HEARING THE VOICE FROM THE VEIL.
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY INTO THE MOURNING FOR LADY ZAINAB BY
TORONTO SHIITES

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ABSTRACT

The religious flux experienced by Indo-Pakistani Shiites in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) raises insightful questions about how and why their lamentation assemblies are modified. Although the martyrdom of Hussain and his companions at the siege of Karbala has an existential importance to Shiite mourning, a premium is also placed on the narrative of Lady Zaynab, the first granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad. I use the veneration of Zaynab as my guide into explaining ritual change within this Shiite diaspora. Zaynab was Hussain's comrade in spirit and, in the absence of Zaynab, Hussain's resistance was futile – her strength of mind, compassion and dedication make her the cornerstone of Shiite belief and the driving force behind the panorama of Shiite mourning rituals and assemblies. These mourning rituals are discussed through my participation in them during my formative years in Dubai, the strict formulae to our mourning and the socioeconomic, political circumstances within which our mourning transpired. Through the authoritative discourses that mediated our mourning, I highlight the ritual change I unexpectedly witnessed upon migrating to the Greater Toronto Area, how it is received by the elder members of the Shiite diaspora and the fluid interpretations of Shiite mourning within the context of ritual theory, identity and diaspora. This unsettles any assumption of the essential fixity of Shiite Islam by emphasizing the power relations that mediate rituals and the interpretive scope. The narrative of Zaynab remains central to the work – Markazi Matami Sangat Toronto, the core group behind the ritual change, was formed in the courtyard of her shrine and a series of interviews and discussions on power and memory provide an understanding of how and why Shiite mourning rituals have witnessed significant modifications in the multicultural Greater Toronto Area.

DEDICATION

To my father and mother, for encouraging me to question, and to my grandparents, whose

journeys through India, East Africa and the Middle East gave us the freedom to.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION: MOURNING RITUALS FOR ZAYNAB, THE UNTAUGHT

SCHOLAR

The following thesis studies Shiite mourning rituals with one major objective: to provide

sociological insight into the increased frequency of these rituals in Toronto's Indo-Pakistani

Shiite diaspora. Although the types of ritual may differ, Shiites predominantly organize

mourning rituals in the first two months and eight days, Ayam e Aza, of the Islamic lunar

calendar wherein they congregate to mourn the martyrdom of their patron saints from the lineage

of the Prophet Muhammad[1]. During the Ayam e Aza, Shiites strictly refrain from joyous

celebrations and commit themselves entirely to mourning. However, the group of contemporary

immigrants (mostly second generation immigrants from Pakistan) I will study participate in

weekly lamentation assemblies extending beyond the standard mourning periods. The religious

flux experienced by these Indo-Pakistani Shiites raises insightful questions about why and how

their lamentation assemblies modify in Toronto. It further questions the tension between the

second generation and community elders who take issue with the validity, appropriateness and

nature of these modifications – perhaps, I argue, identity and a "true self" is heavily

problematized and community elders sense a steady erasure of the core features of their identity

which they have laboriously established in Canadian contexts (Hall 1989: 339). Although the

martyrdom of Hussain, the prince/lord of martyrs, and his companions at the siege of Karbala

has an existential importance to Shiite mourning[2], a premium is also placed on the narrative of

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[1] Al Naqvi, Syed Ali Naqi. A Historical Review of The Institution of Azadari For Imam Hussain.

Karachi: Peer Muhammad Trust, 1974.

[2] Ali, Ahmed. Hussain:The Saviour of Islam. New York: Baldwin, 1974.

Lady Zaynab, the first granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad. I use the veneration of Zaynab as my entrance into explaining ritual change within this Shiite diaspora. Zaynab is merited as the pioneer of the system of Shiite mourning rituals and mourners in Toronto embark on annual pilgrimages to her shrine to pay homage to her for successfully resisting a hegemonic and oppressive ruling Caliphate[3]. In fact, it was during a visit to Zaynab's shrine in 2006 that Toronto's chief Shiite mourning group, Markazi Matami Sangat Toronto (MMST), was founded. The increased frequency of these mourning assemblies, specifically around the ritual of self-flagellation, in Toronto suggests a renewed vigor and perspective within this diaspora's second generation. Currently, Shiites in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, specifically in Pakistan, routinely witness target killings by militant groups and perhaps Zaynab's prominence in the diaspora underscores her role in empowering the Shiite community and protecting its identity. Additionally, Shiites as a whole are contesting a variety of political battles in the Middle East – the theological teachings and political advice from the Shiite clergy have mobilized a variety of responses across the diaspora and I inquire into how this speaks to MMST. Lastly, the context within the GTA itself cannot be ignored and it is appropriate to examine whether the onerous images of Islam and general debate around Muslim practices in the Western world have had any bearing on their renewal exercise. The analysis of ritual change facilitates multiple theoretical discussions. Inherent within this is a need to understand the Canadian context, and I use discourses around multiculturalism to argue possible reasons and implications of the ritual changes – perhaps the modifications are in response to the failures of multiculturalism in accommodating for the diversity within Islam? The discussions around multiculturalism in

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[3] Al Shahid, Abdullah. The life of Fatima Az-Zahra, The Principal Of All Women. Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2006

Canada began in 1971 to encourage cultural diversity within the society (Farrar 2012: 9). Yet, specifically post 9-11, fears around militant Islam have shifted public sentiment away from the multicultural ideal and Muslim communities are increasingly suspect for their religious practices and rituals (Modood 2013: 14). Shiite mourning within this context requires some understanding which may, perhaps, tie back into the changes I describe in the GTA. Thus, regardless of the theological verity of the ritual changes, drawing on personal experiences, sociological analysis of ritual, interviews with MMST members and previously published ethnographic materials, I will examine why and how ritual change has occurred in Toronto's Indo-Pakistani Shiite diaspora, its relations to 'home' and the prism of meanings Zaynab offers to the mourners' inter-related identity of nationality and religion. While I do not concern myself with Islamic theological assessments on the validity of Shiite mourning rituals and M``MST, I use the tensions that I witness to open discussion into how the Shiite Indo-Pak community in the GTA is positioning itself within the community as well as within the broader context of a multicultural society.

0.1   APPROACHING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Azadari is the traditionally accepted term for the various Shiite mourning rituals that reenact, recount and recollect the sufferings of the Prophet Muhammad's family against oppressive regimes. The Arabic word 'aza' combines with the Persian suffix 'dari' to mean the complex of Shiite mourning rituals that are a public, visceral demonstration of fidelity to the Prophet Muhammad's household (Hyder 2006: 52): Azadari has a social function and it conveys one's identity and group affiliation. Mourning rituals serve as an expression of partisanship and are practiced within an expansive freedom. And, while most mourning focuses overwhelmingly on the portentous event of Karbala, there is no singular experience engendered by these rituals (Schubel 1993: 159). These rituals, however, are not monolithic and are modified through

alternating social, political and cultural spaces (Aghaie 2005: 241) – additionally, mourning is a communal and public demonstration of faith and affiliation[4].

Shiite mourning rituals are a part of both my personal and academic heritage. In chapter 1, I dissect the rich and complex elements of Shiite mourning rituals and compose a detailed narrative of my memories as a teenage mourner. I do not omit my personal experiences. Instead, I use this chapter to orient my readers to the Shiite mourning rituals I participated in during my formative years in Dubai's Indo-Pak diaspora. In doing so, I also provide some background into the socioeconomic, political contexts and the impact I understood our mourning rituals to have had. Mourning in the Shiite Indo-Pak diaspora is inextricably linked to the memories of home (Hyder 2005: 75). It is, also, significantly linked to a 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 19) through which mourners in the diaspora negotiate experiences of displacement and secularization. I describe the various stages and settings for the mourning rituals as well as the symbolic meanings attached to them. Hervieu-Léger explains that the symbolic meanings attached to these mourning rituals speak to the importance of religion in 21st century diasporas and its capacity to link past, present and future members. Extending from Durkheim's collective conscience, Hervieu-Leger explains religion as a shared tradition that binds individuals from similar backgrounds together (Langham 2003: 693): she does, however, acknowledge the role of modernity in empowering individual interpretations of these rituals. Growing up in this diaspora, wherein we also resided in Indo-Pak boroughs, had an immense impact on the types of rituals I participated in and my understanding of my family's Indo-Pak heritage – from the language of the mourning eulogies to my mourning dress, I was socialized into a Shiite faith that

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[4] Ahmad, Imtiaz. Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India. New Delhi: 1981.

was inextricably linked and inspired by Indo-Pak symbols[5]. In addition to this, given the geographical proximity between Dubai and the Indo-Pak, the news of secular conflicts was a regular discussion in our community – the fear of Shiites being ethnically cleansed from certain regions in Pakistan and Afghanistan, for example, evoked heavy emotional responses and our mourning rituals often ended with prayers for the oppressed Shiites. In essence, our mourning was a means of announcing our existence and survival through difficult circumstances. Along with this, I explain the socioeconomic circumstances within which our mourning transpired and I unwrap discussions on how the communal gatherings impacted the daily lives of our largely working class diaspora. Dubai is an immensely diverse bastion of Shiite diasporas and I also include other Shiite diasporas into my narrative and attend to the nuances in these rituals – I describe how shifting cultural contexts allowed me to experience contrasting rituals within the Iranian, Iraqi and Tanzanian Shiite communities. Although I eventually shift exclusive attention to the self-flagellation ritual of Matam, I discuss how migration, religious authority and socioeconomic status mediate Shiite mourning rituals as well as the time brackets within which they occur. I introduce the reader to the strictly defined Shiite occasions of joy and sadness and relay how various rituals were stitched into my identity. Through emulating my parents, I was reminded of the efficacy of Shiite rituals in demonstrating my love for the Prophet Muhammad's household: I provide details on my first pilgrimage to Zaynab's shrine[6], my first engagement in a particular type of Matam with my father on the hallowed day of Ashura and my parents' unfailing reliance on the miraculous intercession of Shiite martyrs. Many of these coming of age rituals allowed me to further engage with my mourning praxis and I share some of the questions

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[5] Hollister, John. <u>The Shia of India</u>. London: Huzac, 1993.

[6] Shahin, Badr. <u>Lady Zaynab.</u> Qum: Ansariyan Publications, 2002.

that emerged for me as I deepened my participation. This discussion permeates into how I came to learn about the strict parameters for our mourning rituals and the overall resistance to change. Within our community, the mourning rituals were followed with strict precision - from the mobilization of resources to the special eulogies recited on each martyr's death anniversary, our community maintained a pattern to the mourning rituals that had gone relatively unchanged for over 200 years. Any change in our mourning rituals was perceived as a threat to our cultural and religious heritage. In fact, I argue that changes in rituals were often received as erroneous readings of religious prescriptions. One of the major debates during my formative years in Dubai was around a proposal to conduct certain segments of the rituals (specifically the eulogies) in the English language to accommodate for non-Urdu speaking congregants and observers of the public mourning processions. In light of Dubai's cosmopolitan populace, the proposal was aimed at making our community more inclusive. However, a contingent of community elders vehemently opposed the change and saw it as a step towards eroding the community's past. The strict system, if you will, I had come to practice within was radically unsettled for me upon moving to Toronto. I conclude the chapter with my migration to Toronto, joining MMST and witnessing ritual change through the increased frequency of the self-flagellation ritual of Matam as well as a summary of the related controversies surrounding Matam. Although this chapter will not delve too deeply into the specific mourning rituals and changes in the GTA, I will briefly discuss the public mourning processions to provide for a brief encounter with the tensions around authoritative discourse and the degree of interpretive scope.

In Chapter 2, I discuss ritual theories in the social sciences insofar as they offer productive lenses for identifying different layers of signification in Matam. The study of Matam, specifically its threshold for change, will be my central focus of a ritual. I begin with a history on

the emergence of ritual as an analytical category. Even though the study of ritual has been closely linked to the academic conceptualization of religion as a separate category of analysis (Bell 1997: 3), ritual has hitherto been used to explore the consequences of social, political as well as religious practice. Ritual is thus couched within a complex arena of scholarship. Accordingly, this allows me to dissect ritual to account for three important elements: the function of ritual in a social setting, the power relations that punctuate it and the individual participant's level of agency. There is an extensive body of literature on ritual and there is no collectively agreed upon definition for the term. Ritual is often seen to emerge out of or be related to the reproduction of 'the sacred', especially so among Durkheimians: Robert Bellah highlights the importance of the social implications of such rituals in reinforcing social solidarity and inducting the youth into the community (Bellah 1964: 364). Ritual is also contested by evolutionary biologists to be rooted in animal behavior[7]. And beyond the disagreements on the origins of ritual, there is continuous debate on its sociopolitical patterns. Writing from a structural-functionalist paradigm, Maurice Bloch argues that rituals are highly formalized, offering the participant few alternatives to change the 'script'. Bloch advances ritual as the special strategy of traditional authority (Kelly & Kaplan 1990: 125) and a conservative force that serves to protect the status quo. Stanley Tambiah contests Bloch and positions rituals as sites of order and change. He posits that rituals can turn left or right depending upon the conditions they are practiced in (Kelly & Kaplan 1990: 126): rituals could function as a tool of traditional authority but could also serve as a location for participants to exercise their own agency. Once I augment the theoretical schools on ritual, I examine how Matam operates as a ritual and select a definition of

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[7] Bell, Catherine. <u>Teaching Ritual. Oxford Online Scholarship.</u> New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

ritual to guide my work into the primary Shiite ritual arena, the Imambargah. Ritual is not a passive, natural occurrence that human beings simply fall in line with – there is analytical merit in the performative dimension of rituals and the ritual arena, which allows me to assess the societal impact of Matam, the influence of the Shiite elders and the scope for change in the frequency of Matam. I punctuate this with questions on ritual and Matam: I question the parameters for Matam established by Zaynab, whether it truly originates from strict religious doctrine (authenticating discourse) and whether individual mourners can reinterpret Matam for themselves under specific social conditions and historical circumstances (interpretive scope). Most of these questions get further contextualized in Toronto through my later interviews with members of MMST. Although this chapter is laden with a theoretical emphasis, I conclude with a small discussion on the authoritative practices within Shiite Islam, the centrality of the clergy and the eclectic, Sufi-inspired roots of many Matami Sangats. I touch briefly on the mystical figure of Lal Shabaz Qalandar who is credited with spreading the Azadari through much of modern day Pakistan – which he, along with other venerated figures, refused the clerical authority speaks closely to the manner in which MMST proceeds with their Matam.

