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And We have not sent you,
[O Muammad], except as a mercy
to the worlds.

(*) Al-Anbiyā'107





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Editorial Note

In the Name of
Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most
Compassionate

All praise is due to Allah, who sent His Prophet with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail over all other religions. He is sufficient as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner. May peace and blessings be upon Muhammad, the Chosen One, whose prophethood enlightened minds and whose message uplifted values, and upon his noble Household and his chosen Companions.

With each issue of Our Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household), we renew our connection with the noble Prophetic biography—not merely as a historical account but as a continuous source of insight, a field for reflection, and a space for critical and scholarly engagement, especially in response to the various challenges, misconceptions, and ideological distortions raised against it.

In this ninth issue, we shed light on multiple themes that re-examine the Prophetic biography through legal, political, social, and intellectual lenses. In our study of Prophetic migration, we revisit this foundational event from both a legal and political perspective, revealing its vital role in state-building and identity formation. In a critical review of how Western writings have portrayed the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) up to the time of the Crusades, we trace the contours of distortion and instrumentalization. We also highlight



the dangers
of ideologically driven readings
of the Qur'an and Hadith and their impact on
shaping Islam's political identity.

This issue also includes a study on the right to privacy in the Prophetic biography, demonstrating how the noble Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) offered a sublime model for upholding human dignity. The issue concludes with a critical reading of the Prophet's image in Thomas Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship*, striking a balance between admiration and fairness while exploring the cultural filters through which the "other" receives his image.

In this and every issue of the magazine, we strive to bridge academic research with the noble Prophetic mission—defending it, refuting falsehoods imposed upon it, and affirming its values in a world overwhelmed by distortion and malicious interpretations.

We pray that Allah accepts this endeavor and grants it reward in the scale of all who serve the Sunnah of His Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) and exert themselves in its defense. And our final word is: praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

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An Ideological Reading of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Hadith: The Clash of Narratives in Shaping the Political Identity of Islam



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An Ideological Reading of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Hadith: The Clash of Narratives in Shaping the Political Identity of Islam

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Abstract

This study explores the most prominent methods used in reinterpreting prophetic texts in the context of intellectual, social, and political conflicts following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household). It relies on an ideological reading of prophetic texts based on six key elements: systematization, action orientation, justification, legitimation, universalization, and naturalization. The study examines how the Salafi school presented a reversed interpretation of prophetic texts and justified the legitimacy of alternative leadership. It sheds light on the main strategies employed by ruling powers, including the reinterpretation of the Hadith of Ghadir, by exploiting tribal norms to establish a new political system and completely marginalize the opposition. The study aims to demonstrate the political reading of prophetic texts and the ideological exploitation involved in reshaping political narratives in Islam.

Introduction

When an individual seeks to establish a school of thought, an idea, or a religious, political, or social ideology, they must first lay down the theoretical foundations that will serve as a reference point for all actions and decisions made by the followers of that school. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household) was no exception to this rule, as he sought to establish a leadership theory through various textual and rational means.

The Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) utilized several occasions to emphasize the principles of governance and leadership in his Islamic school. The Qur'an itself offered several affirmations in this regard. It presents leadership as divine and non-negotiable: "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a vicegerent" (Al-Baqarah 2:30). The phrase "Indeed I" emphasizes the exclusivity and certainty of the appointment, leaving no room for debate or intervention, even from the angels who are infallible and do not err. Suppose God did not grant the angels any authority to choose or express opinion regarding leadership on earth. How can human tribes and communities assume a role in this matter, which God has reserved exclusively for Himself? Thus, God categorically rejected any human or political interference in the imposition of sovereignty or the selection of a leader.

The Qur'an continues to explain the nature of political leadership as a matter of divine designation, revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) for public declaration: "O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you" (Al-Nisa' 4:59). This verse emphasizes obedience to the Prophet and those "in authority" who have been divinely appointed as successors on earth. The verse does not refer to caliphs chosen by people through consultation (shura), coercion, or tribal dominance. Instead, it relates to those God designated as guardians and successors via explicit revelation through the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household).

It appears from some Qur'anic verses that even the Prophet was not granted au-

thority to appoint a caliph of his own will. This authority remained solely with God, as seen in the verse: “And if he had made up about Us some [false] sayings, We would have seized him by the right hand; then We would have cut from him the aorta” (Al-Haqqah 69:44–46). The Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) was not to exercise *ijtihad* in succession nor show favoritism in granting this position. He could not appoint a caliph based on personal preferences or tribal norms, which were dominant in that Arab society. The Qur’an firmly closes this door, reserving the authority to appoint a caliph exclusively to God. Moreover, the Prophet was far removed from tribalism and familial favoritism. There is even a narration recorded by al-Bukhari—though deemed weak by Shi’a scholars—in which the Prophet reportedly said: “By God, if Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, were to steal, I would cut off her hand.”¹

Although the Shi’a tradition rejects the authenticity of this Hadith, it is considered valid by the standards of the Sunni hadith collections. Suppose the Prophet rejected tribal favoritism even regarding his daughter. In that case, all the more reason for the followers of the Sunni tradition to accept the succession of Imam Ali is not based on kinship but on divine designation revealed to the Prophet.

However, after the Prophet’s death, tribal interests overrode divine directives. The Prophet’s sayings—affirming the divine designation of Imam Ali—were still fresh in people’s memories. Still, it was not easy for them to abandon what they inherited from their ancestors. Power had always been seized through force and the sword. There was no space to implement the Prophet’s values and theories of governance, for “power is barren.” Schools of justification emerged, rejecting the Prophetic teachings, interpretations, and actions that consistently affirmed Ali’s succession.

