



CHAPTER 3

Islam in the Town

The Shari'a in Dearborn

Life Outside the Mosque

WHILE THE DEARBORN area mosques increase in number and diversify in their uses, to focus exclusively on their role in this community would be a mistake. A substantial number of Shi'a never enter a mosque except perhaps for a wedding, funeral, or occasional holiday. Sermons, congregational prayer, and other group rituals are simply not part of their lives; attending mosque is not a religious obligation as attending mass is for Catholics.

Islam was established as a way of life. Much of the Koran was revealed in response to immediate problems and concerns of the believers. Early followers committed to memory the sayings of the Prophet and his actions (i.e., the Hadith and the Sunna) so that they could serve as a model for future generations of Muslims to follow. While one may attend the mosque to learn from the clergy how a Muslim should live, one is also free to read the Koran and other religious texts on one's own. The believer is expected to turn to a religious expert, a *marja'*, regarding matters of personal behavior, but he or she can consult a book to obtain answers, or simply ask the sheikh what the *marja'* says without attending any kind of formal program. In these days, the conscientious person can simply make a telephone call to the sheikh with questions.

When asked "What does it mean to be religious?" it was a rare person who mentioned mosque attendance in his or her answer. Attending mosque could not be equated with the truly important matters of fasting, praying, and following "all the rules of religion." As we shall see, there was little agreement about what "all the rules of religion" actually entailed, but going to the mosque was not considered one of them.

Therefore, to have a fuller picture of Shi'i Islamic life in this area, we must leave the world of the mosque. Certainly, what goes on in the home is at least as important as what is occurring at the Jami' or the Majma'. Prayer and fasting and following dietary laws are principally, although certainly not exclusively, aspects of private religious life.

While I am interested in what religious laws and rules are being followed or neglected, I am also interested in the spirit with which religion is being practiced, what religion actually means to the people. Are people reassessing their religious beliefs and practices now that they find themselves in a new environment? Do the mores of American society affect religiosity, and, if so, how? What aspects of religion are most important to people, and to what lengths will they go to observe their religious obligations under circumstances that make religious observance far more difficult?

Being Shi'a in America

I asked people in what way being a Muslim in America was different from being a Muslim "back home." There were two types of responses. People usually told me that it was easier being a Muslim in Lebanon, essentially because in the old country, "everyone is Muslim." (Oddly, even those who came from villages with a substantial Christian population said the same thing.) Older people and those with little contact outside their immediate family were likely to say that there was no difference because of the large number of Muslims living in Dearborn.

A few said that Islam is the same no matter where one lives. I predicted that this would have been the opinion of the more Shari'a-minded in my sample, because they seem to dismiss cultural influences in so many other ways. But I was mistaken. This group is undergoing the same types of struggle as those who reflected a more traditional approach to Islam.

Zuheir, an engineer in his thirties who was raised in a "traditional" religious atmosphere in Beirut, said, "It is much harder to be a Muslim here because there are so many temptations such as

drugs, women, financial things. The religious person here is more praiseworthy because back home there were not all those temptations." In spite of all the "temptations," Zuheir does not see that he has changed in his approach to religion since living in the United States. As he has always done, he selects what aspects of religion are important to him and practices accordingly.

Khalid, also college-educated and somewhat more religiously learned than Zuheir, said, "There are lots of challenges here. You can't practice religion here perfectly. You cannot pray anytime. You make compromises. If you want to be accepted, you must do things like eat non-*halal* meat. You get more rewards from God here. In Lebanon, no one opposes you because you are surrounded by Muslims. You feel like a pioneer here." Making compromises or not, Khalid admitted that he has become more religious since living in America, as a "reaction to a sinful world." He went on to say that he saw religion as "a shelter to shield me from what is going on." But Khalid, too, is selective about what rules he follows.

Mahmoud, around forty years of age and affiliated with the Hizb Allah movement, told me, "Here I get to practice religion more. There are so many bad things around me. I must look into my religion more. Back home, everyone is Muslim, so it is all built in." Mahmoud did not consider himself religious until he was "born again" after the Iranian Revolution. Before this point, he describes his life as being "boring." His life now revolves around his religious activities, and he considers it of utmost importance to "worry only about pleasing God" and to follow all the rules of religion.

About a third of the people to whom I spoke claimed to have become more religious over the years, either as a result of the civil war, the Iranian Revolution, their new surroundings in America, or simply growing older, no one claimed to have lost his or her religion because of American experience per se. I knew two people who had actually come to lose their faith and had replaced it with Marxist ideology but this process was completed while they were still in Lebanon.

Men were twice as likely to speak of becoming more religious in America than were women. I believe this difference can be accounted for partially by considering how much more exposure Lebanese men have to the outside world than do the women. Men are in a position to learn of competing ideologies. Before Musa Sadr assumed leadership in the Shi'i community, Shi'ism in Lebanon was not seen as a vehicle for advancement in any sense. If the Shi'a were drawn to an ideology at all, it tended to be communism. The missionary zeal of Musa Sadr and the success of Khomeini turned

this around. The women, on the other hand, tied to the home and their traditional religious roots, would not need to undergo a serious revival. Perhaps they came to believe that they must dress more modestly or be a little more conscientious about prayer, but, by and large, they were still, religiously speaking, the same people they had always been, people who believed deeply in God's unwavering presence. The two women I know who underwent the most extreme religious transformation had spent their formative years in America. Both, on their own, decided that a lukewarm attitude toward religion was not sufficient and have thrown themselves into an activist approach to Islam.

As I mentioned, America has not tended to lessen religious zeal, at least not in the past ten to fifteen years. True, there are women who have stopped wearing the scarf, but this was not done either as a gesture of protest against religious "oppression" or as an expression of indifference to religion. Mona, a widow who has been struggling for years to provide for her children, came to America wearing the *hijab*. From South Lebanon, she was strongly influenced by Musa Sadr. Though she wore the *hijab* for a few years after she came to the United States, she finally abandoned it, claiming that someone had assaulted her because he thought she was Iranian and blamed her for the hostage situation in Tehran. But her decision to abandon the scarf probably has more to do with the fact that the *hijab* would interfere with her aspirations to work as a cosmetologist and that she wanted acceptance from American society. It does not appear to reflect a diminishing concern for her religion. While the turmoil in her life does interfere with the demands of prayer and fasting, she certainly considers it her ideal to follow all the rules of religion.

Other women who have removed the scarf justify their action by saying that they don't think their religion demands them to wear it. This is far different from saying that they know their religion demands it but they don't care. Some young women say that they only need to wear the scarf when they are older, which they claim they plan to do. While the woman who removes her scarf may not be making a statement about her religious feelings, the woman who suddenly dons it usually is.

Iman is a quiet, thoughtful woman who was brought to Dearborn as a bride at the age of seventeen. Though she said her mother taught her to pray and fast, she never wore the scarf or studied her religion. About five years ago, after having lived in America for several years and having had three children, she began to wear the scarf, study religion, and follow the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini.

She claims that she has been "hassled" for wearing the scarf by Americans, but this seems only to have strengthened her resolve to continue to wear it.

While men do not have as obvious a symbol as a head covering to show their religious feelings, they also express an increased interest in and concern for religion. By all appearances, Ashraf seems almost totally assimilated into American society. In his blue jeans and T-shirts and with his easy command of English, he interacts comfortably with Americans. He even admits to being serious about an American woman, which has aroused the anger of his relatives. For most of his life, being religious has meant being ethical, moral, and kind. Up until very recently, he has not concerned himself with the rules of Islam. But he has begun to associate more with a relative who is aligned with the Hizb Allah movement, someone Ashraf considers religious. This, he said, has affected him, and he has started to pray and fast and pay attention to other requirements, though he does not agree with his relative on many points.

Religion and Education

It is generally assumed that a Western-style education will have the effect of causing religious doubt. In 1954, the Orientalist Alfred Guillaume posed the question, "To what extent are modern Muslims affected by modern historical criticism, modern philosophy, and modern science?"¹ The Lebanese civil war and the Iranian Revolution notwithstanding, this is still a relevant question. Approximately half of my sample were either college-educated or attending college at the time of the interview. (Only two of them had parents with any education beyond high school.) As I have said previously, there is a tendency among this population to study practical sciences, such as engineering and computer science, as these majors are likely to lead to promising careers. The fields they choose are also fields that do not challenge their religious and philosophical thought; courses that may do this are generally avoided.

Lebanese Shi'i students particularly avoid any courses dealing with human evolution, which they consider to be against Islamic teaching. Some who had taken a course covering evolution say they are glad to understand the theory but don't believe it. One young woman, who is exceptionally open to American ways, said that her introductory anthropology course only made her believe more than ever in the Koran.

Ahmad is working toward his master's degree in engineering. Very serious about his religion and enamored of the "New Islam" of

Iran, he considers himself a rationalist and would like to see the mosques serve as "a place of dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims." At the mosque, "there should be discussion which can lead one or the other parties to change his mind." But he made it clear that he believes everything about Islam is true and correct because intellectually it can be proven. Ahmad even gave a scientific justification for the existence of the *jinn*, the spirits spoken about in the Koran. He explained about the different dimensions and how we could not know the *jinn* because they had more dimensions than we do. (Another engineer also spoke about the *jinn* in "scientific" terms.)

But those few who have pursued studies in the humanities and the behavioral sciences are affected by Western thought. Hisham has a master's degree in economics. His interest in religion was short-lived. As a young student in Lebanon, he became sensitive to the suffering around him and began to blame God for injustice. The idea that there would be a reward for the poor in the next life was unacceptable to him. He became influenced by the writings of Marx and Hegel and now does not concern himself with the question of whether or not there is a God. Fadwa, a woman about thirty years of age, went through a similar experience. She regrets that communism has lost ground among her generation of Lebanese and that Khomeini's Islam has taken its place.

Although he has been subjected to many of the same influences that Hisham and Fadwa have experienced, Ridwan's attitudes have evolved differently. He, too, began to have religious doubts when he was about seventeen, at a time when religion had become unfashionable among university students in Lebanon. With an advanced degree in one of the social sciences, he still maintains doubts about the Koran being the word of God, but, on the other hand, he says that he fears God. Mostly, he thinks of religion as serving communal and psychological needs. "Religion is part of a heritage, and you feel you are part of it," he stated. He enjoys going to pray on Friday at the mosque to experience this communal feeling.

But Hisham, Fadwa, and Ridwan are anomalies in this community. Indeed, Fadwa was so aware of the "oddness" of her views that she sought me out so that her opinions could be represented. She did not want me to think that all Lebanese in the Dearborn area were religious. While not everyone else to whom I spoke would claim to "be religious," it was clear from their other responses that religion—at least at some level—continued to play an important role in their lives.

To Be Religious

Michel Mazzaoui's claim that the Arab Shi'a have a more "exoteric" approach to religion, as opposed to the Persians' more "esoteric" approach, is supported by the fact that it is, by and large, the Persians who have produced the philosophical and mystical treatises over the century.² For a variety of reasons probably involving historical, political, economic, and ecological factors, the Lebanese have not been involved in producing such works. Certainly, in this study, I found much emphasis on the external aspects of religion in this community, but this is not the entire picture.

To the question "What does it mean to be religious?" I received a wide variety of responses. Nearly a third of my respondents did emphasize "following the rules." There was no difference between men and women or between early and late immigrants. Two educated, professional women who grew up in the United States and now have grown children of their own both stated that being religious meant following the rules of religion. One stressed the importance of modesty, though she did not wear Islamic dress.

In contrast to the rule-oriented response was the comment "A religious person is someone who believes in God and that he will leave this life soon and go to the next world. He is grateful to God." And another person said, "A religious person is at peace with himself."

What is so interesting here is that these latter comments were made by people who were emphatic about following the letter of the law. They both consulted the works of their *marji'* and believed that there should be no compromise with society. The rules must be followed.

On the other hand, several people who referred to the importance of following the rules were themselves very lax in doing so. Mr. S. is a case in point. A warm, congenial man from the Bekaa who is employed as an auto mechanic, he does not pray or fast. He told me gleefully that he has even done what is considered almost unthinkable in this community: he has eaten pork. His college student daughter, an admiring devotee of her father, claims that he has always taught her to be kind, loving, and accepting of everyone. She describes him as deeply religious in an "inward" sense. Yet when I asked him what it meant to be religious, he provided a follow-the-rules response.

Why these contradictions exist is fairly obvious. The Shari'a-minded, whether Hizb Allah-oriented or not, have set the standards for this community. These are the people who are considered to be

religious. Their behaviors, attitudes, and style of dress have influenced others. I noted over and over in my interviews that men and women compared themselves to those with a more legalistic view of Islam than their own. They were often reacting to the influence of their more orthodox relatives or friends, either by becoming more rule-conscious themselves or by having to come up with justifications for not following the rules.

Zahra D., a college-educated woman from a politically important family in Lebanon, says that she is religious "almost to the point of being superstitious." Yet fasting and prayer have not been a part of her life. She normally wears jeans and pullovers and dons a scarf only on those rare occasions when she attends mosque. When I interviewed her, she was in a state of transition in her approach to religion. Zahra's sister-in-law and cousin, whom Zahra considers to be very religious, has taken it upon herself to lead Zahra to her more orthodox approach to religion. Zahra has begun to pray and was planning on fasting during Ramadan.

Still, there is considerable ambivalence about what constitutes religiosity. Ali B., a flamboyant entrepreneur with dealings in show business who has been in America for thirty years, responded, "Who would say they are not religious?" He made it clear that his religion meant much to him, though it had little to do with any legal aspects of Islam. He distinguished between those, like himself, who were religious, and those who were "super-religious who follow everything in religion."

Following the Laws: Prayer

One morning, my friend Wafa called to invite me for coffee. As we sat at her kitchen table, she told me about a dream she had the previous night. As dreams often are, this one—to me, anyway—was a disjointed series of scenes. Emotional struggles were evident, and there was an overriding religious sort of theme. But to Wafa, it meant one thing: "God is telling me to pray," she said definitively. Over the years that I have known her, Wafa has struggled with sticking to prayer as American women struggle with diets. Just before Ramadan began in 1990, she told me that she was making an appointment to see the sheikh so that he could help her with her "prayer problem."

Abu Hisham, a factory worker from Bint Jubeil who enjoys attending the services at the mosque but has not wanted to be bothered with prayer and fasting, also had a dream one night. In this one, the Imam 'Ali appeared to him and began to push him. Clearly,

the Imam 'Ali wanted him to pray. For a while, he did so, but he has become lax again.

Most Lebanese Shi'a in Dearborn will say that they pray, that is, perform *salat*, the obligatory prayer. However, they might be exaggerating. *Salat* takes time, not only for the prayers themselves but also for the ablutions that precede them. Mona claimed that she performs her prayers five times a day. Yet I have spent a considerable amount of time with her and can recall no occasion when she has gone off to pray. I do not mean to say that she and others have deliberately lied to me. I do think that if people perform *salat* at all—or if at periods of time they pray regularly—they tend to think they have done their religious duty. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency in this community to want to convince others of one's religious commitment. Religiosity is held in high esteem. Those who are lax in their religious obligations are the ones who are on the defensive these days.

American work schedules certainly interfere with prayers, and many men bemoaned the fact that they could not go to Friday prayers at the mosques. However, this is not as serious a problem for the Shi'a as it is for the Sunni. In Shi'ism, it is acceptable to condense the noon prayer and the late afternoon prayer into one and to combine the evening and midnight prayers. The Shi'a can then pray three times a day rather than five and still meet the legal requirements.

It was striking that men such as the social scientist Ridwan and the engineer Zuheir, both of whom are busy with their jobs and have no interest in listening to sermons, try to take time for prayers at the mosque. That prayer is a paramount obligation goes unquestioned among the believers in this community.

Prayer seems even more important here in America than it was in Lebanon. America is seen as a land riddled with sin among the new immigrants in this community. This opinion is held by sheikhs and uneducated factory workers alike. America is a land of free sex, drugs, alcohol, and materialism, and prayer is seen as a means of protection from these evils. The fact that more people do not pray is indicative not so much of work schedules as of the fact that people were so relaxed about this obligation before they came here. Prayer was not so important in Lebanon because "everyone there was Muslim. Religion was in the air." In Dearborn, the emphasis has to shift to the individual's responsibility for his or her religious well-being. Religion is not seen as something in the air here at all. Effort must be made if one is going to protect one's soul. Prayer, while being an orthodox part of religion, becomes what

Sami Zubaida refers to as an "instrumental" aspect of religion.³ That is, people use it in an almost magical way to protect themselves or attain a desired end.

While this instrumental approach to prayer is fairly pervasive, it is less so for those with a political orientation to Islam. In their case, prayer is a statement of membership in Islam. It is a marker of their solidarity.

Salat, as I said, takes effort. Not everyone I have met here knows how to perform *salat*. If a person did not learn it as a child, chances are he or she will not learn it as an adult. One woman who grew up here told me that she had not learned *salat* "completely." Another young woman and her sisters, who had gone to a Christian school in the Bekaa, wanted to learn to pray before Ramadan but were too embarrassed to go to the sheikh and admit their ignorance. A stylish young woman from Bint Jubeil said that she had never learned to do *salat* and that her scarf-wearing mother had never learned, either. Still, religion is extremely important to them. They feel they know enough about their religion to know what is right and wrong.

It is my estimate that about 5 to 10 percent of the adults in this community pray three or five times a day and that perhaps another 20 percent pray on a fairly regular basis, as time permits. Older people are more likely to pray than young ones. The Shari'a-minded are by far the most conscientious about doing *salat*.

As for the remainder who claimed to pray, they make an effort to do so during special times of the year, particularly at Ramadan. As several of my interviews took place during Ramadan, people were likely to say that they prayed regularly. They said they intended to continue to pray afterward as well, but it appears that they need dreams to remind them. During Ramadan, Wafa, my friend with the "prayer problem," greeted me at the door one day wearing her prayer cover, but the cloth would see little use until the next fast.

On the other hand, there are people such as the religiously knowledgeable Hajj Deeb, who does not allow work to interfere with his prayers. A repairman at Ford, he has obtained permission from his supervisor to take time for prayer. Going off to a small, sequestered place with his rug, he prostrates himself and prays.