In Chapter 3, I delve into the history of Shiite migration to Toronto and share details on the creation of the first Indo-Pak Imambargah in Toronto. I provide a theoretical discussion on diaspora, transnationalism and memory and look into the multi-stranded means by which immigrants maintain links between their new host and old home societies. The dynamics of Indo-Pak religiosity and ritual practice in the diaspora is a powerful determinant of the linkages and divisions within the diaspora (Brown 2006: 93). Understanding this diaspora also opens up investigation into how immigrant communities adapt to change and how certain kinds of religious digital media mediate and enable such transitions. Not only does digital media create

connections between people in different geographies, it also minimizes the experiences of spatio-temporal distance (Eisenlohr 2006: 224). Such media plays a heavy role in creating community in the diaspora and maintains a constant link between the former and new homes. Qasim Hasan and Qasim Hussain, affectionately known as the Hussaini brothers, immigrated with their families to Toronto in the early 1970s. As active mourners back in the city of Lucknow, they brought with themselves a capital of audio/video recordings of Urdu speeches from esteemed Shiite clerics, mourning eulogies and religious symbols needed to continue their rituals. I explore the brothers' role in establishing a community of mourners in the GTA and move into the analysis of ritual change in the current community. Today, there are over 10 Indo-Pak Imambargahs in Toronto alone, and there is a constant tension between members of MMST and the community elders. One of the backbone issues around ritual change in the diaspora, is the role of memory. Memory is one of the structural bases of the immigrant experience (Rosinska 2010: 31). In sociology, memory does not only refer to our capacity to remember, but to the various practices and social arrangements through which social groups are formed and through which they acquire a sense of the social imaginary of belonging. Memory is one of the foremost sites in which Zaynab lives in the diaspora and I advance that most Indo-Pak Shiites who immigrate to the GTA do so with a personal memory of mourning – changes to this can be quite unsettling and I examine this tension to explore the reconfiguration of ritual. I explore the economic capacities for religious place making and the role of technology in sustaining memories. In what is, for me, the most exciting section of my work, I look at how Imambargahs from Lucknow and Lahore have been recreated in Toronto and how these sites are being, controversially, reconfigured by MMST. I explore the idea of a Sangat and detail on the changes being evidenced in the Matam assemblies organized by MMST. Importantly, I relate these

changes to Zaynab's advocacy and establishment of mourning rituals. As mentioned earlier, I also bring the reader to attend to the issues around multiculturalism and the assimilation of Shiite youth into the GTA community. As I provide the readers with a landscape of the Imambargahs in the Greater Toronto Area, I also delve into the political influences that shape the outlook and perspectives of the congregation. This, to some degree, lends some investment into understanding how Matam connects to the identity of the MMST members and their stance on articulating an Islamic identity in the GTA.

In Chapter 4, I explore my interviews with members of MMST and demonstrate how Zaynab has empowered their fervor for Matam. The interviews are couched within a brief theoretical analysis of identity. I analyze my interviews through the previously discussed categories of ritual, diaspora and memory and solicit their thoughts on how Matam is relevant to their identity. By interviewing members of MMST, I delve into personal narratives and explore how the second generation was introduced to their community's mourning rituals: the result of the interviews is to also understand how the changes to the rituals were received in the community and the impact these have had on relationships within the community. Furthermore, beyond examining the reasons for the mobilization of MMST, I also look into how the contemporary socio-political circumstances have impacted the Shiite identity of the members. I search what it means to be a Shiite mourner of Zaynab in the Canadian context. I conclude in Chapter 5 with my understanding of how Matam and Zaynab could further the academy's understanding of the development of Shiite Islam in North America, the difficulties with teaching Shiite ritual in non-Shiite circles and a personal reflection on the power and identity politics that I have witnessed. This personal reflection is an effort to grow both my own and the academy's interest in the formation of religious communities in the diaspora – I discuss the

constant battle between a "religious" and "spiritual" identity and impress upon the reader the heightened need to continue inter-disciplinary work on the multifaceted dimensions of Zaynab and Shiite mourning rituals.

The later sections of this introduction provide the necessary, albeit brief, historical background against which the theoretical chapters and interviews are set.

0.2   ZAYNAB & THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAM'S SHIITE MINORITY SECT

As memory is key to how second generation Shi'ites understand and practice Matam, I want to contextualize this with a discussion of Shiite mourning rituals and Zaynab in the Indo-Pak by drawing on some of the authoritative sources that normatively define its religious history. Even though this reads more like a summary of some of the key moments in this history, I attempt to invite further scholarship and thought on how we might understand Zaynab's establishment of mourning and the authorizing discourses accompanying it. Among practitioners, no one doubts that the mourning rituals are intricately tied with the Shiite community's minority status in most albeit not all contexts of practice. To contextualize: Shiite Islam is one of the two major schools of thought in Islam and its creedal roots branched out shortly after the Prophet Muhammad's death in 632 CE. Today, Sunni Muslims constitute 87% of the global Muslim population and Shiites the remainder. Both schools of thought also dissect further into subsects: my work is with the Ithna-Asheri, Twelver Shiites who believe in twelve infallible leaders after the Prophet Muhammad. Historically, Islam did not unfold exclusively under two polarized sects (Hyder 2006: 6). In fact, the two schools of thought grew separately in the Islamic landscape many years after Muhammad's death. However, the seeds of this separation were planted soon after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad and continuous political agitation and protest, often

with brutal consequences, marred the Muslim community[8].

Central to these innumerable episodes of contention was a question of unto whom should the Prophet Muhammad's authoritative power devolve. Following the death of the Prophet Muhammad, the Muslim community in the city of Madina, the sociopolitical unit of Islam, was plunged deep into a nebulous "crisis of succession" and the unity that bound them during the Prophet Muhammad's time did not outlive him (Achaia 2001: 1). An uncertainty about who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad flit around the community. Muslims were divided over who was qualified to lead the community and, more importantly, how that leader should be elected. Eventually, a schism developed that pronounced permanent sectarian borders between the Muslims,

> "Even though the process of prophecy came to an end with the Prophet, the relationship of most Muslims with Islam was affected by their allegiances to particular post-Muhammadan discourses and leaders" (Hyder 2006: 5).

Attending to the uncertainty and crisis, a group of Muslims struck a committee that elected Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, as the community's leader. This election concretized a caliphate system, a system that would eventually form the pillars of a ruling empire. A majority of the Muslims, who are now identified as Sunni Muslims, voted in favour of their religious lives being governed by the ruler caliph and accepted Abu Bakr as the first caliph. However, a minority, who are now identified as Shiite Muslims, vehemently opposed this rule. This Shiite Muslim opposition believed that the successor of the Prophet was ordained through divine judgment. To them, Ali Ebn-e Abu Talib, the Prophet's son-in-law, was the first infallible

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[8] Rogerson, Barnaby. The Heirs Of The Prophet Muhammad. London: Little Brown, 2006.

guide, the exegete par excellence after the Prophet Muhammad and the successors of the Prophet Muhammad were believed to be his immediate family. They swore their allegiance to Ali. The Arabic word "Shi'ah" means "party of" and is used to signify the minority party that supported Ali as the successor of the Prophet Muhammad.

Fearing a civil war, Ali did not publicly protest the election procedure and vote count. Shiite historians suggest that he only voiced his displeasure with the caliphate system in a sermon delivered during the time of the 3rd caliph, Uthman Ebn-e Affan. Nonetheless, immediately post Muhammad, his followers, specifically his household, were perceived as threats and Ali himself was assassinated in 661 CE. Ali's followers and supporters were few and far between but could be easily identified by their shaved heads (they did this as a mark of protest). Some historical accounts also report that Ali's wife was abused by Abu Bakr (Pinault 2001: 12) for her refusal of the caliphate. Economically, the partisans of Ali were excluded from many trade and labour opportunities and lived off poor subsistence (Wiley 1992: 25). This exclusion was the catalyst for the heightened oppression against Ali's followers and family, particularly after 661 CE, as they proceeded to openly protest the lifecycle of the caliphate. Through petitions, street protests and blockades, the partisans of Ali pressed for their rights to co-exist equally, if not separately, within the Islamic milieu. These agitations, though, were met with severe brutality and state violence.

It is within this crisis that Zaynab emerges and acquires a pivotal role in the memory of Shi'ites around the world. The provenance of Zaynab's narrative begins after Muhammad's death when Shiite authorities posit that Umar attacked Zaynab's house and fatally injured her mother Fatima (Hazleton 2009: 70). The later assassination of Zaynab's brother, Hussain, at Karbala is mourned by Shiites as the extreme of the oppression suffered by Zaynab's household.

In 680 CE, on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, Hussain, was slain on the plains of Karbala along with 72 of his faithful male companions and family. This day is remembered as Ashura and Hussain, ever since, is metaphorically alive as the prince of martyrs. Hussain was killed for refusing to accept the reign of the second Umayyad caliph, Yazid Ebn-e Muawiya. Aware of the labyrinthine condition of the leadership after the Prophet Muhammad, Hussain was convinced that Yazid was stepping beyond his bailiwick by assuming Islamic leadership by force. When ordered to pledge allegiance to Yazid, Hussain decided to proceed, along with his family and followers, to southern Iraq and initiate an uprising. Yazid, however, intercepted Hussain on his journey to southern Iraq and a standoff took place at Karbala. After three days, bereft of food and drink, Hussain and his loyalists were massacred by Yazid's thousand strong militia. After the massacre, Yazid's forces looted Hussain's caravan, mounted the heads of the dead on spears and raped the women. He took these women as captives to his political seat in Damascus and paraded them through public markets.

For Shiites, Hussain's fight against Yazid was thus a battle between "good and evil". Hussain represented just, divine rule and Yazid was the satanic figure who exercised unjust rule. Hussain's martyrdom in Karbala was a resistance against injustice, a resistance that gave him a symbolic victory. For Shiites, inspiration for all moments of life is drawn from the events of Karbala and it an event that renders legitimacy to their claims. Commemorating Hussain is an act of reaffirmation for the Shiites. It repeats their call for just rule, divine rule. Such is its essence that the 6th Imam, Jafar Ebn-e-Mohammad Baqir, of the Shiites calls on them to regard each land and day as Karbala and Ashura.

Zaynab witnessed Hussain being massacred in Karbala along with his male companions

and watched Hussain's final moments before his head was severed and mounted on a lance. Zaynab also lost her two sons, Aun and Muhammad, in Karbala. Following the events of Ashura, Zaynab's sisters and children were assaulted by Hussain's killers. Zaynab's family was looted of its possessions by the army of the Umayyad ruler Yazid. After their tents in Karbala were set ablaze and their headscarves forcefully removed, Zaynab's female relatives and children were assaulted, raped and presented before Yazid. For Shiites, Zaynab's speech in the court of Damascus is interpreted as a voice of truth against an oppressive sultanate (Aghaie 2005: 169). She is a woman warrior who advanced Islam in a tyrant's court and is memorialized in Indo-Pakistani mourning rituals as the preserver of Shiite Islam. Shiite historians also advance Zaynab to be a prominent scholarly personality of her time and she often spoke on behalf of the Shiite leadership (Shahin 1967: 63). Zaynab's political protest against the public rape and assault of Muhammad's daughters, exactly 48 years after his death, is, for Shiites, an invocation of an alternative Islamic history (Hyder 2005: 162). Zaynab's non-violent resistance and critique of the ruling Islamic despots is attributed to her profound intellect.

As a matter of fact, Zaynab's intellectual prowess is elevated in Shiite thought. There are two episodes in her relations with Muhammad that offer a rarely spoken of perspective into her role in the establishment of the Islamic system. I look into Zaynab's naming ceremony at birth and a dream she shared with Muhammad that revealed her forthcoming life of trial and tribulation. Zaynab's birth and familial lineage speak volumes of her inherited connections with the fundamental figures in Islam's nascent years.While from a paternal side Zaynab's grandfather was the founding messenger of Islam, her grandmother from her paternal side was Khadijah (Abbas 2005: 141). Khadijah, the first wife of Muhammad, is celebrated as Islam's chief economic supporter: her wealth assisted Muhammad in establishing key Islamic

infrastructure and she remained an ardent supporter of his cause until death. Zaynab's father Ali Bin Abu Talib and mother Fatima Az Zahra are hailed by Shiites as the leaders of truth and the truthful (Hyder 2006: 18).

From this genealogical tree, Zaynab is surrounded by the primary bastions of the Islamic cause. It is important to not overlook the fact that Zaynab had direct access to the Prophet Muhammad for much of her early life and, as such, her actions are reflective of his guidance. Her public advancements against a tyrannical regime certainly question the patriarchal image that often gets plastered onto Muhammad. As was the tradition in Arabia, she was bestowed, at birth, with the Arabic epithet Al- Alimah, The Knowledgeable One. There is considerable evidence that Zaynab was named only after the Prophet Muhammad arrived to celebrate her birth. According to Shiite sources, Ali refused to name Zaynab without the Prophet's consent and the Prophet refused to bless the newborn with a name until it was revealed by God. Zaynab was named after an immediate revelation from the archangel Gabriel (Shahin 2002: 57).

As a caveat, it is interesting that most accounts of Zaynab's birth suggest that this occasion was far from festive. The Prophet Muhammad, under divine instruction, informed his kin of Zaynab's upcoming hardships. It is for this reason that she was also titled as Ummal Masaib, the mother of grievances. Zaynab's nephew, the 4th Shiite Imam Zayn ul Abideen, often spoke of Zaynab's knowledge as a miraculous endowment. Zaynab, he says, never received formal education and the source of her vast knowledge can only be framed as a miracle. Zaynab engaged in a process of self-study and deeply immersed herself in prophetic instruction (Shahin 2002: 83). While Zaynab had access to the male speakers of Islam, she rarely, if ever, engaged them in scholarly discussion. And as she graduated in age and was tied in matrimony, Zaynab often held private classes for local women on the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence. The

cause of justice was the vocation of the Prophet Muhammad's life and through base historical evidence it is clear that Zaynab, as a woman, aligned herself with this cause from an early age (Hyder 2006: 97). While she may not have engaged in the public political arena, she was fluent in Islamic and social discourse. Zaynab's life, as such, may well support the gendered division of the mourning rituals I have experienced. However, the participation of women in the communitas is by no means relegated to stereotypical gender roles. Zaynab's birth and life is a testament to Islam's veneration of female potential.

While the episode of her birth reflect her connection to the Prophet Muhammad, a conversation closer to Muhammad's final moments reveals the close proximity of her struggle to Muhammad. Zaynab had once approached Muhammad in relation to a disturbing dream – he translated the dream as a revelation on the suffering she would endure upon the deaths of her grandfather, father, mother and brothers (Shahin 2002: 63). The Prophet Muhammad mourned the public assault she and the rest of his harem would endure. However, he also promised her a society of mourners who would not forget her stand. Shiites often revel in this and declare themselves as this promised society[9]. It is perhaps relevant to extract from this that the Prophet Muhammad involved Zaynab in the progression of Islam. Her endurance and energy in further the Islamic cause was not devalued in the prophetic mission. The spiritual and mystical dimensions of Zaynab's character are thus a source of solace for most Shiites.

