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Ta'ifah, Sect and Sectarianism: from the Word and its Changing Implications to the Analytical Sociological Term[1]

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Abstract

This article, a chapter from the author's recently published book (March 2018) titled*, Ta'ifah, Sectarianism and Imagined Sects*, attempts to build fundamental conceptual idiomatic distinctions between community according to religious or confessional affiliation (*at-tai'fah*), sectarianism (*at-ta'ifiyyah*) and confessionalism (*al-madhabiyyah*) – concepts and phenomena that are deeply intertwined. The author also explores related concepts such as identity, religious affiliation, sect, difference, fanaticism (*taasub*), and others. Bishara analyzes the linguistic and semantic conceptual evolution of the term sectarianism, as well as the evolution of the term through the concepts of confession/group (*firqa*), sect (*tai'fa*), and craft (*hirfa*) – concepts that reflect on the ways (*turuq*), the occupational and professional congregations as well as the Sufi orders, within Islamic society. All of these developments are examined to reach an understanding of the widespread modern Arabic term sectarianism – sectarianism being a modern term, and sect an old one. Through a critical debate with the modern Western sociological concepts of sectarianism (*al-ta'ifiyyah* or *al-firqiyyah*), the study attempts to develop the term "sect" as an analytical sociological term that can be used to analyze the formation, evolution, and characteristics of new contemporary imagined communities, according to religious communities that the author calls imagined sects in his book. One of the major theses in this work is that modern religious communities (tawa'if: plural of *tai'fah*) do not produce sectarianism; rather, it is sectarianism which breeds the imagined communities that the author calls imagined sects.

Group community of belief or confession (al-tai'fa) Sectarianism (al-ta'ifiyyah) Confessionalism (al-madhabiyyah) Sect (al-firqa) Fanaticism (al-taasub).

Introduction

A prevalent distinction made in everyday usage and across Arab media discourse more generally is between sectarianism and confessionalism. Sectarianism is taken as a fanatic affiliation to a specific religion among other religions, while the latter indicates confessional fanaticism, i.e. to a specific confession among other confessions in the context of the same religion. Confessionalization is in fact the adoption of a religious creed, or the favoring of a jurisprudential or doctrinal school in the interpretation of a particular religion, or the belonging to one model of religiosity within the same religion that organizes the specific practices of a believer such as worship. With the passage of time, all religions have had to take on the form of confessions.

1 This study was originally published in Issue 6/23, Winter 2018 of Omran. It is also a chapter in a book by the same titled Sect, Sectarianism and Imagined Sects.

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Fanaticism, on the other hand, takes belonging to a religion or confession as a determinant of identity, and even of attitudes, towards those who belong to other groups. This is what has become known recently as sectarianism, which entails fanaticism for a group of people– that is a ta'ifah which originally and more accurately means a subgroup – and that determines the position towards others, after they have been categorized also according to religious or confessional affiliations. The derivation of the word sectarianism, in this case, is similar to that of tribalism and nationalism. What in everyday usage is branded madhabiyya (confessionalism) is in fact sectarianism. It does not matter here whether this sectarianism means fanaticism for a group that follows a confession or a religion; in other words, whether it is confessional sectarianism or religious sectarianism. In both cases, it is a fanatical belonging to a group brought together by the bonds of creed as identity (and not necessarily conscious belief in this creed and practicing its commandments). In sectarianism in general, affiliation the group prevails over fanaticism for the religion, while in the case of religiosity, fanaticism for the confession's belief in religion theoretically prevails over fanaticism for the group, although the two affiliations intersect.

In both cases there is a difference between, on the one hand, religiosity and confessionalization and, on the other, the group of people imagined as a religious community and sectarianism. The belonging to the group does not necessarily imply religious or confessional faith; rather it is the group that follows a confession or religion. Sectarianism is fanaticism for a group of people affiliated to a religion or confession, where belonging to it determines the definitions of self-identity, where others are categorized according to this kind of belonging, and where it determines the attitudes towards other groups and towards the state.

Political sectarianism is a politicized societal phenomenon and not an individual political choice. Even when it is posited as a political cultural choice before the individual, sectarianism has developed, spread, and become one the parameters of the group to which the individual belongs, in that sectarianism is mixed with the religious or confessional affiliation of the individual, as explained above, and makes it easier for sectarians to claim that sectarianism is congruent with membership in the group and in distinguishing it from non-membership – a matter which makes the non-sectarian choice difficult. Choosing to belong or not is usually an illusory choice when sectarianism is dominant. Sectarianism is the denial of the freedom to make this choice; such freedom is only exercised through conflict with sectarianism.

Some might deduce from the above that sectarianism is thus the root of all calamities; however, the intent here is to show the differences or disagreements between what is religious and confessional on the one hand and sectarianism on the other. These are two completely different things.

This does not mean that religiosity and embracing a confession is necessarily a good connotation compared with sectarianism, nor is it the other way round. We are not making a value judgment here, but writing this with the objective of making the necessary terminological distinctions to categorize the phenomena under study. I am not saying this to exonerate religiosity and confessions for disputes, conflicts, and wars, or to make sectarianism alone responsible. There are historical examples of long and bloody religious and confessional wars, motivated by religious and confessional disagreements and by other things, even before the religious groups\communities crystallized as a social phenomenon. Human history has witnessed many religious wars or wars motivated by religion. Equally, the guardians of "orthodoxy" have vigorously pursued schismatic religious groups or sects, waged war on them, and punished their followers. Historically, a dialectic developed between the religious institution and that of kingship, starting from the services that the political authority performed for "the true religion" in pursuit of those who deviated from the creed at various periods during the middle ages with the flourishing of the papacy in Europe. The same happened when Iran under the first Safavid ruler Ismail I was forced to become Shia and with the Sunnification and Islamization of the Mashreq in the Mameluke period. Religious jurisprudential disagreements were also used to legitimize wars that were launched as religious wars to impose or spread a specific religious belief, whether this belief was confessional and branching off from a religion, or understood itself as the religion. In other cases, the struggle over power took a religious form, as was the case of the conflicts over the caliphate against the Umayyads, and later the Abbasids. The same was the case of the monarchy in England; for example after the split with Catholicism, when sovereigns (such

as Mary Tudor) were accused of seeking to return to Catholicism, after that belief had been deemed heresy.(3)

The aim of this distinction is to clarify the terms theoretically. Although these overlapping phenomena are real and historical, this distinction is necessary to clarify the separate concepts and understand their overlap. Without this, it is impossible to understand how a secular person can be sectarian, just as we can conceive of a religious person who is not sectarian.