The rival school could not outright deny the large number of hadiths narrated by numerous companions, so it rejected the Prophetic authority altogether. This is evident in the incident known as “Thursday’s Calamity” (Raziyat al-Khamis) when Ibn Abbas said: “Thursday! And what a Thursday that was!” He then began to weep until

1 Muhammad ibn Ismail Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, ed. Mustafa Al-Dhahabi (Dar Al-Hadith) vol. 8, p. 165, HaH dith 6788.

his tears fell like pearls on his cheeks. He narrated: "The Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his Household) said: 'Bring me a pen and paper so that I may write for you something after which you will never go astray.' But they said: 'The Messenger of God is delirious.'"²

There is a deep divide between the two schools in their approach to the issue of succession—between the Prophetic school of revelation and the Salafi school of justification. The Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) was far removed from tribal standards and focused on divine designation and moral excellence in leadership. In a narration, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari once asked the Prophet to appoint him to a position. The Prophet struck his shoulder and said: "O Abu Dharr, you are weak, and it is a trust. And on the Day of Judgment, it will be a cause of disgrace and regret."³

The Prophet also said about Abu Dharr: "The earth has not carried nor the sky shaded anyone more truthful in speech than Abu Dharr."⁴ Despite this high praise, the Prophet denied his request for a position because he adhered to divine criteria imposed upon him from the heavens.

In contrast, the post-Prophetic Salafi school reverted to ancestral customs. During the debate at the Saqifah of Banu Sa'idah, Umar said: "By God, the Arabs will never accept leadership from you while the Prophet was from us and not from you. The Arabs will not give their allegiance to anyone other than the tribe from which prophethood came. We have a stronger claim. Who would dispute our authority over Muhammad's legacy when we are his close kin and tribe?"⁵

This reflects a profound difference between the Prophet's method—sent to perfect moral character—and the Salafi school that rejected his instructions in pursuit of

2 Muslim ibn Al-Hajjaj Al-Nisaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, ed. Muhammad Fouad Abdul-Baqi (Beirut: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-Arabi.) 1637.

3 Muhammad Nasir al-Din Al-Albani, *Ghayat Al-Maram Fi Takhrij Ahadith Al-Halal Wa-l-Haram* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1995), p. 174.

4 Muhammad Nasir al-Din Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Jami' Al-Saghir Wa Ziyadatuh* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1988), 5654.

5 Muhammad ibn Jarir Al-Tabari, *Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 1987), vol. 2, p. 459-461.

power. Hence, they relied on political justification and interpretation rather than divine revelation. As a result, a new hadith tradition emerged to support this trajectory.

The History of the Prophetic Hadith and Utilitarian Interpretations

The Prophetic Hadith has passed through a history marked by numerous events and intellectual, theological, and even military conflicts. It was very interesting to caliphs and sultans who sought to dominate governance. Military dominance alone was insufficient to impose authority over the Islamic state; the ruler needed something more vital than weaponry. The affairs of the state could not be managed without intellectual and ideological hegemony.⁶ It was not enough for a ruler to suppress opposition movements by force; history has proven that opposition tends to grow when met with violence. Thus, rulers throughout Islamic history resorted to asserting their control ideologically.⁷

As Mohammedali Al-Hilo notes: “The ruling apparatus practiced its authority even in the formation and structure of the text. Through this, it extracted intellectual concepts favoring its schools of thought. Many of these extracted concepts eventually became perceived as unquestionable Islamic givens, and the Islamic historian became a prisoner to these formulations of the Prophetic Hadith.”⁸

The authorities could not alter the Qur’anic text, as Muslims had memorized the verses and prevented any entity from tampering with or adding to the scripture. The caliphal apparatus could do no more than rearrange the order of verses and chapters⁹ ^{10 11}, but even this attempt failed to strip the Qur’an of its meanings and the significance of its revelations. The Qur’an remained a genuine threat to the legitimacy of

6 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, ed. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

7 Mujtaba Al-Hilo, “Desedimentation of Routine: Post-Crisis Invention of Tradition in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*,” *International Journal of Literature Studies*, 2023, 75–84, <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijts>, p. 78.

8 Mohammedali Al-Hilo, *Tarikh Al-Hadith Al-Nabawi: Bayn Sultat Al-Nass Wa-Nass Al-Sultah* (Qom: Al-Balagh Foundation, 2002), p. 5.

9 Jalal al-Din Al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum Al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2008), 62-70.

10 Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab Al-Masahif*, ed. Muhammad Ahmad Dahman (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1985), 15-22.

11 Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari, *Jami’ Al-Bayan ‘an Ta’wil Ay Al-Qur’An*, ed. Sadaqi Jamil Al-’Attar (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr, 2001) p. 45-50.

the caliphate. Numerous verses explicitly refer to appointing a legitimate successor after the Prophet's death. These verses were recited by the people daily. They repeated verses indicating political dissent in their prayers and daily recitations, and the ruling authorities could do nothing to stop it.

Texts Between Model Interpretation and Utilitarian Interpretation

The caliphate needed an intellectual system to counter the spiritual authority of the Quran. Relying solely on the Qur'an—as Umar ibn al-Khattab famously said during the incident of "Thursday's Calamity," "The Book of God is sufficient for us"¹²—revealed the dangers of such a methodology. This is because the Qur'an exposes any political party that claims legitimacy outside of what is explicitly stated in its verses. Thus, the caliphate required a new intellectual framework offering an alternative reading of the Qur'an—through interpretation and exegesis.