0.3 SHIITE RESISTANCE THROUGH COMMUNAL MOURNING RITUALS

The Late Allama Rashid Torabi, a celebrated philosopher and interlocutor in Shiite and

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[9] Sachedina, Abdul Aziz. The Just Ruler In Shiite Islam. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

interfaith circles, theorized on Zaynab's life as the successful summation of Hussain's (Hyder 2006: 41). While Yazid gloated over his temporal victories and arrogated himself as the leader of the Islamic community, Zaynab defiantly upheld her brother's stand and protested his unfair exile from Saudi Arabia. Her ordeals in Iraq's garrison city of Kufa and in the Islamic caliphate's seat in Damascus are routinely spoken about in mourning assemblies. Zaynab suffered both mental and physical abuse – she witnessed her nephew, Hussain's only surviving son, have hot water thrown on him and endured severe wounds from persistent lashes (Nakshawani 2014: 125). For Torabi, Zaynab was Hussain's comrade in spirit and he often underscored that in the absence of Zaynab, Hussain's resistance would be futile. Zaynab's strength of mind, compassion and dedication to others make her the cornerstone of Shiite belief (Deeb 2005: 256) and it is her commitment to promulgating justice that ushered the establishment of the institution of mourning rituals and assemblies[10]. Zaynab, Torabi would explain, could have chosen to accept Yazid and free herself from his torment. Instead, by mourning for Hussain publically, she maintained his innocence and infuriated Yazid. The institution of mourning established by Zaynab was aimed at eternalizing condemnation of the oppression and pain suffered by the Prophet Muhammad's household. The aspect of physical mourning and self-flagellation opens a brief theoretical discussion on the role of pain in religious practice and the position of the individual. In my own experience of sharing videos of Shiite mourning rituals in guest lectures, my audience was often shocked, and perhaps even appalled, by the pain the mourners were causing to themselves. The veneration of Hussain and the martyrs itself was not an issue. Instead, it was the mourning of these figures through painful rituals that raised much ire. This discussion is less an endeavour to seek justification for the rituals but more a concentration on the function of pain on the

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[10] Hosni, Hosayn Zulfiqar. Majales-e-Torabi. Karachi: Mahfuz Book Agency, 1991.

individual, the practising community and outsiders. Asad describes pain to be more than a private relationship – it is, instead, a public relationship (Asad 2003: 81). The mourner enters into a relationship with the mourned and shares in the experience of the pain. Far from picturing the mourner as passive in the experience of pain, Talal argues that the capacity to experience and express pain is at the core of what makes the human active and formulates much of what is considered to be religious devotion. This experience was often expressed by elders in the community in which I was raised – to feel the pain of the Shiite patron saints was rooted in the idea of being "at one" with their personalities and standing in solidarity with them. Numerous salutations that are recited in honour of the Imams reference a desire of the Shiites to have been with their Imams through their trials and difficulties. The pain through mourning is, in some way, an attempt to feel some of that bygone pain.

In Chapter 1, I provide a thorough breakdown of each ritual and explain the attached significance. However, given that my focus is on the ritual of Matam, this section details on two types of Matam with a brief, personal explanation of the imbibed ethos of resistance. Hath Ka Matam is performed daily during the mourning period and involves rows of mourners beating their chests to slogans and eulogies. Often, especially in Punjabi Pakistani communities, the men participating are bare chested. According to Allama Nasir Abbas, a Shiite scholar who was assassinated in Lahore in December 2013, Matam is performed in rows in memory of Hussain's last walk to the battlefield: it is said that Zaynab and her children stood guard for Hussain and he walked between their rows. Zanjeer Ka Matam, on the other hand, is strictly performed by men and involves the striking of one's back with a series of knives connected by six inch chains connected to a wooden handle. Zanjeer Ka Matam happens outside the Imambargah as well as inside.

It is important to note that Matam does not fall under the obligatory acts of worship. Matam is a choice one makes and it is not mandatory for one to participate. Some communities in Pakistan and India also perform Agg Ka Matam and walk on fire to remember Hussain's burning tents. I have never experienced or witnessed this form of Matam. Furthermore, this practice is extremely rare. Those who engage in Matam are also called Matamis – Zaynab, by all accounts, was the first Matami. The performance of Matam manifests a Shiites' personal and communal devotion to Zaynab's resistance (Schubel 1993: 17) Matam has deep psychological, political, social and soteriological facets to it. The intensity of grief has a psychological influence that brings the mourner to associate at a personal level with Zaynab. Politically, Matam is a condemnation of Yazid. It is, as I see it, an acceptance of death over injustice. My father often quoted the 4th Shiite Imam, Zayn ul Abideen, and said that if Yazid's atrocities ended at Karbala and the women were spared, Shiites would not mourn as they did. For him, Matam was a means to keep the conversation on Zaynab alive and seek justice: that, he said, which never ceases to hurt will never leave memory. It was a way to enter the Karbala paradigm and say to Hussain that he would sacrifice his body before anybody could oppress Zaynab. It is almost as though Matam is a vehicle that goes back in time and allows my father to position himself in Karbala. The backs and chests of those who engage in Matam are filled with lacerations and keloids. However, as I can attest, mourners do not express physical pain when performing the act and almost never require heightened medical attention.

Matam is both a public and private activity. The blood seen in Matam is meant to recreate the horrific scenes of Karbala. But, importantly, many see Matam as a way to recall the beatings Zaynab endured in her travels to Damascus. Numerous odes reflect on Zaynab's pain and Matam is meant to bring this alive for the mourners. Importantly, such visual display of grief is an

attempt by the Shiites to motivate on lookers into asking them about the reason for their grief and hopefully inspire them to resist oppression. Shiites often refer to the banning of Matam in Saddam Hussain's Iraq and Indian occupied Kashmir as evidences of the ritual's efficacy: numerous non-Muslim reformers such as Mahatma Gandhi and Munshi Premchand have also evoked the Karbala narrative as sources for change and justice. The Shiite are also in waiting for the Mahdi, a messianic figure whom they believe will return to restore justice on earth. Mourning for Zaynab is seen as a way to seek her intercession before the Mahdi. Zaynab, in essence, offers a route to salvation.

0.4   MIGRATION FROM THE INDO-PAK & RELIGIOUS PLACEMAKING

The stories of the Shiite patron saints and the narratives attached to them mediate the daily experiences of Shiites. Often, the experiences of a particular revered personality gets correlated with the contemporary lives of Shiites and it is only inevitable that the experience of migration and placemaking carry with it Shiite memories. The analysis on diaspora and memory in Chapter 2 follows from the previous analysis of ritual – the way in which Matam is recreated in Toronto deepens my inquiry into ritual change. This section offers a summary of Muslim Shiite Indo-Pak Migration into Toronto and the development of Imambargahs.

Lebanese Muslims were amongst the earliest Muslim immigrants to Canada between 1900 and 1914. These Muslims belonged to both Sunni and Shiite schools and did not have the economic power to establish a religious centre (Jabbra J. and Jabbra N. 1999:926). Today, many of these early Middle Eastern immigrants have established communities in Ottawa, Hamilton and Waterloo. While the history of Muslim immigration into Canada dates back to a century, the major influx of immigrants began post 1950s.The province of Ontario has Canada's highest

population of Muslims and a vast section of these Muslims have settled in the Greater Toronto Area. The major wave of Muslim, predominantly followers of Sunni Islam, immigrants to the GTA came in the later 1960s. While Shiites remain a minority, Aziz Sachedina says they account for 30 percent of overall Muslims in North America (Jafri 2000: 9).

Canada modified its immigration rules in the 1960s and rapidly became the globe's second largest recipient of immigrants from the third world (Smith 2006: 34). Clauses around compassionate and humanitarian grounds allowed for a diverse body of immigrants to enter into Canada. Iranians, the majority of whom are Shiites, arrived in Canada in two migratory waves. Between 1964-1978, as part of a broader movement of professionals from the third world to advanced capitalist countries, many Iranians moved to Canada to continue to excel in their professional spheres. In 1979, in a largely involuntary migration linked to the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war (Moallem 1999: 727-28), many Iranians came to Canada from various socioeconomic groups. Indo-Pak Shiites, mainly those with Gujarati origins, from East Africa began to arrive in Toronto close to this period as they fled Idi Amin's imperial Africanisation process. The mass exodus of Asians from Uganda in 1971 was furthered fuelled by African socialist programs in Tanzania. The East African immigrants were primarily tradespeople with access to significant economic capital. Fleeing persecution and political tensions, many of the Iraqi, Afghan and Lebanese Shiite immigrants arrived in the early 1980s. Many single, young Pakistani and Indian men began migrating directly from South Asia to Canada in the 1950s and 1960s. This immigration current was fuelled by the growing need for skilled labour (Smith 2006: 25). Many more arrived later, particularly as family class immigrants, in the 1970s and 1980s (Israel 1999:1031-1032). Almost all of this was chain migration, with immigrants coming from common kin and village groups.

Unlike the Lebanese Shiites who established religious centres in Michigan many decades ago, the emergence of Shiites centres in Toronto is a fairly recent phenomena (Jafri 2000: 14) and the early immigrants, essentially, arrived into a vacuum of representation. The first organization to serve the Shiite community of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) was the Islamic Shia Ithna Asheri Jamaat of Toronto (ISIJ). From the 1960s onwards, ISIJ began organizing mourning congregations for the first 10 days of Muharram in rented units. Importantly, the ceremonies were not exclusive to a particular language or tradition. Shiite immigrants from multiple ethnic groups, specifically Iranian, East African and Arabic, attended and funded these ceremonies. The ISIJ nurtured this community and then established the Jaffari Islamic Centre (JIC) as a permanent institution in Thornhill. By 1994, JIC further expanded with 5 branches in Thornhill, Brampton, Richmond Hill, Hamilton and London. Today, these multi-faceted facilities also include a religious school, sporting and housing complexes that cater predominantly to local converts and Shiites of East African ancestry.

Migration into a new space opens up interesting analysis into how immigrants find a place in the new host economy and transplant their cultures into it. Smith suggests that one aspect of South Asian religion in the diaspora is a need felt by the people to represent themselves (Smith 2006: 110). Representation occurs through the establishment of institutions and umbrella organizations dedicated to this purpose. Many of the early immigrant Indo-Pak Shiites were not comfortable with the mourning etiquette at ISIJ. These Indo-Pak Shiites predominantly came from Lahore, Karachi and Lucknow where their mourning rituals were a polar opposite from those at the ISIJ. As I can relate, the non-South Asian languages did not evoke in them the same emotional pull that they were used to in their homes. Their collective and individual pasts certainly brought up a feeling of nostalgia. Although relieved with having a congregation to

mourn with, many of these immigrants longed to recreate the Indo-Pak styles of mourning. They deeply missed their traditional eulogies in Urdu and Punjabi, custom replicas and slogans and wanted for their children to partake in the rituals of back home. Eventually, in 1972, led by two brothers originally from Lucknow, the first exclusive gathering of Shiite Indians and Pakistanis was organized with the intention of conducting the ceremonies in Urdu and Punjabi. Qasim Hasan and Qasim Hussain converted their Scarborough apartment into a makeshift Imambargah and conducted private ceremonies for fellow Indo-Pak Shiites. Shiite Indian and Pakistani families in the GTA congregated here, daily during the first 10 days of Muharram and then bi-weekly, to preserve their mourning practices from Lucknow, Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. While the brothers coordinated most of the arrangements, congregants volunteered to lead various rituals and fund related activities. It is through the efforts of the Hussaini brothers that Indo-Pak Shiite rituals in Toronto began to gain traction. As the community's affluence increased, more religious centres emerged with a widespread geography of mourners. With time, and the birth of children, changes begin to emerge and the establishment of MMST marks one of the most significant of these changes. The general sense of how Shiites mourn gets unsettled and different interpretations are realized.

In the next chapters, I lead into these changes by submitting a theoretical analysis of ritual and the diaspora. I discuss particular changes to the mourning rituals established in the GTA and attend sharply to the social relations that lead towards a change in ritual. Ultimately, I argue, the process of change is at the heart of any diasporic community and, in the case of the Indo-Pak Shiites in the GTA, it is change that provides an entry into how Canadian-born members negotiate their Canadian, Indo-Pak and Shiite identities.

CHAPTER 1

LEARNING TO MOURN

In this chapter, I position myself as a subject and a researcher to further three important discussions: the spread and sociopolitical context of Shiite mourning rituals in Indo-Pak diasporas, my parents' central role in teaching me how to mourn and how a chance pilgrimage to Lady Zaynab's shrine in Damascus heightened my attention to variations in Shiite mourning. I share a narrative on growing up in an Indo-Pak Shiite community settled within a working class Dubai suburb and augment how these diasporas recreated their mourning rituals in Muharram. I also provide detailed analysis of the various mourning traditions that were inherited across generations and offer personal reflections on becoming an active Shiite mourner. I use my experiences, along with secondary Shiite sources and popular narratives, to orient my readers to Shiite mourning rituals, specifically the self-flagellation ritual of Matam, and explain the jargon associated with it: eventually, this auto-ethnographic narrative provides the framework to discuss the changes in Matam. Previously, we established the historical context behind the elevated Shiite devotion towards the Prophet Muhammad's household, Ahlul Bayt. Along with mourning rituals, the Ahlul Bayt are beseeched through quotidian prayers and the remembrance of their sufferings is the primary vessel through which Shiites learn to practice Islam and the Prophetic tradition[11]. However, the styles and formats of these remembrances, specifically the mourning rituals, varies over time, geography and households. In the next two sections, I proceed with an analysis of the Indo-Pak Shiite mourning rituals I was born into in the United Arab Emirates: I examine the movement of Shiites from Gujarat to Tanzania and look at the key economic and social tasks which resulted in the successful transmission of their mourning rituals across

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[11]Attar, Farid Al Din. Muslim Saints and Mystics. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

generations.

1.1   FROM THE INDO-PAK TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The emergence of Indo-Pak Shiite mourning rituals in the United Arab Emirates can be traced back to the arrival of a group called the Khojas. Without unpacking specific rituals, it is particularly important to briefly understand the movement of the Khojas as it highlights the socioeconomic and political engines that facilitate Shiite rituals. The Khojas were a tightly knit trading and commerce community whose forefathers, under the influence of the Persian missionary Pir Sadruddin, converted from Hinduism to various Islamic sects in the fourteenth century[12]. The Khojas hailed mostly from western British India (modern day Gujarat) and were rich landowners. Since the 1870s, many Khoja Ithna-Asheri Shiites, including my forefathers, migrated to East Africa to escape the North Eastern monsoons and, potentially, take advantage of commercial, import and export opportunities (Jaffer 1983).