Nisrene, a young mother who grew up in a nonpolitical but devoutly religious home near Nabatiyeh, does not answer the door or the telephone when she is praying. Her year-old son mimics her actions and attempts the words "*Allahu Akbar*."

That it is a struggle to keep *salat* alive in America is evident. Judging from my interviews and the contacts I have had with the

American-born and those who came here as young people before the new wave of immigrants arrived, there was a trend for people to grow lax about their prayers. Not that there was a lack of religious feeling or a desire to be "good Muslims," but the whole notion of this sort of ritualized prayer seemed to be losing its meaning. Although this is a tentative finding, I believe that prayer had begun to take on a more Christian style. "I pray in my heart" or "I pray in my own way" are comments I heard.

One woman who grew up in America says that she did learn *salat* as a child. Assigned a paper to present in class, she decided she would discuss her religion and include a demonstration of *salat*. Her classmates and teacher, none of whom was Muslim, did not disguise their amusement and caused her intense humiliation. Although an incident occurred immediately afterward that she considered "miraculous" and which helped confirm her in her religion, she rarely does *salat*. Prayer for her is communing with God. She makes up her own prayers as she goes along.

The course has now changed for these earlier immigrants and their offspring. The arrival of the new wave of immigrants and the resurgence of Islam in the world have caused the Americanized Muslims to pay closer attention to their religious obligations, including *salat*.

Fasting

Sawm (fasting) is quite different from prayer, at least from private prayer. First, unlike *salat*, one does not have to learn how to fast—one simply avoids eating, drinking, smoking, and having sexual relations from the first light of dawn until dark. Second, it is a far more public statement of religious convictions and identity. So, it is far more likely for people to fast than to pray.

The scholarly young son of an Iraqi family from Najaf who has taken an interest in my research scoffed at the notion of the Lebanese carrying through with the fast. "They fast for two or three days," he said with a wave of his hand, "and that's it." Certainly, there is some of this. One set of neighbors fasted for several days until they decided they wanted a picnic and brought out their grill to roast shish kebab. Another young neighbor proudly announced to me that she was fasting, but when I saw her a few days later, she was sipping a cup of coffee and smoking a cigarette. It is easy to focus on situations such as this, but to do so clouds the fact that there are a great many Muslims who are not eating during the daylight hours of Ramadan in East Dearborn. The restaurants may not

be empty during the day, but their Muslim clientele is greatly reduced. Even those who take an occasional break for a few days tend to return to fasting. There are usually more people fasting at the beginning and the end of Ramadan than in the middle.

To indicate deepest piety, fasting is not limited to Ramadan. Occasionally, I would meet a person—usually very Shari'a-minded but not always—who was fasting at different times of the year. According to the Hadith (at least, the Hadith referred to locally), the Prophet advised that Thursday is the most efficacious day to fast.

Classroom teachers in the East Dearborn schools have great difficulty with Ramadan as even children as young as eight and nine years forgo food during the day. Some teachers have tried to persuade young children not to fast, knowing that it is not obligatory for them to do so. School performance suffers, and teachers complain that children fall asleep during class or act out. On the other hand, at least in the school my children attended, the administrators have shown great sensitivity to the situation with Ramadan, planning evening activities so that they do not conflict with *iftar*, the breaking of the fast.

Iftar is commonly held at the Majma' and at the recently opened Majlis. At 9:00 P.M., mothers will be dishing out food to their youngsters, the first they have eaten all day. (Some eat before the sun rises. During Ramadan 1990, this meant getting up at 4:30 A.M.) After dinner, these children will mill around the rooms of the building as their parents listen to sermons or visit among themselves.

Ramadan shows no signs at all of dying out in this community. The person who does not fast subjects himself or herself to chastisement and lectures from those who are fasting. For many of the Shari'a-minded, Ramadan takes on a special significance. It is a time of close contact with other Muslims who share one's orientation. Especially at the Majma' and the Majlis, the "strict interpretation of the law" view of Islam is strongly reinforced at this time. It is also a time when one can attempt to promote a "proper atmosphere" for the Muslim community. For example, a neighbor with a rather lax attitude toward religion was asked to turn his tape player off during Ramadan by another neighbor. He claimed it would awaken his sleeping child, but everyone knew the real reason for the request: this man considers popular music to be *haram* and especially offensive during this sacred time of the year.

For the community at large whose approach can be said to be more traditional, it is also a time for establishing one's religious credentials. Apparently, the sheikhs in Dearborn never eat in their own homes during Ramadan. One friend's husband attempted to invite a

sheikh for *iftar*, but there was not one night that he had not already scheduled for dining with other believers. One of the homes this sheikh had already been invited to was that of Husayn. He had recently purchased and completely remodeled a large and expensive house of which he was very proud. Husayn's wife told me about the event in great detail. The guests dined on an elaborate meal of whole roasted lamb, chicken and rice, spinach and meat pies, salad, and so on. Here again, we have a case of displaying worldly success while also being purified by the pious act of feeding the sheikh.

The Hajj

If you walk the streets of East Dearborn in the middle of July, you will occasionally see a house whose porch has been decorated with crepe paper and balloons, sporting a banner written in bold, brightly colored Arabic lettering welcoming home a pilgrim. I assisted with the decorations a few days before Hajj Deeb returned home from Mecca. When he did arrive, the guests poured into his home to greet the man who had walked on the same soil and on the same path as the Prophet more than 1300 years ago. When I took my turn to visit, I was presented with a large black scarf for my head and some kohl for my eyes, which he had purchased in Mecca, and I was given a cup of the precious ZemZem water to drink. Though he had by then told the story of his pilgrimage many times over, he still rhapsodized about this incomparable experience.

Hajj Deeb has an American passport, so it was a simple matter for him to travel to Saudi Arabia. Relations between the Wahabi Sunni Saudis and the Shi'a have never been good, but the attacks on the shrines by Shi'a in Mecca during the *hajj* in 1979 have made relations positively hostile. Since that time, the Saudis have attempted to prevent Shi'a from the Middle East from performing the *hajj*. Only very recently have restrictions let up, but having an American passport facilitates the process of getting a visa. The Shi'a who do go to Mecca generally keep a low profile while there. During the *hajj* of the summer of 1990, there were approximately fifty pilgrims from the Dearborn area. These days, about two million pilgrims go to Mecca during the pilgrimage season each year from all over the world.

Like prayer and fasting, the *hajj* is considered obligatory in Islam, but it is also infused with extraordinary meaning. Barbara Metcalf has written:

Travel to Mecca is travel of a very particular kind. To go to Mecca is to go home, to return to one's *ruhani watn*. To go to

Mecca is to perform an act of unquestioned value. Not only is the goal clear, but the place, in contrast to the destinations of some kinds of travel, is thoroughly known by vast resources of the culture in story and devotional song—now reinforced by techniques of reproduction and communication that make the Holy Places ever present. Moreover, the journey moves on the invisible lines which believers create by every prayer, posture at sleep, and burial in the grave; on the day the *hajjis* perform the ritual sacrifice, fellow Muslims everywhere perform their sacrifice and all are linked worldwide in celebration of the feast. By undertaking the *hajj*, the pilgrim in principle affirms his individual responsibility for obedience to God and claims his place among the community of faithful people.⁴

The Shi'a of Dearborn take seriously the obligation to make the *hajj*. It is an obligation that is anticipated with both joy and trepidation. Only those few who rejected religion completely expressed no interest in making the pilgrimage.

Oddly enough, though, the responses I received regarding the *hajj* tended to be among the ones that clearly delineated the Shari' minded—particularly the politically oriented—from the traditionalists.

Perhaps Adel's answers to the questions about pilgrimage best sum up, though in a slightly exaggerated way, the feelings of the more traditional Shi'a in this community. He is a young man who supports his wife and child as a cook in a restaurant and through income from rental properties. Always at odds with his in-laws and often as not with his tenants and employers, he is always one to test the limits of the law and the social norms. In the summer, he goes about in shorts, a practice that tends to belie his insistence that he is a very pious man. He is, after all, a *sayyid* with a brother studying in a *madrasa*. He says he looks forward to the day when he will be a *hajj* and he expects he will be different afterward. Then, he says, he will "stay home, be retired, go to the mosque, and talk about religion all the time."

Almost invariably, the women who do not wear the scarf stated that they will wear it after they make their pilgrimage. They anticipate that the pilgrimage will be a turning point in their lives. Zahra D. said that the thought of making a pilgrimage was frightening for her because she knew how much her life would have to change afterward. She did not feel at all ready to make that sort of commitment at her young age of thirty-two. She realizes that she could no longer be careless about praying, fasting, or dress. She, of course, would not be able to shake hands with men anymore, either.

Najwa, who professed to caring deeply about her religion but seemed remarkably uninformed about its tenets, also said she looked forward to being a *hajja*. She believes people will respect her after she has made her pilgrimage. Asked if she thought she would change after pilgrimage, she said only that she would be much older then. When I specifically asked her if she would start wearing the scarf, she replied negatively. Another young woman was in the room at the time, and she gasped in horror at Najwa's comment. She wanted me to know that Najwa was mistaken about this matter and that a woman must wear a scarf after she has gone on pilgrimage.

The traditional *hajja* is unmistakable. She wears a white gossamer scarf that completely covers her hair and is almost invariably old. She is fully cognizant of the fact that she is to be treated with the utmost respect.

To the more traditional sort of Muslim, there is the assumption that the *hajj* is to be performed in one's later years. Clearly, the statement being made is that in one's later years it is easier and less inconvenient to be "holy." It is only natural that one will be sinful (i.e., lax in one's religious duties) in one's earlier years. Furthermore, young men are likely to be concerned with (or obsessed by) sex and, now that they are in America, fast and flashy cars. Young Lebanese women, while their body parts may be more covered than those of their non-Lebanese counterparts, are notably flashy in their attire. Proud of their thick manes of hair, the majority of school-aged girls do not opt to cover it. Once these young men and women are married, their appearance and behavior tone down considerably. Yet they still don't see themselves as ready to take on the responsibilities of being *hajjis*. These earlier years are a time for some religious leeway.

But once one reaches his or her fifties and sixties, there is rarely any excuse (except for poor health) for not making the pilgrimage to Mecca. At that point, one has little to lose and much to gain by doing so. Jane Fonda is not a role model for fifty-year-old women in this community. A woman at that age should be stout and dowdy in her appearance. She should be no sexual threat. Indeed, anthropologists studying the Middle East have referred to postmenopausal women as being symbolically men. As for mature men, they gain no respect by being dashing and rakish. In these later years, then, one should make a pilgrimage, the purpose of which is "purification and atonement" for one's past life. Then, when one returns home from pilgrimage, one leads a life of prayer and fasting. He or she will avoid shaking hands with the opposite sex and will try to avoid all other sins. In other words, the *hajj* is viewed as a rite of passage.

This life-cycle or rite-of-passage view of Islam infuriates the Shari'a-minded. One should already be living a religious life before one goes on pilgrimage. And to wait until one is "too old to sin" suggests a lack of religious commitment. Young Ismael expressed the harshest criticism of this attitude. He looks upon the *hajj* as being a "spiritual education" but not a point in his life at which he starts following God's laws. He already does that. He simply hopes that on his pilgrimage, he will come to have a deeper understanding of religion. He believes that most people go on pilgrimage to gain status. He complained of *hajjis* who get upset if they are not called by that title.

Yet, even among the more Shari'a-minded, there is a tendency to have some expectation of self-improvement after pilgrimage. Youssef is only in his thirties and has already made the pilgrimage. Strict in his conformity to most religious law, he does feel he has changed since becoming a *hajj*. Now he no longer attends weddings held outside the mosque (i.e., weddings where there is music and dancing), nor will he listen to music other than the chanting of the Koran or "anthems." These attitudes, he said, did not come suddenly but were building up prior to the *hajj* (again suggesting the view that the *hajj* should not be considered a rite of passage).

It should be noted that the traditional sort never mentioned having to give up music or attendance at weddings. To do so would be a sign of "fanaticism." Hajja Sharifi may pray and fast, even outside Ramadan, but she delights in visiting her nieces at their homes for an evening of music and traditional dance. And she certainly finds nothing wrong with attending her kinsmen's weddings in the local halls.

There is little likelihood that the more orthodox views of Islam will affect the general community's attitudes toward the *hajj*. First, the notion that the *hajj* is for purification purposes is deeply embedded. A person who is a *hajji* truly is expected to behave differently from a non-*hajji*, and he or she is subjected to criticism if he or she does not live up to the community's standards. Second, I have detected no real pressure by the Shari'a-minded to encourage early pilgrimages. The points of contention in this community concern general behavior and modesty of dress, not something as individual as one's attitudes about and timing of the *hajj*.

Furthermore, even if there were pressures being put on the community for early *hajj*, there is the added consideration that the pilgrimage is expensive, and here in America there are so many things in which to put one's money. Better to wait until one has amassed one's fortune and then go on *hajj*.

Halal or Haram Meat?

Mr. M. told me that when he came here in the late 1940s, the people were "in doubt" about meat. By this, he meant that there was no way to be sure whether the meat one ate was prepared according to religious rules or not. Consequently, the people ate the meat they could buy in the markets and only avoided eating pork, about which there is no doubt. Under no conditions is pork *halal*.

Today there should be no doubt about the meat one eats. On the main business street of East Dearborn alone, within a space of about eight blocks, there are three Lebanese Shi'i-owned meat markets with signs in front announcing "*Halal Meat*." Other such shops are found throughout the eastern and southeastern sections of the city.

According to Khu'i, for meat to be *halal*, five conditions must be met:

A slaughtered animal is *halal* if it is slaughtered by a Muslim. It is not *halal* if it is slaughtered by a nonbeliever or even by a monotheist. It is not conditioned on faith. According to the most reliable opinion, he need not be a Shi'i if he is judged to be a Muslim and if he is not an enemy or of a group such as the Kharijites or certain extremist Shi'ite sects that have been judged to be non-Muslim.

The animal may be slaughtered by a Muslim woman or even the young child of a Muslim, so long as he or she knows the difference between right and wrong.

It is only permissible to slaughter the animal with an iron implement so long as one is available. . . . If there is no iron available, then the use of a sharp implement of some other material is acceptable.

It is obligatory to cut through four things: the esophagus, the windpipe, and the two arteries.

Correct slaughter of an animal is based on the following conditions:

First condition: the animal to be slaughtered and its place of slaughter must both face the *qibla*.

Second condition: that the person who is to slaughter the animal says the name of God.

Third condition: that the blood drain out in the correct way. If it comes out slowly or in drops, the meat is not *halal*.

Fourth condition: that the throat be cut in the correct place, not on the nape of the neck. It is a precaution to place the knife on the throat and then cut the jugular veins. It is not sufficient to stab beneath the jugular veins and then cut upwards.⁵

When I asked people if they ate *halal* meat, they almost invariably said that they did. However, this does not mean that they do not eat meat that is not *halal*. Men are far more likely than women to eat meat that is not religiously sanctioned, principally because men spend much more time outside the home. If they are on the main street of East Dearborn, there is no difficulty obtaining *halal* meat in Shi'i-owned and -operated restaurants. However, once outside the neighborhood, there is no guarantee of finding *halal* meat. Besides, the men—especially those with a traditional view of Islam—confess that they are sorely tempted by Burger King hamburgers. Women have fewer such temptations. If they eat out, it will be with relatives or close friends who are also likely to buy meat from the local markets.

However, the topic of *halal* meat did elicit some curious responses. Mahmoud, the engineering student who could scientifically prove the existence of *jinn*, said that there was only one market in town from which he would buy meat. He was certain that the other markets did not butcher their meat properly. One of the sheikhs reportedly expressed the same concern and avoided eating meat. Ali, the entertainer-entrepreneur, would not give me a yes-or-no answer to my question concerning his meat preference but only replied that there was no place that really sold *halal* meat.

I did not take these comments very seriously until my scholarly Iraqi friend, a woman who is the very vision of Islamic propriety, told me about her own visit to the meat market that I frequent. When she ordered meat, the butcher asked her (of all people) if she wanted "*lahme halal* or *haram*." She left the shop indignantly.

While shopping in the meat section of a large grocery store in town, I saw a Lebanese man and his *hijab*-covered wife loading up their cart with steaks that were on special. Quite taken aback, I went to one of my chief informants who is an employee at this same store. He laughed at me and said, "What do think? This happens all the time." He then explained that money is the determining factor. If meat at the grocery store is cheaper than at the *halal* meat markets, the people, no matter how religious otherwise, will buy their meat "*haram*."

Perhaps he is right, in some cases at least. Since questions have arisen about whether the meat at the Lebanese markets is truly *halal*, one could justify the purchase of meat at an American grocery. It seems, then, that some people are still "in doubt" just as Mr. M. was in the 1940s. On the other hand, Hajj Deeb and his family would not leave Dearborn for a vacation outside the area without loading up his cooler with enough locally purchased *halal* meat to last the entire

family for a week. As most people will say, if the butcher shops are not selling *halal* as they say they are, then the sin lies with them and not with their customers. Only those with the most rigid interpretation of the law, then, would refuse to eat meat from a market that calls itself "*halal*."

For those who are truly in doubt about the local meat markets and want to be sure that they are eating properly butchered meat, there are farms in the area where one can purchase an animal and butcher it oneself. Of course, this is the most economical way to purchase meat as well, so wherein lies the true motive?

Obviously, the insistence on meat killed only by a Muslim who does not have enmity with the members of the House of the Prophet, that is, the Shi'a, is a powerful tool in establishing a caste type of system in a community. This situation could only be realized in a community where the butchers claim to sell religiously sanctioned meat. To some extent, this caste system does exist. My experience leads me to believe that perhaps more than half of the adults in this community will only eat *halal* meat. I can say this with some confidence because I see that it is not just the meat itself that is somehow sacred but also what that meat becomes. *Kibbeh*, *kafta*, *kabab*—these meats are truly "food." Notions of "pure meat" are melded with notions of "pure food." For the women particularly, I see a strong resistance to eating anything else. That food is important in Middle Eastern societies has been well documented. But now transported, it takes on almost quasi-religious connotations.