The Qur'an remains a silent book, requiring a reader to interpret it. There were two main approaches to dealing with the Qur'anic text. The first insisted on the necessity of a designated interpreter who truly understands both the outward and inward meanings of the verses. This school derived its interpretation from the Prophet himself, who was the recipient of divine revelation and fully knowledgeable of everything related to the Qur'an. The School of Ahl al-Bayt maintained a direct and continuous connection with the Prophet in every incident and movement. Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib described this proximity, saying:

"You all know my closeness to the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his Household) by kinship and a special position. He placed me on his lap while I was a child, embraced me to his chest, shared his bed with me, touched me with his body, and breathed his scent upon me. He would chew food and feed it to me. He never found a lie in my words nor a misstep in my actions. God attached to him the greatest of His angels from the time he was weaned, guiding him along the path of virtues and the noble ethics of the world, day and night. I followed him as a young camel followed its mother. Each day, he would show me an aspect of his character and command me

12 Al-Bukhari, Sahih Al-Bukhari, Hadith 6932.

to emulate it. He used to retreat in the Cave of Hira each year, and I alone would see him while no one else did. At that time, no house in Islam gathered its members except the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household), Khadija, and myself. I saw the light of revelation and smelled the fragrance of prophethood. And I heard the moaning of Satan when revelation descended upon him.”¹³

There was no doubt about this closeness and position. Muslims agreed that Ali was the closest to the source of the Qur’an and the most knowledgeable in its interpretation. However, political circumstances had a different agenda. Thus, the first school of interpretation is the traditional or model interpretation.

Italian novelist and critic Umberto Eco proposed this theory, considering it the only viable method for accessing a text’s true meaning. He stated: “The text is the foundation for constructing the model reader... The text can predict a model reader with the right to make infinite conjectures. The reader merely attempts to guess what kind of model reader the text assumes.”¹⁴ In this context, the Qur’anic text requires a model reader to offer informed interpretations. In contrast, the non-specialist reader offers only guesses or speculations about the intended meanings of the verses. Imam Ali sharply critiqued this difference in interpretations, saying:

“A case comes before one of them involving a legal judgment, and he rules according to his opinion. Then, the same case comes before another, and he rules contrary to the first. Then they gather before the leader who appointed them as judges, and he approves all of their opinions—even though their God is one, their Prophet is one, and their Book is one. Did God command them to disagree, and they obeyed, or did He forbid them, and they disobeyed? Or did God reveal an incomplete religion and seek their help in completing it? Or were they partners with Him, so they had a say, and He had to approve? Or did God reveal a complete religion, and the Prophet fell short in delivering and explaining it?”¹⁵

13 Abu al-Hasan Muhammad ibn al-Husayn; al-Sharif Al-Radi, *Nahj Al-Balagha*, ed. Subhi Al-Salih, 1st ed (Beirut, Lebanon, 1967), p. 157.

14 Christine Brooke-Rose Eco, Umberto, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 64.

15 Al-Radi, *Nahj Al-Balagha*, p. 288.

In contrast to the model interpretation of Ahl al-Bayt, the opposing school was the pragmatic political school. Richard Rorty, one of the leading figures in American pragmatism, stated: "There is no need to believe that there is one hidden meaning, or even a set of possible meanings, within a text that a reader must uncover."¹⁶

In other words, the text is not bound by a fixed set of meanings that interpreters must uncover, as it can offer infinite interpretations according to the reader's needs. He added, "The purpose of reading is not to discover what the author intended but to give the text a new and possibly different function."¹⁷ Rorty suggests that the text is a tool for achieving specific purposes, regardless of the author's original intent. Thus, the Qur'an becomes a political tool that rulers employ based on their needs and the moment's demands—without any binding principles or interpretive constraints.

One of the most prominent examples is the arbitration incident after the battle was settled in favor of Ali ibn Abi Talib. This incident illustrates how interpretation can overturn the balance of power to the point where the weapon of interpretation overcame the weapons of sword and spear. The battle was effectively over, with Ali's army overpowering Mu'awiyah's forces. Malik al-Ashtar was just a short distance from Mu'awiyah, yet 'Amr ibn al-'As employed the weapon of pragmatic interpretation. The opposing army raised Qur'ans and chanted "No judgment but God's"—about the verse: "The judgment is only God's" (Al-An'am 6:57). Upon hearing this, Imam Ali remarked: "It is a word of truth intended for falsehood. They did not raise it by God because they understood it or believed in it. It is nothing but deception, cowardice, and trickery."¹⁸ The situation was clear: Mu'awiyah had exploited the Qur'an for political and utilitarian purposes, offering a contextual reading to suit his aims.

This utilitarian and pragmatic reading of the Qur'anic text also extended to the Prophetic Hadith, which was used politically to establish new power equations. The Prophetic Hadith, like the Qur'an, was not immune from reinterpretation. The Proph-

16 Eco, Umberto, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p. 85.

17 Eco, Umberto, Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler, p. 94.

18 Nasr ibn Muzahim, *Waq'at Siffin*, ed. Abd al-Salam Muhammad Harun, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1998), p. 489.

et had intended specific meanings that the people understood well. However, political justifications saw it differently. The Hadith posed a real threat to the legitimacy of all the caliphates that emerged after the Prophet's death, as it clearly and explicitly identified the rightful leadership. Yet the "factories of justification" * A clear example of this utilitarian reading is the Hadith of Ghadir. Authorities reinterpreted the most significant line from the Prophet's sermon at Ghadir: "Whoever I am his master, Ali is his master." This Hadith is narrated by numerous sources and verified by many transmitters, with several versions:

"We returned with the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his Household) during his Farewell Pilgrimage. He stopped at a place and called for a congregation. He then took Ali's hand and said: 'Am I not more entitled to the believers than they are to themselves?' They said: 'Yes, indeed.' He said: 'Whoever I am, Ali is his master. O Allah, support whoever supports him, and oppose whoever opposes him.'"^{19 20 21}

Those seeking to undermine this Hadith initially attempted to question its authenticity despite most sources agreeing on its soundness. Al-Zayla'i wrote in *Takhreej al-Hidaya*: "How many a Hadith has numerous chains of narration and yet is weak, like the Hadith: 'Whoever I am his master, Ali is his master.'" ²² Ibn Taymiyyah wrote: "As for the statement: 'Whoever I am his master, Ali is his master,' it is not found in the authentic collections, but scholars narrate it. People have disputed its authenticity. It is reported that al-Bukhari, Ibrahim al-Harbi, and oth-

19 Muhammad ibn Yazid al-Qazwini Ibn Majah, *Sahih Ibn Majah*, ed. Shuaib Al-Arnaout, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Re'salah al-Alamiyyah, 2009).

20 Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Sader, n.d.).

21 Muhammad ibn Isa Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan Al-Tirmidhi*, ed. Bashar Awwad Marouf, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1996).

22 Jamal al-Din Abdullah ibn Yusuf Al-Zayla'i, *Nasb Al-Rayah Li-Ahadith Al-Hidayah*, ed. Muhammad Awwamah, 1st ed. (Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah for Islamic Culture, 1987), p. 189.

*A term used by Mohammedali Al-Hilo in several of his theories to refer to the narrators and jurists who undertook the task of justifying and legitimizing the usurpation of the caliphate from its rightful holders after the Prophet's death. See: *The History of the Prophetic Hadith: Between the Authority of the Text and the Text of Authority*. worked to distort the Hadith and its meanings.

ers criticized it... As for the addition: 'O Allah, support whoever supports him...' there is no doubt that it is fabricated."²³

Nevertheless, the Hadith of Ghadir remains beyond the reach of later critics. Several early scholars agreed on its authenticity. When all attempts to discredit it failed, the only remaining option was to reinterpret it in a utilitarian way that justified depriving Ali of the caliphate. The anti-Ahl al-Bayt school worked to detach the Hadith from its original context and reduce its meaning. It is astonishing to see prominent scholars and respected transmitters fall into such pragmatic justifications far from the Hadith's context and intent. In *Tuhfat al-Ahwazi*, it is stated:

"It was said that its meaning is: 'Whoever I love, Ali also loves,' or 'Whoever befriends me, Ali befriends him.' Al-Qari cited this from some scholars. Al-Jazari in *al-Nihaya* wrote: 'The term "mawla" has many meanings: master, owner, benefactor, emancipator, supporter, beloved, follower, neighbor, cousin, ally, in-law, slave, and freedman. Most of these meanings appear in Hadith, and each should be interpreted according to context. Anyone who assumes responsibility for something is its mawla and wali. The Hadith should be understood in light of these meanings.' Al-Shafi'i said: 'He meant the allegiance of Islam, as in the verse: "That is because Allah is the protector of those who believes" (Qur'an 47:11).' Al-Tibi said: 'It is incorrect to interpret "wilayah" as leadership, because the only independent authority during the Prophet's lifetime was the Prophet himself. Therefore, it must be interpreted as love and religious loyalty.'"²⁴

One may wonder how these scholars and narrators could ignore the temporal and spatial context, the historical and social backdrop of this Hadith, and the allegiance that occurred afterward to Imam Ali. Or, more simply, how could they be so ignorant of the Arabic language? While many answers can be offered to these questions, the

23 Ahmad ibn Abd al-Halim Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhaj Al-Sunnah Al-Nabawiyyah Fi Naqd Kalam Al-Shi'ah Al-Qadariryyah*, ed. Muhammad Rashad Salim, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, 1986), vol. 7, p. 319.

24 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Abd al-Rahim Mubarakfuri, *Tuhfat Al-Ahwadhi* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1995), vol. 10, p. 147.

primary point is to highlight the ideological motives behind these justifications. Why did the anti-Ahl al-Bayt school resort to such flawed and inaccurate interpretations to divert authority away from Ali and his descendants?

The Human Fantasy and Its Role in the Ideological Interpretation of Religious Texts

The fundamental engine behind human conflict is fantasy. Fantasy plays a central role in driving humanity either toward order or chaos. However, it has mostly had a negative impact. According to religious narratives, the first conflict arose from Satan's rebellion against divine commands. Satan resorted to his fantasy and formulated a theory of superiority based on his creation from fire over that of man from clay. Similarly, in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, their imagined vision of eternal bliss led to their downfall. The same applies to the story of Cain and Abel. After the death of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household), the Islamic nation was no exception to this premise. But how does fantasy function?

Human beings live in a state of constant deprivation. The first form of deprivation a human experience is separation from the mother's breast during the first two years of life. This deprivation deepens with the entry of the father into the child's life, introducing laws and new forms of discipline. The child, who once imagined himself to be the center of the world—with all his needs met instantly at the sound of his cry, whether for food, sleep, or affection—now enters a world of law and language. The father's presence after age two, along with the child's entrance into the realm of language and societal rules, all contribute to the repression of the pleasures the child once enjoyed. These desires accumulate as the individual matures and struggles with social rules, cultural norms, and tribal traditions. Naturally, these desires are transferred into the unconscious mind, forming psychological complexes and unfulfilled ambitions.^{25 26} This is not an exceptional condition—it is a psychological process every human must undergo to reach psychological maturity.

25 Mujtaba Al-Hilo, "The Starving Sex: Psychoanalysis of Gendered Identity Crisis in the Gothic Novel" 3, no. 12 (2020): 277–81, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47752/sjell.312.277.281>, 279.