A secularist calling for the religious neutrality of the state and who separates between creed and religious law on the one hand and politics on the other can define his identity through affiliation to a group he or she belongs, based on specific things they have in common and within the context of a solidarity relationship imbued with socio-political meanings. All his or her political judgments, for example, start from "the oppression of his/her group of religion" or "its unjust status" or "its share" in the social wealth and political power, even if this power does not exploit\serve a specific religious creed. From another perspective, it is possible to conceive of a religious person, who thinks him or herself "devout", but who at the same time condemns fanaticism for a group simply because it comprises followers of a religion or a confession, because from his/her religious perspective it may contain righteous and sinners, good and bad.

This distinction is correct in theory and in many cases also holds in practice. Religiosity and sectarianism often overlap, however, and in some countries, secularism takes the form of opposition to sectarianism. A declared Arab secularist, in the Levant for example, usually defines him or herself as a secularist by their opposition to sectarianism, and not their position on religion's relationship with politics or through opposition to religion. This stands in contrast to some extreme models of secularism which took the form of a war against religion itself,(4) deemed as a "backward" belief, such as for instance the "worship of reason" during the Robespierrean stage of the French Revolution, and in the "scientific atheism" of the former Soviet Union or in the anti-religion law of communist Albania.

On the Classical Islamic Descriptive Concept of the *Ta'ifah*

Tai'fah means faction (*fi'ah*) or group (*jama'ah*). In its Arabic origins its meaning was not connected to a religious or confessional group. What marks it out in Arabic from the word group (*jama'ah*) is that it signifies a faction (*fi'ah*), and a faction is part of a whole. The sect is a group that forms part of a whole. For this reason, the word is essentially a *"ta'ifah* of ..." meaning some of: "a tai'fah of things", "a division, a group of people under a certain category", "a section of the nation", "a *tai'fah* of the believers" in the *Qur'an* meaning a group that is part of a larger reference group. It is a collection, but a collection that forms a section of a larger group. Its meaning developed to refer to a faction of people specifically one that forms a part of a larger faction. Today, one no longer speaks of a *ta'ifah* of things; rather the word in Arabic has come to mean specifically a group of people. Although the *Encyclopedia of Islam* settles

3 See Azmi Bishara, *Religion and Secularism in Historical Context*, vol. 2, part 2, S*ecularism and Theories of Secularization* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2015), pp. 78-81.

4 Hassan Alawi considered, from his understanding of sectarianism as a system of governing in Iraq, that Iraqi sectarianism could not be understood in isolation from the fact that the modern Iraqi regime has been confessional since the monarchy era (a diagnosis we completely disagree with, as will be explained in the historical section of this book: neither the monarchical nor the republican system was a confessional system according to our research). However, he at least distinguishes between sectarian and confessional differences, although he does not clearly scrutinize the terms. He writes that Iraqi sectarianism was not around confessional disagreements (although he subsequently calls sectarianism confessionalism). He thinks that Iraqi sects did not disagree about confessional issues or issues related to religion, which prompts him to consider it a unique case in Muslim countries. It is an almost purely political sectarianism with a connection to political power. It stood between the people and the authority, and not between the people themselves, because the authority adhered to a ruling confession other than the governed. He goes as far as to say, "It is remarkable that political Iraqi sectarianism develops in part from a secular milieu, and it is clearly delineated in the national milieu, weakly delineated in the Marxist milieu, while the force and vigor of sectarianism weaken and fade in the political Islamic milieu, be it in Sunni or Shiite." Hassan Alawi, *The Shia and the Nation State 1914–1990*, 2nd ed. (Iran: Dar Al-Thaqafa Littiba'ah Wan-Nashr, 1990), pp. 260-1. In his view, ancient sectarianism was spontaneous and transparent, and even encouraged creative philosophical thinking and literary production. It was also linked with confessional debates. Modern Iraqi sectarianism on the other hand, had a relationship to political and social currents and not intellectual or religious doctrines. In this way he differentiates between sectarianism and confessionalism. While I do not agree with his diagnosis, I do concur with that differentiation, and in taking political sectarianism as being connected to government and opposition to government.

with the meaning "group" this does not convey the meaning[5] because the group taken as a *tai'fah* is in essence a faction of a larger group. The meaning of the word has become more specific in our age being associated with a religion or confession. It is rarely used to indicate something else.

The Arabic dictionaries are accurate in explaining the semantic origins of the word. According to *Lisan al-Arab*, "The *tai'fah* of something means part of it. In the Quran: ... Usages such as a *ta'ifah* of people, '*tai'fah* of the believers', and a *tai'fah* of the night are found. In the Hadith: A *ta'ifah* of my *umma* remain right; meaning a group of people ... Ishaq ibn Rahawayhi was asked about it and he said: *ta'ifah* means less than one thousand ... In the Hadith of Imran ibn Husayn and his rebellious servant we find: I will certainly cut off a *ta'ifah* from him ... that is one of his limbs."[6]

Hence it is no coincidence the term *ta'ifah*, as used in contemporary life gives the meaning of grouping, or grouping and dividing simultaneously, for it means factions of people divided into groups distinguished by religion, confession, or profession (in the middle ages). In its etymology we find the semantic basis for the negative implications that developed later, and by virtue of *which tawa'if* became an expression of factionalism. The part is the division of the whole. In modern Arabic, the group that forms part of a whole is a faction. From here comes the origin of the proximity in meaning between sectarianism and factionalism. Sectarianism is factional, and in its modern usage means religious or confessional factionalism. It is no coincidence either that we have not found any non-modern usage of the term *ta'ifiyyah* (sectarianism). In pre-modern times, the word "*ta'ifah*" was found in Arabic, but the word "ta'ifiyyah" is modern.

Most Quranic uses of the word *ta'ifah* do not initially have a negative or positive connotation.[7] It is a descriptive term and not a normative concept. The

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5 "Ta'ifah," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

6 See the entry at "Ta, Waw, Fa" in Jamaluddin Ibn Manzour, *Lisan al-Arab*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2005), pp. 160-1.