Thus far, I have not even discussed pork, the meat that is truly *haram*. One can forgo all other religious obligations and still avoid pork. The idea of eating pig meat is simply repugnant to a people who believe this animal is filthy. Mr. S., who said that he had eaten pork in the form of pepperoni on a pizza, did so to shock his wife. A man with an unusually positive view of America, he disapproves of his wife's narrow view of her religion and of the world and was making a statement. It was a radical statement. Linda, a professional woman who grew up in America, refuses to eat pork. She considers this to be a strong indicator of her religious convictions, but the idea of eating only *halal* meat seems rather alien to her.

The schools in East Dearborn do not serve pork in their lunch program. A letter goes home to the parents in English and Arabic reassuring the parents that they have nothing to fear on this front. But the meat is not *halal*, and I rather doubt that there will be any effort to introduce this into the school lunch program. The notion of religiously sanctioned meat is alien to this community, where there are no kosher delicatessens to have paved the way. Further, so long

as the Lebanese do not feel their rights are actively being infringed upon or that they are being attacked by the outside community, they do not tend to make protests and demands. The line must be drawn at pork, but most Lebanese feel that some compromises have to be made, at least when dealing with American schools and employers.

Purity

As Fischer and Abedi point out in their introduction to Khomeini's *Resaleh*, or *Clarification of Questions*, fully a quarter of the three thousand problems deal with issues of purity, while the theme of purity relates to other problems as well. It is helpful to look at how Fischer and Abedi explain purity in Shi'ism. After warning the English reader that one must not confuse the purity code with modern notions of cleanliness, they say:

Excrement for instance is always unclean or dirty, but the excrement of an animal whose flesh may be eaten is never impure. Purity has something to do with the state in which one can approach God: one must be pure for prayer. There is an interior aspect (the *batin*) which is all important, and there is an outer sign of the inner spirit. The rules of purification through various forms of ablution (the *vozu* before the formal prayer called *namaz* or *salat*; the full ritual bath or *ghosl* required after seminal emission, menstrual flow, afterbirth, touching a corpse) constitute these outer signs; in themselves they have no meaning and no efficacy if they are not accompanied with the inner spirit. . . . Nor is it merely a washing, but it is ritual, a washing done with the proper form and *niyyat*. Thus, prayers said by a peasant in a shirt stained with cow dung are perfectly valid; the shirt is dirty but not impure. Conversely, the wet hand of a non-Muslim may be clean, but is nonetheless always impure; so, too, a dog freshly washed is clean, but is nonetheless always impure and polluting.⁶

In no other area of religious life will a Shi'i living in America find so much difficulty as that of living up to the purity code. There are three mosques to pray in, and there are enough *halal* meat markets to provide for the entire community. One can still manage to fast if one tries, though certainly America is not geared to a fasting schedule. But if one wants to follow one's religion to the letter of the law, there will be serious difficulties in living up to the purity code. Problems will arise particularly when the Muslim must work and

associate with non-Muslims. To refuse to shake an American's hand on the basis that he is impure is tantamount to slapping him in the face. I can safely say that the vast majority of Lebanese living in Dearborn realize the problem and ignore this injunction.

Fouad Ajami alludes to the fear of defilement, the Shi'a's fear of touching something, that is *najis* or impure. Musa Sadr addressed this problem head-on by ostentatiously purchasing and eating the ice cream served to him by a Christian ice cream vendor. As Ajami says, "The lesson was not lost on the crowd. Things hitherto impermissible were declared acceptable by a man of religion and a *sayyid*, a descendant of the Prophet."⁷

However, I have witnessed awkward moments of indecision. My husband and I had occasion to usher around a television correspondent who was interested in doing a feature story on Islam. We spent an afternoon with one of the local sheikhs and a visiting *qadi* (religious judge) from Lebanon. My husband, having to leave early, rose and stretched out his hand to the *qadi*, who glanced nervously at the sheikh. Almost imperceptibly, the sheikh gestured to the *qadi*, and the *qadi* reached out his hand to my husband.

Another of the local sheikhs apparently had little or no experience with non-Muslims when we first met him. When we were introduced, he placed his hand to his breast as a gesture of greeting and did not extend his hand to my husband. However, the interview proved to be quite cordial, and he seemed particularly pleased that we had spent some time in Iran. On departing, he initiated a handshake with my husband.

While one might be able to rationalize shaking hands with non-Muslims on the basis that it would cause bad feelings and turn Americans against Islam, there is no rationalizing one's feelings about dogs. As Khomeini and all Shi'i scholars have made so clear, dogs are *najis*. This is a teaching that the Lebanese definitely take to heart. The American propensity to have dogs roaming the house is a confirmation of how different the worlds of Muslim and non-Muslim are and how important it is that they remain separate.

A situation that seemed at first amusing but ended sadly involved our own dog. Young Wa'el befriended our then ten-year-old son, Nathaniel. A friendly child intrigued by the differences between our home life and his own, Wa'el spent a good deal of time with us. His parents showed no objection to this at all and were always warm and hospitable with us. But the main attraction for Wa'el was the dog, which became very devoted to him. (Incidentally, aware of the Lebanese distaste for dogs, ours was kept in the yard or in parts of the house where guests do not go.) At first, Wa'el

bragged to his friends about his relationship with the dog, until word got to his parents that he was playing with it and actually touching it. His father's reaction was initially to chastise him; his mother's was to make him shower whenever he had been to visit us. I learned this indirectly from one of their relatives. Still, Wa'el came, and, despite my admonitions that he should not disobey his parents, he continued to play with the dog. The verbal scoldings turned into physical punishment, and finally Wa'el was forbidden to play at our home.

Roy Mottehedeh cites an amusing story of an Iranian who encounters a dog on his way to prayers. Having performed his ablutions, he did not want to have to perform them again. He simply uttered the words, "*En sha' Allah*, it's a goat," and went off to pray.⁸ Dogs are not being mentally transformed into goats in this community. The anthropological theorist Mary Douglas proposed that laws regarding purity and permitted foods be seen as "signs which at every turn inspire meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God."⁹ Yet, when considering the lives of Shi'a in Lebanon, who had to remain separate from their non-Shi'a countrymen, one cannot help but see these laws in more practical terms. They are important reminders that the Shi'a are "different." Following these laws is a means of rejecting incorporation into the dominant culture, whether it be that of the Sunnis in the Middle East or of secularized Christian culture in America.

Gold and Religious Conviction

Prosperity comes quickly in this community if you are fortunate enough to find the means to open a gold shop. The two gold shops on Warren Avenue, which import gold jewelry primarily from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Italy, are doing quite well. Women and even the smallest girls are dazzling in their 24-karat gold bracelets, necklaces, rings, and earrings. Despite the interest in investing in rental properties and businesses, wealth is still put into jewelry.

I was rather taken aback, then, when a woman at the Majma' told me that wearing gold jewelry is forbidden. "It will cause men to be attracted to a woman," she said. The sanction does not appear to be taking hold. Only two women I interviewed wore no jewelry whatsoever, although most women who wear the *hijab* wear relatively conservative amounts of jewelry. Layla, who wears the *hijab*, only recently learned about the ruling against gold from other women at the Majma'. She confirmed what they said with a sheikh

visiting from Lebanon. She has removed all but a couple of bracelets and her rings.

The vast majority of women I spoke with had never heard of any injunction against wearing gold and swore that I was mistaken in my information. During a visit with Wafa and her sisters, I brought up the subject of gold. Wafa said, "These Muslims will all tell you different things." She claimed she herself had asked one of the sheikhs about wearing gold, and he had told her it was *halal* for women but not for men. Men, though, are allowed to wear silver. I asked why she thought gold was forbidden for men. Her sister said that it was because the gold passes through the skin into the bloodstream and has an ill effect on them, but Wafa cut her off, telling her that what she was saying was all wrong and that I should not listen to her. Others, though, offered the same explanation as Wafa's sister.

At an engagement I attended at the Jami', Sheikh Chirri stated that it was permissible for a woman to wear gold but not for a man. The newly engaged man wore a ring of silver. Obviously this issue has yet to be definitively settled.

Among the men themselves, there is little agreement in this community about whether or not gold is allowed. Most men who eschew wearing gold jewelry do so because they simply don't think that such adornment is masculine, but there are those—both traditional and Shari'a-minded—who will not wear gold for religious reasons. However, the general perception in the community can be summed up in the statement of one man who had been raised in Dearborn and grew up attending the Jami': "Only the Hizb Allah believe that gold is forbidden."

Makeup

A similar controversy exists about makeup, but more women appear willing to conform to sanctions about the former than the latter. Approximately a third of the women I interviewed said they only wear makeup for their husbands or if they are at an all-female party. This is interesting, because makeup, among those who use it, tends to be applied lavishly. To refuse to wear it is to make a very definite and visual statement about one's religious orientation.

Shaking Hands with the Opposite Sex

Aside from the injunction not to shake hands with *kuffar* (unbelievers), shaking hands with members of the opposite sex is also proscribed. On this issue, there is more agreement than there is

about gold and makeup. People know it is wrong for a woman to shake a man's hand, and vice versa. After all, the Prophet did not shake hands with the women when he accepted their allegiance in Mecca. But I estimated that approximately a third of the men and half of the women follow this rule completely.

There were comments expressing the belief that shaking hands is a friendly gesture. Although people realized it was religiously forbidden, they could not understand why this was so and made the decision for themselves to shake hands. Iman, who is struggling to follow the rules of her religion, did admit that when she is introduced to an American man, she shakes hands so that she "will not cause bad feelings."

When a Shari'a-minded man was introduced to me, he would generally place his right hand to his chest. I never initiated handshakes with men but was surprised on a few occasions when men whom I knew were strict followers of the law reached out their hands to me. After speaking with one of these men for a while, I asked why he had shaken my hand. Basically, it was because he thought I would expect this. He explained that he does not follow the laws exactly, that he does have "some sins," and that shaking hands with women was one of them.

Of course, after one is a *hajji*, one must surely follow the restriction about shaking hands with the opposite sex. Though for the recent immigrants this does not seem to be such a problem, for those who have lived here for many years, or who have grown up here, the question of whether or not a *hajji* will shake hands with a woman to whom he is being introduced is not easily answered. I was told, "We try our best to avoid it."



Catholicism, of course, does not have the equivalent of *halal* meat or proscriptions against gold jewelry or shaking hands with the opposite sex. Yet parallels do exist between Shi'ism and Catholicism. The Catholic church's prohibition against eating meat on Friday comes to mind. Eating fish became a "badge of individual integrity and identity."¹⁰ This dietary rule expressed not only Catholics' desire for separateness but also their moral superiority over Protestants. The Lenten fast, while hardly as rigorous as that of Ramadan, was an occasion for publicly demonstrating this superiority.

Certainly, the highly ritualistic, devotional, and sacramentalized Catholicism that held sway through at least the first half of this century could be interpreted as an earnest attempt to ensure that the

dividing line between Catholic and Protestant did not become fuzzy. Children in Catholic schools were reminded repeatedly that it was only through the Church that they could attain salvation. Should a child be so unfortunate as to have a Protestant parent or some other close relative, he or she was supposed to pray devoutly for that person's conversion.

Tensions regarding whether to emphasize or deemphasize the differences between themselves and their non-Shi'i neighbors are as great in Dearborn as they were in many immigrant Catholic communities. Should a Shi'a make accommodations with American society, or should he steadfastly observe the letter of the law in order to maintain his distinctiveness?

Ultimately for the Shi'a, as for the Catholics, the real question emerges: what really constitutes true religion anyway? The answer will help determine how Shi'ism survives in America.

Living with the Supernatural

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote, "Our problem, and it grows worse by the day, is not to define religion but to find it."¹¹ In writing about Morocco and Indonesia, Geertz realized he was studying Islamic societies undergoing tremendous structural changes, ones in which "the machinery of faith" was wearing out.

The Lebanese, first in Lebanon and now in America, have undergone radical changes that necessarily impinge on the structural aspects of their religion but also test the strength and resiliency of their individually held faith. In this section, I am concerned with the individual and what he or she believes. This is not the realm of formal or communal religion, but, rather, it is the realm of the heart, soul, and mind. In a sense, I am trying to find an aspect of religion that one cannot find if one defines Islam only in its scriptural sense.

I am concerned with how much importance people attribute to the supernatural and how they see their earthly lives interact with it. Do they see otherworldly concerns shaping their lives, affecting what they do? How are the Koran's numerous warnings about hell (*al-Nar*, "the Fire") and its promises of paradise (*Jannah*) seen in this community? The Koran's treatment of the afterlife is very sensuous. One can almost see and hear and smell the delights of paradise and feel the agony of the fire of hell when reading the Koran. Do the Lebanese Shi'a accept this view of an afterlife, or do they opt for a more symbolic interpretation? Are there differences in opinions

between the Shari'a-minded and the traditionalists? Is life in urban America affecting their views?

How do people view God, or Allah? Is he principally a punitive creator, or is he benign? Is death to be feared or merely accepted with resignation? Or is there truly a life of beauty and ease to be anticipated? Erika Friedl, in her study of poor Iranian village women, states that "for a great many women only death means a true end to hardship (or joy, as the case might be); in this sense death is seen not as a hopeful release from earthly shackles into the pleasures of heaven but as release into nonexistence, back-to-dust finality."¹² In the case of the Lebanese, who have faced years of death and destruction and, particularly with the Shi'a, a great deal of poverty, do they share this view of death with their Iranian co-religionists?

If people do have hope for a better life in the next world, how does one attain admittance into paradise? Is it through following religious law, or is there some other way to redemption?

The idea of deliverance from a world of disorder and tyranny is a common theme in world populations and certainly among peasants who have experienced a large share of the world's tyranny.¹³ However, relief from tyranny does not have to be confined only to the afterlife. Millenarian movements concern themselves principally with establishing utopian societies here on earth. Such thinking is built into Shi'i eschatology. Twelver Shi'ism is almost defined by its anticipation of the return of the Twelfth Imam, referred to as the Qa'im or, more so in this community, as the Imam Mahdi. The son of the Eleventh Imam, it is believed that he went into occultation in A.D. 872 at the age of five years and has continued to live in occultation until this day. He will remain hidden until the Day of Judgment, at which time he will appear, conquer his enemies, and bring justice and peace to the world. According to the Shi'i philosopher 'Allama Tabataba'i, "the future will see a day when human society will be replete with justice and when all will live in peace and tranquillity, when human beings will be fully possessed of virtue and perfection. The establishment of such a condition will occur through human hands but with Divine succor. And the leader of such a society, who will be the savior of man, is called in the language of the *Hadith*, the Mahdi."¹⁴

The Mahdi is to be the leader in the Final Days, appearing before the Day of Resurrection when souls will be joined with their bodies. He and other members of the family of the Prophet, most notably the Imam Husayn, are to have a role in the judging of souls who will be sent to either paradise or hell. As the *raj'a*, or return, of

the Mahdi is so central to Shi'ism, it is important to ascertain how the community under study views his return. Finally, there is also the question of supernatural beings, specifically the *jinn*, and their role in this earthly existence. Before entering into this realm, we will first discuss eschatological concerns.

The Existence of the Afterlife

I posed the question "If a person does not follow the laws of Islam, what will happen to him?" With only a few exceptions, my respondents automatically answered, "He will go to hell." In view of the fact that the Koran mentions and describes hell so often, this is not surprising.

However, it should be noted that most people in this community do not follow the laws of Shi'i Islam exactly. There is considerable laxity about prayer, fasting, and strict modesty for women. While honesty is a virtue people want associated with their names, business people are not always absolutely scrupulous about income taxes. It is common to hear men and women talk about obtaining "cash jobs," whereby they earn money that does not have to be reported to the IRS, which is beneficial both to them and to their employers. There are other ingenious tactics utilized for "beating the system" as well. While the Muslims in this community value honesty as one of the virtues of the Prophet and the imams, they also see their survival as important. It can be argued that this sort of chicanery is not as offensive as cheating a customer. Face-to-face relationships invariably have a more salient impact on people's behaviors. The inclination to manipulate and cheat the U.S. government is certainly not surprising in view of the long history of indifferent and even malevolent treatment of the Shi'a by the Lebanese government. (In fact, what is truly surprising is that more people did not share this negative attitude. There were obviously many who believed it to be their Islamic duty to follow all the laws of the land in which they reside.)

Do those who are lax in their adherence to the rules and in ethical matters see themselves as being destined for that most horrid of places, *el-Nar* or hell? The answer to that question is emphatically no.

The people in this community tend to see themselves as being in God's favor. Responses indicated that others would go to hell, but they did not envision this scenario for themselves. This idea was reinforced when I asked questions about the next life, and almost invariably people spontaneously described paradise but had to be

asked specifically to describe hell. Why are these Shi'a so optimistic about the next life?

This question can be answered at least partially by referring to the responses to my questions regarding moral values. Specifically, I asked, "What is the worst thing a person can do?" and "Who are the best people?" I wanted to know what people truly considered to be the worst offenses and what characteristics they admired the most. Was the person who prays and fasts, performs the *hajj*, and pays the *khums* the one most admired in this community? And, on the other hand, was the person who is negligent in these duties the worst?

Very few, it seems, see the world in these terms. Those whose lives are most strongly influenced by the Shari'a told me that it was imperative to follow all the rules of religion, to live by the Five Pillars of Islam. Hajj Youssef said that the best people are "very, very strict about their religion and won't even allow a TV or a radio in their home." To Ismael, the best person was the one who knows the truth and follows it—especially the Shi'a." Um Hamood thought the worst thing a person could do was not pray.

But these responses were in the minority. The vast majority of people with whom I spoke saw "goodness" in more universalistic terms and did not necessarily insist that a person needs to be a Muslim to be considered good. Even Iman, who conscientiously prays and fasts, said the best people were "warm, loving, caring, and clean people." And Suad, a wearer of the black *'abaya* and a regular at the very pro-Iranian Majlis, said that the best people are "those who are good to others, kind and generous. They are people who love others."

These comments do not sharply contrast with those of the more traditional Zuheir, who values kindness and caring in others. Zahra D. saw her "nonreligious" (but obviously beloved) husband as being the best sort of person, because "he is honest, tolerant, funny, helpful, optimistic, and determined."