26 Mujtaba Mohammedali Yahya Al-Hilo, "Navigating Doctorow's Narrative Maze: Ideological Intricacies of Government and History," *International Journal of Social Science And Human Research* 6, no. 11 (2023): 6828–32, <https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v6-i11-35>, p. 6830.

Thus, every person harbors unfulfilled ambitions and desires restricted by societal laws and customs. However, fantasy remains beyond the reach of those restrictions. The more desires are repressed, the more active the fantasy becomes. Every human being harbors a desire for power, pleasure, wealth, status, and sexual fulfillment. Since these desires cannot be fully realized in the real world, the individual transfers them to a fictional realm within the fantasy and lives them out there.²⁷ As a result, people strive, to the best of their ability, to realize parts of their fantasy in real life whenever circumstances permit. Based on this premise, human history is fundamentally driven by a conflict fueled by fantasy and unmet ambition. Every individual seeks to fulfill this imaginary world and its repressed desires. Some even transgress all boundaries and norms in search of an outlet for these inner drives.

The Islamic society and the community that accompanied the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household) were not immune to this human nature. Among them were individuals who desired power, prestige, and position. Yet, the Prophet's sayings were clear, explicit, and undeniable. On several occasions, the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) was adamant in declaring the future course of the Muslim nation and identifying his successor after his death. The community at the time witnessed his speeches and declarations in which he affirmed the succession of Ali ibn Abi Talib. He would seize every suitable opportunity to confirm Ali's leadership, as seen in Hadith al-Thaqalayn: "I leave among you two weighty things; as long as you hold fast to them, you will never go astray: the Book of Allah and my progeny, the members of my household."²⁸ Or in Hadith al-Manzilah: "Are you not pleased, O Ali, to be to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me? Surely, it is not fitting that I should depart without leaving you as

27 and Haider S. Y. Jubran Al-Hilo, Mujtaba, "Lord Byron's Manfred: The Revival of the Irrational Gothic over the Death of the Rational Norm" 2, no. 1 (2023): 53–56, <https://doi.org/10.24018/ejlang.2023.2.1.59>, p. 55.

28 Al-Nisaburi, Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2408.

my successor.”²⁹ Or in the Hadith of Loyalty: “Whoever I am his master, Ali is his master.”³⁰—alongside numerous other hadiths.

Those who opposed the Prophet needed an outlet to release the tension between their inner desires and the explicit instructions of the Prophet witnessed by thousands. Thus, they resorted to ideological justifications for their actions and decisions, employing reversed interpretations and distorted readings of the Prophet’s sayings (peace be upon him and his Household).

29 Al-Bukhari, Sahih Al-Bukhari, Hadith 4416.

30 Ibn Hanbal, Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Hadith 18495.

Controlling the Narrative: Between Prophetic Texts and Political Ideology

Terry Eagleton argues that authorities often resort to various strategies in their ideological justifications. Governments that manipulate the truth typically begin by constructing new, fabricated ideas to sustain dominance. These fabricated narratives rely on six essential elements that ensure these lies' longevity or the ruling ideology's continued control. According to Eagleton, ideology must be "unifying, action-oriented, rationalizing, legitimating, universalizing, and naturalizing."³¹

1. Ideological Unification

The dominant ideology at the time sought to unify the people by presenting them with a reversed interpretation of events and isolating the opposition led by Ali ibn Abi Talib. The ruling faction urgently needed cohesion, yet the Ghadir Sermon stood as a significant obstacle to the legitimacy of the new caliphate. Despite its clarity and the testimony of thousands who witnessed it, the authorities did not deny the event. Still, they distorted its meaning, recognizing the impossibility of denying such a widely known incident. They constructed a new source of authority based on tribal power—an authority the Prophet had explicitly rejected and opposed. The use of force was deemed essential to support this reversed reading of the Ghadir event, as people would not have accepted it without the sword at their throats. The siege of Medina by Banu Aslam³² served as the decisive factor in imposing the new interpretation and the emerging ideology of the Salafi school.

The caliphal faction exploited the political vacuum that followed the Prophet's death. People saw the position of the caliph as vacant and did not perceive it as a divinely mandated role. Tribalism continued to dominate the collective mindset. They viewed the leadership office as belonging to the one who could command fear and assert power. The faction opposing Ali was well aware of this shallow and limited per-

31 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 45.

32 Mohammedali Al-Hilo, *Ma Ba'd Al-Hudnah: Muwajahat Al-Imam Al-Hasan Min Tada'iyat Al-Hudnah* (Najaf: Imam al-Sadiq Foundation for Publishing and Research, 2022), p. 6.

ception of the political and social context. Conflicts erupted, and each group began to nominate its tribal elder or chief. However, the loudest voices were those of the Muhajirun and the Ansar. The Muhajirun claimed they were the first to believe in the Prophet and were thus more deserving of the caliphate. At the same time, the Ansar argued that they had ensured the survival of Islam by protecting the Prophet and supporting his mission.

During the dispute at Saqifah, Abu Bakr claimed that he had heard the Prophet say, “The leaders (Imams) are from Quraysh.”³³ Despite the many issues surrounding the authenticity of this narration, let us assume for the sake of argument that the Prophet indeed spoke it. Still, Abu Bakr offered a reversed reading of the Hadith, inserting himself as its intended subject, ignoring Ali and the dozens of hadiths explicitly affirming his succession. Amid tension between the Muhajirun and the Ansar, Abu Bakr presented himself as the senior Qurayshi Muslim in Medina and invoked the Hadith. The people interpreted the statement as referencing Abu Bakr, who placed himself in a manipulated context and imposed a reversed understanding of the Hadith. As a result, Abu Bakr succeeded in unifying the Muslims through this distorted reading of the Prophet’s words.