7 The word sect has a neutral meaning in all the Quranic verses in which it appears. In God's word to his Prophet it may appear in the same verse as a *ta'ifah* of believers or non-believers, a *ta'ifa*h with him or one against him (the bold text below highlights the *translation* of *ta'ifah* where it appeared in these Quranic verses):

- "**Some of the People of the Book say**: 'At the beginning of the day, believe in what has been revealed to these believers [the Muslims], then at the end of the day reject it turn back" M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "The Family of Imran 3: 72", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "After sorrow, He caused calm to descend upon you, a sleep that overtook **some of you**. **Another group**, caring only for themselves, entertained false thoughts about God, thoughts more appropriate to pagan ignorance, and said, "Do we get a say in any of this?" [Prophet], tell them, "Everything to do with this affair is in God's hands." They conceal in their hearts things they will not reveal to you. They say, "If we had had our say in this, none of us would have been killed here." Tell them, "Even if you had resolved to stay at home, those who were destined to be killed would still have gone out to meet their deaths." God did this in order to test everything within you and in order to prove what is in your hearts. God knows your innermost thoughts very well." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "The Family of Imran 3:154", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "They say, "We obey you," but as soon as they leave your presence, **some of them** scheme by night to do other than what you said. God records what they scheme, so leave them alone, and put your trust in God: He is sufficient protector." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "Women 4:81", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "When you [Prophet] are with the believers, leading them in prayer, let **a group of them** stand up in prayer with you, taking their weapons with them, and when they have finished their prostration, let them take up their positions at the back. Then let the **other group**, who have not yet prayed, pray with you, also on their guard and armed with their weapons: the disbelievers would dearly like you to be heedless of your weapons and baggage, in order for them to take you in a single assault. You will not be blamed if you lay aside your arms when you are overtaken by heavy rain or illness, but be on your guard. Indeed, God has prepared a humiliating punishment for the disbelievers." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "Women 4:102", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "If it were not for the grace of God and His mercy to you [Prophet], **a party of them** would have tried to lead you astray; they only lead themselves astray, and cannot harm you in any way, since God has sent down the Scripture and Wisdom to you, and taught you what you did not know. God's bounty to you is great indeed." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "Women 4:113", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "If **some of you** believe the message I bring **and others** do not, then be patient till God judges between us. He is the best of all judges." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "The Heights 7:87", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "Do not try to justify yourselves; you have gone from belief to disbelief. We may forgive **some of you**, but we will punish **others**: they are evildoers." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "Repentance 9:66", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "So [Prophet], if God brings you back to **a group of them**, who ask you for permission to go out [to battle], say, "You will never go out and fight an enemy with me: you chose to sit at home the first time, so remain with those who stay behind now." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "Repentance 9:83", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "Yet it is not right for all the believers to go out [to battle] together: out of each community, **a group** should go out to gain understanding of the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return and so that they can guard themselves against evil." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "Repentance 9:122", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "Remember when **two groups of you** were about to lose heart and God protected them – let the believers put their trust in God." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "The Family of Imran 3:122", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- "If **two groups** of the believers fight, you [believers] should try to reconcile them; if one of them is [clearly] oppressing the other, fight the oppressors until they submit to God's command, then make a just and even-handed reconciliation between the two of them: God loves those who are even-handed." M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, trans., "The Private Rooms 49: 9", *The Qur'an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

ta'ifah in Quranic terminology could be a group of "disobedients", heretics, or of "believers". The Quran mentions two parties of believers fighting against each other. The *tai'fah* here is an inseparable part of the group which is based on fraternal, creedal, or religious interrelation.

Taken as a descriptive, non-normative, term, the semantics of ta'ifah developed in urban Islamic society to signify, from a socio-economic perspective, the organized professional and occupational guilds. At the beginning of the Islamic middle ages, professions and occupations were usually designated sanf or asnaf in the sense of classes of occupations and professions in the Islamic city, and they were also called tawa'if (guilds). This is logical because what it meant here are the factions\categories of craftsmen and professionals. In Lisan al-Arab, Ibn Manzour states that sanf means "the ta'ifah of each thing, and every kind of thing is a distinct sanf." We find the word used in the sense of tai'fah and sect (firqah) of people in Ibn Hanifa's Al-Alim wal-Muta'allim. However, even at this early period, the word was used to a certain extent in association with professions and occupations.(8)

The synonymy between *sanf* and *ta'ifah* did not remain on the linguistic plane. The *tawa'if* of the crafts was a system known in the Islamic period and continued in the Ottoman period until the mid-19th century. The Ottoman government granted the Sheikhs of the crafts in the Ottoman provinces in the Levant positions in social bodies, in between it and the members of the crafts. The "Sheikhs of the crafts" or "guild sheikhs" and the "head Sheikh of the Sheikhs of the crafts" were appointed by the *qadi* (or judge), although they were appointed after being selected by the craftsmen. The authority of the craft sheikh administered the affairs of the craftsmen, and "took an interest in their problems, oversaw the implementation of agreements, and requested the qadi to record these agreements."(9) The craft *tawa'if* came under the control of the sultan in the 17th century, and became an administrative tool under his rule. Each guild (*ta'ifah*) was subject to an appointed officer, and those officers were responsible for protecting their guilds and collecting taxes from them. In the 18th century there were three main groups of *tawa'if* in Cairo. They had their traditions and rituals which all the members of the guild observed and took part in public and private celebrations. Each guild took part in processions with a float bearing samples of their craft. The most prominent of these celebrations were the holy carpet parade with the *mahmal*(10), the sighting of the new moon of Ramadan, and the flooding of the Nile. The system of craft guilds started to lose its significance with the building of factories in the time of ruler Mohammed Ali. During the rule of Khedive Sa'id, the guild sheikh lost the right to fine guild members. Finally, the remnants of the guilds were abolished in 1882, and ultimately in 1883 with the foundation of the civil courts.(11)

What applies to the trades (the asnaf) also applies to every corporation in the city (student, teachers, merchants, craftsmen). The corporate group defined the status of its members and their social status, the kind of taxes they had to pay, and the identity of one's direct leaders. In this sense even the water-sellers and beggars had guilds (*tawa'if*).(12)

The ta'ifah in this sense was the cornerstone of the structure of the Islamic city, and an element for its relative stability in the middle ages and until the modern period, or the period of the Ottoman reforms known as the tanzimat. Its traces remained after the dissolution of its bases and its absorption into the traditional urban craft markets, until the beginning of the 20th century. The trade and craft guilds endured for centuries and reproduced themselves by inheritance or through the relationship of the apprentice with the master craftsman or merchant. As corporatist bodies, the guilds (*tawa'if*) afforded protection even to humble city dwellers, in terms of status, a social environment, and a normative system on which to

8 Abderrahman Zaki, The Cairo City Encyclopedia in One Thousand Year, (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library, 1987), p. 86. See also: Edward William Lane, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, (London, J.M. Dent & Co. and New York, E.P. Dutton & Co: 1908).

9 Wajih Kawtharani, *Authority, Society, and Political Action, From the History of the Ottoman Province in the Levant* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1988), p. 47.

10 A fine carpet of huge fabric for festooning the Kaaba at a Mecca procession.

11 Zaki, p. 155; see also: William Lane.

12 On this subject see: H.A.R. Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West,* vol. I: *Islamic Society in the Eighteenth Century,* Part I (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 276-277.

live their life. They knew what was expected of them, and what they could look forward to. The *ta'ifah* in this sense (the guild) helped to define their social character and the virtues one ought to aspire to, and the ethics and standards one should adhere to. The group to which people belonged - not as an individual but as a member of a group that also defined what was expected, the qualities desired, and behavior - was the source of authority for what was right. This differs from the modern imagined sect (*ta'ifah*) that I shall shortly turn to which does not constitute a moral frame of reference like this, and keeps on fanaticism without a specific civil group and hence without a lived framework for right and wrong, and where "we" and "they" occupies the place of good and bad. When there is no new moral system with criteria over which there is consensus, then group fanaticism fills the vacuum.