Hurting another in any way was generally considered to be the worst thing a person can do. Whether killing someone or causing trouble through backbiting, the act of harming one's fellow man was definitely *haram*. Ali A. referred to backbiting as being like "killing a soul very slowly. This is what Arabic people today are doing to each other. Backbiting is the most *haram* thing a person can do." His feelings were reiterated by others. During a visit to Ghalia's home one day with her sisters, I found her in quite a frenzied state of mind. Someone was making trouble between her husband and her brother through what she swore were lies. She was expecting the worst.

Concern with gossip is natural in a community that uses this form of social control so readily. Gossip and slander, while helping to ensure that cultural and religious mores are upheld, also have the deleterious effect of playing havoc with people's lives.

One woman I knew has suffered considerably from her community's jealousy. Rumors abound that her family's business wealth is generated through drug sales. These rumors, she says, reached the police, who sent undercover agents to investigate. She claims that the police found no grounds for the accusations, but the rumors have not abated. "If this jealousy hurts my family, we will close our business," she told me.

The war in Lebanon also directly affected some of the responses. Khalid saw the most despicable of persons being one who "betrays his nation or his own cause." The best of people to him are "the honest politicians who are leading their people against all odds, like Imam 'Ali, the Prophet Muhammad, Nabih Berri, and Imam Musa Sadr." Ali S., who, like Khalid, supports Amal, shared Khalid's feelings. He hates people who commit treason and deceive their people. He said that Hizb Allah fall under this category.

Several men mentioned hypocrisy as the most hated of sins. As Hajj C. said, "I like people who practice what they preach." There were surprisingly few mentions of sexual misbehavior. Najwa, who, in her pedal-pushers and short-sleeved pullovers, is an interesting contrast to the rest of the married women in the neighborhood, said that immodest dress was the most *haram* thing for a woman. From Al Januub, she accused the women of the Bekaa for their immodesty. For men, she said, at least for married ones, going out with women is the worst thing. Only two other women mentioned adultery.

I do not believe that the dearth of comments relating to sexual behavior is a result of any lack of concern with this matter. Rather, I think the two particular questions I posed served as an inkblot test. I noticed frequently that people responded with statements that reflected what they had been experiencing lately. I knew in many cases that women particularly, but also men, were concerned with what others were saying about them, so they were prone to seeing gossip as particularly reprehensible. Comments reflect other hurts and slights as well. Mona, who has had to rely on considerable assistance from her friends, said that she finds those who help but don't want praise to be the most admirable. Ali A., who said he considers gossip to be the cause of "a soul's slow death," suffers from much division in his family which he attributes to others' interference and gossip.

In general, I believe that the majority of people in this community set greater stock by peaceful coexistence with family and neighbors than following precisely all the laws of Islam. However, they feel a person should strive to live a good life in the name of God, not just for some humanistic belief system. Several respondents mentioned that the best people are religious, although they frequently added that they did not necessarily have to be Muslim. Zahra conceded that some of the best people she has known have been Christians. But not to believe in God at all seems almost incomprehensible in this community. The worst accusation a person can have made against him or her is to be called an atheist.

The legalistic aspects of religion tend to be downplayed by the majority of Shi'a in this community. While religion is deeply important to them, they are more likely to stress the spirit rather than the letter of the law, again reflecting the Lebanese Shi'a's relative isolation from the scholarly centers of Shi'ism. This tendency also would be strengthened by the Christian influences in Lebanon.

When discussing prospects for the afterlife, a number of individuals mentioned that good deeds were more important than strictly adhering to religious rules. This was heard from both new immigrants and earlier ones. As the recently arrived Dr. B. stated, and others also reiterated, "Good works are paramount." The elderly Zahria, who was raised in the United States, said, "Each person is judged individually, not just by whether he follows the laws of religion or not." In these responses, I heard an invocation of some other source of morality than that of scriptural religion. Such ideas are anathema to the Shari'a-minded, who believe that all wisdom and guidance come from the sacred texts and that good works are certainly not enough to save one's soul.

Another factor that can influence people's expectations for the next life is reliance on God's mercy and forgiveness. "God is forgiving" was a phrase I heard repeatedly. Zuheir feels it is wrong not to abide by the Koranic rules. Yet, he added, he knows that he is supposed to pray but does not because he is "too lazy." He fears God yet perceives him as being "loving, caring, and forgiving." I also heard repeatedly that God is just. He weighs the good and the bad. Several individuals referred to the Koranic image of a scale on which God or his angels actually compare the good and bad actions of a person during his entire lifetime. Most people seem confident that their good actions have counteracted any evil they may have done.

That God is forgiving is something both the Shari'a-minded and the traditionally religious can agree on. Yet there are differences

even on this matter. The Shari'a-minded Imam made it clear that God's forgiveness won't come on one's deathbed. One must beseech God's forgiveness while one still has time to prove one's faith and sincerity. No such radical change in behavior seems to be required for the traditionalist. Forgiveness can come at any stage, even at death.

Finally, I believe that this community's optimism is closely linked to the circumstances under which the people have been practicing their Shi'i beliefs. They are a people who have always had to share their environment with non-Shi'a, be they other Muslims or Christians. These others were constant reminders to the Shi'a of their spiritual edge over the rest of the world. They were the only ones to pledge their loyalty to the Imam Ali and the other imams. They were the descendants of those who suffered persecution for their beliefs. And they alone had the Imam Husayn as their savior.

Suffering in This Life

When people said that they believed there was a punishment in the next life, I asked if they believed that God punished in this life as well. This community seems to be about equally divided between those who believe that God punishes only in the afterlife and those who believe that God punishes sinners in this life as well.

Those who expressed a belief only in an otherworldly punishment often commented that people can enjoy a very prosperous life here yet have to face a terrible fate after death. In other words, worldly success was no indicator of God's favor, as it is believed to be in the Calvinist tradition. Though this community tends toward upward mobility, there is still a great deal of suspicion about those who have done very well materially. For those who have not managed to achieve the American dream, there is a great deal of envy of those who have. Accusations that a well-to-do shop owner or other entrepreneur has made his fortune through drugs or some other illegal activity are extremely prevalent. Apparently, those who have not been materially successful find some comfort in their belief that the rich will ultimately suffer. The envy found in this community probably reflects a common idea among people of peasant background: there is only so much good to go around; anyone who takes too much is depriving his neighbor of his share.

As for those who have suffered misfortune in this life, one should not assume that they are being punished by God for their sins. After all, God tests his loved ones. Zuheir commented that the best people are those who suffer most in this world. Several people

commented that the question about suffering in this life was very complicated and had various possible answers.

There is earthly punishment for transgressors, however. Both the Shari'a-minded and the traditionalists believe this. Traditionalists, though, tended to give "superstitious" explanations for the afflictions. Ghalia believes that a person's mind will become confused, and Saroya believes that even members of the offender's family can face illness or other misfortune if God is displeased with a person. Zahra D. is afraid that if things are going too well in her life, she will face a punishment. Therefore, she is trying to be more conscientious in her religious obligations.

The Shari'a-minded take a more logical approach. They believe that Islam is the perfect prescription for living. If one does not follow this prescription, one's life cannot possibly be healthy and happy. One will fall into paths that lead to destruction. In other words, this suffering is not a direct result of God's punishment but rather a self-inflicted type of punishment, just as by not following the safety rules for using a dangerous machine, one may cut off one's fingers. As Samira put it, "They are making trouble for themselves by not following God's laws that are made for us to live our life by. Here in the U.S., there is always a need for government and police, but in an Islamic society, one knows how to follow Islam. No other rules are necessary. If a person follows the rules of Islam, they have no problems."

Two men I interviewed referred to a different sort of worldly punishment, that inflicted by the government. When asked if a person is punished in this life for disobeying Islamic law, Maher said, "Nothing happens to a person in this life because we don't have an Islamic government. In the next life, the offender will get what is coming to him. If a person is punished by a non-Islamic government for a crime, he still must pay the penalty for having offended God. If he is punished the Islamic way, his debt is paid. He is forgiven by God." Ali, a college student, replied, "If a person does not follow the laws of Islam, what will happen to him depends on whether there is an Islamic government or not. If there were, they would take care of the sinner, but when there is none, the person must be left to God." Both of these men, of course, believe that an Islamic government would serve as God's representation on earth and would be a vehicle for the salvation of souls. If people are punished here, they would be spared punishment in the next life. Outside Iran, they believe, no such government and, therefore, possibility for forgiveness exists.

Those Who Don't Believe

Mona, the woman who studied with Musa Sadr's sister in Lebanon, who came to the United States wearing *hijab*, and who refuses to wear blue jeans or a bathing suit because they are "against religion," gave a startling response to my questions about the afterlife. She said, "In the Holy Book, it says there is a heaven and a hell, but I am not sure about that. No one has ever come back from death to report about the next life, so I don't think there is a next life. However, the Koran tells us to stay away from trouble, so you should. I don't believe that God punishes anybody. If you are bad, you have no respect either from yourself or from others. A person should not be good just because of reward in the next life."

The only others to voice such doubts were those who had questions about the existence of God. Mona does not question God's existence. She was shocked and appalled when a Lebanese Shi'a, a very disreputable man in the community, said that he wasn't afraid of God, so he certainly wasn't afraid of Mona and her brothers. Over and over again, she repeated his words, trying to comprehend them. And yet, in front of another Lebanese woman during the interview, she said she doubted the existence of the next life. I waited for a reaction from the other woman. It never came. Could it be that others have such doubts but can't bring themselves to voice them? Yet Mona said what I had observed earlier. One can follow the Koran, not because of a fear of punishment but because it presents a way of life that people view as the correct path to follow. It is also the path sanctioned by all of one's family and closest friends. It probably seems more realistic to fear them in their tangible presence than to fear God.

There were a few bona fide nonbelievers, or at least serious doubters, in my sample, but even these had some surprising thoughts to share about life after death. Ridwan, the social scientist, said that he is "skeptical" about the next life. He does not believe in punishment. He thinks of religion as serving communal, psychological needs. "Religion is part of a heritage, and you feel you are part of it," he said. He likes to pray on Friday at the mosque to experience this communal feeling. Yet, while he is "not convinced there is an afterlife," he added that he still fears God.

Husayn, who feels "religion has no place in our lives anymore" (yet who shares many of the same moral views as the believers), does not concern himself with whether or not there is a God. He stated that he does not believe in punishment for sins and that

the end of the body is the end of life. But he does experience some fear that was evident in his recounting of a movie he had seen about a woman suffering greatly before her death. In the movie, a woman died but came back to life for a moment—just long enough to tell the woman who was preparing her body for burial that she was still suffering just as greatly in the next life as she had in this one. Husayn told me that he had a fear of something like this but then repeated that he did not believe in an afterlife.

The Imam Mahdi

The time of the Advent or "Return" of the Imam is known to God alone, but it will be heralded by numerous signs . . . of which the most celebrated are the coming of the wicked and hideous Sufyani, whose army the earth will finally swallow up. The appearance of a figure in the sun; the multiplication of misleading divines and lawyers and of poets; the abounding of tyranny and oppression; the appearance of Antichrist (*Dajjal*) riding on his Ass; the assembling of 313 chosen supporters of the Imam in Taliqan of Khurasan, etc. After a "reign of the Saints" lasting seventy years, the Imam will die, poisoned by a woman named Maliha, and the Imam Husayn will return to earth to read the Burial Service of him. This is the beginning of what is called the "Lesser Resurrection" (*Qiyamat-i-Sughra*), when the Prophet and all the Imams, as well as their chief antagonists, shall return to earth for a while, and fight their battles over again, but with a different result, since the unbelievers shall be uniformly defeated. In this first temporary Resurrection only those who are purely believers or unbelievers (*Mumin-t-Khalis* or *Kafir-i-khalis*) will come to life. Then they will again disappear from the face of the earth, and, after forty days' anarchy and confusion, the tribes of Gog and Magog (*Yajuj u Majuj*) will burst through the Wall (*Sadd*) which keeps them back, and will overrun the earth, and eat up all the grass and herbs, and drink up the rivers.

The "Greater Resurrection" (*Qiyamat-ii-Kubra*), when all the dead shall be raised to life in the same bodies they had while on earth, recreated by God's Power as a broken brick can be remade from its original materials, will be inaugurated by the blast of Israfil's trumpet, which shall draw into itself all the spirits of the quick and the dead, so that no living thing shall remain on earth save the "Fourteen Immaculate Ones" (*Chahardah Ma'sum*). Then, when their bodies have been recreated, Israfil will again blow his trumpet, and the spirits will emerge from it like a swarm of bees, and fly each one to its own body. All animals will also be raised to life to undergo the Reckoning

and be judged for their acts of violence towards one another. Then the Balance (*Mizan*) will be set up for the weighing of the good and bad acts of each soul, and the scroll of each man's deeds, written down by the Recording Angels Sa'ig and Shahid, will be placed in his hand.¹⁵

When I asked young Shari'a-minded Ishmael when he thought the Imam Mahdi would return, he responded, "It is not allowed to make such predictions." But he could not help adding, "There are signs that it may be coming soon. The Islamic Republic in Iran and the social problems like sexual freedom and other corruptions are also a sign." Maher, also very strict in his interpretation of the law, said, "The Imam Mahdi will come when he gets permission from God, and anyone who tells you otherwise is a liar." But his equally Shari'a-minded wife on another occasion told me that she was studying with a visiting sheikh from Lebanon who was not at all reticent about making some predictions. She reported that he told his class that the war in Lebanon, Arab against Arab, Jews coming back home, all these things, and many more must happen before the Imam Mahdi comes with Jesus to bring justice to the world. Changes of weather patterns are another indication of his coming. From her understanding of what the sheikh was teaching, she is convinced that the Imam's return is imminent. Indeed, one of the most sought-after religious books in the community is a popular account in Arabic of the prophecies of the Mahdi that shows how they are in the process of fulfillment.

While there are some like Maher and Ishmael who are resistant to sharing their opinions about the time of the return, the sheikhs are less so. When Sheikh Berri was asked this question, he quoted the scholar Ibn 'Arabi on the subject, citing prophecies that strongly suggest that the believers are justified in their hopes that the Mahdi will return in their lifetimes. Sheikh Chirri very directly teaches that the Mahdi will return soon. During one of his sermons, he said, "Can the Mahdi defeat all enemies of Islam? Muhammad is 'bigger' than the Mahdi. Why do we expect one man, the Mahdi, to change the whole world? The reason: when the Prophet Muhammad was in the world, there was not the technology to broadcast to the world."

To my question about the Imam Mahdi, the ardently pro-Iranian Samira gave a most novel response. She prefaced her answer with a disclaimer that she knows when he would return, but continued, "There are signs that he will come, such as when there is much oppression on earth. Also, Shi'ites won't be allowed to go on *hajj*.

There will be computers, and women will dress like men. *El Mahdi* has been known to come without people realizing it at the time. He performs miraculous cures, and people he has helped will recognize him when he comes. He could be on this street right now." Actually, I am surprised I did not hear more about encounters with the Mahdi. There is a fair amount of folklore about people who have met him, since, after all, he is not dead but simply in hiding.

Only those who question the divine origin of Islam truly doubt the return of the Mahdi. Skeptic Husayn thinks that the issue of the return is a purely political matter. He believes that "the Shi'a use the Mahdi to reinforce their conviction that the imams are the rightful successors [to the Prophet] so as to oppose the Sunnis." The Sunnis also have a belief in the advent of a Mahdi figure, but the Shi'i beliefs are directly linked with the belief in the imamate, they are far more specific, and the prophecies do include some very anti-Sunni aspects.

Six of my respondents told me explicitly that the Mahdi would return before the year 2000. These tended to be the most traditional and least educated, but, while the more educated in my sample resisted the temptation to use that exact date, it was apparent that they see the Mahdi's time as having come.

The American experience has not weakened people's belief in and longing for the Mahdi. Hajj C., a second-generation American, told me, "He doesn't have to come in my lifetime, but I would like to respond to his call." He said he was prepared to give up everything to follow the Mahdi. Hajj M., also a second-generation believer, said that it was Sheikh Chirri's insistence that the Imam Mahdi would appear soon that was instrumental in making him a more observant Muslim.

Life in America would not necessarily weaken this belief and, in fact, may strengthen it. After all, America is the birthplace of some of the most activist millenarian movements, in which people have dedicated their lives and fortunes to preparation for Christ's return. Some of my more Americanized informants are well aware of how eagerly American Christians await the return of Christ. The two returns, that of Christ and that of the Imam Mahdi, according to Shi'i belief, are supposed to occur more or less simultaneously. Therefore, the Christian beliefs reinforce those of the Muslims. Also, the Muslims can look forward to a time when they will have the upper hand, even in predominantly Christian America. Abdo, one of the most ostensibly assimilated of my respondents, said, "The Imam Mahdi will come prior to the return of Christ, who will meet him in Jerusalem. He will ask Christ to pray, and Christ will tell him

that he will follow him." Certainly, the vindication of Islam in the eyes of the Christian world would be a major triumph for Islam and something to anticipate.

That the expectation of the Imam Mahdi's return is not simply considered a theoretical matter but something close to the hearts of the local Shi'a was reflected in Minnie's comments. A traditionally religious woman raised in America with a high school education, she said, "All people will rise from the dead [when the Mahdi comes]. The punished people will carry coffins on their backs wherever they go. Allah will talk to each one alone about their sins. I think it will be soon because I hear about it too much from my family."

A translation of the late highly esteemed scholar Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's words on the coming of the Imam Mahdi appears in the religious bookstore in Dearborn. In one of his essays, he writes:

The Mahdi is not only an embodiment of the Islamic belief but he is also the symbol of an aspiration cherished by mankind irrespective of its divergent religious doctrines. . . . This belief is not merely a source of consolation but it is also a source of virtue and strength. It is a source of virtue because the belief in the Mahdi means the total elimination of injustice and oppression prevailing in the world. It is a source of inexhaustible strength because it provides hope which enables man to resist frustration, howsoever hopeless and dismal the circumstances may be.¹⁶

One of the signs from the traditions for the return of the Mahdi is that "death and fear will afflict the people of Baghdad and Iraq. A fire will appear in the sky and a redness will cover them."¹⁷ The events that arose out of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait may well serve to strengthen faith for some.