Although Islam had already been popular amongst many Arab settlers in East Africa, the Khojas were probably the first Shiite Ithna-Asheris in the area and were faced with numerous challenges. Without knowing local language or customs, trade was challenging and hiring local labor was extremely difficult. Furthermore, with no previous contact with indigenous Africans, the Khojas had to settle themselves on their own and explore vast terrains of unexplored land (Jaffer 1983). Pivoted by their specialist knowledge and urgency to represent themselves in their host society, the Khojas successfully determined trade routes and business pipelines. They secured a profitable livelihood and constructed dense social, kinship and religious networks that inevitably paved the way for more migration and better resettlement services for their relatives

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[12] Khoja Sunnat Jamat, Bombay, and CRL - York University, An Account of the Khoja Sunnat Jamat, Bombay. Karachi: Oxford Book House, 1969.

and friends elsewhere[13]. The nature of the host economy was such that it supported innovative

trading mechanisms – more importantly, because these mechanisms created jobs for the locals,

the Khojas steadily rose to drive much of their hosts' economy. The Khojas were keen on

establishing East African regions as their permanent home as opposed to a transit spot. They

invested heavily in cultural and religious practices and, as such, steadily cemented a connection

with their native home.

My parents were born in the Tanzanian cities of Dar-es-Salam and Mwanza which had

already seen the establishment of two major Shiite mosques. Along with revitalizing various

elements of their culture, the Khojas retained their traditional languages and actively organized

mourning and religious assemblies[14]. My father explained that although he was taught the native

language of Swahili, given the Khojas' fiscal prowess, the Shi'ite diaspora stood apart and the

Khojas were insulated from change. The community established religious centres as well as

learning centres, libraries, sports facilities and schools and the newer generations were

effectively taught to speak in Hindi and Gujarati. The community's language, dress and cuisine

were manifest in their religious rituals. While the men actively engaged in trade and sought

investment opportunities, women were typically responsible for taking care of households,

cooking and maintaining community centres/mosques. Alongside community elders, the Khojas

would often invite scholars from the Indo-Pak to train the community in religious theology and

guide their spiritual parlance. Given that all the infrastructure of their social lives was

constructed by their community, my father explained that the second and third generation Khojas

were deeply entrenched in Shiite Indo-Pak traditions. Marriages were always within the

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[13] Nayyar, D. Migration, Remittances and Capital Flows. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994

[14] Hollister, J.N. The Shi'a of India. London: Luzac & Company, 1953

community and various social assistance programs ensured that community members were taken care of. As a result of an effective combination of money, transport and radio technology and a division of labour, the Khojas were successful in recreating and continuing their rituals in the diaspora. Furthermore, with the backing of professional education and technical knowledge, many Khojas rose to official posts and became senior participants in the governmental process. Today, the Dar-es-Salam community has approximately 8,500 members with a state of the art school, gym, apartment complex, hospital and business incubator. They form the largest contingent of Shiite Ithna-Asheris in the country, have assumed national citizenship and enjoy a relatively secure environment within which to practice their religious beliefs[15].

In the early 1970s, owing to political unease in neighbouring regions, there was a mass exodus of Khojas from East African countries. Specifically, in 1972, Idi Amin's expulsion of South Asians from Uganda resulted in a new dispersal of South Asians across the world. Many affluent South Asians appropriated foreign investments and re-established themselves across North America and the United Kingdom. However, salaried professionals and others with limited resources had to begin their economic lives from scratch (Brah 1996: 34). Despite the challenges, there was a steady migration of the East African Asians to North America and the United Kingdom. In addition to these, many Khoja Ithna Asheri Shiites left Tanzania and headed for the newly independent, oil producing United Arab Emirates. Much like their forefathers left British India, the Khojas in East Africa steadily migrated to the Arabian Gulf and invited others once they had established a solid infrastructure – their first religious centre in the United Arab Emirates was established in 1977 complete with a welfare centre, sports facility and educational body (Brown 2006: 48). The Khojas, however, were not the only Shiite Ithna-Asheri

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[15] Hollister, J.N. The Shi'a of India. London: Luzac & Company, 1953

immigrants. The labour scarcity in the United Arab Emirates and the improved modes of

transportation resulted in Shiite Ithna –Asheris from India, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq migrating to

the country (Brown 2006: 51). Soon after their marriage in 1978, my parents arrived in the

United Arab Emirates and I was born in 1986 on the first day of the Islamic lunar month of

Muharram. At only six days old, I had my first efficacious encounter with Shiite ritual. My

father consecrated a green cloth against the replica of Hussain's standard in Karbala and wrapped

me in its fold. Subsequently, I was named in solidarity with Hussain's standard bearer and

warrior brother Abbas. I was named as a reminder of the Hussaini ethos, an ethos transcending

temporal limits and relating to every aspect of my life. Through my formative years, my

socialization into Shiite mourning rituals was greatly advanced by the emergence of numerous

Shiite centres in the cosmopolitan hub of Dubai.

In the next section, I introduce the readers to these mourning rituals, as well as the ritual

arena, with deeper attention to the socioeconomic patterns and the religious meanings attached to

the rituals.

1.2   MOURNING AT THE PAKISTANI PUNJABI IMAMBARGAH

The Imambargah is the chief mourning centre and religious building for the Shiites. Also

known as Hussainiya or Azakhana, the term Imambargah is more commonly used in Indo-Pak

circles and it translates, loosely, into the court of the holy Shiite Imams. The Imambargah is

different from the traditional mosque which is exclusively meant for the five daily prayers and

recitation of Quranic scripture: the Imambargah, instead, is used to host mourning assemblies

and serves as a meeting point for the community providing all of the necessary items to facilitate

the mourning rituals. As seen in Tanzania, Shiites construct a variety of infrastructure for social

and religious purposes. However, the sole purpose of the Imambargah is to facilitate mourning

rituals and allow for the community to comfortably express their devotion to the Ahlul Bayt.

The construction of the Imambargah is influenced by capital, size of the community and geopolitical contexts. East African Asian Shiite (Khojas) communities typically hailed from urban, middle class backgrounds (Brah 1996: 33), and, as such, have been able to establish Imambargahs of significant grandeur in the diaspora. Given this community's economic standing, their families typically graduate from an English-speaking curriculum and are quick in understanding local jurisdictions while establishing new Imambargahs. Other South Asian Shiite communities, however, are usually challenged by limited economic and social capital and are unable to channel the required resources in establishing large-scale Imambargahs. Financially, the amount of money that can be allocated to constructing the Imambargah dictates the locality in which it is developed as well the architecture it is modelled under. Fiscal capital echoes the social standing of the community and the quality of life it enjoys in a particular location: this inevitably ties into the networks formed by the Imambargah and the role is serves within the larger society. While the size of the community could influence its financial capacities, it heavily determines the square footage of the Imambargah and scale of activities. Geopolitical contexts further influence the location of the Imambargah but also the grandeur and level of engagement with other faiths. Imambargahs are not closed to Shiites only and are open to other faiths. However, in countries known to be unfriendly towards Shiites, Imambargahs are often forced underground and away from the public eye. It is fascinating to study the concept of public and private rituals within Shiite mourning. While this is most certainly a separate body of study, it is useful to note that Shiite mourning rituals have both public and private spaces of performance: the choice of space, amongst other things, is influenced by local geopolitical contexts as well as international politics. In Dubai, for example, all spaces are within government control and, given

that most Indo-Pak Shiites and other expatriate workers and professionals do not hold local citizenship, there is very little room to contest government directives. I discuss this further later on in my narrative on mourning with my father[16].

Each Imambargah, typically, is named after a venerated saint in Shiite theology. Occasionally, the name might also be taken from a title bestowed upon the saint. Throughout the Indo-Pak region, there are numerous Imambargahs that go back a few hundred years. One of the earliest Imambargahs is the decorous Bara Imambargah built in the 18th century in Lucknow, India. While many Imambargahs are modelled on Shiite shrines across the Middle East, there is no singular architecture or specifications to them. Some Imambargahs even operate out of rented units. In some cases, well off Shiites or the Syeds, modern day descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, often convert a section of their property into an Imambargah (Abbas 2005: 144). Imambargahs are supported by local Shiites and run by an elected body of volunteers. The monetary donations and assignment of duties ultimately ensure that the Imambargah is prepared to serve as the primary ritual arena for the lamentation assemblies. Membership schemes are quite common and congregants are invited to purchase annual memberships and receive free religious services. The Imam Ali Centre in downtown Toronto, for example, runs the Al-Emaan society which gives members access to a religious library, counseling and daycare facilities. During the mourning period, the Imambargah is usually covered in black cloth and decorated with Shiite standards of black and red. Imambargahs have separate sections for both genders along with a kitchen, washrooms and space for religious ablution. The Imambargahs may also have a media team which sets up shop outside the Imambargah to sell religious materials in

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[16] Mahdavi, Pardis. Gridlock: Labor, Migration, and Human Trafficking in Dubai. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

multimedia formats. Further below (Chapter 3) I will explore how the Imambargah's occasion forms of diasporic placemaking which further substantiates claims I will introduce here and in next chapters that dissuades exclusive framings of such places as "purely religious".

In Dubai, I attended the Mohammad Shah Imambargah nestled in a working class hub of the city. Although the Khojas from Tanzania had their own Imambargah, the Mohammad Shah Imambargah was conveniently located within walking distance from my family residence. The location was also close to the main trading port and the heart of the country's textile industry. Migrant labor from South Asia found lucrative employment opportunities in the area and began to establish cultural enclaves in the area since the early 1980s. Most of the attendees of the Mohammad Shah Imambargah were Punjabi and Urdu speaking migrant laborers from the Pakistani cities of Lahore, Multan, Chakwal and Karachi: they had come together in the late 1980s and converted a traditional Arabic villa into an Imambargah. The Mohammad Shah Imambargah steadily grew into the central hub for these Shiites who collectively began to recreate patterns of mourning from their homes – by pooling their funds together, the community was able to import religious memorabilia from Pakistan, invite clerics and run an internal kitchen to feed the congregation. Given that the majority of the congregants were working class laborers, the community did not have the means or vision to expand into anything more than an Imambargah. Nonetheless, by the early 1990s, the Mohammad Shah Imambargah grew into one of the central points for Azadari in the Middle East. The Imambargah had a 10 feet tall religious flag, topped with a metal representation of the five-fingered Fatimid hand, at the entrance with a raised platform for the mourners to place offerings of sweetmeats and light incense sticks. A gallery of religious posters and banners covered the outside walls along with artist impressions of the scenes of Ashura. A sizeable sandy parking lot ahead of the building was often turned into a

makeshift Imambargah when crowd sizes swelled. Before entering the Imambargah, attendees would leave their sandals/shoes in racks outside the main entrance. Mourners were seated on the floor and often kissed the floor as a form of respect for the holy quarters. The two floored Imambargah had a section for women in the upstairs and an advanced audio visual system to allow for women to follow the men. At the Mohammad Shah Imambargah, a pulpit, Mimbar, was placed at the center of the room alongside mock coffins and shrines of Shiite martyrs. Mourners usually kissed and touched these objects as mark of respect.

Some of the characteristic items one might find in an Imambargah include:

Taaziya: a mock coffin or shrine of a Shiite martyr. The Taaziya ties into the passion play that often occurs during Muharram.

Alams: different version of Hussain's flag in Karbala.

Zuljana: although not common, some Imambargahs may have a version of Hussain's horse in Karbala.

Aza Khana: a separate section filled with religious paraphernalia from Iraq and Iran.

Niyaz: special food served during and at the end of commemorations.

The Azadari at the Muhammad Shah Imambargah was extremely busy during the mourning period. Rituals would typically begin after sunset with the recitation of a chapter from the Quran. Mourners, also known as Azadars, would gather around the reciter and attempt to read along through memory. After this, the master of ceremonies would make announcements on behalf of the management and alerted the attendees on upcoming programs. From time to time, mourners

continued to chant Arabic blessings on Muhammad and his family along with other Shiite

slogans. Preselected mourners would then begin to recite poems of sorrow, Marsiya[17]. The

Marsiya is recited in a melodic tune. Usually, one person recites and others provide a droning

baseline. Marsiya extends from the rulers of Awadh and Mirza Dabir and Mir Anis are credited

with being the founders of this art form (Hyder 2006: 30).This was followed by the cleric, Zakir,

who sat on the Mimbar to deliver a sermon, Majlis. Most sermons typically lasted for about 50

minutes and were filled with praises of Muhammad's family and their teachings. The topics of

these speeches varied and each speaker ca with a specific area of interest. Often, however, the

Majlis would become a site for Shiites to defend their faith and respond to sectarian tensions in

the Indo-Pak. Excited congregants would shout slogans and stand up to praise the speaker. The

Majlis always concluded with an emotional account of the tragedies that befell Hussain and his

family, Masaib. After the Masaib, the mourners would perform Matam. A unique aspect to the

Punjabi Shiites was their special group of mourners who were dedicated to performing Matam,

Sangat. The Sangat had an ominous presence in the Imambargah and guided the Matam ritual. It

is unclear how the idea of a Sangat emerged in Shiite Indo-Pak circles. The etymology of the

term and its Punjabi roots would make for an insightful optic into the emergence of Shiite

mourning in the Indo-Pak: I do not engage rigorously with this area however, in my later

discussions on the emergence of MMST, I use the historical backgrounds on the Sufi Saint Lal

Shabaz Qalandar to discuss some of the influences on Sangats. The length of Matam depended

on the occasion but typically lasted for 20 to 50 minutes. All ceremonies always ended with the

Ziyarat, the reading of an Islamic prayer which extends salutations on the Prophet Muhammad

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[17] Schimmel, Annemarie. <u>The Marsiya in Sindhi Poetry</u>. New York: New York University Press,

1979.

and his household. As a whole, however, the first 10 days of Muharram at the Mohammad Shah Imambargah had a general pattern:

First to fifth of Muharram: speeches on Hussain's arrival in Karbala, poems on his journey from Saudi Arabia to Karbala and Matam. Typically these nights included references to Hussain's sickly daughter, Sughra, who was unable to join her father at Karbala.

Sixth to Seventh of Muharram: along with more intense Matam, more rituals are introduced. The cradle of Hussain's martyred infant son was taken out along with the wedding clothes of Hussain's nephew.

Eighth of Muharram: was dedicated to Hussain's brother Abbas and a standard in his honor was raised.