The professions were mostly organized into their own chapels (*zawaya*) or Sufi orders in the consolidation of the guilds as fraternities. The Sufi orders here are equivalent to guilds (*tawa'if*), for what is termed a guild in the social sense, that is the trade and craft, or the distinct religious confessions in the religious sense, is what in Sufism is termed the order (*al-ṭarīqah*), which represents a founding framework organizing the behavior of the disciple. As Murtada Mathari puts it, "When those with mystical knowledge are mentioned in connection with knowledge, they are called gnostics, and when they are mentioned in connection with a social matter, they are called Sufis, for the order is a social institution."[13] This achieves its clearest embodiment in the Sufi craft guilds in the Levant and Anatolia.

Sufism adopted the word *ta'ifah* to describe the group, thereby making a group of spiritual Muslims become followers of the order: al-Junayd (d. 298 AH/ 910 AD) was titled Master of the *ta'ifah*. Ibn Arabi also used the word in this sense in *Al-Futuhat Al-Makkiyya*. This was *the taifah*, with the definite article, to particularize it. Without the definite article, the word continued to mean a faction (*fi'ah*) of .... The designation evolved from Sufism, where it meant the order, but soon came to signify the sub-branches of the order, which were called *tawa'if*. Nevertheless, from the available facts it can be inferred that the essence of the word *ta'ifah* in its association with a confession or religion to mean a religious group part of a whole, and in this case the *tawa'if* are branches of the order, goes back to the Sufi orders.

The *tawa'if* in the medieval Islamic cities were Sufi sects (*firaq*) and craft guilds at the same time. This distinction does not necessarily imply marginalization, since that depends on the period in question. The followers of the religion were not called a *ta'ifah*. Certainly not the majority religion, whose followers in their normal religious condition, as a group of believers, were a *millah* and an *umma*. The *millah*, for some Arabic lexicographers, means a community, and for others it means a community of religious law, in which the religion might be a confession. The *ta'ifah* however, always meant a part, and not the whole or the majority that thinks of itself as the whole.

The Term Sect in Sociological Thought

Max Weber's distinctions between Church and sect has held sway in the academic sociological conceptualization of the term sect. He distinguished between the Church and the sect (*firqah*), wrongly translated in Arabic as *ta'ifah*, which is only lexically and not idiomatically correct. The meaning of the sociological term sect differs from the meaning of the religious *ta'ifah* in Arabic, and its closer to what was meant in the past by *firqah* (plural *firaq*). The term sect in our day is used to signify a group of followers of a religious, philosophical, or political orientation when this group in its teachings and rituals is differentiated from, or opposed to, the prevailing convictions in society. The term is usually connected with a religious sect in schism with a larger religious group. The usage of the word by the Church can be seen as degrading for this reason and is distinct from the scientific use of the term to mean a distinctive or new religious group.

The Latin etymology of sect is *secta*, which is attested from the 3rd century BC. Its usage was neutral and linked with the followers of a philosophical, religious, or other idea. The Greek *hairesis*, which meant choice and then came to mean an intellectual or religious current synonymous with *secta*, took on

13 Morteza Motahari , *Gnosis, Religion, and Philosophy* (Beirut: Dar Al-Irshad, 2009), pp. 335-6.

negative connotations from the perspective of the Church, including the notion of heresy (and this is no coincidence, for it usually refers to schismatic sects). However, the word's original sense is a choice based on an opinion. In the Hellenistic period, the word was used to describe philosophical teachings and their adherents such as Cynics or the Platonists.

There are two terms which were used to describe religious groups which were a schism of, or rebelled against, the official Church at specific historical periods: the first is sect and the second is cult, which means worship, and refers to the ritual differences among sects. The sect (*firqah)* here is limited to worship deemed deviant in comparison with the prevalent form or the established religion. Religious sects do not describe themselves in such terms. The dominant central religious establishment uses the designation for "schismatics", in order to belittle them.

By sect, Weber meant to develop a sociological concept that explained the religious group made up of religious people who observed a religious life, in disagreement and opposition with the mainstream of society, and who freely and voluntarily chose this confession and the form of religious o*r confessional* life associated with it.

For Weber, the Church was a religious institution, both congregation and creed at the same time, because the Church, in the case of Christianity, comprises clerics and members of the Church, that is the laity, the flock, or the people (*laos*). This is what is termed *ta'ifah* in modern Arabic. Weber made it a condition that the sect take an institutional form to the extent that a person was born into it, and belonging to it voluntarily was an exception, such as by converting from one religion to another. The Church is not an elite of fundamentalist believers mobilized in the service of the true creed that the sect usually represents. The Church is not the sect (*firqah)*, nor is the *millah* of Islam. Churches differ from sects (*firaq)* because they have a professional priesthood and beliefs, rituals, and pretensions to universalism. They are not 'exclusionary' elitists and see themselves as right for all. Churches, according to Weber, tend to impose at least doctrinal control, just as individuals are mostly born into the Church and do not join it. For him, most of the distinctive features of the Church, that is the religious establishment, derive from the separation between charisma and the person following the emergence of the class of the priests, the institutionalization of rituals, and the transfer of charisma to the institution. Sects are also a kind of voluntary union; people join them because they are convinced by them or drawn to them by charisma, which, in contrast to the Church, resides (or is distributed) in the believers bound together in the sect.[14] The distinction between clergy and laity is essential for church while this difference is minimal or even non-existent in sects.

It is clear then that sect does not mean *ta'ifah*, and that what is closest to the meaning of *ta'ifah* in modern Islamic Arabic culture is definitely what Weber designates *Kirche* or Church. However, the element of the religious establishment and the existence of the Churches as voluntary unions in the case of the Protestant sects, in the United States especially, distanced the daily usage of church from the sociological concept and distanced it from the religious *ta'ifah* as seen in the modern Arab context.

The closest term for the *madhab* and creed with adherents is confession, in the sense of the term after it shifted from its original meaning of religious acknowledgment. It subsequently came to mean the public declaration or profession of the creed. In the usage of German historians it came to mean the formation of a Church defined by a written and declared credo and with defined adherents (Konfessionbildung) as happened in the 16th century; that is, the century when the three Churches and doctrines and their followers were constructed in a confrontation between them (Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism).[15] In the case of this particular term, the focus is on the

14 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Guenter Roth and Claus Wittich (eds.), Ephraim Fischoff et al. (trans.), (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 56 and 1164.

