiveness and his ethical agency, preparing the subject for the practice of *taqlid*, or the emulation of an accepted religious authority.

The children's books address the question of authority by linking foundational texts (such as the Koran and hadith collections) with authoritative saints and scholars. Saints are introduced first, then sacred texts. Lastly, scholars are brought into the picture at the age of *taklif*, or the age of maturity, at which time an individual has the ability to distinguish ethically. By responding to the introduction and assuming the role of the *muqallid* (follower), the Shi'i subject becomes recognizable as such. The mature Shi'i subject, according to the children's books, is therefore not autonomous but integrated and settled into relationships with others, members of the *ahl al-bayt* and religious scholars, in search for a common, virtuous good.

56. See ibid., 156.

57. There are two possible reasons for this. First, it could reflect discomfort on the part of the artist or publisher about depicting Muslim prophets, saints, and holy figures. Second, it could symbolize the "Muhammadan light," which according to Shi'is, distinguishes the Fourteen Infallibles from other human beings. See Ingvild Flaskerud, *Visualizing Belief and Piety in Iranian Shi'ism* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 42–44.

58. In *Silsilat al-Sabaya* only the children of the *ahl al-bayt* are depicted with facial features. Adult women of the *ahl al-bayt* are shown as dressed in black while their faces are veiled in white. As in other series, such as the *Silsilat al-Tufulat al-Mahdawiyya*, the men are dressed in green while their facial features are unrecognizable and bathed in yellow light. In *Silsilat Sayyidat Bayt al-Nubuwwah* and in *Silsilat Bint al-Huda al-Qisasiyya li-l-Nashi'a* both men's and women's faces are illuminated by yellow light. Meanwhile, the *Introduction to Infallibles* series depicts only the faces of people who do not belong to the *ahl al-bayt*. In this series, those who are part of the *ahl al-bayt* always show their backs to the reader. They are distinguished, however, by a halo around their heads. Notably, there are two types of light: some books depict the *ahl al-bayt* with halos (which crown their heads) while others simply depict their faces as filled with light.

59. Likewise, William Graham explains that tradition is transmitted through relationships, highlighting personal connectivity. See William Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3, "Religion and History" (1993): 495–522.