Ninth to tenth of Muharram: featured the most intense Matam and speakers highlight the oppression Zaynab was about to endure after her brother's martyrdom. After Ashura, the Matam for Zaynab continued in what is called Sham e Gharibaan, the night of the dispossessed. It is from this night onwards that Zaynab became a central figure and the mourning intensifies towards her.

This system of mourning continues until today in Dubai. There have been some changes enforced by government directives in the recent past and those are more clearly seen in the shifts in the Ashura day mourning discussed in the next section.

1.3   MATAM WITH MY FATHER

One major outcome of attending the Azadari at the Mohammad Shah Imambargah was the opportunity to watch my father up close in his religious practice. Given the traditional makeup of the community, children, such as myself, were always in the company of their guardians and were raised to strictly obey their parents – there was little, if any, room to question our mourning rituals. Furthermore, Dubai's majority population was Sunni and our community elders were particularly focused on ensuring that their children did not compromise their loyalty to the Ahlul Bayt. While there was no formal schooling into Azadari, obedience to our parents ultimately resulted in us following their pattern of mourning. At the Mohammad Shah Imambargah, the parents were repeatedly reminded to keep their children with them during proceedings and to set an example for the community's future. Importantly, the pattern of Matam I had witnessed was the pattern I had come to accept as unchangeable. Admittedly, there was a near robotic element to our practice – I never could imagine it as any different. Our parents and community elders exercised an absolute authority over our religious and cultural parlance. And although we were all encouraged to pursue educational opportunities, we were expected to adhere and maintain the system of mourning. It is important to note that although there were numerous other Imambargahs in Dubai, including Iranian, Iraqi and Afghan communities,

My father was devoted to the practice of Matam and appreciated the Mohammad Shah Imambargah Sangat's efforts. I first engaged in Haath Ka Matam at the age of eight. My father would encourage me to join the Sangat as they formed rows of mourners, removed their shirts and struck their chests. Children would be placed in between the rows of men. I was always stood close to my father and struck my chest as he would. Often, blood would ooze from the men's chests and I remember returning home to show my mother how red my chest had become

from Matam. As a child, I really did not feel the emotional connection that the elders would. Doing Matam with my father was a way to mimic the elders and challenge my friends on the force of our Matam. I did not partake in Zanjeer Ka Matam as a child. When I was approximately 15 years old, my father handmade the Zanjeer, chains with attached knives, for me and encouraged my participation in the Ashura flagellation rituals. This was my coming of age and the conversations I had with my father as I was about to flagellate have left an indelible mark on my psyche. In Dubai, the Ashura flagellations would take place in a vast open field which accommodated for over ten thousand mourners. Although the ruling government was predominantly Sunni, we had ample arrangements to mourn which also included free medical services to mourners injured from excessive flagellation. The government's openness to these mourning rituals, however, has significantly decreased since the Arab Spring. Today, all public mourning processions are completed banned in Dubai (although some occasional exceptions are granted) and Zanjeer Ka Matam declared illegal. There have been numerous reasons offered to explain this shift in policy and perspective. However, the predominant sense is that government officials have been weary of overly enthused Shiites using the Azadari as a means to speak about against local authorities. As referenced in the introductory chapters, Azadari ties back to the Shiites' history of standing up against oppressive regimes and is a signature of their resistance, both physically and mentally, to dire situations. The content of the Muharram lectures are now intensely monitored by local authorities and Imambargah management are given prior warning to stop any discussion on Sunni-Shia politics and government regimes. Additionally, many local Shiites believe that the government has worked to sequester the Azadari into private Imambargahs largely because of the negative impact of public processions on the local shopping complexes and tourism. This is a fear I remember being expressed since 2001 during the rise of

the annual Dubai Shopping Festival – the Mohammad Shah Imambargah authorities often requested the congregation to be courteous with their garbage disposal, limit loud noise and reduce any inconveniences to other local tourists and workers in the areas. The density in the area around the Mohammad Shah Imambargah inevitably pushed authorities to strictly regulate the mourning practices: in fact, Sunni mosques in the area have also received directives from the government to reduce traffic and noise. The development of the nation-state in the belly of capitalism speaks loudly herein. Nonetheless, Shiites are afforded a space to practice and openly participate in societal proceedings. The Dubai government, for example, has a separate body called the "Awqaf" to deal with Islamic issues and a separate Awqaf of Shiite citizens of the United Arab Emirates has been set in place since the later 1990s to ensure that Shiites in the country have their religious affairs attended to.

On the morning of Ashura, my mother would read a prayer into a glass of water and pour it onto the knives: this prayer, as she would later explain me, was a vow from her to offer her child in the way of Hussain. Upon leaving our home and reaching the central Ashura gathering, my father would unpack my Zanjeer from a white cloth and apply finishing shaves with a sharpening stone. Around me, various flags and mock coffins began to enter the vicinity. As the cleric began to narrate Hussain's final moments, the crescendo of tears swiftly transformed into bare chested men preparing the field to begin whipping themselves with the Zanjeer. My father held my shirt for me, embraced me and told me to imagine myself in 680 CE Karbala using my body to shield Hussain from the arrows and spears. As I prepared to strike my back, I noticed my father watching from a distance and realized that my father also saw in me an offering to Hussain: in essence, my loyalty to Hussain was in being loyal to my father and ignoring the pain from the lacerations. I engaged with the Zanjeer for approximately 15 minutes and proceeded

back to my father. He embraced me again, adorned me in a white shirt and he tucked away the Zanjeer in a plastic pouch. Matam was complete and I walked away through the city streets with my bloody back. Again, the blood was a public announcement of grief. And I noticed my father's satisfied gait – for him, I was his offering to Hussain.

In essence, during my formative years, participating in Matam and the Sangat was a matter of satisfying my parents. I was rewarded for being an obedient follower and my good behaviour was repeatedly incentivized. But my tacit acceptance of Matam soon changed after my first pilgrimage to the shrine of Lady Zaynab where I witnessed different patterns and forms of mourning.

1.4   A PILGRIMAGE TO ZAYNAB'S SHRINE IN DAMASCUS AND QUESTIONING MATAM

One of the bedrock practices of the Shiite faith is to embark on pilgrimage, Ziyarat, to Zaynab's shrine in south east Damascus (Hyder 2005: 160). The Ziyarat is not obligatory on Shiites but is advised upon those with the financial and physical capacity to do so[18]. The Ziyarat is also seen as a demonstration of loyalty to Hussain, his comrades and the Ahlul Bayt. Much like the annual pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia, Shiite shrines across Iraq, Iran and Syria become the epicentre of Shiite gatherings at various points of the year. The Ashura pilgrimage to Karbala is the second largest gathering in the world and an estimated 20 to 25 million people gathered at Hussain's shrine in December 2013. Pilgrims to Hussain's shrine came from North America, Africa and Europe as well as local Iraqis who reportedly walked from cities over hundreds of kilometers away from Karbala. Although travel to Syria is currently extremely

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[18] Schimmel, Annemarrie. <u>Mystical Dimensions of Islam</u>. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

precarious, before May 2012, Shiites would congregate annually at Zaynab's shrine and the shrine of his baby daughter Sakina: pilgrims from the Indo-Pak diaspora formed a major contingent and often blocked the roads leading to the shrines with religious processions and rituals. On the 12th day of Muharram, for as long as I can remember, my mother would unfailingly gather our family to pray for a visit to Zaynab's shrine, prepare a lentil soup and offer it as an ex-voto, Nazar, to Zaynab. Given that we lived in Dubai, flights to Syria were relatively inexpensive and most families would visit Zaynab's shrine at least twice a year – the per capita cost of a pilgrimage from Dubai would average US \$450 in 2004. During the Ziyarat, pilgrims are advised against staying in luxury residences and enjoying hearty meals. As such, most arrangements are made to provide for the basic essentials and the costs of the trip are significantly reduced: most of the costs go towards transportation, lodging and legal procedures. Pilgrims, especially from the Western diasporas, still carry extra amounts of money to purchase memorabilia and make donations to the caretakers of the various shrines. Religious tourism has, undeniably, brought plenty of foreign investment and interest into Iran, Iraq and Syria. In fact, since the fall of Saddam Hussain, Shiites have also proceeded into buying property in the city of Karbala[19]. However, for my mother, a visitation to Zaynab's shrine was a matter of spiritual ascendance. Her devotional perspective on Zaynab did not extend from any theological prescriptive. While my mother conducted numerous rituals seeking Zaynab's blessings, her perspective on Zaynab was a personal one, fraught with her own commentary of Zaynab. To this date, my mother continues to relate to Zaynab, less as a religious figure, and more as a daughter, sister and mother. That Zaynab, given her circumstances, was victorious in a public sphere that

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[19] Cockburn, Patrick. Muqatada: Muqatada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival and the Struggle for Iraq. New York: Scribner, 2008.

was damning of women, was particularly appealing to my mother. For my mother, Zaynab's narrative was a miraculous one and extended pearls of strength to her own life as an entrepreneur in Tanzania and Dubai. By spiritual ascendance, my mother appeared to venerate Zaynab to the status of a princess who could only be visited through her own personal decree. For my mother, that our family had the fiscal means to attend the Ziyarat did not guarantee our visitation. Instead, it would only happen with an invitation from Zaynab, Bulawa, either in the form of a dream or miraculous occurrence. Miracles are a part and parcel of the Shiite vision and the capacity to produce miracles is taken as testament to the authority of Zaynab over her followers (Schubel 1993: 22). In fact, it is quite common to find individuals with life threatening illnesses to be taken to Zaynab's shrine in search of a miraculous cure. My family's first visit in 2004 stemmed from my mother's conviction in receiving this invite.

Shiite dominated Iran has always been a bastion for Shiite gatherings. Iran hosts the tombs of the 8th Shiite Imam, Ali Al Reza, and his sister as well as numerous academic institutions for Shiite scholarship. However, pilgrimages to Iran are often tied to celebrations in the Shiite calendar and the chief mourning sites are in Iraq and Syria. Before the current turmoil in Syria and the removal of Iraq's Ba'aath party, Saddam Hussain imposed restrictions on pilgrimage to Karbala in the 1980s and 1990s – Shiites were forbidden from mourning openly[20].As a result, Damascus became the epicentre for Shiite mourning rituals. The impact of the current turmoil in Syria on the Ziyarat is a matter of separate research.

The 40 days after Ashura are dedicated to Zaynab as the Ashra-e-Zainabiya, the days of Zaynab, and it is highly recommended for Shiites to visit Zaynab's shrine on the 40th day after Ashura, Arbaeen. In 2004, my parents organized our pilgrimage for Arbaeen and we joined a

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[20] Young, Gavin. Iraq: The Land of Two Rivers. London: Collins, 1980.

caravan of approximately 100 families from the Imambargah Muhammad Shah Sangat. As we awaited clearance from customs at the Damascus International Airport, our group of professional male dirge chanters, Noha Khawns, sat in an empty corner. With minimal conversation, they removed their sandals and a crowd organized around them. I sat amongst them. Men and women sat on opposite ends of each other and the chanters began an elegiac ode to Zaynab, beseeching her to fulfill their prayers[21]. The Urdu ode was written by the late Tanveer Shah, a renowned Shiite writer in Lahore, Pakistan. Speaking directly to Zaynab, it read:

Aey Sharek-atul Hussain, ai bint-e-Murtaza, Zaynab,

Sadqa Hussain ka suno, hum sab ki iltija Zaynab.

Lehkar Dua ey ayai, teray dar peh Azadar yeh,

Teray bhaiyo keh beto ki, aya joh ghum kar yeh,

Ho mustajab, mangi hai jo dua Zaynab.

O partner of Hussain, the daughter of Ali, Zaynab,

For the sake of Hussain, hear our requests Zaynab.

With many wishes you mourners have arrived,

Mourning for your brother they have arrived,

Fulfil each of their wishes they have asked, Zaynab.

Shah's reading of Zaynab suggests that Zaynab is from Hussain and Hussain is from Zaynab. Zaynab plays a role in immortalizing Hussain and is the keeper of his message into posterity. It is

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[21] Faridi, Shahidullah. Inner Aspects of Faith. Karachi: Mehfil-e-Zauqia, 1979.

clear that Zaynab favours the mourners of her brother. The first lamentation assembly for

Hussain was organized by Zaynab and traditions of devotion are ascribed to her. Importantly,

Shah writes in the present progressive tense, as if Zaynab is with him as he mourns. The women

did not recite along with us. Tears and wails punctuated the airport building as other visitors

arrived at customs. Some mourners, overcome with emotion, began to beat their chests and slap

their faces, Matam.

After approximately 20 minutes, we boarded a bus for the township of Zainabiyah. It

was not long before we meandered through Damascus' raucous markets and parked into a sandy

crevice between two budget motels. Shiite pilgrimage plays a major role in the city's economics

and extra precaution is taken to ensure mourners are comfortable. However, the moment of being

before Zaynab's shrine renders all other things mute. We were steps away from Zaynab's

elegant, golden minaret. Our bus, once again, erupted with tears. Some mourners stepped out of

the bus and saluted her dome. Others began reciting scriptures in Arabic, Ziyarat, that extend

greetings to Zaynab and pledge allegiance to her cause. The check-in to our rooms was speedy.

Shiite pilgrimage has a significant impact on the city's economics and brings with it a sizeable

influx of US currency and trade. Even budget motels, as I had seen, provided services such as

broadband internet and power generators and extra care is taken of pilgrims to ensure that they

are focussed on their rituals. Not long after we arrived, our group congregated at the hotel

entrance to begin a walk to the shrine. The majority of our group was dressed in black and

traditional Pakistani attire. Our group leader, Salar, signalled for our procession to move.

Amidst shouts of Zaynab's name, we marched as a sea of black towards her shrine.

Shortly thereafter, groups of men prepared to flagellate. I joined the formation of men, most of

them with bare upper torsos, and began to beat my chest in a rhythmic beat. Pilgrims from other

countries joined us. Shortly thereafter a Noha by the Pakistani mystic, Syed Ali Raza Bukhari, was read. It did not take long for the mourners to begin slapping their faces. In fact, some mourners already began to bleed from their cheeks. The Noha spoke of Zaynab's final words at Hussain's body:

Bacha keh teero seh tujko na laa sakhi Zaynab,

Mein dekh thi rahi gardan peh chal gaya khanjar,

Na tum bula sakey bhai, na a sakhi Zaynab.

Zaynab could not return you home and save you from the arrows,

I (Zaynab) watched as the sword severed your head,

Neither could you call out to me nor could I reach out to you.