15 E.W. Zeedan, "Grundlagen und Wege der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskaempfe," *Historische Zeitschrift*," no. 185 (1985), pp. 249-99; E. W. Zeedan, *Entstehung der Konfessionen: Grudlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskaempfe,* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1965); H. Schilling, "Die Konfessionalisierung von Kirche und Gesellschaft: Profil, Leistung, Defizite und Perspektiven eines geschichtswissenschaflicehen Paradigmas," in: W. Reinhard and H. Schillind (eds.), *Die Katholisce Konfessionalisierung* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlaghaus, 1995); W. Reinhard, "Konfeion und Konfessionalisierung in Europa," in: *Bkenntnis und Geschichte: Die Confession Augustana im Historischen Zusammmenhang* (Munich: Voegel, 1981), pp. 165-89.

clear formulation of doctrine, worship, and rites and their promulgation to the believers, the formation of a group on this basis whose rites and articles of faith are guarded by a religious institution. This gradually transforms into a community through belief in and profession of the articles of faith and their repetition in prayer, in the performance of shared rites distinct from others, in the interpretation of this difference, in religious commandments, and in some issues of personal status. In short this is confessionalization. This once again differs from the semantics of the modern Arabic *ta'ifah*, even if it comprises elements of these terms.

We use the term sectarianism and not the term confessionalism to signify *al-ta'ifiyyah* in English even though it is not very precise in its sociological semantics, solely because it is the widespread (and erroneous) translation for sectarianism in Arabic. It is also used to describe sectarianism in contemporary Ireland for example, in defiance of the sociological definition in the Weberian tradition.[16] We will attempt to understand the phenomena that the term *ta'ifiyyah* in Arabic describes, irrespective of its English translation, and so work to turn it into a concept with analytical importance in a specific sociohistorical reality. This demands a theoretical effort in a totally different context to the effort of Max Weber.

I have found usages closer to contemporary usage and broader than Weber's sociological term from a period prior to its formulation in the records of the British parliament from the 19th century, in the context of the debate over the secularization of education, with the proposal for secular schools and the right of parents from every sect – meaning here the followers of a confession – to have their children receive religious instruction according to their confession. Because schools could not provide a different religion teacher for each child, it was proposed that clergy from each confession should be charged with teaching religion lessons to the children of their confession, rather than schools doing so, when the religion teacher would be from a different confession from that of the children. What interests me here is the definition made by the proposer: "These sects, or sections –for some of the more high-minded repudiate the term *sect* when applied to themselves– are distinguished by various kinds and degrees of difference, doctrinal, ritual, disciplinal, and economical; but one character of these differences is universal, they divide the religious world into a corresponding number of distinct communities. Now, any cause of difference sufficient to produce this segregation is sufficient to dispose the adherents of each denomination to object to their children being placed under the religious tuition of a teacher who, belonging to another denomination, will naturally inculcate the doctrines ... of this own sect."[17] Here, confessional difference is linked to the formation of the community and the right of parents to have their children receive religious instruction on the basis of confession. This definition is closer to our current understanding of religious sectarianism, and not to the Weberian sociological definition of sect, which was made general in English sociology by Brian Wilson and his students.

The correct fundamentals of doctrine and its practice, the so-called true religion, have major importance in the culture of the religious sect (*firqah*), which is the very thing absent for many of those who belong to a religious *ta'ifah* as we understand it today. In our age, the *ta'ifah* brings together observant practicing religious people and other people who ascribe to the creed or confession without religious observance, or the very minimum of it. The *ta'ifah* undoubtedly takes form initially around a specific formulation of doctrine, worship, rites, and religious establishment, but membership in the *ta'ifah* usually become self-

16 We shall come back to the Irish case later in this book. There are however other usages of sectarianism in the Anglo-Saxon world prior to Weber's definitions that we shall deal with. I found (thanks to the research of the staff at the ACRPS and Doha Institute Library among second-hand book dealers) during the preparation of this study an old book published in Boston in 1854 which dealt with the reasons for the division of the religious sects in Christianity, covering all the confessions including Catholicism. The book was interested in the term "Churches", in an effort to lay down rules by which to classify them. It starts with the existence of 41 religious sects in the state of Ohio alone, which it classes into three major trends or confessions: Episcopalian (including Catholics), Presbyterian, and Congregational. See: Alexander Blaike (Rev.), *The Philosophy of Sectarianism on a Classified View of the Christian Sects in the United States* (Boston: Philips Sampson and Co., 1854), pp. 20-33. In the same manner I also found an old edition of a book from 1903 on sectarianism in China, which dealt with this term as a synonym for religious fanaticism against other trends and confessions, and to rebut the claim prevalent on the tolerance of Confucianism and the existence of tolerance for religious and confessional difference in China. See: J.J. De Groot, *Sectarianism and Religious Persecution in China,* vol. I (Ireland and New York: Irish University Press, Barnes and Noble Books, 1903), pp. 2, 149-75.

17 *Anti-National Education, Or, the Spirit of the Sectarianism Morally Tested by Means of Certain Speeches and Letters from the Member for Kilmarnock* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1837), p. 4, accessed on June 24, 2018, at: http://bit.ly/2eZukfQ

sustaining even for those who have forgotten the creed, or who only rely on religious practices for objectives connected to membership of the community of the *ta'ifah*. This marginal position may become the rule and the majority. At the core of a religion there is a group of observant practicing believers and the religious establishment. A religion would not last long, however, if adherence to it did not became akin to a shared identity encompassing the observant believers, observant non-believers, and non-observant non-believers, that is a shared adherence to the religion or confession simply because adherence itself is the axis for group formation. The strength of the religious *ta'ifah*, when it succeeds in taking the form of an imagined community, rests on the affiliation inherent in the fact that affiliation brings all of these people together. In certain historical sociological and cultural contexts, the struggle on power, resources, and status in the modern state could become a major factor in reviving these group identities.

Inmodern everyday life, the word sect is normally used with negative connotations depicting religious sects that differ from the prevailing norm, and its usage has extended to sometimes include extreme political sects. In the modern period, states have avoided using the term officially in legislation, since they prefer to speak of religions and religious groups. Some states, such as France, however, have used it in official language in a negative sense. However, generally speaking, democratic states do not like to use the term because it is a negative theological term.