When the Virgin Mary appeared at Fatima and Lourdes, the children who encountered her were initially denounced by the Church as impostors. The clerical hierarchy knew full well that through the visions of these children, religious power was being transferred from the Church to the "spiritually pure" laity. The Church, unable to discredit the children, ultimately had no choice but to give credence to the apparitions and incorporate reverence

and visitations to the sacred sites as part of Church belief. Still, an uneasy relationship maintains between the clerics and those who experience their deepest religious convictions through apparitions of the Virgin. The religion that the Virgin Mary represents—the nonconformist, antiestablishment religion of the individual—continues to be a threat to the status quo of the Church. In 1960, there was much speculation among American Catholic adults and children alike about what was contained in the letter believed to have been given to the oldest child at Lourdes by Mary and passed on to the Pope. Many believed that we were on the eve of enormous political and social changes associated with the return of Christ and, by implication, the disempowerment of the Pope and church hierarchy.

The Imam Mahdi, too, may well be seen as the antithesis of established religion and government. His ever-promised appearance holds a latent power as great as, if not greater than, that of the Virgin. The governments of Iran, since the Safavids, have had to pay lip service to their belief in him but have always dreaded the announcement that he has appeared. For example, when Ali Muhammad, the Bab, proclaimed in Iran that he was the Mahdi, he was imprisoned and executed in 1850 by Nasir al-Din Shah with the full support of the higher levels of *'ulama*. A substantial number of the lower-ranking *'ulama*, on the other hand, chose to follow the Bab, many of whom were tortured and killed as a result.

The *'ulama* and the lay Shi'a of Dearborn can well afford to anticipate the appearance of the Mahdi, as it is only through him that their greatest hopes of ascendancy could be realized. The Shi'a of Dearborn are not revolutionaries out to establish an Islamic regime in America, but the Imam Mahdi, with Christ at his side, has the power to transform the entire world.

Jinn

As a girl in her late teens, Wafa's sister had turned down many suitors. She had a friend with a brother who wanted to marry her. She rejected him.

One day, while still in Lebanon, the family was involved in a huge housecleaning project in preparation for the arrival of an uncle. While Wafa was helping to air the mattresses, a ball-like object fell from one of them. She took it and began to bounce it off a wall. The "ball" came open, and inside she found paper with writing. She took it to her father, who recognized it as a curse. He, in turn, took it to her grandfather, who was a sheikh and had many books and knew about sorcery. The curse, he said, was on Wafa's

sister. She would either never marry or have a disastrous marriage. He directed Wafa's father to dissolve the paper in water, but it would not dissolve. He consulted his books and said that Wafa's father and sister must get on a boat and go to the middle of the sea. Her father would have to immerse the girl seven times in the water and throw away the paper. He did so, and the curse was broken. Wafa's sister is now a happily married woman with children.

I had known Wafa for more than a year before she told me this story. She only told me because I had brought up the subject of the *jinn*. Earlier in the week, I had heard that a very Shari'a-minded woman had consulted a woman who speaks to the *jinn*. This is all I had heard; there were no details. So, when Wafa telephoned me, I asked her what she knew about the *jinn*. She knew plenty. There was the woman who was being seduced by the *jinn* until one night people found her naked in the cemetery. The *jinn* also came to the hospital room and took Wafa's grandmother to paradise; I am told that there are photographs of this, but I have not seen them. For Wafa, the *jinn* are a reality and a force to be reckoned with. To protect oneself from them, one must say "*Bismillahi Rahmani Rahim*," and they will leave the potential victim alone.

After listening to Wafa's stories, I began to wonder if all Shi'i Lebanese carried within their psyches the same fears and apprehensions about these mysterious creatures.

The *jinn* are mentioned in the Koran and are considered servants of God, somewhat in the same manner as humans and angels are. They are a part of the established religion. *The Encyclopedia of Islam* states: "According to the Muslim conception [they are] bodies composed of vapor or flame, intelligent, imperceptible to our senses, capable of appearing under different forms and of carrying out heavy labors. They were created of smokeless flame (Kur'an, LV, 14) while mankind and the angels, the other two classes of intelligent beings, were created of clay and light. They are capable of salvation; Muhammad was sent to them as well as to mankind; some will enter Paradise while others will be cast into the fire of hell."¹⁸

While the *jinn* are part of Islamic creed, the question arises of whether it is acceptable to use incantations and spells to compel the *jinn* to accomplish something desirable. On many occasions, the Prophet was asked about the efficacy and truthfulness of charms, omens, fortune-telling, and the like. In each case, he either condemned these practices or advised against them. It is interesting that he condemned them but did not appear to suggest that these practices were absurd or impossible. In the Koran, Sura CXIII states:

Say: I take refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak
from the evil of what He has created,
from the evil of darkness when it gathers,
from the evil of the women who blow on knots,
evil of an envier when he envies.¹⁹

It has been left up to the theologians to determine what is allowable regarding people's involvement with the *jinn* and with magic.²⁰ In Wafa's family, there are sheikhs who have gone off to the Atabat to study. She has told me that some of them believe it is acceptable to learn all one can about the *jinn* in order to control them, while others, though firmly convinced of the existence of these spirits, feel that "one should take refuge with the Lord" and avoid such matters. The latter attitude conforms to that of Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth-century Arab scholar who wrote in considerable detail about supernatural forces. He gave an example of a sorcerer who entered into a pact with the *jinn*, thereby making his spell more forceful. While he noted that "no intelligent person doubts the existence of sorcery," he warned that sorcery, the use of talismans, and dealings with astrology are harmful and should be avoided.²¹

The sharp dichotomy between religion and magic has proven time and again in anthropological studies to be a false one. While there are differences between the two, magic tends to be entwined with religion, whether it is the religion of primitive or complex societies. In Islam, magical forces of a variety of types have a particular legitimacy both because Islam was founded in a culture where magic played an essential role and because of the Koran's recognition of its potential force. The Koran rejects forces that challenge the power of God but never denies the existence of such forces. The *jinn* have a particular significance because they are specifically referred to in the Koran. Yet, for those who see religion in a highly scientific, rational way such as many Sharia'-minded tend to do, the *jinn* would seem to pose a problem.

It was my task to find out what people believed about the *jinn*. Did they indeed put full credence in their existence? Did educated people believe in them? Were people from one region more inclined to believe than those from another region? If people believed, did they have experiences with them, and were they likely to try to contact the *jinn*?

One comment I heard repeatedly was that it was the people from Bint Jubeil and Tibnin, two villages in South Lebanon, who were most "knowledgeable" about the *jinn*. However, when I asked people what their beliefs were regarding these spirits, I found no

difference between people from these villages and those from other areas.

Mr. S., from Machghara in the Bekaa, still becomes quite visibly shaken when he talks about his visit to the shrine of Sitt Zeinab. He was kneeling next to his mother when he noticed a woman beside him dressed in white who suddenly vanished into thin air. He had no doubt that she was a *jinn*.

Um Ali, also from Machghara, told me that a female relative had kicked a cat that was in her way and suddenly became incapable of functioning. She had lost her mind, Um Ali said. The woman was taken to the hospital, but the doctor could find nothing physically wrong with her. Someone came and read the Koran over her, and she became well.

Another woman, again from Machghara, used to wash dishes in the bathroom and dump food in her toilet. One day, when she walked into the bathroom, she saw a vision of a huge sheikh standing in the tub. She consulted a sheikh, and he told her to stop flushing food in the toilet. She followed his advice and never saw the vision again.

Hajja Sharifi, from another village in the Bekaa, told me that in the olden days, "when people were very good, a goat came along and was hurt and needed help. A man came and gently took care of it. When he did, the goat spoke to him and thanked him. Now it is different. People aren't good, and now the *jinn* may hurt you. They usually look like monkeys, covered with hair, but they can take any form. If you are suspicious that you are dealing with the *jinn*, you always say '*Bismallahi Rahmani Rahim*.' Then they will go away and leave you alone. If you are throwing hot water away outside, always say, '*Bismallahi* . . . ' because you might accidentally throw hot water on the *jinn*, which makes them furious, and they will drive you mad."

One evening, I was having coffee with my young neighbors. One of them was seventeen-year-old Mariam from Bint Jubeil, who was expecting a baby any day. Reading the coffee grounds from a demitasse cup, she began telling the fortune of the other woman, who was from Ayetini in the Bekaa. I personally have only known people from Bint Jubeil who read fortunes, and the two young women agreed that it is only Bint Jubeilis who know how to read fortunes, though I am not sure if this is true. I then asked Mariam about *jinn* and whether she had had experience with them. She had a story to tell, but she wanted me to be clear that fortune-telling was just for fun, whereas the *jinn* were for real. She proceeded to tell me that when she was fourteen years old, she returned to Lebanon to

become engaged. She claimed that she was very frightened traveling by herself because she was afraid people would think she was a "bad girl." (I learned later that she was also extremely unhappy about the engagement, which was to a cousin she did not know. There was a boy in Dearborn whom she liked very much. Her father eventually threatened him when he continued to show an interest in Mariam.) When Mariam reached her village, she went to a sheikh who talks to the *jinn*. She paid him "a lot of money," and he gave her a piece of paper with writing, tightly bound in tape, to place under her shoulder when she went to bed at night. After that, she was calm. This young woman and her family have had much experience with supernatural forces, two of her infant siblings having been killed through "supernatural means."

It may be instructive to look at Mariam's case to understand her and her family's involvement with the supernatural. This is a family steeped in Lebanese tradition. While Mariam's family took the great leap to come to the United States, there was no wish on their part to leave Lebanon behind. They simply needed a safer place to live and one that provided an opportunity to make a living. In this way, they are very typical of many families I knew. Mariam posed a threat to their traditional ways, however. A pretty, spirited teenage girl who was fascinated by all that America offers its youth, she dared to show an interest in a boy not hand-picked by her family. While a more religiously sophisticated family would try to control their daughter's behavior through norms prescribed by scriptural religion, this family taught their daughter that it was the *jinn* whom she needed to fear if she were to break society's rules. Using such reasoning, one would expect that belief in the *jinn* might increase among traditional Shi'a in America, at least in the short run.

An overwhelming majority of Lebanese Shi'a in Dearborn may have claimed that they place some credence in the existence of the *jinn*, but there is considerable disagreement about their role in the world otherwise. A minority specifically stated that they believed in the *jinn* "because they are mentioned in the Koran." These people claimed to have no knowledge of these spirits otherwise and said that they were not important in their lives. These tended to be the Shari'a-minded who want to downplay any mystical or mysterious aspect of religion. In fact, a couple of women who wear full *hijab* chided me for asking about the *jinn*. They both wanted to know why I would bother to ask such a question, as they believe that the *jinn* are not an important part of religion. One of the women who objected had gone to a sorceress to consult the *jinn*. She never admitted this to me, but a close relative of hers did.

Generally, the more highly educated also made it clear that *jinn* for them were a matter of faith. They believed in the Koran, so they must accept the *jinn*. But even this was not a consistent finding. I was quite taken aback when college-educated Dalal, who claimed no religious sentiment whatsoever, told me, in all seriousness and with conviction, a story of a man being raised up to the ceiling because of the *jinn*. "If the man said '*Bismallah* . . .,' he would fall," she told me.

Not all Shi'a who were either born in America or spent their formative years here were as definite about the role of the *jinn* as Mariam's family. One woman saw them as angels (although actually they are supposed to be distinct from angels). One man portrayed them as the subconscious struggle between good and evil. Another said that anyone who said he could contact the *jinn* was having hallucinations. These responses all suggest Western influence. Yet Hannah, who was born here but whose parents originated from a village in the south, told of a most remarkable experience.

Hannah is a widow who was left to raise three children. She told me that before her husband died, she saw a woman in the doorway of her home wearing black. The woman had only one eye in the middle of her face, and she knew that this woman comes only when there is an imminent death. Her husband died days later while her younger daughter was at camp. A teacher from the camp called Hannah and said that the daughter had been frightened by a dream of a woman dressed in black and was afraid something had happened to her father. Hannah believed these were visitations from the *jinn* and that they have played an important role in her life.

However, several people, both the traditional and the Shari'a-minded, felt that the *jinn* used to live in the days of the Prophet but are no longer with us. One man who does not consider himself to be religious said that God chained the *jinn* so that they can no longer control people's lives. An elderly woman who only recently made the *hajj* told me she does not believe in the *jinn* but that when her father was a young man, he was walking one day in a forest in the Bekaa and came across a goat. He tried to kill it, but he couldn't; it just vanished. But she doesn't believe such things.

For those who believe that the *jinn* are still among us, these spirits are quite terrifying. "They are black and hairy and come upon us suddenly," exclaimed Najwa, from Bint Jubeil, shaking herself as though shaking off the spirits. The other woman in the room at the time kept repeating "*Bismillahi Rahmani Rahiim*" over and over again but was only half glad when this exciting topic came to an end.

While having coffee with a few young women one day, I mentioned that I would like to meet someone who has contact with the *jinn*. "No, don't do it, Linda," one of them warned. "Something terrible will happen to you." Then the stories flowed of children being kidnapped by *jinn* who live in cemeteries, of *jinn* removing a man's appendix at night, of goats that transform themselves into women before one's very eyes . . . *Bismallah!*

The Evil Eye

Ibn Khaldun writes: "Another psychic influence is that of the eye—that is, an influence exercised by the soul of the person who has the evil eye. A thing or situation appears pleasing to the eye of a person, and he likes it very much. This creates in him envy and the desire to take it away from its owner. Therefore, he prefers to destroy him."²²

When Mariam's mother lost one of her babies, it was because of the evil eye of a jealous woman. There is nothing one can do about the person with the evil eye. He or she does not harm intentionally, as would a sorcerer. One can take precautions against such harm, however, and precautions appear to abound among this community, particularly in protecting newborns from the evil eye of another.

When a baby is born, friends and neighbors are expected to visit. The guests are served *ainar*, a pudding made with nuts and cinnamon which is actually considered to have healthful benefits for the mother. Sometime during the visit, the guest invariably smuggles some money into the infant's clothing or blankets as a gift. In case any of these visitors should have the evil eye, the baby is equipped with a piece of protective jewelry bearing a robin's-egg blue bead. Such items, which can be found even in grocery stores, are affixed to the inner side of the baby's shirt. Sometimes a minuscule Koran will also be attached. It does not matter whether the person is traditional or Shari'a-minded in religious viewpoint; the amulet appears in any case. In Lebanon, the fear of the evil eye was deeply embedded in the culture and reinforced by both religious writing and a traditionally high infant mortality rate. Brian Spooner found that the fear of the evil eye is greater among peasants (such as the Lebanese) than among nomads. Peasants are very concerned with guarding their privacy and feel a need to put up a protective wall against outsiders, whom they consider threatening. Nomads, on the other hand, have no private life, and "the stranger-guest is an integral feature of the life of the community."²³

The parents of a child are not the only ones who can take precautions. The admirer of the baby can also do so. He or she should always accompany any words of admiration with the exclamation "*Smullah!*" (colloquial for "In the name of God!"), thereby invoking God's protection for the child.

Amulets and invocations aside, I observed no obsession with protecting the child from supernatural forces. All the mothers I knew readily took their children to the doctor, and, if a child were ill, none of them spoke about the *jinn* or the evil eye having caused the illness. These babies and older children had colds and flu and ear infections just like their American counterparts. While blue beads and miniature Korans might continue to be used and their efficacy believed in, they seem, at least in many cases, to have taken on the role of religious symbols and not simply superstitious objects. In fact, they seem very much akin to statues of the Virgin Mary which can either contain supernatural powers or remind people of their deep devotion and reverence for the "Mother of God."



In Detroit . . . one Polish woman attributed the death of a friend's child, obviously a victim of infantile paralysis, to a malady she described as "tangled hair." "Tangled hair" resulted from bewitchment countered by clipping the matted hairs off and placing them beneath the sufferer's pillow. Bewitchment, Poles believed, was carried out by the power of the 'evil eye' possessed by magicians, witches, persons considered malevolent, and sometimes even by animals. . . . A belief in magic gave immigrant Poles a resource for explaining—and thereby coming to psychological terms with—the stresses and losses they daily found in an often hostile alien world they could not control.²⁴

Priests and nuns have not tried to obliterate folk religious beliefs but rather have generally sought to reinforce the use of substances and objects that have an institutional basis such as holy water, medals, holy cards, rosary beads, and the like.

While French Canadians in Quebec still go to shrines seeking cures for a variety of maladies, Polish-American Catholics no longer attribute children's deaths to bewitchment. Belief in supernatural intervention in human lives rarely vanishes entirely among people. In urban settings such as Detroit, beliefs associated with agrarian life tend either to fade or to take on a new meaning and be sustained in a fashion that does not seem so contrary to sophisticated urban

culture. For example, the use of medals among Catholics does not necessarily mean that they are expecting miracles. Rather, they are a sign of Catholic identity and a desire to feel close to the saint whose image is engraved on the medal. Occasionally, relics or images that have been used in a more "orthodox" fashion might revert to their more magical uses. A case in point would be the apparitions and miracles associated with a statue of the Virgin Mary in a northern New Jersey town during 1993. Frequently, such extraordinary occurrences can be linked to problems existing in the community. One problem might be tensions between the clerical hierarchy and the laypeople. In the case of French Canadians who visit shrines in remote regions of Quebec, we find that there has been a shortage of high-quality modern health care. Perhaps if modern health-care facilities were available to the people, there would be a diminished belief in the curative powers associated with shrines. A variety of societal factors affect what types of beliefs will be sustained, how strong these beliefs will remain, and what meaning will be given to them.

As mentioned above, the Shi'a are already showing some shift in the meaning they give traditional beliefs. The proliferation of scholarly sheikhs in the community and the ascendancy of the Shari'a-minded in Dearborn will affect the emphasis placed on the supernatural. Those striving to live by the Shari'a do not see, for example, the *jinn* as important in their daily struggle to lead an Islamic life. College education, which is being pursued by many, seems already to be dampening traditional views of supernatural forces. A very traditional woman with a college-educated daughter regaled me with vivid stories about encounters with the *jinn*. But when she finished, she added that she was quite certain that there were no *jinn* in America. "They just live in Lebanon," she told me.