Bukhari touches a sensitive spot in Zaynab's narrative. The image of Zaynab speaking to the headless corpse of Hussain invokes a terrible sadness. Bukhari touches on Zaynab's helpless state on Ashura but also reminds the mourners of Ashura as the beginning of Zaynab's never ending pains. After approximately 30 minutes, we were steps away from the arched gate of Zaynab's shrine. As we approached the gilded dome, I could see the tomb glittering across the wall mirrors. We entered through the northern gate. I saw mourners from across various nationalities around me and was particularly moved by the ladies carrying extended black veil, Chadors, to place on Zaynab's tomb – Zaynab's Chador was torn and set ablaze on Ashura. Suddenly, the Noha stopped and all the men bowed down in prostration before her gate. In Islam, I was taught, prostration was only to god in the direction of Makkah, Saudi Arabia. I was struck, deeply, by this and mechanically followed the men in prostration[22]. The image of Muslim men

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[22] Attar, Farid-Al Din. <u>Muslim Saints and Mystics.</u> London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

prostrating before the sepulchre of Zaynab and beseeching her favour has never left me since. All mourning rituals were led by men in segregated settings and the vociferous mourning by men for Hussain's sister seemed ironic at best. Furthermore, this was the first time I witnessed the Azadari in a globalized setting: pilgrims from different cultures were mourning for Zaynab in their own unique ways that were different from what I was accustomed to. This, inevitably, brought me to question the essential fixity and stasis within which I had come to understand Matam.

1.5   MATAM THEN & NOW: WHAT HAS CHANGED

After the out of ordinary experience of the Azadari at Zaynab's shrine, I began to think about the varieties of the Azadari. Prior to my visit to Zaynab, I was fully aware of mourning rituals that were different from my own – the experience of it, however, in a singular environment stimulated my curiosity. On one hand, I found great pride in declaring my Shiite faith and the cultural cosmos it contained. On the other hand, I was curious about tackling the barriers between the different mourning rituals I had seen – much like the five daily, prescribed prayers, was a sort of osmosis possible where all the mourning rituals amongst the cultures became one? The subsequent years in Dubai, I observed more about my community's mourning rituals and the borders with Shiites from other cultures. Not only did I realize how impermeable these borders were, I also began to appreciate their importance. The mourning I was used to at my local Imambargah played a major role in sustaining our familial language, visual arts and vocal expertise. There was no animosity between the different Shiite cultures per say. However, and rightfully so, each community seemed dedicated to preserving their collective past and sense of home. The opposition to change and adaptation, perhaps, was rooted in a sense of survival. The elders of our community led our mourning and the authoritative structure was in place,

seemingly, for our community's own good. That this good was rooted in giving the children a sense of identity meant that any unsettling of this was seen as an attack, first and foremost, on identity. Hall raises essential questions about cultural identity and the paradigms through which it must be understood within a global, transnational context (Hall 1992: 344). Coded within his discussion of identity and migration is the necessary realization of identity being a split phenomenon, a phenomenon of knowing that you may have lived in one particular place/system but have now moved on – presumably, as I understand it, Hall is underlining the fact that conflict and tension is an inevitable aspect of migration and transnationalism.

It was a powerful surprise when I witnessed substantial changes to our mourning rituals when I left Dubai and realized the conflict it was canvassed within. Upon migrating to Toronto, I immediately noticed the increased frequency in the mourning rituals. This change and the emergency of Markazi Matami Sangat Toronto (MMST) revealed to me a dramatic shift in the ways in which the Matam rituals were conducted. Firstly, the rituals in Toronto are not being led by community elders – instead, it is mostly second generation immigrants who have taken the lead. Secondly, the second generation, by virtue of technology, are forming and interpreting their own relations with the homeland. Lastly, the ritual of Matam now appears to be independent from many of the rituals that lead to it. That MMST was formed in the courtyard of Lady Zaynab's shrine suggests that her message had a role in mobilizing these second generation mourners. Thus, in the next chapter, I proceed into the theoretical analysis of ritual and ritual change and compare how it fits into my observations in Toronto's Indo-Pak Shiite diaspora. Eventually, this will tie into the specifics of how diaspora and transnationalism can explain the means of such change and the implications of it in the GTA.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIZING MATAM

The focus of this chapter is on elucidating the relationship between Matam as a ritual and the societal contexts through which it acquires significance. I produce three sociological analyses: definitions and complexities of ritual, power dynamics in ritual and ritual change. This is neither an exhaustive coverage of ritual theory nor is it an attempt to produce an absolute, universal theorem of ritual, which has rightly come under criticism.[23] Instead, my focus is oriented at ritual activity and ritual practices as being in a state of flux. The relationship between ritual change and societal change is considered here in particular in regards to diasporic displacement, generational change and to the various challenges to understand the renewed investment in Matam as a meaningful ritual practice within the diaspora of Indo-Pak Shiites in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Immigrant groups, historically, turn to religion to structure their new lives and to find meaning in a new social world (Mazumdar & Mazumdar 2004: 74). Numerous scholars have also discussed the renewed vitalities that emerge in diasporic communities. My focus is on the dynamic of ritual and the relations within which these vitalities emerge. My attempt to understand ritual and ritual change hinges heavily on reflecting on the formation of Markazi Matami Sangat Toronto (MMST) within a diasporic congregation that had settled into its ways since the 1970s. Multiple caveats accompany this formation. Although later chapters elaborate extensively on MMST and their development in the diaspora, the changes heralded by the group are best unpacked by a strong theoretical grasp of ritual. Religious groups, especially in the diaspora, are concerned with how to adapt their traditions and rituals to

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[23] Tambiah, Stanley. A Performative Approach to Ritual. London: British Academy, 1981.

changing societal circumstances (Bell 1997: 210) and understanding how MMST has radically changed Matam in the GTA requires an analysis of ritual within sociocultural life. The average age of the core MMST membership is twenty eight and this age cohort typically has a limited voice in Shiite rituals. Much to my surprise, MMST appears to have reconfigured their role and re-defined the ritual space. They have sidestepped community elders to alter the frequency, intensity and language of Matam. The changes may at first glance appear as a natural progression of human interaction and adaptation– however, given that these changes directly contradict the rituals established by the first Indo-Pak Shiite migrants to the GTA, the analysis of ritual offers an explanation on how ritual change occurs within a religious diaspora. Through an analysis of Matam as a ritual, the chapter looks for the components of a ritual and progresses a commentary on how individuals interact with these components.

In my review of the literature, I commenced with the theoretical logic of ritual. Although ritual is most certainly an interdisciplinary term, my focus was on its utility to the sociological study of Matam. I organized my review around a central question – why do I refer to Matam as a ritual to begin with? As a participant in Matam, I further questioned why I was using the academic enterprise of ritual studies to bring an analytic reflex to my participation. While the term "ritual" is routinely used in common discourse around Matam, its theoretical relevance and differentiation from other terms – worship, performance or practice - was not apparent to me. I troubled the term ritual to open understandings into how the social context factors into Matam. Catherine Bell describes ritual as more of a scholarly term[24] and less of a concept that is

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[24] Bell, Catherine. <u>Teaching Ritual. Oxford Scholarship Online – York University & Oxford University Press.</u> New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

observed out there - it is a tool for inquiry and the understandings which spring from it hinge on how the tool is deployed. Throughout this chapter, I argue that the efficacy of sociological definitions of ritual are in that these magnify the context and relations within which a ritual is performed. While I augment sets of theories on ritual, I invest my interest in understanding the strategies via which ritualized activities achieve their social action and involve the participants within a particular mesh of power. I utilize Bell's concept of "ritualization" to express my understandings of Matam and change (Bell 1992: 7). I am acutely interested in how Shiite mourners, such as myself, develop a "sense of ritual" and interface with the embedded power dynamics (Bell 1992: 80). A ritual does not sit alone and it is layered by social customs, power relations and day to day activities that route how the ritual is performed (Bell 1997: 171).

By the second section of this chapter, I justify situating Matam under the analytical category of ritual and distinguish a ritual from other social behaviours. I demonstrate how myriad sociological theories of ritual apply to Matam and combine these diverse perspectives of ritual with my own participation in Matam. Previously, I shared the changes I witnessed in Matam and the shift from the dominant paradigm within which it was performed. Now, I develop theoretical explanations for how these changes occur and study the ritual from within to discuss the power relations woven into the community of ritual participants. While many of the community elders in Toronto have stood aghast at the changes pioneered by MMST, my analysis of ritual will discuss why these are manifested in Toronto's Indo-Pak Shiite diaspora and examine its relations to the corpus of Zaynab's teachings. As my interviews with participants elucidate in the final chapters of this thesis, Matam is just as much communal as it is personal - as a ritual, it is broad, punctuated by alternating linguistic, regional, individual and social

discourses[25]. Just as there is no singular, sempiternal understanding of ritual, I discuss how

Matam can be performed in myriad ways. By studying the power relations that mediate ritual, I

bring attention to ritual change, how it is received by the Shiite diaspora and sharpen the analysis

for the readers to appreciate the plural interpretations of Matam within the context of ritual

theory. This approach unsettles any assumption of the essential fixity of Shiite Islam (Hyder

2006: 71) and illustrates the wide-ranging panorama of lamentation and mourning that can be

witnessed in the diaspora. Zaynab, Karbala and Islam are organically linked and yet are subject

to repeated re-visioning's both on a collective and individual level. Even though the dominant

trope in the literature is that of a collective ritual that involves the self-infliction of pain, which is

often read as "irrational" or in more benevolent terms "liminal", extending the focus to the

individual mourner allows me precisely to examine how individuals negotiate the relationship

between home and away, ritual and diaspora through such practices which have clearly a

rationale and affective significance that is not detached from the social and political. To the

extent that theories on ritual have had a tendency to separate out the religious dimension, it will

be crucial for me to keep a critical engagement running throughout this chapter so that

theoretical claims can be interrogated on the bases of some of the intertextual processes and

practices that I describe in other chapters. The spirit of intertextuality will also emerge from a

small discussion on the emergence of Sangats in Shiite culture and the role of venerated Sufi

saints. As will be seen in later discussion, many of the MMST members take issue with the

control and strict paradigms within the Shiite faith is operated – for reasons which will be

discussed later, MMST seems to have placed a heavy emphasis on individual voice and

expression of devotion. Much like Zaynab's lone stand before Yazid and emphatic refusal of his

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[25] Jafri, S Hussain. <u>Origins and Early Development of Shia Islam</u>. London: Longman, 1979.

authority, MMST appears to position itself in opposition to authority. I will share a brief analysis of this and trust that it will converse with the concept of ritualization and the rich context it asks us to study ritual within. The conundrum of doing and applying theory versus constructing a method of studying ritual, I hope, will benefit further scholarship on Shiite mourning rituals and contextualize the specific lenses that I advocate through an analysis of my interviews in the final chapter.

2.1   DEFINING RITUAL

The exegesis of this section is not to arrive at a static definition of ritual – it is an effort to orient the reader to some of the theoretical ends achieved by the concept as well as some of the debate within the theoretical camps. I do not concern myself much with ethnographic data as I do with select sets of ritual theory. Although the label of ritual studies garnered much attention from the 1970s (Grimes 2014: 6), the study of ritual extends to much before then. Since the late nineteenth century, there has been a multidisciplinary interest in the term ritual specifically within the context of religion and cultural studies[26]. The sole vocation of early theorists of ritual was with using ritual, to varying degrees, as a route to uncovering the epistemology of religion (Bell 1997: 22). Early studies, for example, were engrossed in learning the Indo-European roots of Greek mythology and camps of myth and ritualist thinkers, phenomenologists and psychoanalysts studied patterns in rituals to decode the meanings of religious artifacts as well as the source of mythical traditions. Phenomenologists suggested that religion is a result of human beings as *homo religiosus*: the search for god and the sacred is a "structure of our consciousness" (Bell 1997:10).The phenomenologist Jonathan Smith thus presented religion as

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[26] Rappaport, Roy. Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1999

the idealized way through which things in the world should be organized (Bell 1997: 13). Psychoanalytic studies took ritual backwards and searched for the "the return of the repressed". Rituals, they suggested, provided an optic into our repressed fears and anxieties which, in turn, spawned the development of religious thinking (Bell 1997: 15). Although there has been a steady decline in seeing ritual firmly rooted in religion (Grimes 2006: 261), such concentration certainly demonstrated that religion involves much more than belief and includes, amongst other assets, practices and changing customs. Importantly, the early theorists led us into a nascent field of study which studied ritual beyond the project of assessing the validity of doctrinal belief.

  "Ritual Studies" is now a vast, albeit messy, terrain of interdisciplinary academic literature with scholarly perspective on data gathered from a variety of rituals in a religious and non-religious context. But it is important to assert its academic utility. Ritual studies is not only a canon of literature that exclusively debates the term ritual or contextualizes it within the study of religions. Instead, and especially within sociology, it surveys the pattern of ritual as a shared activity and looks to how individuals and communities create and recreate meaning. For sociology, I find ritual studies to be a prolific enterprise – it problematizes the fixity of religion and identifies how individuals and societies shape and reshape ritual. In many ways, these studies attend to the social evolution of religion and rituals. Thus, in this section, we will examine the sociocultural primacy of ritual before applying it to a ritual profile of Matam. Although titled as defining ritual, this section pursues the provocative aspect of assigning a singular definition to the term. It is vital to understand that by defining ritual I am not submitting a one-size-fits-all understanding of ritual – instead, I am emphasizing the sociocultural contexts and implications of rituals. My approach is to investigate the theory first. This is a necessary assemblage as it underscores the complexities of the term and delineates the history and tensions

that emanate from it. Generally, theoretical discussions on ritual often construct it as an action that may tie into a belief system (Bell 1992: 19). But the term ritual has no sanitized, universal definition per say. Theoretically, there are broad and narrow definitions that single out ritual from other behaviour – however, many of these definitions are contested as exclusionary. A universal definition of ritual is largely complicated by the fact that the term is used frequently and interchangeably by speakers of the English language. The English dictionary ascribes a variety of imprecise meanings to ritual. From an ascribed religious procedure to a particular observance of public worship, the dictionary definitions do not address the complexities, specifically the social relations, at play in a ritual[27]. Grimes further explains that from a linguistic and etymological perspective, the definition of ritual is further complicated when it is associated with synonyms such as rite and ceremony. The loose vocabulary around ritual blurs the lines between regular activity and ritual and does not sufficiently articulate the uniqueness of the term. It is perhaps, as Grimes suggests the fact that humans are not necessarily reflexive and articulate about their habitual practices and what they embody (Grimes 2014: 5). Furthermore, within specialist, theoretical camps, there has been heightened debate on the term ritual itself and some scholars have argued ritual to be a hegemonic concept that studies social phenomena from a western, scientific lens (Bell 1992: 6). Nonetheless, although Jack Goody expresses distrust in the efficacy of the term ritual as a global construct[28], the reality remains that various societies

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[27] Grimes, R. L. Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006

[28] Bell, Catherine. Teaching Ritual. Oxford Online Scholarship. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

have continued to demark certain activities as ritual and distinct from ordinary every events (Tambiah 1981: 116) – as such, the phenomenon of a ritual appears to extend beyond a western construct and appeals to scholarly attention. The popularization of the term ritual and the increasing academic interest in studying it renders further credence to the term. It is important to appreciate that the goal of defining a ritual does not need to be a conclusive definition that is applicable to all reported instances of ritual. Bell explains that while ritual theorists attempt a set of features that distinguish a ritual from a non-ritual activity (Bell 1992: 69), arriving at a universal definition of ritual is not desirable. Bell cautions against universal definitions, for these disregard indigenous distinctions of behavior. Similarly, Tambiah finds that an absolute distinction of ritual is not only undesirable but undoable (Tambiah 1977: 116). Both Tambiah and Bell suggest that studies on ritual, whenever it is identified, attend to the particular cultural contexts within which these rituals occur and encourage analyses of these contexts in order to better engage with the implications of ritual. Far from promoting a definitional approach, Bell emphasizes an understanding of what circumstances distinguish ritual from other behaviors and how these rituals do what other activities do not (Bell 1992: 70). Given the plethora of "ritual types", a major challenge with a universal construct of ritual is that there is no sense of a ritual's center or boundaries (Bell 1992: 69).