People's daily lives impose a decline in doctrinal awareness and the model of the sect-based life. The religious *ta'ifah* and not sect (*firqah*) becomes the rule governing membership. In the case of some confessions and religions where proselytization is not possible, the sectarian consciousness takes the place of the doctrine entirely. Religion is transformed into an entirely closed inheritance (Judaism, the Druze religion). In cases where doctrine becomes esoteric, in that the masses are ignorant of it and only an elite knows it, and it is included in "gnostic esoteric knowledge" as in the case of the enlightened (*ukkal*) and the ignorant (*juhhal*) among the Druze, in that the young believe in a religion they can only understand if they belong to the class of clergy; in such cases, belonging to the *ta'ifah* entirely takes the place of religious belief. Thus, in such cases, sectarian identity is very strong.[18]

In fact the Arabic term *ta'ifiyyah* bears the semantics of both the terms mentioned above, but the connotation of the doctrinal religions element in it is less than its connotation in those two terms. This is in spite of the debates by clerics over every jot and tittle in Scripture. The belonging to the group part inherent in the Arab term *ta'ifiyyah* is the more pronounced, whereas doctrinal affiliation is expressed in the classical Arabic found in the books on religious communities by the word *firqah*. What defines the *firqah* in all classical *firaq* books is not the social aspects, but its statement of doctrine that differs from that of others. This distinction is not found in European languages.

Tai'fah undoubtedly means a group belonging to a religion or confession. But in the Arabic case, which is the subject of our study, it left confessional debate behind and continued as *ta'ifiyyah* sectarianism, as belonging to a group very similar to tribalism, with the difference that in the case of the large modern *ta'ifah* it is an imagined community. In the past, this usually coalesced around tribes and tribal conflicts, that is around real communities of people. Ibn Khaldun wrote: "Similarly, prophets in their religious propaganda depended on groups and families, though they were the ones who could have been supported by God with anything in existence, if He had wished, but in His wisdom He permitted matters to take their customary course."[19]

Given that in specific cases the *ta'ifah* became more influential in the life of society than the religion itself, Arab secularists are not satisfied with state neutrality in the matter of religion, because such neutrality does not solve the sectarian problem, which is self-

18 It is interesting to observe this approach in an analysis of the relationship with worldly ideology. Whenever knowledge of it and conviction about it grew, adherence to the party system organized by its official creed decreased. And whenever knowledge of it decreased, fanaticism for the party took the place of intellectual persuasions in preserving and unifying it. We note that fanaticism for the Communist Party was mostly practiced by party members who had not read a word of Marx, for example, or who had read but mostly without understanding.

19 Abderrahman Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: Book of Lessons, Record of Beginnings and Events in the History of the Arabs and Foreigners and Berbers and their Powerful Contemporaries*, eds Khalil Shehadeh and Suhail Zakkar, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 2010), p. 200.; Abderrahman Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Franz Rosenthal (trans.), N. J. Dawood (ed.), 9th paperback ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Bollingen Series/Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 127.

sustaining. This means that membership in the *ta'ifah*, even after state neutrality in the matter of religion, remains in effect in society and state. Hence, when defining secularism in the Arab case, there ought to be added to state neutrality in the matter of religion a guaranteed state neutrality in the matter of the *twa'if* pluralism as well. This is a current debate. Is the state completely neutral in the matter of the *ta'ifah*, does it discriminate between them, or does it guarantee the representation and participation of the *tawa'if* in the state? This debate intersects with another problematic in democracy regarding the different models of consociational democracy.

Weber used the term sectarianism itself in the sense of *firqiyyah*, meaning the phenomenon of sects such as Baptists and the Quakers.[20] In its basic structure, this concurs with many aspects of the classical Islamic concept of the *firqah*, which was used to signify the fusion of the group with the confession or a defined statement of belief. We find similar usages in 19th century American texts dealing with sectarianism (*firqiyyah*) as fanaticism for a specific interpretation of Christianity voluntarily chosen by the believer, and the view of other confessions as heresy and error to the point of deeming them non-belief.(21)

Weber used the word sectarian, not in the sense of *ta'ifi* (of a person or attitude), nor as it is used presently in the western literature dealing with sectarianism in Ireland and in the Arab region in Lebanon and Iraq, but to describe the morals and ideas of the adherents of a religious sect (*firqah*) that adheres to the fixed principles of religion by voluntary choice. He explains, for example, why the bourgeoise preferred to work with sectarian merchants, because they trusted their morals, they incorporated their protestant ethics in work itself, and acted in a God fearing way in their business transactions. They did not exploit, for example, the inadvertence or mistake of the other to make a profit, because the sphere of work was also the sphere of morality. According to Weber, however, the Jews separated between morality and business, and a merchant did not worry greatly about making a profit out of the stupidity or mistakes of the other party, as long as the merchant and businessmen observed Jewish law in other areas of life.[22]

The new distinction developed between the religious establishment and its public (Church – flock or Church – denomination (*ta'ifah*)[23]) on the one hand and religious sects (*firaq*) on the other.[24] Here too we must point out that Richard Niebuhr considered the denomination a third institution between religion and religious sects, and it was a result of American particularity. This is most closely translated as *kanisah* (Church) and less devalued than *firqah* (sect). For some scholars, sects develop into a denomination with the passing of time and the economic flourishing

20 Weber, p. 479.

21 George Washington Burnap, *Sectarianism, both Catholic and Protestant: A Lecture* (Baltimore: W.R. Lucas and J.N. Wight, 1835), pp. 7-11, 17-18. The book refers to incidents of killing and assault against a confessional backdrop against Baptists and Quakers in America in the mid-17th century. The book is available at http://bit.ly/2fcTi8e

22 Weber, p. 616. The whole of the chapter comparing Jewish and Puritan ethics in the same work can be reviewed, pp. 615-23.

23 I have chosen to translate the term sect as *firqah*, because of its connotations of adherence to a creed, smallness, elitism, separation, and schism, even though it is usually rendered as *ta'ifah* in Arabic, because we translate *ta'ifiyyah* as sectarianism, giving the sense of being closed. At the same time, I take *ta'ifah* when on a confessional basis as a possible translation for the term denomination. Lately in the United States, new private Churches have considered themselves Congregations.