Although the Ghadir event was still fresh in the public’s memory, the people ultimately chose to unite under an ideology contradicting the Prophet’s directives rather than risk civil war, division, and internal strife after the Prophet’s death (peace be upon him and his Household).

33 Al-Bukhari, Sahih Al-Bukhari, Hadith 3495.

2. Action Orientation

One of the defining features of dominant ideologies is their drive to translate abstract ideas into tangible actions. They do not remain in theory or discourse but seek implementation through direct application.^{34 35} The rejection of Ali's caliphate and the promotion of a counter-narrative to the Prophet's hadiths were deliberate attempts to impose a new political reality, reassert tribal dominance, and ensure the continuity of power amid the rise of a foundational opposition seeking to uphold the legacy of Ahl al-Bayt within the social and political structure.

The faction opposing Ali fully understood that the people of that tribal society would not submit to words or ideals alone—they responded only to force and authority. For this reason, Abu Bakr allied himself with Banu Aslam and imposed his rule by force, compelling people to accept him as caliph. At that time, the Hejazi culture required the visible presence of power—the sword—not prophetic teachings or moral persuasion, to establish political legitimacy. The core actors within the Salafi school knew well that successfully applying their ideology required physical force. They recognized that while the people admired the Prophet's wisdom and gentle character as admirable traits, they did not consider such qualities suitable for daily life. Consequently, these ideological agents replaced moral guidance and kind words with the sword as the enforcement tool.

The Salafi school insisted on presenting a reversed interpretation of the Prophet's hadiths regarding Ali's succession, implementing this distortion through flawed practices such as the concept of shura (consultation). They appropriated a Qur'anic term and forced it into a context that contradicted its intended divine purpose. As Ali remarked during the Battle of Siffin when the opposing army raised Qur'ans as a deceptive call for arbitration: "It is a word of truth by which falsehood is intended."³⁶

34 Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, p. 125.

35 Mujtaba Mohammedali Yahya Al-Hilo, "Alideological Manipulation Strategies of Religion and Emotional Deception: A Study of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 13, no. 1 (2022): 49–55.

36 Al-Radi, *Nahj Al-Balagha*, Sermon 40.

Similarly, the proponents of Saqifah, after the Prophet's death, argued that leadership should be decided through shura among Muslims³⁷, citing the Qur'an as their basis.

In doing so, they positioned the Qur'anic call for consultation above the Prophet's explicit designation of Ali, as though the Prophet had overlooked these verses, and they were now correcting his supposed oversight. It was as if the Prophet had misunderstood the Qur'anic directive, and they, in their wisdom, were now restoring the proper meaning³⁸. Through this ideological manipulation, they applied their political agenda by promoting a misconstrued and decontextualized version of shura to justify their actions and reshape reality in line with their goals.

3. Ideological Justification

For any ideology to be effective and accepted within society and among its followers, it must justify its decisions and actions—especially when it seeks to distort widely accepted truths. Ideology intervenes by reshaping facts and reintroducing them in ways that serve the goals of its leaders and power structures.

The Salafi school—or the faction opposing Ali—relied heavily on ideological justification. The facts were clear and undeniable to the people, as tens of thousands had witnessed the Ghadir sermon. No one could reasonably reject Ali's succession, which the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) had affirmed on several occasions. Thus, the opposing leadership needed to construct a set of justifications that would persuade the public of the legitimacy of their actions and the exclusion of Ali.

The leading figures of the Saqifah incident, both from the Muhajirun and the Ansar, insisted that Muslims must unite under a single leader. This principle—unity under one caliph—was presented as essential to preserving religion and elevating Islam's banner, as if the Prophet had neglected to address this matter and left it for the community to resolve independently. Among the arguments presented, the Muhajirun offered what seemed more rational and acceptable, particularly through Abu Bakr, who

37 Al-Tabari, *Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk*, p. vo. 2, p. 233.

38 Ibn Hisham Abu Muhammad Abd Al-Malik, *Al-Sirah Al-Nabawiyah*, ed. Al-Abiyari (Cairo, 1955), vol. 4, p. 275.

claimed he had heard the Prophet say that leadership belongs to Quraysh. Therefore, no one else had the right to dispute it.

It is unclear how many people heard or transmitted this Hadith, and there are no reliable statistics about those who affirmed it when Abu Bakr cited it. Nevertheless, the argument appeared convincing to those present at Saqifah. The people lived in a tribal society that did not value knowledge, piety, or moral excellence as leadership criteria. Instead, lineage, kinship, and tribal affiliation were considered paramount. If this Hadith is taken as authentic, then even by tribal standards, Ali—a Qurayshi and the Prophet's closest kin—would have been the rightful successor. Yet, the version of events backed by the sword and justified through strategic reasoning ultimately prevailed.

Addressing the escalating tension between the Muhajirun and the Ansar, Umar declared: "Impossible! Two cannot be joined in the same neck-ring. By God, the Arabs will never accept that you ruled when the Prophet was from among us. The Arabs will not concede leadership to anyone except those from whom prophethood came. We have the strongest claim. Who would dispute the authority of Muhammad while we are his kin and tribe?"³⁹ With these words, Umar openly rejected the prophetic reading and prioritized tribal logic over the Prophet's instructions—justifying the decision in a way that resonated with the audience's sensibilities at the time.