Women and the Family

On a typical summer Sunday afternoon in East Dearborn, the streets, normally full of the sounds of children, are remarkably quiet. The houses are closed up, and the cars are gone from streets and driveways. This is the day for the family picnic.

There are fine parks with outdoor swimming pools in East Dearborn, but that is not where the Lebanese neighbors are to be found. They are far more likely to be on the "non-Arab" west side of town, at a park not any more pleasant than the ones on the east side but with a far larger swimming pool than any of the others in town.

There are remarkably few non-Arabs in this park on Sundays. Sunday has become the day for the Lebanese.

The smell of shish kebab and garlic-marinated chicken fills the air as women in all manner of dress, from full *hijab* to village dress to blue jeans, cluster at tables, visiting back and forth from one group to the next. "The group," though, is the family. Parents, children, cousins, aunts and uncles, grandparents—they are all there.

As Laurel Wigle found in her study of the south end of Dearborn, kinship, which in the Lebanese case is extended out through entire villages with endogamous marriages, has shown no obvious signs of weakening.²⁵ The cousin marriages in Dearborn are not necessarily through the patrilineage; a mother's sibling's child appears to suffice.²⁶ With so many complex interrelationships resulting from these marriage patterns, anyone who is not related is considered an outsider; the word often used is *stranger*. The result is that one has an extremely large circle of relatives with whom to socialize and on whom to rely.

Along with sex, alcohol, and drugs, family breakdown is another evil that this community wants to guard itself against. Ali H., a twenty-year-old college student who also works at a gas station to help pay family expenses, has expressed to me repeatedly that he finds the family situation among Americans to be appalling. "Nobody cares about anyone here," he said. He looks forward to marrying a relative from his village in the Bekaa. These endogamous marriages, of course, strengthen the bond between religion and family.

When Wigle conducted her study in the south end looking at, among other things, the relationship between marriage and religion, she did not distinguish among Yemenis, Palestinians, and Lebanese. She saw the Sunni/Shi'a division as inconsequential because people told her that they did not differentiate between the two sects for purposes of marriage. I contend that they told her this so as to put on "a good face" for the outsider. Barbara Aswad also found that half of the Lebanese women she interviewed said they would permit a child to marry into another Islamic sect,²⁷ but in actuality there are very few Shi'i/Sunni marriages in this community. Four of the cases I know of involve Shi'i men with Sunni wives; in only one is the wife a Shi'a married to a Sunni. In one case, the wife has conceded and now calls herself a Shi'a. In another case, there is continual bantering between the couple, with the husband, who is an ardent admirer of the imams 'Ali and Husayn, teasing his wife that she belongs to "that filthy sect." In a third case where the woman is a Sunni, the family at large has difficulties contending with her, and

when they discuss her, they remind their listeners that she is a Sunni. In a fourth case, the Shi'i identity of the man and his family is not strong, and there appears to be no tension over the matter of religion. The situation of the Shi'i woman married to a Sunni man appears to be fairly harmonious.

There is no ban per se on the Shi'i/Sunni marriage, but when the preference is for cousin marriages, this is only going to reinforce the notion that religion, specifically Shi'ism, and family are inseparable.

Husbands, Wives, and Shi'ism

Shireen Mahdavi gives an excellent account of the development of Shi'ism and its direct effect on women, particularly as related to the development of the role of the *'ulama* and the concept of *ijtihad*, the process by which the learned men come to understand the meaning of religious dogma. She cites three of the *'ulama* or *mujtahids* who are involved with interpreting the position of women in Iran: Tabataba'i Nuri, and Motahheri.

Although these three *mujtahids* reside in Iran, the country about which Mahdavi is writing, this discussion is very relevant to the study of the Dearborn community. The writings of these three men can be found at the local mosques and bookstores, and Motahheri's writings have even been translated into English. The opinion of all three *mujtahids* is the same: the psychological and physical differences between men and women make it imperative that men should have control over the lives of women. Only men can initiate divorce, and only men can have multiple spouses. All three of these learned men are emphatic that a woman's body should be completely covered, leaving only the face and hands exposed. All three assume that "man's sexuality in the face of temptation is uncontrollable,"²⁸ which justifies their position in favor of *mut'a*.

According to the *'ulama*, the Shi'i ideal is that of a wife who is totally obedient to her husband, who accepts his contracting other wives, whether permanent or temporary, and who has no legal recourse to divorce if she is unhappy with the marriage for any reason. In Khu'i's words: "A wife must not leave her house without the permission of her husband whenever her absence might prevent her husband from taking his pleasure in her—or anytime, as a precaution. If she leaves without his permission, she is recalcitrant. She is not prohibited from doing other things without the permission of her husband, so long as these do not prevent her husband from taking his pleasure in her."²⁹ And: "The husband is obliged to

supply his permanent wife with maintenance, including food, clothing, shelter, bedclothes, curtains, instruments for cleaning, and everything else that is required in his state of life, so long as she lives with him."³⁰

We will now look at how well the Lebanese live up to this ideal.

Scarves, Veils, and Other Bones of Contention

"Wearing *hijab* is the 'first thing' for women in Islam. It makes you feel spiritual." The muezzin was calling the faithful to prayer at the Majma' as Neifa, a middle-aged woman, said this. She added, "It makes you feel spiritual, the way the prayer call does." She has worn the scarf for ten years and decided to do so because she knew she had to "choose between paradise and hell." She lived in the United States at the time of her decision to don the *hijab*. I told her that I knew many Lebanese women who loved their religion but did not wear the *hijab*. She told me that sooner or later, they would decide on their own to wear it. She said that it is in the Koran that women must veil themselves and that in the days of the Prophet, all Muslim women wore the *hijab*. *Hijab*, she said, is for the protection of women so that men do not look covetously at them. She thinks that much of the rape in this society has to do with women going around with their bodies exposed. Men cannot bear the temptation.

Until the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the trend in the Levant was to abandon all types of veiling. The removal of the veil was considered a good indicator of women's emancipation, a sign of modernization.³¹ However, even in areas where modernization had not deeply penetrated the society, the Lebanese had only a limited form of veiling. Emrys Peters describes peasant women in South Lebanon in the 1970s as being comparatively independent. Male/female division of labor was not strict, and women played a productive role in the economy. They also inherited property and received a bride wealth settlement upon marriage. They covered their faces only in the presence of men who were strangers. Peters's description of these women suggests that economic factors were of paramount importance in defining a woman's place in society, as well as her attire.³²

But since the revolution, there has been a trend throughout the Middle East toward defining women's role in religious terms so that the matter of dress would be more influenced by dogma than by occupation. Also, there is a pervasive desire to disassociate "modernization" and "Westernization." It is significant that the most orthodox people I have met refer to themselves as "modern" Mus-

lims. For these women, the veil is, as Anne Betteridge states when referring to Iranian women on the eve of the revolution, "an indication of spiritual independence and self-worth."³³

There is a general consensus in this community that women should be modest and that this includes wearing a head covering. However, disagreement arises over what kind of covering and at what age a woman needs to begin to cover.

The kind of covering a woman wears says as much about her as not wearing a scarf at all. Someone who is conscientiously trying to follow a *marja'* will dress so that only her face and hands, below the wrist, are showing. Her ankles may show, but essentially nothing else. So women who are Shari'a-minded will dress like this. They are then considered to be wearing *hijab*. But there are the politically Shari'a-minded and the nonpolitical sorts, and there are subtle and not-so-subtle ways of making distinctions among themselves.

At least some members of the community believe that a woman is showing her affiliation with Hizb Allah by wearing her scarf, which is very large so that the end is fastened with a pin near the left ear. A friend's cousin wore her scarf that way to a doctor's office once, and the doctor asked her if she had joined Hizb Allah. The woman had not, and after this she quickly changed her style of wearing her scarf. In addition, though, women who are identified with Hizb Allah will also wear long, loose-fitting "coats" over their clothes, which are worn anytime they set foot outside the house. These are generally made of light fabric which easily blow in the wind. They can be particularly cumbersome when a woman tries to play tennis or badminton in them, which I have seen on occasion.

There are women who are Amal supporters who also fasten their scarves on the left side. However, these women do not wear the coatlike covering but rather simply very modest dress. It is more difficult to ascertain by appearance whether one is an Amal supporter or not. Attending what amounted to an Amal rally at the Jami' one evening, I found a wide variety of costumes. In fact, two or three women I had previously associated with Hizb Allah turned out to be Amal supporters. Their dress was ambiguous enough that I could not tell what kind of statement they were making.

I am not the only one who suffers from this confusion. Zahra D.'s sisters-in-law wear their scarves pinned on the side along with long, very modest dresses. Another Lebanese woman approached one of these sisters-in-law one day when Zahra D. was with her. The woman asked, "Do you wear your *hijab* for Hizb Allah or Amal?" Zahra angrily blurted out, "She wears it for God."

On the other hand, there are Amal supporters who do not normally wear the scarf. There is wide variation on religious matters in this organization.

Another way of wearing one's scarf to announce one's adherence to the laws of Islam is to wear it balaclava-style, like the medieval knights wore under their helmets and armor.

For those who want to make it very clear that Khomeini is their leader, both religiously and politically, there is the *chador* (Iranian) or the *'abaya* (Iraqi). Within the short span of a year, there have appeared in Dearborn an increasing number of these black shrouds, which have been worn over the centuries in places such as Iran and Afghanistan but not in Lebanon. Normally, with the *chador*, only the eyes, nose, and mouth show, but occasionally one will find a woman who chooses to reveal only her eyes. The wives of two of the sheikhs wear the *chador*, one obviously more willingly than the other. They are apparently serving as role models for a growing number of women.

The traditional way of covering one's hair in Lebanon was simply to wear a scarf babushka-style, tied under the chin. These scarves are not as large as their modern equivalents and may or may not cover all the hair. If even the slightest bit of hair is exposed, this will be sufficient evidence that a woman is not truly Shari'a-minded and is probably apolitical. (There is a way of pleating one's scarf to ensure that not a bit of hair ever shows.) A majority of middle-aged women can be seen wearing babushka-type scarves at least part of the time.

The younger women who hold traditional religious attitudes feel that there is plenty of time to wear the scarf in one's lifetime. They prefer to wait until they are plump and gray and not so attractive before covering their hair. The irony, of course, is that the scarf is supposed to prevent men from being sexually stimulated by a woman's beauty, but these women don't want to wear the scarf until they are less likely to be sexually stimulating.

There is a way for younger women to wear a scarf without looking dowdy or political. They can tie it at the nape of the neck, gypsy-style, still revealing a great deal of hair. Aware that they still look very attractive, they can also claim to be fulfilling their religious duty. But, interestingly, not many women opt for this solution, presumably because it is associated with a "peasant" look. They prefer either to go bare-headed until their beauty forsakes them or to wear *hijab*.

What does the scarf mean then?

For the young women who wear the full *hijab*, many of whom are indeed very attractive underneath the layers of cloth, the *hijab*

does succeed largely in hiding their charms. (Even among these, I have found a few women who still can manage to look glamorous while completely following the rules.)

Only about 20 to 25 percent of school-aged girls, at the elementary and high school level, cover their hair, usually in a complete fashion. These girls, and their families, are projecting the message that they are sexually off limits. (It should be noted, however, that some young girls wear their scarves as they walk to school but remove them when they enter the classroom. They complain that the Arab boys pull off their scarves—much like non-Arab girls in America have traditionally had their braids pulled—in school. But the question arises, of course, of whether this is just an excuse for ridding oneself of the unfashionable and annoying garment.)

A great many women are wearing the scarf who cannot possibly view themselves as sexual temptations. Hajja Sharifi, the mother of several adult children, is an example. Gray, wrinkled, and extremely stout, she will allow no man to see her when she is not wearing her white gossamer scarf. Once, she and I were visiting with her nieces in one of their homes. When the niece's husband started to enter the apartment, Hajja Sharifi called to him to wait, while she properly adorned herself. Yet none of the other women did so, in spite of the fact that they were the ones who were young and pretty.

My conclusion is that the scarf in this community has very little to do with men and their sexual urges. A woman wears a scarf as a statement. A woman who wears the full *hijab* is announcing her total commitment either to following the Shari'a or to following a political movement. For an elderly *hajja*, such as Sharifi, it is an announcement that she has undergone an important rite of passage and should be treated with great deference.

Anthropologists studying the Middle East have found that a woman who has borne children and is more advanced in years has far more power than a young woman.³⁴ Wrinkles and matronliness have a definite advantage among Middle Eastern women. In this community, at least, the scarf only serves to enhance a woman's position as it shows that she has religion behind her.

Modesty in America

Mona from Bint Jubeil wore the *hijab* when she came to America but found it inconvenient here. (She also claims she found it dangerous during the hostage crisis because of anti-Middle Eastern sentiment.) Saroya, from the same village, did not wear the scarf upon

arrival here, nor for some years later, but she finally decided to. A serious illness had made her see her mortality.

Wafa had never worn a scarf either in Beirut or in Tibnin where her family originated. When she came to America, the Iranian Revolution was under way, and she decided to put on the scarf. That lasted about two weeks. She has not worn it outside a mosque since. The scarf does not fit with her business and her relatively extravagant lifestyle.

Iman's mother, back in southern Lebanon, wore the scarf. When Iman decided to start to wear one while living in Dearborn, she chose to follow the *mujtahids'* injunction about covering all but the oval of her face. America's free-wheeling style chastened her.

Nisrene from Nabatiyeh has worn the scarf, *hijab*-style, since her teens (a bit late for this village, so she incurred some criticism). Since living in Dearborn, she has not changed her style of dressing.

The above examples reflect how divergent are opinions about the scarf. They also suggest that there are no real answers to the question of whether life in America is going to encourage or discourage the use of the scarf. Economic and occupational circumstances, education (of both a secular and a religious nature), political views, and individual personality are going to influence a woman's decision whether or not to veil.

Of course, the issue of veiling pertains to minor daughters as well as to adult women. The ambivalence families feel about this issue is striking. Some Shari'a-minded families seem to have come to terms with the problem fairly easily. The daughter's identity may be so strongly Islamic that she herself wishes to wear the *hijab*. But most families have not resolved the issue as amicably as that. After all, they realize, their children do attend American schools, and veiling is not an American custom. They see that their children are going to be more affected by American values, and they realize they must make some adjustments. But the question of how much to compromise is a constant preoccupation. There does appear to be unanimous agreement among this population that America's greatest failing is in the area of moral values relating to sex, drugs, and alcohol. Dressing modestly, whether with or without the scarf, is still going to be considered of paramount importance if one is to protect oneself against the onslaught of American sexual freedom.

The case with Sarah's family exemplifies this concern. One day I took the sixteen-year-old Sarah shopping. We picked out an oversized top and a skirt that reached just to the middle of her knee. She had tried on several pairs of slacks, but I could see that she definitely wanted the skirt, so we bought it. Still, she had reserva-

tions. Her mother does not wear the scarf and in some ways shows unusual openness to American life and has never required Sarah to wear the scarf, so I did not expect that the length of this skirt, which was not so very short, would matter. When we arrived home, she had to model her clothes. The top was fine, but there was much titling from her mother and brothers about the skirt. Sarah's father would have to give the final verdict when he came home from work. I saw the top on Sarah several times, but the skirt only once, several months after the shopping trip. Nothing more was ever said about it. While Sarah never openly rebels, she does have her quiet struggles for greater freedom.

Men's Views on the Scarf

Thus far, I have focused only on women's attitudes toward the scarf. Yet the injunction that women should wear scarves originated with men. Furthermore, according to religious law, women are supposed to be obedient to their husbands. In a patrilineal society such as is found in Lebanon, it is also expected that all females are under the jurisdiction of their male kinsmen, particularly their fathers and brothers and, when married, their husbands. It should follow that it is actually the men of the household who are deciding whether or not their womenfolk need to wear the scarf.

My findings do not corroborate this assumption at all. The debonair Dr. B. told me that a woman should cover her hair and every part of her body that is pretty so that she will not be considered a sex object. Dr. B.'s wife wears no scarf at all, nor do the women in his office, nor do his numerous female cousins whom I know. His sister wears the *'abaya*, but that is because she is married to a sheikh.

Mustafa's wife was very surprised to hear that her rather non-religious husband had a favorable view toward the scarf and believed that eventually his wife would decide to wear it. But it is her decision, he said.

Deeb's bare-headed wife was also surprised on hearing her husband's views. He feels that women who are out in the work world should cover themselves completely. He stated that women's immodesty causes a great deal of trouble. "Men cannot work properly," he said. "And there are a lot of unwanted pregnancies because women don't dress properly." His wife laughed at him when he said this.

When Saroya decided to wear the scarf, her husband was furious and threatened to divorce her. He was concerned that she would appear to be influenced by politics. She compromised by

tying the scarf at the nape of her neck, still covering almost all of her hair. That way, everyone would know she was wearing it only for religious reasons.

Diab wants his wife to wear the scarf and told me a man can divorce his wife if she disobeys him in this matter. "Wearing the *hijab* is the first thing in religion," he said with great feeling. He told me this several months after his wife stopped wearing the scarf. She has not returned to wearing it yet. She became pregnant soon after he expressed this opinion, and he has not initiated a divorce.

The cases presented here clearly show that typically in this community, the decision to wear the scarf is the woman's decision. Some women stated that they did not think their husbands had any influence on their decision about wearing the scarf. Nor did the women think that the men had any right to influence them. Um Zuheir put it best when she said wryly, "My husband doesn't worry about my scarf."