24 The German thinker, historian and Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) enriched the social sciences with his important studies on the formation of sects (*firaq*) and denominations (*tawa'if, millal*) through a process of the institutionalization of Christianity and the compromise solutions they adopted to become institutionalized, as well as the spiritual and religio-political reactions to this in the religious sects. See: Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches,* Olive Wyon (trans.), vol. I (New York: Macmillan, 1931), pp. 40-42, vol. II, pp. 443, 990-1000. Apart from the distinctions of Max Weber between church and sect, which are basically related to the fact that the sect is a voluntary association arising from conviction and not birth, Ernst Troeltsch added distinctions derived in practice from these initial distinctions and which are related to comprehensive religious upbringing, the personal connection with the group, the personal relationship with God, and the internal faith within the sect in equality and brotherhood. Troeltsch further developed the theory of Weber, adding that the Churches tended to reach accommodation with the state, and during that process become linked with the ruling classes and partly with the existing social order; that is, they are founded on adjustments to the world. On the other hand, religious sects strive towards internal perfection, personal adherence, and dealing with the outside world with indifference, tolerance, or an oppositional and hostile tone. The values of the religious sect are dissent from the values of society in general and protest against them. The salvation the members of religious sects seek is mostly in tension with worldly interests and institutions. The sect puts itself in confrontation with the Church hierarchy and Church law. Troeltsch classified them according to three kinds: (1) active and elitist of a militant nature and aspiring to carry the message to society; (2) isolated and rejecting violence, whose environment tolerates them and that perform their customs without causing annoyance; and (3) tending towards integration after surrendering to social pressure and the willingness to make concessions.

of their members, and in accommodation and coexistence with the existing reality in society, after the time when the sect rejected, was hostile to, and turned its back on society.[25] It is a religion and established Church into which it is possible to be born, although it accepts or recognizes the existence of other options alongside it in a kind of a market of supply and demand and open competition between the products on display. This designation has come to be applied to the churches and church-like trends that in Arabic are usually called a religious *ta'ifah*, and include the relationship between the religious establishment and the followers of this establishment. All of this depends on the social position and social and political role it performs. Some sects (*firaq*) become denominations (*tawa'if* and millal) in the second generation; some are institutionalized as a sect, in the sense of a small, closed denomination, or are absorbed into the prevailing religious establishment; and some disappear from memory. With secularization and modernization, however, the transformation of sects into major religions has stopped in practice.[26]

The relation that exists between established religion and the flock, or established religion and the denomination, is characterized by adherence or membership which is based on birth and the presence of geographic, "ethnic", or political boundaries for the religious denomination and the presence of administrative bodies to run spiritual and material resources to some extent. It is also characterized by the transformation of the religious experience into an institutional and routine form that ensures the ability to formulate compromise solutions with the existing social system and adapt to the changes within. This of course does not deny that conversion to a religion happens, but institutional religion does not rest on such individual choices which remain exceptions. Here religion approaches the immersion in an ideological identity framework as a religious denomination (*ta'ifah*).

The religious sect - by definition and by virtue of its development not on the basis of birth, but on the basis of conversion, or personal experience, as well as its being selective in its membership - is exclusionary, and usually closed to and reclusive of society and compromise solutions with what it deems a "social evil which religion came to cure". However, by virtue of the sect being based on conversion and not birth, it faces a crisis in the second generation: what do members of the sect do with their children? Are they automatically members of the sect? To consider them members automatically contradicts the principle of conviction and conversion. How are they to be brought up? What are they to be taught? These and other questions arising from defeats or victories sooner or later lead to either institutionalization as a hereditary religious denomination or to dissolution. The sect may turn into a denomination, be reabsorbed into one, or be institutionalized as a closed exclusivist sect, where the concept of the sect turns into its opposite, since it almost cannot accept new converts, and opposite to how it began, membership becomes limited to birth and not conversion. Here the sect turn to a *ta'ifah* which exists by and for itself, and takes the place of the creed.

The relationship with an institutionalized religious *ta'ifah* that follows a Church or denomination, differs from an institutionalized faith creed (when the usage is positive or neutral) and sect (when negative) in European culture. We can however observe a telling overlap between the etymology and meaning of sect and the roots and semantic field of the word *ta'ifah*. It is difficult to find any trace of the word and term in the dictionaries of the social sciences and in writings on the sectarianism phenomenon. For some social scientists it means an oppositional, protest sectarianism (*firqiyyah*) (against the prevailing system or model of religion). Brian Wilson,[27] in the fashion of Max Weber, writes about Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Adventists, as well as those he terms "new religious movements" as examples of sectarianism. For him, the features of the religious sect are: (1) voluntary association; (2) membership by proof to sect authorities of fitness or virtue; (3)

25 See the article explaining the development of the Quakers in this direction: Elizabeth Isighei, "From Sect to Denomination among the Quakers," in: Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organization and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements* (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 161-210.

26 In an earlier book, I already reached the conclusion that the fact that new spiritual religions had stopped appearing and that sects had stopped turning into religions was one of the features of the late stages of secularization. Major socioeconomic and political transformations no longer took the form of emergence of new religions. See Azmi Bishara, *Secularism in Historical Context*, vol. 1, *Religion and Religiosity* (Beirut/Doha: ACRPS, 2013), pp. 419-20.

27 Bryan R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society* (Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992).

exclusiveness emphasized and expulsion exercised; (4) elitism and the dismissal of members who do not observe its creed and morality; (5) the priesthood of all believers; and (6) hostility to, withdrawal from, or indifference to secular society.[28] Elsewhere he wrote that what distinguishes the religious sect is its totalitarian hold and its being apart from other religious trends and from society in general.[29] In our view, this is a correct use of the Weberian term also for religious sects in Muslim societies, and even for the religious political movements in the Islamic world, since they behave like religious sects more than political parties.[30] Really it would be more correct to use the term *firqiyyah* to describe the movements of political Islam than to describe religious denominations like Shia, Sunni, and Christian (which are imagined communities in modernity as we shall see). It would also be correct to apply the term to rigid and dogmatically secular movements which are isolationist in their relations with other movements and society in general, so that we might consider them sectarian (*firqiyyah*). None of this is close to the sense of *ta'ifiyyah*, which is how we normally translate the term sectarianism, or to the concept of *ta'ifiyyah* that we are dealing with and wish to deduce in this research.

For Brian Wilson the terms sect and sectarian are not connected to whether the religious group is a minority or a majority, for the term does not apply to Catholics in France where they are the majority or in Germany where they form a minority. The religious sect for him maintains a degree of tension (opposition) to the surrounding world, and its members observe standards of behavior and belief. In order to be accepted into the group, and to remain as members, they have to prove a certain seriousness. They have to accept a certain regime, whose violation leads to expulsion from the group. For the member of a sect, membership is his or her primary identity that he or she puts before all others, even when allegiance and observance wane over the generations.[31]

In the tradition of Weber, Wilson, and others, many scholars classify the religious *firaq* as sects when researching religious and secular political sects that have tried to establish communities living together according to a particular lifestyle, in that the group controls the life of the individual. These include those whose members isolate themselves from society in a communal life and those who live an ordinary life but in obedience with the community.[32]

As we stated above, this Weberian definition is valid in Islamic culture for schismatic religious sects, and perhaps for some religious political movements (and even some secular movements) in contemporary world.

The Shia are not a sect and neither are the Sunni, in this sense. One scholar states that if we wish to apply Weberian terminology, then the Shia are closer to being a Church than the Sunni, but in both cases they are not expressions of voluntary membership or association.[33] In neither case is there elitist confessional exclusivism or necessarily opposition to the world.