These justifications did not end with Saqifah. They continued in later events, including arguments that Ali was too young compared to other notable figures and that it was inappropriate by tribal customs for a younger man to lead elders. This ideological reasoning was widely accepted in the Arab environment, where such age differences posed a serious barrier to leadership. In this way, tribal norms and ideological justifications carried greater weight in the people's hearts than the explicit sayings and instructions of the Prophet regarding Ali (peace be upon him).

39 Al-Tabari, *Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk*, vol. 2, p. 459-461.

4. Ideological Legitimation

According to Terry Eagleton, ideological legitimation is a core element of any political or sectarian movement seeking to dominate society⁴⁰. It is one of the key mechanisms through which ideologies sustain their longevity. Ideological legitimation consists of procedures and decisions introduced by authorities to justify their actions—particularly those that may be considered unethical or criminal—to secure public support and endorsement.

In the Saqifah incident, the emerging ideology presented a new interpretation of events, distinct from the one intended by the Prophet. Abu Bakr said, “Here is Umar and Abu Ubaydah; if you wish, pledge allegiance to either of them.” They replied, “By God, we will not place ourselves above you. You are the best of the Muhajirun and the Prophet’s successor in leading prayer—the highest religious duty. Extend your hand so we may pledge allegiance.”⁴¹

The legitimation is evident in how Umar and Abu Ubaydah invoked prayer as foundational proof of Abu Bakr’s right to political leadership. They disregarded the Prophet’s explicit designation of Ali. They introduced a new framework in which those who led prayer in the Prophet’s absence were deemed worthy of leading the entire community in religious and worldly affairs. By promoting prayer as the most central pillar of Islam, the Salafi school succeeded in convincing the public that Abu Bakr was the most qualified to assume the caliphate, thereby diminishing the impact of the Prophet’s explicit statements regarding Ali’s succession and transforming the issue into a “legitimate” political and religious decision.

This manipulation of religious narrative is evident in the statement: “You are the best of the Muhajirun and the Prophet’s successor in prayer—which is the highest religious duty.” Leading prayer was reinterpreted as evidence of political eligibility. This reframing helped to justify Ali’s exclusion from the political and social scene and to rebrand the sidelining of the Prophet’s instructions as a logical continuation of

⁴⁰ Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, p. 41.

⁴¹ Al-Tabari, *Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk*, p. 61.

the Prophetic tradition. However, upon returning to Qur'anic and Prophetic sources, there is no explicit basis for such an interpretation; instead, it legitimized the new ruling authority.

In the same gathering, Abu Bakr stated: "Indeed, God has sent us a Messenger... and the Muhajirun were the first to worship Allah on this earth and believe in Him and His Messenger. They are his kin, his closest supporters, and the most deserving of leadership after him. No one disputes them but a wrongdoer."⁴² Here, Abu Bakr frames the Muhajirun as the foundational core of the Islamic mission and, therefore, the rightful heir to political leadership. He also asserts that any challenge to their claim amounts to injustice and a threat to the unity of the Ummah. This portrayal reinforces his image as the most prominent and deserving figure among the Muhajirun, which implicitly marginalizes Ali, positioning his exclusion as a matter of political necessity and religious legitimacy.

Also, at Saqifah, Umar declared: "By God, the Arabs will never accept that you rule while the Prophet was from us. Nor will they yield leadership to anyone but those among whom prophethood came."⁴³ Umar's appeal to tribal logic was a deliberate strategy to establish legitimacy. Such logic fit seamlessly within the cultural context of the Hejazi society, which was deeply rooted in tribalism. Although this justification contradicted the principles of Islam, it was acceptable within the political framework of Saqifah, where the conflict revolved around political control—not religious succession, which the Prophet had already clarified.

Thus, the core of ideological legitimation lies in transforming controversial or problematic decisions into actions deemed politically, religiously, or morally acceptable—making them appear as natural extensions of divine or social order, even when they contradict explicit religious teachings.

⁴² Al-Tabari, p. 61.

⁴³ Ibid.

5. Universalization

Universalization is key in rendering ideologies eternal, framing them as necessary and valid across all times and places. This process presents ideological claims not as mere options or outcomes of specific political or historical circumstances but as part of the natural order—unchangeable and foundational.

At the Saqifah of Banu Sa'idah, Abu Bakr addressed the gathered crowd by saying: "You know that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his Household) said—and you were present—'Quraysh are the guardians of this matter. The righteous among them are to be followed, and the wicked among them are to be followed.'"⁴⁴ In this statement, Abu Bakr generalized the leadership of Quraysh and asserted its perpetual necessity, claiming that the Prophet had explicitly stated their exclusive right to rule. However, Abu Bakr offered his interpretation, placing himself within the scope of those intended by the Prophet's words. Through this, he portrayed Quraysh—specifically the Salafi school—as the eternal custodians of Islamic leadership.

He continued his speech by stating: "God chose the early Muhajirun from among his people to believe in him, support him, and remain patient in the face of the harm and denial from their people... They were the first to worship God on this earth and believe in Him and His Messenger. They are his close supporters and kin and the most entitled to this matter after him."⁴⁵ Abu Bakr presented the Muhajirun's role as an absolute and everlasting priority that guaranteed their right to leadership—regardless of their later actions or the consequences of their governance. This included, for example, the well-known atrocities committed by Khalid ibn al-Walid during the campaigns in Yemen.⁴⁶ Still, Abu Bakr generalized the Muhajirun's historical support for the Prophet into a permanent ideological principle that justified their exclusive right to rule.

44 Al-Tabari, *Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk*, p. 61.

45 Ibid.

46 Izz al-Din Ibn Al-Athir, *Al-Kamil Fi Al-Tarikh*, ed. Omar Abd al-Salam Tadmuri (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1997), vo. 2, p. 344-346.