The majority of men agreed that the decision to wear the scarf lay with the woman. When both husband and wife are Shari'a-minded, there is no question of whether or not a woman should cover herself, but exactly the way she does so appears to be hers to decide. Even elementary and high-school-aged girls appeared to be given a fair amount of leeway. My observation was substantiated by a Lebanese school counselor. It would be interesting to pursue this line of research.³⁵

Men's World/Women's House

While the Lebanese who have come to the Dearborn area have been adjusting to the idea that there are educational opportunities for their daughters as well as for their sons, they are still ambivalent about the idea of a woman working outside the home after she is married. Barbara Aswad, in comparing Yemeni and Lebanese women in Dearborn, found that the latter do think it is permissible for their daughters to hold some types of jobs, and they are far more open to even married women working than are Yemeni women.³⁶ Some of the more respectable occupations for women include working in family stores, teaching, pharmacology, and medical or dental technology.

Even with a more liberal attitude toward women's education and occupation, there remains the desire to marry off daughters at a young age (for the sake of virginity), and therefore women's careers have not become a major issue here. I suspect, though, that it may become a major issue soon. During an art class for fourth and fifth

graders at my sons' school, the children were asked to make cut-out drawings of themselves dressed in their "future career clothes." I am told that an overwhelming number of young Lebanese girls pictured themselves as doctors and nurses.

Amina is a university student studying English literature. She is a serious student who would like to have a career, though she also expects to marry. She realizes that the traditional Lebanese woman's role would be difficult for her to follow. When she was in her mid-teens, young men and their parents came to her father's home, where she still lives, and made marriage proposals, something that is common in this community. She turned down these proposals. Sarah, who endured her family's disapproval of her short skirt, also has rejected suitors in order to pursue college studies. Her mother expressed both pride and misgivings about her daughter's decision. The fact that the mother had come to terms with it was surprising in view of the fact that her elder daughter had married at the age of seventeen. Both Amina and Sarah come from the same village in the Bekaa and have parents with very little education. Yet these parents have accepted—to some degree, at least—their daughters' ambitions. These cases notwithstanding, there is still great ambivalence in this community over the issue of higher education versus early marriage for girls.

Layla is seventeen and expecting her first child. At the age of fourteen, she returned to her village of Bint Jubeil to become engaged to her cousin who was also living in the United States. She completed only two years of high school but expresses no regret. Her neighbor, Zeynab from the Bekaa, was also engaged while in high school. She did graduate, but now that she has been married for a few years, she expresses regret that she did not have more schooling. Her husband resists the idea of her taking any college courses or working outside the home at all. Her job is to stay home and take care of their child and the house.

I attended a huge wedding of a teenage girl, not yet out of high school. Radiant with excitement on her wedding day, she expressed no hesitation about her marriage. As I sat at the table at the party, a friend from Bint Jubeil, who was married at the age of thirteen herself, pointed out other women who had been teenage brides. There were many. Since it is illegal to be married in the state of Michigan before the age of sixteen, those who do not wish to wait simply go to another state that permits marriage at an earlier age.

While it is interesting to know that girls continue to marry at a young age, it is more interesting for this study to discuss what they are doing after they marry.

By and large, they are cleaning their houses. They are mopping walls and floors, washing windows, disinfecting their bathrooms, and scrubbing their kitchens. Frequently, they have two kitchens, one upstairs for show and one in the basement where they actually cook, although this one is also cleaned avidly. In fact, the main floor of most houses is just for receiving guests. The refinished basement is where the family tends to spend its time. There is never any mess or clutter. The women have total intolerance for the slightest disarray, let alone dirt.

Of course, the question arises of whether this passion for cleanliness has anything to do with religion. I believe it does. Or, to be more precise, I believe the Lebanese Shi'a believe it does. A second-generation Lebanese, giving a sermon at the Jami' one day, commented that "Islam is the cleanest religion." Islam very much in this case means Shi'ism and its purity code. Mazzaoui's comment that Arab Shi'ism takes an exoteric form as opposed to the esoteric Iranian Shi'ism is pertinent here. I believe the Lebanese are interpreting the purity code in such a way that it leads them to an almost compulsive attitude toward cleanliness, which would be consistent with their practical, nonmystical approach to religion.

Women do not spend hours a day cleaning their houses because their husbands come home from work to inspect them. Anyone watching a Lebanese woman doing housecleaning knows that she does it from her own heart. No one has to tell her. However, her husband does share her values on cleanliness. When a house is purchased by a Lebanese man, he immediately repaints it and often sets about gutting it, removing the drywall, carpets, tile, bathroom fixtures, and so on. Everything should be new and clean. People who have just purchased a used home invariably tell me that it was "filthy" when they bought it. How much this is a reaction to living in a house owned previously by unbelievers I cannot say, but the zealotry with which the house is stripped does suggest that fear of impurity is at least partially the cause.

One could argue that this obsession with cleanliness is Lebanese rather than specifically Shi'i Lebanese or that it is common to all Shi'a, regardless of nationality. As for the latter theory, to my knowledge no one has ever commented on the Iranian Shi'a's overcommitment to cleanliness, and in my time spent with Iranians I never observed anything comparable to the Lebanese attitude. (This is not to say that Iranians are dirty, simply that there is more variation in household cleanliness standards than is found among the Lebanese Shi'a.) As for it being a generalized Lebanese trait, Judith Williams offers some indirect evidence that it is not. In her study of

Haouch el Harimi, a Sunni village in the Bekaa, she presents a striking contrast to the Shi'i community in her description of toilet training: "The child's training toward cleanliness proceeds rather casually. Most of the time the child's bottom is left free and women seem unperturbed if he soils in their lap or about the house."³⁷ She cites other research in Sunni villages to suggest that this approach to toilet training is widespread.

I observed no such casualness in Dearborn. Soiling a carpet or a mother's skirt would never be met with serenity. The woman who is "lazy" about toilet training faces criticism from family and friends. By the time a child is eighteen months old, diapers should be a thing of the past. American theories that a child should not be toilet trained until he or she is ready are greeted with contempt. This is just another indicator of American slovenliness. This attitude toward toilet training is in keeping with every other aspect of the Lebanese Shi'a's life. Comments they make on a daily basis indicate that cleanliness and religion are linked in their minds.

Mut'a

When I discussed the role of the *marji' taqlid* in the community, I introduced the topic of *mut'a*, translated as "temporary" or, more correctly, "pleasure" marriage. I cited the "official" definitions of this type of marriage and some of its requirements and restrictions. Throughout the centuries, the topic of temporary marriage has been debated, largely because the Sunnis reject it. The second caliph, Omar, who is almost universally hated by the Shi'a as the great usurper of the Imam 'Ali's position, abolished the practice, although it appears that it was permissible in the time of the Prophet. The imams, those descendants of the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, and her husband, 'Ali, who became the religious leaders of the Shi'i community until the occultation of the Twelfth Imam in the ninth century, have elucidated on this subject. The belief that *mut'a* is acceptable, and actually something religiously encouraged, is part of Shi'i dogma. Shahla Haeri offers an account of the practice of *mut'a* in the shrine cities of Iraq and Iran and explains the rationale behind the practice: "*Mut'a* marriage is an institution in which the relationships between the sexes, marriage, sexuality, morality, religious rules, secular laws, and cultural practices converge. At the same time it is the kind of custom that puts religion and popular culture at odds. Whereas religiously there is no restriction for virgin women to contract a temporary marriage, popular culture demands that a woman be a virgin for her first permanent marriage."³⁸ It is

this tension between religion and popular culture that is of greatest interest to me.

I have not elected to focus on *mut'a* because it is a practice that is rampant in this community. Rather, I have done so because people's reactions to this institution reveal so much about their attitudes toward religion and toward women.

Soon after I arrived in Dearborn, I occasionally heard rumors that *mut'a* was being encouraged by the sheikhs. To be more specific, young men in public places were discussing the matter in terms that suggested that the sheikhs were saying that a young man could have an affair with an American woman as long as he formed a contract with the woman making her a *mut'i*.

More than a year elapsed before I was actually to encounter people who claimed to have formed a *mut'a* marriage. The first was a middle-aged woman who had just fled her husband, leaving behind her older children. She claimed to be homeless, and through neighbors I became involved in her problems. When the issue of legal assistance came up, she said that she was actually divorced from the man she had just fled. However, some time after the divorce, she had returned to him as a *mut'i* and had lived with him ever since. Various members of this family, which has become notorious in the community, have had problems with the law and have actually been imprisoned, mostly for drug dealing. My impression is that this woman simply returned to her former husband and now refers to their relationship as *mut'a* to preserve some sense of dignity before her God-fearing neighbors. It is highly doubtful that any contract was ever involved.

The second case was that of a young man, Mahmoud S., who, as he told me quite bluntly, simply desired a sexual relationship that was religiously sanctioned. He said it was futile in his circumstances to hope that a Lebanese girl would marry him because he was a student and had no job yet. He began to approach American women to ask them if they would agree to a *mut'a* marriage. He reported that all of them laughed at him except one. This woman, a divorcee, married him temporarily. She eventually converted, at least nominally, to Islam, and they have since married in the presence of a sheikh with the purpose of forming a permanent union. I have been told that it is not uncommon for temporary unions to end up as permanent marriages.

In 1989, Sheikh Berri wrote a small book entitled *Temporary Marriage in Islam*, which was published locally. The fact that he would take the time and effort to write such a tract indicated that there must be a fair amount of concern regarding this issue, at least in some circles.

As time passed, I began to realize that aside from attitudes toward religion, the issue of temporary marriage would also help to illuminate this community's attitudes toward women and marriage. While initially I feared that people would not be forthcoming, I found to the contrary that there were many who were willing to expound on the subject and to share their personal views (that is, after they recovered from the initial shock that I knew about the practice).

Sheikh Berri's Text on *Mut'a*

Sheikh Berri formulates his treatise in a conventional style used in Shi'ism. (Unfortunately, the translation of Berri's text does not do justice to his facility with language. He is known for his excellent Arabic, and, though he has become quite facile with English in a short period of time, he apparently did not feel qualified to write in English.) This small book is based on questions he has received regarding the topic. The answers are framed in response to the concerns of one young man who says that "in his heart [he feels] it [temporary marriage] is an immoral act." The young man goes on to say that he would not accept *mut'a* for his sisters and doesn't believe that the other *mu'minin* brothers (good Muslims) would do so, either.

Berri prefaces his comments with a scenario about a beautiful girl (one has a definite sense that she is American) who has seduced a believer and given him AIDS. In this way, he couches his argument in favor of *mut'a*, substantiated by the sayings of the early imams, in terms of it being a solution to the pressures of a highly sexualized environment.

Not surprisingly, the caliph Omar is condemned for having made *mut'a* illegal. Berri cites, as his first defense, proof from the Koran that it was permissible in the times of the Prophet. On the other hand, he still seeks logical justification for the practice in these modern times: "Isn't corruption to let the young men and women fall in the traps of adultery, weird sex, and homosexuality? Or is it maybe to seek God's protection, words and his laws of marriage and the organization of sexual relationship the corruption. Therefore temporary marriage is one of chastity and love, and a form of decency and conservatism and is not an indecency. Nor is it like the 'friendship' of boys and girls which was known before Islam, and is revived by the Western culture."³⁹

He goes on to address the issue of a man allowing his sister to form a temporary marriage: "Is the standard that the brother

accepts or rejects? Isn't it first the satisfaction of Almighty God's will and then the sister herself? Or maybe the religion of God should submit to the desires of the brother and his jealousy. Anyway some brothers do accept. Also, why would a brother in many cases allow himself to do things he prevents his sister from doing? Doesn't he do that to protect 'himself' from social shame? And that 'shame' is not it a fake and an improper one? And did it not originate from 'tradition' not the right sensing? If not, why then would he do things that he does not allow her to do?"⁴⁰

While one should not forbid *mut'a* for virgins on general principles, Sheikh Berri does not condemn the father who will not permit his virgin daughter to form a *mut'a* marriage, as long as permission is denied on the grounds that he is safeguarding her well-being.

He continues, "Temporary marriage is seen as a way of avoiding sinfulness, especially during young maturity." It is also a means of protecting oneself from sexually transmitted disease, because a man is supposed to choose a "virtuous woman" as his *mut'i*. Berri dispels the idea that this type of union is purely for sex, saying instead that love can exist in a temporary union, as it can in a permanent one.

He also states that "temporary marriage is not encouraged when the continuous [marriage] is available."⁴¹ Addressing the issue of how many temporary wives are allowed at one time, he cites sources saying that four is the limit (as it is in so-called continuous marriage) and other sources saying there is no limit.

A great deal is being said about this community in the above quotes from Berri's book.

In the first place, the young man inquiring about the practice has strong misgivings about it. Sheikh Berri does not have to inquire about his hesitations. The idea of *mut'a*, especially for a virgin, runs contrary to the value Lebanese culture places on virginity. Sheikh Berri claims that the Koran permits the practice, while Lebanese culture insists that it is forbidden. But Berri is a Lebanese himself and the father of daughters. He finds a loophole. The father can reject *mut'a* for his daughter on the grounds that it is personally not good for her. In doing this, he rejects the notion that culture is more powerful and important than religion while at the same time he protects the cultural norm of virginity for unmarried women. Furthermore, he reinforces the Islamic (and cultural) prerogatives given to the male head of the household.

It is indeed very striking that he should advocate a sister having the same rights as her brother in matters of sexuality (although

he also indicates that the father has authority to forbid the union). It can be argued, of course, that he is simply giving the *mujtahids'* opinions on the matter. But Sheikh Berri has carefully selected what he has presented about *mut'a*. What he has given us is not a hodge-podge of quotes from the imams and the *mujtahids*. (Indeed, Khomeini and other ayatollahs are far more ardent in their encouragement of the practice than is Berri.) Rather, he is responding to issues of Lebanese culture and the problems he is having to deal with in the United States. By saying that a girl can elect to form a *mut'a*, he is giving a way out to the headstrong girl, who, defying her parents' authority, has a sexual relationship with a man outside marriage. Meanwhile, he is still protecting the rights of the father.

When I interviewed Maher, a man affiliated with the Majma' who has a close ear to the ground in the community, he said that while it is not recommended that a young girl form a *mut'a* marriage, he could see that in the case of a rebellious daughter who wanted to have a sexual relationship, *mut'a* could be a solution. By stating that the possibility exists for a girl to form a temporary union, Berri is thereby discouraging families from taking drastic measures against her. By drastic measures, I am referring to the possibility of killing her, something that was not unusual in Lebanon, especially in the Bekaa. In fact, in 1987 in Dearborn, a Shi'i man killed his teenage daughter on the grounds that she was having an affair with a man and destroying the honor of the family.

In this text, Berri is addressing young unmarried men who are not yet in a position to marry. He is attempting to discourage casual sex and is encouraging sex within religiously sanctioned parameters. When he addresses the issue of married men forming *mut'a* marriages, he cites traditions that discourage the practice for married men, though he could easily have found ones that do the opposite. He chooses to quote from the Imam Al-Rida, who is reported to have said, "but do not persist on pleasure marriage where it would keep you occupied from your continuous wives. Then they would reject the faith, complain, and then accuse us and curse us."⁴²

Sheikh Berri has given us the legalistic view (albeit a relatively conservative one in comparison to that of other *'ulama*) of the practice of *mut'a*. The question now arises of how this view fits with that of the community.

Community Attitudes toward *Mut'a*

For elderly Hajja Sharifi, the worst thing a person can do is to commit stupid acts—things that are *haram* (forbidden)—stealing,

drinking, becoming *mut'is*. Like Sharifi, young Ghalia is also from the Bekaa, and she also hates *mut'a*. "It should never be allowed," she said. Nisrene, from the religiously strict village of Nabatiyeh, doesn't like it, either: "If you want to get married, do it the ordinary way." From Bint Jubeil in southern Lebanon, Najwa, still in her teens but married with a baby, said that *mut'a* is *haram*: "only Hizb Allah have *mut'a*." In her home village in the Bekaa, Amina has heard that *mut'a* is now practiced and is causing a great deal of trouble in families. "It's all because of Hizb Allah," she said. "We never had *mut'a* there before." Elderly Um Zuheir, who recently made her pilgrimage to Mecca and who originates from Ba'albek and a Beirut suburb, says that *mut'a* is "against religion."

Samira dissents from this view. The "born again" young woman who spent her school years in America heartily approves of the practice. Wearing her gigantic scarf and flowing "coat," she lectured me on the virtues of *mut'a*, which she supports "100 percent." She went on, "It is a rule sent by God to man. We cannot forbid it because of this." I asked her for her personal opinion on the matter, but she said she could not give me one, that she must tell me only what is written in the books. "*Mut'a* is to protect society. It is for married men, but not married women, because man and woman are different. Man has a much stronger sex drive. A woman isn't always interested in sex like a man is. When a woman is pregnant or menstruating, she has to refuse her husband because it is *makruh* [undesirable but not prohibited] to have sex during these times, especially during menstruation. You can have a deformed child if you get pregnant during your period. So a man can get a *mut'a*. She cannot stop her husband from doing this. She should not ask him about it even."

There are others in this community who share Samira's religious and political views, but I have yet to hear such a forceful defense of *mut'a* from any other woman. The Shari'a-minded tend to pay lip service to the practice. And they all agreed that it was not for a virgin and that they did not see it as being for married men, either. Lila, also part of the earlier immigration and, like Samira, having opted for a strict interpretation of religion, tended to justify *mut'a* on the grounds that it was part of religious dogma. She realizes that her husband is entitled to have a *mut'a*, and they have discussed the subject. He apparently has no intention of getting one, which Lila admitted was good because she "would probably kill him" if he did. She also said that she saw it being abused by young single men, and she was not hesitant to chastise them for this.

It was almost unanimous that *mut'a* was not for virgins, but the dissenting view on this came from an interesting source. The

one woman I interviewed who rejects religion for leftist ideology said that she saw *mut'a* as a good way to legitimize sex for unmarried women, though, she added, such a thing wouldn't be socially acceptable.

Selwa, a Shari'a-minded woman but one who is not political, claimed that she does not agree with *mut'a*. This raised the hackles of an Iraqi woman who asked, "How can you not agree with something your religion preaches? You might not like to practice it, but to say you don't agree with it is wrong." This is the "religiously correct" response for Lebanese women to use with the issue of *mut'a*, but apparently they have not learned it yet. Most of them reject the practice quite emphatically.