Traditional Islamic texts distinguish between what we consider a Church, a sect, or a worship, and other forms. The Shia, the Khawarij, the Murjites, the Mu'tazilites, and so on, are all taken by classical texts as sects (*firaq*).[34] We shall come on to that later. The

28 Bryan R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," in: Bryan R. Wilson (ed.), *Patterns of Sectarianism: Organization and Ideology in Social and Religious Movements* (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 23-4; see also his treatment of the Adventists, ibid, pp. 138-57 and his treatment of the Exclusive Brethren, ibid, pp. 287-337.

29 B.R. Wilson, "An Analysis of Sect Development," *American Sociological Review*, no. 16 (1963), pp. 49-63.

30 See the author's book on the Egyptian revolution and the behavior of the Muslim Brotherhood, which behaved as if it was a religious sect and not a political party, and how that facilitated its political isolation from society: Azmi Bishara, *Egypt's Revolution* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS: 2016), vol. 1, *From July Republic to January Revolution*, p. 398; and vol. 2, *From Revolution to Coup*, p. 396. See also: Tamam Hossam, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Years Before the Revolution* (Cairo: Dar Shurouq, 2012), p. 54.

31 Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism*, pp. 1-2.

32 John Mckelvie Whitworth, "Communitarian Groups and the World," in: Roy Wallis (ed.), *Sectarianism: Analysis of Religious and Non-Religious Sects* (London: Peter Owen, 1975), pp. 117-37. He does not expect the continuation of these communitarian groups in the conditions of modernity. See also in the same work the article: Roger O'Toole, "Sectarianism in Politics: Case Studies of Maoists and De Lionists," in: Wallis (ed.), pp. 162-89.

33 Michael Cook, "Weber and Islamic Sects," in: Toby E. Huff and Wolfgang Schluchter (eds.), *Max Weber and Islam* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1999), p. 276.

34 Adam Gaiser, "A Narrative Identity Approach to Islamic Sectarianism," in: Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel (eds.), *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2017), p. 67. I read the article by this researcher and thought that the book it appeared in recently on sectarianization should not be overlooked because the ideas in it on this subject are close to those I lay out in this chapter, but with less detail. His aim is different, as he wants to affirm that the sect in the Arab context is an identity based on a specific historical narrative. We hold that while this is an important component, it is not the only one.

subject of sects in Islamic culture is essentially about the confessional, doctrinal, and intellectual differences, not the sociological structure that interests us.

It is hard to ignore the meaning of the fact that specialist dictionaries do not include this term given the extent of its presence in the West. For this reason we turned to the Oxford English Dictionary and found some doubt whether the word's etymology is from *seque*, meaning "to follow" and gives the meaning of followers of a specific religious or philosophical path (and the derivation of the doctrinal sect follows logically) or from *secere*, meaning "to cut", and gives the meanings section and sector, as does the word *tai'fah* (which really means a faction, class, or group of followers, meaning the part which follows a specific approach). In this case, sectarianism only means factionalism, which is not necessarily religious, and may be associated with an ideology or the tenets of a religious or secular party.

We note here that the meaning of the word sect in the English dictionaries is closer to the semantics of the phenomenon we wish to deal with than the meaning of the term sect in sociology since Max Weber. We will see that delineating the borders of a group of adherents to a religion or confession is one of the key features of sectarian factionalism. Sectarianism does not occur at the period of spread and proselytization, but at the stage of drawing boundaries and setting down distinctions between "us" and "others" on the basis of the same selection, when in this case they are the confessional or religious others. Differentiation comes in degrees from social difference to social, and political, conflict.

Religious sects may start out as political protest movements in the context of religion and religious discourse, raising the banner of religious principles against what they consider negligence around them. They might also start out as a mystical or gnostic spiritual groups, while their development is linked with the historical social and political conditions that governed their emergence. This fact gives birth to the foundation of new religions as well as to the formation of the institution of the Church (Ecclesia) and also gives birth to the continuation of dissident religious sects that reject compromise solutions and proclaim their fanaticism for what they understand as the original teachings, which they cling on to in face of the negligence of the religious establishment. Mostly, the word sect in the history of Christianity has been used negatively to describe dissidents from the mother community.

The religious *ta'ifah*, as we use the concept here, might be a community, and might be an imagined community, but what matters is that it is an identity-based group that differentiates itself by means of affiliation with a creed or confession, which it deems an important social and political determinant. In religious and religiously pluralistic societies it becomes a socio-political entity with a role in the public sphere and that may forefront a set of affiliations (or identities for those who want to use this definition) that determine the individual's self-definition and the position of others towards him because of his membership in a specific *ta'ifah*.

We have previously dealt with the importance of religion in modern societies, the change to its role, and the emergence of civic, political, and other forms of religion.[35] Here, however, we are addressing another subject – namely, sectarianism. When we consider modern industrial societies from the perspective of the *ta'ifah* we find that other ties have come to dominate the tie of the religious *tai'fah*, even for the religious, and there has been a process of social integration brought about by the growth of the modern economy and state, and the secularization process prevalent in them. We still, however, find traces of sectarianism within them. Until recently in the United States, we find the effect of the sectarian attitude towards Catholics manifested in Catholics not standing for the presidency with the sole exception prior to John Kennedy being Al Smith, who lost the elections after a propaganda campaign in which his opponent had no hesitation about pointing out his Catholicism and suggesting that a Catholic was not fit to be president of the United States. That was the case even though the United States is not ruled by a religious regime, and there was no talk of religious teachings that did not allow for a Catholic to be president. For that reason, we say this is a sectarian attitude, not a religious attitude.

It is difficult in the 21st century to claim that anti-Catholic discrimination by Protestants is found in the United States, but there is discrimination against

35 In another work by the author, *Religion and Secularism in Historical Context*.

Muslims in American society, although not in law or in citizenship. In my opinion, this discrimination did not reach the level of sectarian discrimination, and remains simply as one form of prejudice against a different other. Muslims are still outside the American religious dominations in the prevailing culture (although the law recognizes them and their right to establish institutions and freely carry out their religious rites). Racism against Muslims is religious and political cultural more than it is sectarian. Perhaps some of their affairs will become denominational and the discrimination will be sectarian once they have assimilated as a religious denomination into the American nation, in a generation or two; that is, once they become part of the whole.

Generally speaking, there is considerable similarity between racism and sectarianism, particularly if we define racism in cultural terms. The main distinction is that a person can, in theory, change his or her denomination (*ta'ifah*), but cannot change their race. Nonetheless, racism in both cases is understood as a social construction to enshrine difference and make it the basis for formulating policies and discriminating between people on the basis of these socially constructed differences. The same applies to sectarianism.

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