In the same gathering, Umar declared: "Impossible! Two cannot share the same reign! By God, the Arabs will never accept your leadership when the Prophet was not from among you."⁴⁷ Umar invoked a tribal rationale to exclude the Ansar from succeeding the Prophet. He presented this tribal nature as a fixed social law—unchangeable and authoritative—to impose Qurayshi dominance over the rest of the Arabs. Religious and moral standards were not the criteria for selecting the caliph; instead, the justification was that tribal law did not permit leadership to move outside the Quraysh.

Abu Ubaydah also spoke in that gathering: "You were the first to support [Islam], so do not be the first to change and alter it."⁴⁸ He appealed to the principle of social unity, presenting it as a universal and necessary value to preserve peace. In authoritarian regimes, unity is often invoked as a moral and humanitarian justification to silence dissent, casting any opposition as a threat to social order. It appears that adherents of this ideology were fully prepared to ignite a civil war for the sake of securing the caliphate. Forces from Banu Aslam were ready to storm Medina, a reality Ali ibn Abi Talib recognized. Had Ali insisted on claiming the caliphate, the resulting conflict could have led to a catastrophic civil war among Arab tribes.

6. Naturalization

Ideologies often present themselves as natural and inevitable outcomes of historical, cultural, and social movements. They are framed as the result of a fixed sequence of events that leaves no room for alternatives or debate. This was precisely the strategy adopted by the leaders of the Saqifah event, who justified their decisions through the ideological element of naturalization.

The Salafi leadership portrayed the Quraysh as the natural and inherent custodians of political authority. Umar famously declared: "By God, the Arabs will never accept that you rule while the Prophet was from among us, and the Arabs will not entrust their affairs to anyone except those from among whom prophethood came."⁴⁹ In this statement, Umar positioned Quraysh as the eternal and unquestionable choice for leader-

47 Al-Tabari, *Tarikh Al-Umam Wa Al-Muluk*, p. 61.

48 Al-Tabari, p. 61.

49 Al-Tabari, p. 61.

ship based on a presumed social reality about the nature of the Arabs. It was framed as a historical and sociological inevitability beyond discussion or negotiation. This determinism ruled out any alternative to the leadership of the Qurayshi figures present at Saqifah—excluding even other Qurayshis absent from the meeting.

Abu Bakr reinforced this perspective during the same council: “God chose the early Muhajirun from his people to believe in him, support him... they are his allies and his kin, and the most deserving of this matter after him.”⁵⁰ Here, Abu Bakr fused political leadership with a religious and social narrative, proposing a reading that made the caliphate a “natural” continuation of the Muhajirun’s role in supporting the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household). This fusion precluded transferring the caliphate to any other party, as any such attempt would seem to violate the “natural” religious and social order.

Abu Bakr further contradicted the Prophet’s instructions: “Quraysh are the guardians of this matter; the righteous among them are to be followed, and so are the wicked.”⁵¹ This ideological reading froze history in a rigid, predetermined mold. It presented the Qurayshis at Saqifah as the permanent leaders of the Muslim community, regardless of their moral character. Such a claim became a barrier to any intellectual or political opposition, transforming the prevailing political and social structure into an absolute truth that could neither be questioned nor altered. Any attempt to present an alternative reading was immediately deemed impossible and illegitimate.

In another reading of the historical context, Abu Ubaydah said: “O Ansar, you were the first to support [Islam], so do not be the first to change and alter it.” The Salafi ideological school used this rhetorical device to eliminate any suggestion of an alternative to Qurayshi leadership. It linked loyalty to the existing status quo with allegiance to the religion. Thus, any effort to propose a different reading—such as granting leadership to the Ansar or Ali—was framed as a betrayal of the Prophet or deviation from Islam. This effectively closed the door to any serious discussion about alternative successors.

⁵⁰ Al-Tabari, p. 61.

⁵¹ Al-Tabari, p. 61.

Conclusion

The period following the death of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his Household) was marked by a series of political, social, and intellectual conflicts. Yet, the most critical of these was the conflict over interpretation. Competing readings—backed by the force of arms—dominated the political arena, while the Prophetic reading was excluded, marginalized, and suppressed. Political ideologies were employed to enforce a singular interpretation and eliminate all others, leaving no intellectual space for dissenting views to take root. The only “correct” interpretation was that endorsed by the ruling authority. Consequently, all hadiths narrated from the Prophet regarding the succession of Ali were either neglected or reinterpreted in reverse to justify the new authority and exclude opposition.

By applying the tools of ideological analysis, we find that the Saqifah school relied heavily on the six operative elements of ideology: systematization, action orientation, justification, legitimation, universalization, and naturalization. This school strategically used these elements to construct an alternative intellectual framework and to produce a new interpretation that diverged from what the Prophet (peace be upon him and his Household) had intended. It emphasized tribal and cultural norms at the expense of the religious and Prophetic directives that the community had inherited after the Prophet’s passing. Through these justifications and reversed interpretations, it becomes evident that the people had not yet internalized the moral framework introduced by the Prophet; instead, they remained bound to the tribal structures inherited from their forefathers.

This reversed reading and ideological framework aimed to establish a new political order rooted in the perceived social and cultural nature of the Muslim community while promoting a religious narrative different from the one the Prophet had established. Nevertheless, the Saqifah school failed to entirely obscure the Prophet’s proper interpretation, which was preserved and exemplified by Ali throughout

his lifetime whenever circumstances allowed. The matter became clear to many: a struggle existed between an interpretation grounded in divine values and another driven by political and social interests. Throughout history, competing ideologies have continued to impose their readings of religious texts by asserting control over religious and historical narratives.



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