Despite the debate on the currency of the term, ritual theory has a variety of methods and perspectives. These form the structural base upon which to stage a theoretical discussion on the power dynamics and contexts of ritual. In Ancient Greek, theorein means "to look at" (Grimes 2014: 166): ritual theory gives us a way to critically look at ritual. Departing from the early theorists' mandate on the epistemology of religion, structural functionalists began a focus on the social purposes of ritual and are hailed for debuting an optic into what ritual does to the

operations of a society (Bell 1997: 59). Emile Durkheim, credited with advancing the sociological study of the social relations embedded within religious praxis, explained ritual and religion as a way in which individuals expressed their collective interests (Bell 1997: 25). Later functionalist understandings would shift slightly, suggesting that religion helped explain our shared social lives and established a sense of solidarity: the creation of sacred objects brings the community to accept a higher authority and function under its instructions (Barnard & Burgess 1996: 318). Furthermore, ritual was seen as a means to bring people to practice a religion which, in itself, linked to other aspects of the society. The ethnographic works of Bronislaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown in general studied the links between ritual and forms of social organization. Much of the ethos behind this work was also in extending Durkheim's emphasis on social organization to the individual: this opened a field of understanding into appreciating how individual behaviours are mediated by ritual and religion. The rituals in religion were metaphorically seen to be an organ within the larger social organism that played a role in continuing the harmonious life of a society. They examined the practicality of rituals and how these sustain social equilibrium (Kelly & Kaplan 1990: 126). From a functionalist perspective, religion exists as a social fact, a sub system within the social system that works to maintain value consensus. Ultimately, ritual gathered people together to collectively affirm these understandings. Ritual is a way to stabilize the system and maintain group ethos. Eventually, though, Durkheim predicted that science would subsume religious thought and rituals such as our various civic ceremonies would serve as a means of gathering social communities (Bell 1997: 25). Neofunctional system analyses extend the study of ritual into how it impacts the life of the individual and the relationship with other structures in the society (Bell 1997: 29). Such studies furthered the analysis to provide a clearer sense of the relationship between rituals and other

elements in the society. Roy Rappaport's study of New Guinea Tribes, for example, into the ritual killing of pigs under special circumstances, shows how ritual impacts the environment. Being rooted in the divine, people follow such rituals because these not only have implications on the environment, but also to how they are perceived by the powerful other (Bell 1997: 30). Rappaport further suggests that the formality associated with ritual is a continuity of the formality found in all behaviour (Bell 1992: 21).Writing from a structural-functionalist paradigm, Maurice Bloch argues rituals to be highly formalized, offering the participant no alternative. Bloch advances ritual as the special strategy of traditional authority (Kelly & Kaplan 1990: 125) and a conservative force that serves to protect the status quo. Stanley Tambiah contests Bloch and positions rituals as sites of order and change. He posits that rituals can turn left or right depending upon the conditions they are practiced in (Kelly & Kaplan 1990: 126): rituals could function as a tool of traditional authority but could also serve as a location for participants to exercise their own agency. Talal Asad extends from Tambiah and disregards ritual as an unchangeable script of regulating practice – ritual, on the contrary, are performances through which a subject's will, desire and intellect assume a particular form (Mahmood 2001: 834). Asad emphasizes attention on the power structures that mediate rituals. Later ritual theories brought other paradigms into the discussion. Mary Douglas emphasized ritual as a form of communication by paying specific attention to the classificatory schemes such as purity/impurity through which social worlds were ordered. Saba Mahmood's study of Muslim prayers in contemporary Egypt provides a critical perspective on this system of communication by disagreeing with the system of essential meaning that constructs ritual (Mahmood 2001: 844). Mahmood's study on Muslim women's involvement in the Islamic prayer in Cairo illustrates how ritual participants use their will, desire and intellects to rethink their performance of prayer.

The communicative nature of ritual, seen through Tambiah's performative approach (Bell 1992: 72), deepens the discussion on ritual and the status quo. In his working definition of ritual, Tambiah proposes rigidity as a qualifier of ritual – rituals emerge from a shared cultural context that offer a window into how left or right a ritual can proceed.

The theoretical debates though stand at an impasse and are, in many ways, a closed form of cultural study in that these appear to be distanced from a variety of factors that produce a ritual in the first place. To theorize it further, there is an acute tension between ritual and ritual agency in that the focus is on how much emphasis an individual ritual participant can influence the ritual. This tension is the premise of this work. By simply measuring Matam against a collection of theories, I fear that I will be subtracting myself from understanding the mechanisms of the ritual itself. Regardless of the verity of these theories, I am not convinced of a circular, fruitless theoretical debate. I am also cautious against what Pierre Bourdieu advanced as the "theorization effect" (Grimes 2014: 169). I argue in favor of Bell that we do not need another, novel theory in our academic enterprise on ritual. Bell suggests instead of being entangled with theory, we focus on ritualization, produce a new framework for analyzing ritual and look at ritual as a cultural strategy of differentiation – in essence, we must study the practice of ritual as a strategic way of acting and unpack how this construct is achieved. Ritualization comes closest to providing me with a method to understanding Matam. Far from viewing ritual as merely an extension of authority and control, the agentive capacities of ritual compel us into viewing ritual as a practice wherein the participant actively engages and mediates participation. This approach requires a shift from studying ritual through form and function but through an understanding of the significance of human participation. In explaining ritualization, Bell states that ritual is not assumed to exist as a nature category of human practice (Bell 1992: 218). Bell creates a semantic

framework for ritual (Bell 1992: 220) by introducing the term ritualization and she argues that ritual cannot simply occur in a community where people have no relationships or common purpose. In essence, when the term ritual is understood in the light of ritualization, we immediately focus our attention on the relationships and power structures within which a ritual is performed. Inevitably, this ties into the conversation on ritual and power. Extending from Bourdieu's notion of habitus, Bell confronts the actual act of ritual itself and looks at distinctive strategies. In her parlance on practice theory, Bell argues that all rituals necessarily share four qualities of practice:

1. Practice is situational in that all rituals occur within a specific context. The absence of context, in effect, renders any understanding of a ritual mute. Just as Edward Said cautioned against studying a text that is dismembered from contextual reality (Bell 1992: 81), Bell suggests that rituals cannot be considered minus the cultural field within which they are practised;

2. Practice is strategic and it is tied strictly to certain ends. Being strategic suggests that practice does not open itself easily to questions and is simply concerned within being done;

3. Practice uses misrecognition as its central force. It is laced with ambiguities;

4. And practice establishes a case for order in the society. Extending from Gramsci's notion of hegemony, practice enables for power relations to be reproduced in a certain way.

Numerous elements of practice theory speak to the data presented thus far. There is a gust of contextual matter that needs to be understood while coming to an understanding of ritual change and there is the evidence of community elders merely pushing for their youth to

perform the rituals as they had done. And, lastly, it can be argued that MMST disturbs the order of the pre-established mourning rituals.

2.2   RITUALIZATION, RITUAL, CHANGE & MATAM

The question on whether Matam is or is not "a ritual" is secondary, if anything, to the analysis now. The modus operandi in the immediate is to appreciate how a differentiated ritual of mourning, one that is peculiar to Indo-Pak Shiites, emerges and whether it assumes a propensity for change. By using the term ritualization, Bell shows how these four differential qualities of ritual are actualized and what is accomplished in the process. By advancing practice theory, she explains that ritual is not simply the "dead weight" of tradition (Bell 1992: 92). Instead, ritual is tied to a circumstance. Through ritualization, a neat framework for studying Matam as a ritual emerges as a culturally strategic form of acting and it unpacks an understanding into the power relations that mediate ritual. She brings our attention to the unsettling of the habitus and how change is eventually realized. Along with an emphasis of context, Bell positions ritual as fluid and changeable. She argues that ritualization involves two basic dimensions – the body and power relations (Bell 1992: 207). Ritualization uses the body as vehicle to affirm collective understanding. Implicit in the use of the body is the idea that it is open to individual appropriation – participants in a ritual must have some interests in common and that any ritual which is not open to the participants' interests is anything but a ritual. Ergo, ritual change is an integral component of ritual itself and changes in Matam, perhaps, are not aberrant practices per say.

The practice of religion takes place in a social context that lends its rituals specific meaning and makes its boundaries unstable and fluid (Agnew 2006: 268). Matam, studied through the lens of ritualization, is covered in the differential ethos. Shiites engage differently

with Islamic history and dialogue their partisanship differently. Sunnite Muslims, for example, who may revere the events of Karbala, do not mourn or express their condemnation as the Shiites do. To specialize the discussion on ritualization, it is best to proceed by discussing it within the context of Matam itself. To begin with, the performance of Matam is deeply driven by situational circumstance. The designated mourning period, Ayaam e Aza, identifies a certain time bracket within which Shiites are enveloped in grief for their patron saints. The mourning, as such, is not a sign of a pathological attraction to grief[29]. Instead, it relates directly to Shiite history and adumbrates their political and social struggles in the post Muhammad Islamic peninsula. The performance of Matam, wherein the body becomes the locus of activity, is cast within a background of suffering – in order to appreciate the source of the ritual, analytical discussions need to consult historical material. Vernon Schubel's study of the Azadari in Karachi's central Imambargah, Mehfil e Murtaza, emphasizes the mourning rituals as a pledge of allegiance, loyalty and fidelity to Muhammad and his household. Each commemorative date ties back to an occasion in history. The mourning for Zaynab, which intensifies after Ashura, can be grasped with an understanding of her stature alongside Hussain. Her influence as the co-hero of Hussain's struggle are embedded in the elegiac odes to her as well as the procession of mock flags and coffins that pepper the ritual arena. It is crucial to appreciate that each mourner has access to this repository of Shiite history. While there are community elders and clerics who shape the mourner's engagement with the history, there is room for an individual interpretation of the history and the ritual. This concept can be further explored in the section on Matam in the diaspora. There is a necessary strategic and ambiguous element to Matam as well – it is unlikely

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[29] Ameed, S M. <u>The Importance of Weeping and Wailing</u>. Karachi: Peer Muhammad Ebrahim Trust, 1974.

that all ritual participants reflect on the ritual's end specifically. Instead, the ritual is completed in accordance to maintaining one's affiliation with the Shiite faith. The central motif of the mourning rituals is not in the mourning itself but in collectively condemning the atrocities against those who upheld Islamic principles. By mourning, Shiites are fulfilling a millenarian promise to their awaited Messiah, the occulted 12th Imam Al Mahdi, to be lifelong spokespersons of the atrocities against Muhammad's household[30] (Schubel 1993: 100). For the Shiites, allegiance to Muhammad and his household translates into submission to God's will and justice will be served upon the return of the Mahdi. The Mahdi was last seen in Iraq's Askariya suburb and is believed to have disappeared by entering the Bir Al Ghayba (Cave of Disappearance). His return, for the Shiites, will result in the avenging of the apocalyptic events of Karbala and, as I witnessed regularly, this Messianic fervour heightened the intensity of the mourning rituals (Hazleton 2009: 205). Ultimately, the ritual ties into the hegemonic authority of the Shiite infallible Imams over their congregation and the continuity of ritual reaffirms the gratitude the community has for their struggles.

The prospect of ritual change, then, is a matter of how the individual mourner, or group of individuals, are situated within the ritual itself. At one end, the change of ritual could emerge with a collective rereading of Karbala – as my interviews will gather, some individuals parlay the view that Karbala should be mourned less and that its civil message should be delivered in the diaspora through forms of social service. Contrasting the performance of Matam in Hyderabad, India, and Atlanta, Hyder Akbar details a growing shift away from physical Matam (Hyder 2006: 52). Some sections of the diaspora felt a need to modify how their allegiance to Zaynab is

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[30] Sachedina, Abdul Aziz. <u>Islamic Messianism. The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Islam</u>. Albany: State of New York Press, 1981.

expressed: in lieu of growing accusations of Shiite fanaticism, mourners in Atlanta have chosen not to engage in the bloody scenes of Matam as they did in Hyderabad. Conversely, ritual change could also support a substantial increase in mourning rituals as a means to sustain the community's identity in the face of growing sociopolitical tensions. In the GTA, the impact of the sociopolitical world is quite clear on the Imambargah. The Al Mahdi Centre in Pickering, as an example, has aligned itself closely with the jurisprudence of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamanei, who has strongly advocated for Shiites to shift away from physical mourning. Ayatollah Khamanei places a heavy emphasis on geopolitical events and encourages his community to transform the mourning for Hussain and Zaynab into events of public protest and awareness of the ongoing oppression of Muslim communities across the world – the Al Quds rally which happens annually in downtown Toronto is Iran inspired and organized, in large parts, by congregants from the Al Mahdi Centre. The Matamis, however, are less influenced by the religious clergy and, by many accounts, find their roots in the revered Sufi saints of the Indo-Pak. I am not fluent in the histories of all the Sufi saints known to have preached within the Indo-Pak. Yet, within the context of Matam, the Saint of Sindh, Lal Shabaz Qalandar, is credited with introducing a heightened awareness and appreciation for Shiite mourning rituals. Opposing local Islamic clergy, Shabaz would invite people from various religions to hear the story of Hussain's martyrdom – his mourning for Hussain attracted locals and ultimately led to a growth of groups dedicated to mourning. MMST members often adorn a red scarf from Sindh which Shabaz was known to wear – his name "Lal" means red.