How do these responses fit with those of the men? Ali S., a young, married, college-educated man from the south, said, "Perhaps *mut'a* was a reasonable practice in the early days of Islam, but it has lost its purpose as far as I am concerned. It is no different from dating. Just because the name of God is said doesn't make it good."

Khalid, also from the south and with a college education but more religiously learned than Ali, replied initially, "It is legal prostitution." He then retracted this statement and admitted he was confused about the issue. "It is supposed to be a religious thing, and I guess I am leaning toward accepting it, but I don't quite see how a man can have more than one wife." He found it more acceptable for a single man than for a married man. But only a divorced or widowed woman could be a *mut'a*.

Ali H., a college student from the Bekaa, said that he disliked *mut'a*, which was something that only Hizb Allah did. Ashraf, a college graduate who grew up in the Beirut suburbs, could not find justification for *mut'a* but was being pressured by a relative sympathetic to Hizb Allah to form a *mut'a* marriage.

Muhammad T., who grew up in the United States and worked in a factory all his adult life, sees *mut'a* as a good idea, especially in view of the current conditions in America. "Every man can have a *mut'a*," he said, but quickly added that he has never had one. (His wife was in the other room at the time watching TV and seemed not to be listening. However, when he made this last comment, she looked toward me with a smile that said, "He knows what's good for him.")

But there are men who both approve of the practice and follow it. Muhammad F., a college student, is one of them. "It is a good solution for us because we are young students, and it is our only choice." This way, he said, they could have sex and not go against Islam. I asked Muhammad if it was possible to form *mut'a* marriages here with Lebanese girls. He said that a man could form a

temporary marriage with a free woman—someone divorced, widowed, or a virgin over eighteen, if, that is, she was living in the United States. If she was in Lebanon, she was under her father's or brother's guardianship, but not so here. He added that he rejected the Lebanese cultural attitudes against virgins being *mut'is*. Muhammad, young, serious-minded, and pro-Iranian, serves as a model of the sort of person who will form a *mut'a* marriage in this community. But he is not the only type.

Hassan, unmarried and a nightclub swinger on Saturday nights, but in the Jami' on Sunday mornings, was, in some respects, more liberal in his interpretation of *mut'a* than anyone else to whom I spoke. Any man, whether married or not, according to Hassan, can have a temporary marriage, though he should know the woman first and not just walk up to her and make a proposition. The woman should be divorced or widowed.

Hassan parts company with almost everyone else I interviewed. According to my findings, those who believe a married man can form a *mut'a* relationship don't usually form them themselves. *Mut'a* remains for them a theoretical proposition, so to speak. A few older men, and I noted that they were ones who had spent long periods of time away from their wives at certain points in their married lives, said that *mut'a* was a way for them to meet their sexual needs while remaining within the law of Islam. Generally, though, those who do form *mut'a* relationships are the unmarried young men who do not see themselves as able to take on the responsibilities of marriage but are eager not to sin. However, as college student Issa added, *mut'a* is not to be taken lightly. If the woman becomes pregnant, it is up to the man to support the child.

Ali B.'s case was the most surprising. Around forty years of age and the image of the Lebanese nightclub entertainer, he was married with children to a Muslim woman. Having spent most of his life in America before the new wave of immigrants arrived, he had adjusted to American society more than most of the people in the community I have known. I was startled to learn that he himself had a *mut'a* wife. I ascertained from him that this woman was also Muslim and Arab but not Lebanese. Furthermore, this union was formed in the presence of a sheikh, and people were invited to the occasion. However, the marriage was not legal under American law. He told me that a man is entitled to as many as four wives if he can treat them all equally. He assured me that he could treat his two wives, one of whom he referred to as a *mut'a* wife, equally. Actually, I believe he has confused the two types of marriage, permanent and temporary. On the other hand, by calling his second marriage

mut'a, he has found a way around the American law against polygamy.

While the views expressed here are admittedly diverse, there are some definite overriding themes. It is apparent that *mut'a* was not a burning issue in Lebanon before the Iranian Revolution. A number of the people I spoke to had only become aware of it recently and since they had been residing in the United States. It is certainly not viewed as a Lebanese tradition. The fact that Sharifi knew of the practice, as did the older woman who said she had returned to her divorced husband as a *mut'i*, suggests, though, that the idea is not completely foreign to the Lebanese. In fact, it was probably only practiced by sheikhs and women who somehow found themselves on the periphery of society, much as Haeri discovered in Iran. In Lebanon, though, far away from the shrine cities, it was presumably done on a much smaller scale.

The consensus of the community is that, at best, *mut'a* is a hard pill to swallow. Women I spoke to, both formally and informally, overwhelmingly tended to express their dislike for the practice, and I often heard the comment that it was against religion. Some Shari'a-minded women have brothers who have formed *mut'a* unions, and they are quick to justify their brothers' behavior, but they also mention the limitations imposed on the union. They want *mut'a* to be seen as a serious matter and something very different from American "boyfriend-girlfriend" relationships.

While more men tended to accept the practice as justifiable, there was still no overwhelming praise of it. Mr. S., a mechanic from the Bekaa, said that it was acceptable for a man to form a *mut'a* marriage if he were going to be away from his wife for a long period of time. However, he added that it was far preferable for him to be loyal to his wife.

Only those who had totally accepted Khomeini's view of religion would accept the idea of a virgin as a temporary wife, and not even all of them. Maher is a case in point. While he knew such a thing was religiously permissible, his Lebanese values kept him from truly accepting this idea.

That this is a monogamous community has come across very strongly in my research. While men expect loyalty from their wives, wives can and do make the same demands. Considering that this is a community whose religion teaches that the men can have up to four permanent wives and an unlimited number of temporary ones, the men certainly aren't taking advantage of their options. While it could be argued that American law would prohibit taking multiple wives, there are ways around this law (such as Ali B. used) if men

are inclined to seek them. The Shi'i Lebanese, whether here or in Lebanon, have not viewed polygyny as the norm. It does occur in Lebanon, but it is definitely the exception rather than the rule.

Afaf, a pretty, bright, and spirited woman from the Bekaa, claimed that she would not like to live in Iran or Pakistan; she had heard that women were treated badly there. In those countries, "men can have more than one wife!" she said with disgust. Wafa told me that she would leave her husband immediately if he ever cheated on her "even once!"

It should also be noted that divorce is still greatly frowned upon among the Lebanese living in the Dearborn area. One of the great fears in this community is that divorce will become more prevalent as a result of influence from American society. I have discussed this matter with Sheikh Berri, who admits to spending a great deal of his time counseling troubled couples. He does see divorce on the rise and expresses concern for this problem. However, he has also done some research on divorce rates in America and finds that there is no comparison between those rates and the ones he finds among his flock. Sheikh Burro also expressed grave concerns that the Muslims in this community would begin to follow American patterns in matters of divorce, reminding me of the saying that divorce is "the worst of the things that are [religiously] permitted." Clearly, divorce will be discouraged actively by the clergy.

Berri's little book on the subject of *mut'a* has not become a best-seller in this community. Except for women such as Samira and her close acquaintances, the few women I have known who are curious about what is contained in the book are too embarrassed to go to the bookstore to purchase it. They fear that the shop owner will think they want to apply the practice themselves.

Whether or not people read the book or even know of its existence, there is obviously a growing awareness of the practice as well as a growing concern that young men will "misinterpret" the use of *mut'a*, that they will seduce Lebanese girls into forming temporary unions. Um Hamood, well educated in the teachings of Islam and very Shari'a-minded, scolded a young man who formed a *mut'a* marriage. She asked him if he would allow his sister to form such a union. She said "this shut him up." She conceded that it was acceptable to form a *mut'a* if one could not marry but added, "We really hate this practice." Though I have been led to believe that most of these *mut'a* marriages are with Americans, it is obvious from comments of Um Hamood and others that some Lebanese girls are involving themselves in these unions. Should the girls in this community see *mut'a* as a legitimate way to fulfill their sexual needs,

this community could face extraordinary turmoil in the near future, which, I believe, would ultimately force the extinction of the practice in Dearborn.

Mosques and Women

One Sunday morning at the Jami', a dozen or so women, members of the women's auxiliary, were in the kitchen busily preparing a meal to be served after the conclusion of the sermons. At the same time, the woman in charge was arranging the food order for a children's picnic. While there may no longer be dancing and music at the mosques, the purely social occasions do remain an important part of mosque life. As with any church in America, the social functions would not exist without the women.

When I asked people about the differences between Islamic life here and back home, half of the women who had lived part of their lives in Lebanon told me that women were in the mosque much more frequently here than they had been in Lebanon. In fact, some women told me they had never set foot inside a mosque before they came to Dearborn. A group of women from the Bekaa recalled how they had occasionally congregated outside the mosque during holidays but rarely went inside. It had been a men's domain. In the 1970s, Prothro and Diab reported that "in the Levant generally women are not to be found at the daily prayers at the mosque, do not attend the Friday services, and are not even present in the mosque at funerals of close relatives."⁴³ In the Dearborn area, the situation is far different. Except for *salat*, women are as likely as men to attend affairs at all three mosques. Interestingly, men never volunteered that this was one of the differences. In cases where I specifically mentioned my observations about women in the mosques, they grudgingly admitted that these were correct.

Another difference noted was the issue of sexual segregation inside the mosques. In towns and villages where women did attend mosques on occasion, the two sexes were expected to be isolated from each other. A woman who has been attending the Jami' since it first opened its doors said, "Over here, the women and men are together for 'Ashura. Back home, they were separate."

At the Majma', the men and women are still separate for 'Ashura, although for strictly social occasions that appeal to the general community, men and women do sit together.

There are other differences between the Majma' and the Jami' as well. A women's auxiliary does not exist at the Majma' as it does at the Jami'. This is not surprising because second- and third-gener-

ation American Shi'a with exposure to American voluntary organizations are less likely to be found at the Majma' than at the Jami'. Yet the absence of this organization does not appear to keep "the sisters" from playing an important role. Rather than being in the kitchen, they can be found in the meeting rooms. Women come and go almost as freely as men to socialize and to study under the sheikh or one of the more learned "brothers." A few are involved in children's classes.

Not everyone at the Majma' likes to concede that women are spending more time there. The very Shari'a-minded wanted to make it clear that a woman's place was in the home, not in the mosque. Yet one woman in *hijab*, an open advocate of Harakat Amal, expressed great indignation upon seeing for the first time a sign in a college cafeteria reading, "Please Bus Your Tray. Your Mother Does Not Work Here." She resented the fact that women were being portrayed as domestic servants and not as active members of society.

Whether or not they want to admit it, women are spending considerable amounts of time at the Majma'—and these are the Shari'a-minded. One man who admitted that women were at the Majma' more than they had been in the mosque in Lebanon said it was because the women were bored at home. Living in Dearborn, he argued, they did not have the same opportunities to visit in one another's homes as they did back in the village. I must say I have not noticed a lack of visiting in this community. But, whatever the reason, women are present in the mosques, and this is bound to have an effect on the religious life of the community.



"Religion is a woman's job." These words, uttered by an Italian-American Catholic woman, reflected the sentiments found in a community where family, home life, and religion were closely linked. In this ethnic community, it was the women who filled the churches on Sunday morning, not the men.

While church attendance was more evenly balanced between the genders in other ethnic communities, nineteenth-century immigrant Catholic women were seen as preservers of morals and virtues. Between 1830 and 1920, "the importance of domesticity was continually stressed throughout the culture, and woman was placed upon a pedestal, enshrined as the moral guardian of the family."⁴⁴ Later, women continued to be active, especially in the devotional religion that took hold in the churches.

Yet they did not run the churches. Men, as the ones responsible for the public sphere of life, were vestry members and participants in regional and state conventions. Men were the parish trustees, and only men could vote for such trustees.

A visit to a Catholic church today shows how much the scene has changed. A man might stand beyond the communion rail and consecrate the Eucharist, but his role is very much diminished. Without the women of the parish, it is unlikely that the local churches would have remained such potent forces in the lives of Catholic Americans. Of course, Vatican II is partially responsible for these developments. More importantly, though, it seems that American Catholics were simply influenced by the same social forces that affected the Protestant churches in this country.

In her study of the role of women in religion in New England, Nancy Cott wrote that as early as the mid-seventeenth century, "while the church hierarchy remained distinctly male the majority of women in their congregations increased and ministers felt compelled to explain it."⁴⁵ By the nineteenth century, Protestantism had been feminized, and ministers took for granted that their congregations were largely comprised of women.

Women may have started out in Christian churches as simply a quiet majority, but they eventually became politically powerful. Again, quoting from Cott, "Women's prayer groups, charitable institutions, missionary and education societies, Sabbath School organizations, and moral reform and maternal associations all multiplied phenomenally after 1800, and all of these had religious motives."⁴⁶ Voluntary associations were as common among these early American women as they were among men, but the focus for women was always religious.

It is generally assumed that sexual segregation, at least for women, will have a deleterious effect on gaining formal power. But Cott says that sex-segregated prayer meetings served as "prototypes of religious organizations exclusively for women."⁴⁷ Cott offers various explanations for women's involvement in religion, but perhaps the most persuasive is that it allowed them the one arena of life where they could exercise their "full range of moral, intellectual, and physical powers."⁴⁸

Cott's findings are indeed very relevant to this discussion. While currently the men in the mosques hold all the formal power, the fact that women are increasingly finding a place for themselves at the mosques is bound to upset the status quo. Not meek and retiring by nature—even the casual observer notices this—the Lebanese women in this community will, I believe, begin to assert themselves

more and more in the running of the mosques, even though at the present time they seem to accept the power structure as it is. I do not see this change resulting from a Western-style "women's liberation" movement; rather, I see it evolving in the same manner as it did for Catholic and Protestant women and for the same reasons. Changes most likely will occur within the framework of Islam, only with an expanded interpretation of the role of women. Outside ideology probably will not play a role directly. The Lebanese women already wield considerable influence in their homes. The vast majority of Lebanese women jointly control the family finances and share decision making with their husbands.⁴⁹ Lebanese women do not need to look to American women as role models.

However, American approaches to organization will have, and already are having, an effect. For example, a few women, those of the earlier wave of immigration who have been educated in America, obviously do wield some power because of their intimate knowledge of American society and their administrative competence. From observing their behavior, it is obvious that they have an "insider's" role in the mosques.

In the summer of 1990, there was a dinner (catered by one of the local Lebanese restaurants) in honor of "the ladies," as they are always called, because they had raised ten thousand dollars for the Jami'. Several speakers, who were all male leaders of the mosque, praised the women for their efforts on behalf of the Islamic Center. Finally, the head of the women's auxiliary, a second-generation American, came to the podium and was presented with a plaque. In her acceptance speech, she said, "We [the women] have finally gained recognition, and it took ten thousand dollars to do it." She said this goodnaturedly, and it drew laughter, but she is the same person who said to me on another occasion, "Islam gave women their rights, and the Arabs took these rights away."

Also of interest on this occasion was the fact that a city board member, a woman of Lebanese extraction, presented an award to the women's auxiliary. This was the second time I had witnessed a woman of Lebanese background address a gathering at a mosque in Dearborn (with the exception of the woman being presented the award). The first time was at the Majma', where the woman was a lawyer with the law firm representing the Majma' in its attempt to build a school. In both cases, these were professional and public women who had to be treated with special deference. No doubt, as time goes on, there will be more such occasions. People with political clout and community influence are valued, whether they are men or women. The leaders of the mosques are well aware of

women's importance to the Islamic community and are not likely to want to alienate them. Denying a prominent woman, whether Muslim or not, access to the podium on the basis of her sex would certainly be to no one's benefit. (However, it is yet to be seen whether the Majlis would allow such an occurrence.)

While an individual woman's moment at the podium expounding on essentially nonreligious topics is not significant in and of itself, it does at least send the message to the congregation that traditions cannot always be strictly adhered to in America. Furthermore, the young girls witnessing these assertive and confident women speaking publicly before men and other women will certainly be influenced. Some of these young girls already have had the experience of performing recitations, either singly or in groups, at the Jami' and the Majma' as part of their Arabic school programs. I believe that such seemingly small instances of visibility in the mosques will lead to larger roles for women and girls in the running of the religious community.

Another factor that will likely affect women's place in the religious community is the influence of the non-Arab Muslim women who frequent the mosques. These women are mostly Americans who have married Lebanese men. They are extremely fervent about their religion and are among the most heavily covered of the women in the community. While they are very conservative in their religious views, they also bring with them some very American behaviors and attitudes. For example, when I first met these women at the Majma', they were running a rummage sale for Lebanese orphans. Except for their dress, they could have passed for the ladies' auxiliary in any American church. When the earthquake struck Iran, it was these American women who organized garage sales and bake sales to raise money. Such activities draw in the Lebanese women to some extent, and ultimately these isolated activities could lead to the organization of full-fledged voluntary associations.

While voluntary associations did begin to appear in the Beirut suburbs before the outbreak of civil war, they seem to have been totally under male control.⁵⁰ A different situation could occur in Dearborn since women now have a central place for congregating—the mosques. Furthermore, there are pressing issues that concern women, particularly those involving the morals of their children. This could be a rallying point for women to organize themselves.



CHAPTER 4

Gathering Strength: The Emergence of American Shi'ism

When the natural world, the former context of the peasant ideas, faded behind the transatlantic horizon, the newcomers found themselves stripped to those religious institutions they could bring along with them. Well, the trolls and fairies will stay behind, but church and priest at very least will come.¹

SOMETIME AFTER I completed my fieldwork in Dearborn, I visited a mosque in another part of the country during Ramadan. Although Shi'a were certainly not unwelcome at this mosque, Sunnis were the only ones in attendance. Those present on that occasion originated from Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The women were downstairs, the men upstairs. There was no contact whatsoever between the two groups. As I sat with the other women, I reflected on how different an experience this was from the ones to which I had grown so accustomed. While cordiality and hospitality were not lacking, something was missing—and it was not just the men. I realized afterward that what I had found missing was the sense of utter coherence and deeply felt understanding that comes only when all present share in that indefinable essence called culture.

The Islamic group I studied in Dearborn is both distinctively Lebanese and distinctively Shi'i. They are unique. They may share a common set of Islamic values and practices with Muslims all over the world, but their Shi'ism differentiates them in a deep and