But, to me, the core of ritual change emerges in the diaspora because of a heightened sense of awareness that has emerged in the mourners. That the increase in the frequency of Matam has arisen from second generation immigrants who have benefitted from better academic

opportunities shows a profound improvement in their engagement with the context of their mourning. With academic prowess, Matam does not simply remain as a ritual that needs to be "done" per say – there are contested standpoints on the purpose of Matam. The increased affluence has also allowed the members of MMST to engage in pilgrimage and critically assess, for themselves, the benefits of their rituals. One can also argue that the proliferation of mass media has allowed the Matamis to attend more critically to the impact of their Matam. The partnership of increased awareness and financial muscle also allows MMST to confront an existing system and develop their own ritual space – many of their earlier sessions and travels were funded in private spaces. Importantly, with technological access to her various speeches, they have also been able to determine, for themselves, the focus of their Shiite identity.

2.3   THE SOCIOECONOMIC & CULTURAL CONTEXT OF MATAM

From a theological perspective, the proclivity for changes in Matam presents a solid case. Matam is not defined as an obligatory practice and there is no Quranic formulae attached to it. The main resources for Shiite observances are the Quran and the traditions narrated from the Prophet Muhammad and his household[31]. In most lectures, clerics would often trace the system of Azadari to Zaynab by describing the first mourning assembly she organized. Not long after Zaynab was imprisoned in Damascus, she was granted permission to gather her caravan in a single cell to mourn over their beloveds from Karbala. The severed heads and shreds of clothing from the martyrs were presented to Zaynab and the congregation lamented by wailing eulogies and slapping their cheeks. At times, cleric would also remind us that Zaynab struck her forehead on a post when she saw the head of her brother Hussain – the first mourning assembly for Hussain utilized the available resources and deeply involved the body, pain and language. The

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[31] Moojan, Momen. <u>An Introduction to Shi'I Islam</u>. Yale: Yale University Press, 1987.

geography, socio-economic status and cultural atmosphere continue to shape the performance of mourning rituals amongst Shiites today. Matam, as I have studied it, is an extension of Zaynab's first gathering infused with a community's economic, geographic and cultural capital.

When I participated in the mourning rituals in Dubai, there was an expansive political freedom for Shiite observances. Although our ruling government was of the majority Sunni sect, Shiites were afforded a freedom to practice - street processions, public performances of Matam and Zanjeer Zani meant that rituals of the home were recreated in totality and the languages of the Indo-Pak were reproduced in the diasporic setting. Since a change of government in 2009, much of these rituals have been banned and local mourning groups have been forced underground. Likewise, in Pakistan, Shiite mourning rituals become the epicentre for sectarian clashes and many Shiite mourners insist on heightening their public mourning so as to reaffirm their identity. Matam then becomes a continuous announcement of association with Hussain and a sort of fearless stance before life threatening violence. Both in Dubai and Pakistan, mourners, specifically those involved with Matam, rely on richer community members to fund the preparation of food and the purchase of necessary equipment. The reliance on the community ultimately means that shared languages and cultural tropes are incorporated into the mourning.

In the next chapter, I will present a study of Matam in the diaspora and begin to unpack how it relates to the Indo-Pakistani homes the community in the GTA has left behind. Specifically, I will advance the analysis of ritual in the context of the diaspora. Mourning in the Indo-Pak subcontinent was marked by density and concentration: Shiite communities typically lived in the same geographical quarters, Mohallas, and entire streets would be engulfed in mourning symbols during the standard mourning period. Living in the same quarters also heightened the sense of community within the mourners and eased the planning process – there

was a standard division of labor and community elders had established rituals that were repeated annually. Given these conditions back home, a series of analytical discussions emerge. My work requires a theoretical assessment of the immigrant experience and the relations that emerge between the home and host societies. While the function of ritual is sufficiently established, it is necessary to inquire into how immigrants remember and (re)connect with the rituals from home. This inquiry opens up important discussions around immigration, diaspora and transnationalism and also looks into the role of memory. This analysis will, ultimately, wrap up the changes seen in Matam in the GTA in a neat theoretical cover which can be further related to the interviews and conclusions.

CHAPTER 3

MOURNING IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

The re-establishment of religious institutions and rituals in the diaspora is a significant aspect of Indo-Pak migration. Tied into the task of re-establishment, migratory communities are also challenged to create boundaries within which individuals can express themselves but also preserve continuities with the past[32] - religion and religious rituals have a transformative potential in the diaspora. Three core discussions will frame my analysis of the community-making process: the significance of the diaspora to studying religious rituals and institutions, the relations between first and second generation immigrants within established religious institutions and the impact of transnational practices, especially via broadband and transport technologies, on relations between home and host communities. To appreciate the experience and consciousness of an immigrant population, it is of critical import to provide a brief commentary at the onset on how the terms immigrant, diaspora and transnationalism have emerged. In fact, as with the previous chapter, it is useful to my work to explain why I use these terms and demonstrate my theoretical purview – in essence, I must answer how I intend to use these terms as sociological tools. Later in this chapter, I provide a more detailed discussion on the application of these terms. For now, a general commentary will provide the guiding understandings. The terms immigrant, diaspora and transnationalism burst with sociological vitality on social formations. Unfortunately, these terms are often over-used and under-theorized – diaspora and transnationalism speak differently to social relations/networks and provide specialized, unique

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[32] Coward, Harold G., John R Hinnells, and Raymond Brady Williams. The South Asian Religious Diaspora in Britain, Canada, and the United States. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

understandings of how Indo-Pak Shiite mourning continues and changes in the GTA. Extending

from my readings, I use the term immigrant to impart the physical relocation of people to a new

land where they are, usually but not always, set apart by race, language, traditions and other

cultural elements. By diaspora, I am looking at the imagined relations between the immigrants

and their home community: these typically take the shape of memories, sentiments, memorabilia

and other items which remind the immigrant of home. And, lastly, I use transnationalism to look

into the networks and linkages that exist between the diaspora and the home. Taken as a whole,

all three terms are working towards different ways of understanding my subject. It is important to

further appreciate that not every immigrant community becomes a diaspora or a transnational –

the terms are linked but not synonymous (Cohen 1997: 24).There is a genealogical history to

these terms as well. Early sociological research on immigrants to North America predicted that

their attachments to their home would eventually diminish as they acculturate into their new,

host community. More recent research challenges the assumption that immigrant communities

permanently severe ties with their homelands and channel their energies into assimilating into

the host society (Itzigsohn 2000: 281). The research has begun to view immigrants as people

with feet in two societies (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2002: 1). The notion of immigrants does not, or at

least should not, evoke ideas of permanent separation from a homeland and groups of

immigrants cannot simply be categorized as uprooted with no sense or connection of their former

homes (Glick Shiller, Basch and Blanc 1995: 48). This is not to suppose that all migrations are

voluntary and pleasant – the traumas and difficulties associated with migrations are still

manifested and the shift in thinking is in conceiving of immigrant communities not as

dispersions but as diasporas (Vertovec 1999: 129). Diaspora means much more than what

previous notions around immigrants have advanced. As an introductory comment, I understand

diaspora to be a term that initiates inquiry into the consciousness of an immigrant population, their awareness of the home and host societies and reproduction of cultural practices and symbols. Diasporas are growing in number, prevalence and self-awareness. James Clifford (1994: 306) warns that although the term diaspora is clearly overused, it pushes the researcher into realizing immigrant communities as self-conscious and aware of their histories. In many circumstances, albeit too much criticism, researchers examine this awareness and write about diaspora religion (Vertovec 1999: 137). Regardless of the problematics associated with diaspora religion, the strength of religion in the diaspora is an undisputed reality. Religion and religious rituals factor heavily in the diasporic experience and the term transnationalism allows us to inquire into the cross-border, "global" networks that diasporic communities establish. Diasporas are in a constant state of formation and reformation (Cohen 2008: 141) and the transnational element provides a necessary lens on the networks which initiate this state. Aside from establishing themselves, with relative degrees of success, in new geographical communities, immigrants create multiple social networks which are studied in related but different ways by the terms diaspora and transnationalism. Importantly, the terms are effectively providing me with a method to gather data for my analysis.

As I have explored in previous chapters, the transnational landscapes of the Shi'ite diaspora are crucial to consider not only in terms of my own biography and specific perspective on Matam but also in regards to how we should understand its broader social and political dynamics. From a transnational perspective, the understanding of the diaspora in the 21st century is greatly enhanced and it emphasizes the possibilities within a globalized, digital economy. The impact of globalization is indeed positive on diasporic community as the distance between "home" and "away" are getting reduced (Jha 2014: 73). But it also brings necessary attention to

the hierarchical social relations with diaspora communities and augments this as a resource into understanding how identity in a new homeland is formulated[33].

Muslim communities are the second largest religious group in Canada[34]. Muslims have been arriving in what is now considered North America since the 17th century[35]. However, before World War II, Muslim immigration to Canada was sparse and the federal census of 1871 listed only 13 Muslims in the new Dominion of Canada. Most of the early immigrants were from Middle Eastern countries and the first mosque in Canada, the Al-Rashid Mosque, was built by a handful of families from Alberta and Saskatchewan. Thanks largely to new legislation and a points system introduced in 1967, Muslim immigration into Canada began to increase. Today, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is the urban home to one of the largest Muslim diasporas in North America: some counts indicate that the Toronto region alone has approximately 250 Islamic centres. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, there were 424,935 Muslims residing in the GTA alone. Generally speaking, Muslims constitute a remarkably large segment of the world's migrant populace[36] but their concentration in the GTA is markedly significant. According to Statistics Canada, between 1991 and 2001, Muslims accounted for 51 % of immigration into the GTA. Furthermore, 61 % of all Muslims in Canada resided in the province of Ontario and 23 % of them were Canadian born. In fact, Muslims in Canada are the

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[33] Levitt, Peggy. The Transnational Villagers. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

[34] Scott, Jammie. The Religions Of Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012.

[35] Curtis Edward. Muslims in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

[36] Moghissi Haide. Muslim Diaspora. London: Routledge, 2006.

demographically youngest community[37].

This chapter studies the Indo-Pak Shiite diaspora and examines the tensions between first and second generation Indo-Pak Shiites around changes to their traditional mourning rituals. I look, in particular, at the instrumental role of the second generation Shiites in producing ritual change. Since the late 20th century, Shiite communities have witnessed internal changes with members becoming assertive about their understandings and identity[38]. Personally, I find that this assertion has emerged due to the growing educational achievements of the community – as more members have become fluent in a variety of language and theological discourses, a personal voice of sorts has developed and opinionated members are not shy from comment. In fact, in many Shiite communities now, community leaders are chosen through an election process. Religious identity constitutes a key element in the formation, development and sustenance of South Asian diasporic communities[39]. Thus, alongside a focussed discussion on diaspora and the establishment of the first Indo-Pak Shiite Imambargah in Toronto, I look at the tasks and the relationships via which the diasporic people continue their religious rituals and institutions in a new environment. The initial sections of this chapter study describes the processes leading to the foundation of the first Imambargah and traces the cultural capital through which immigrants in the 1970s established their mourning rituals from their homes in Lucknow, Karachi, Islamabad and Lahore. The idea of "place" is an important anchor of memory and speaks to the migratory

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[37] Moghissi, Haide. Muslim Diaspora. London: Routledge, 2006.

[38] Tabatabai, Hussain Muhammad Syed. Shiite Islam. Albany: SUNY Press, 1975.

[39] Sankaran, Chirta and Rajesh Rai. Religion and Identity In The South Asian Diaspora. London: Routledge, 2014.

experience – the immigrant has left a particular place the memory of which is carried into the new, host society. Memory is a social phenomenon (Assmann 2006: 1) – beyond the neural, biological foundations of memory, what and how we remember is socially conditioned and culturally formed or constructed: the diaspora refers to this memory to recreate their conditions in the new home. As such, I briefly explore the role of memory in the migration of Indo-Pak Shiites. The final sections study how the second generation of these immigrants negotiate their identity and ritual performance within these Imambargahs. I regard identity as fluid and understand ritual change within this context. An important element of the lived experience of this growing diaspora is their awareness of belonging within a transnational world[40] : for South Asians born in the diaspora, the subcontinent remains a point of reference, and often a part of their affective world (Brown 2006: 148). Individuals in the diaspora have a transnational sense of self that extends beyond national borders[41].

With the proliferation of cost effective communication and transport technologies, diasporas are capable of developing kinship and social networks often along the chains of migration that, as I have shown in my first chapter for the Khojas, are closely bound to the political histories of labour diasporas stretching across several continents and multiple 'homes'. Dense and highly active networks spanning vast spaces are transforming many kinds of social, cultural, economic and political relationships (Vertovec 2009: 5). The diaspora, hence, is not just unified by a common place of belonging but also by social practices, economic and cultural exchanges, and forms of communication that allow generations to stay connected or to forge new

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[40] Brown, Judith. Global South Asians. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[41] Vertovec, Steven. Transnationalism. Florence: Routledge, 2009.

connections to places their ancestors have lived or which, like it is the case for sites of Shiite pilgrimage, have a specific place in the social and religious imaginary.

As diasporas are established, studies of religious institutions often show a high degree of conflict and contestation (Vertovec 2004: 283). As such, given the tensions that have emerged between community elders and the youngsters in Markazi Matami Sangat Toronto (MMST), I will examine the impact of this transnational character and advance an understanding of how, through online communications and the sharing of rich media, second generation Indo-Pak Shiites are changing their traditional rituals. Importantly, I also look into how the veneration of Zaynab's teachings and personality have contributed to the changes I witness.

3.1   THE MIGRATION OF SHIITES TO THE GTA

Besides being of significant number, the Canadian Muslim population itself is also one of the most diverse. The previously quoted statistics allude to a monolithic, homogenous representation of Islam and do not reveal the various ethnic, cultural and sectarian strands that constitute the Canadian Muslim community. For this reason, many scholars of Islam use the plural term 'Islams' rather than the singular Islam to emphasize the internal diversity that is organic to the religion[42]. Recent data on Canadian immigration reveals a heterogeneous group of Muslim immigrants. In the early 2000s, Muslim immigrants came from eight countries – Pakistan (26%), Iran (12%), Morocco (9 %), Algeria (8%), Bangladesh (6 %), India (5 %),

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[42] Moghissi, Haideh and Halleh Ghorashi. <u>Muslim Diaspora in the West: Negotiating Gender, Home and Belonging</u>. Burlington: Ashgate, 2010.

Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates (approximately 3 % each)[43]. I was unsuccessful in

getting a sense of the median age groups of these immigrants and cannot speak with much

accuracy to any generational gaps. Nonetheless, it is important to delve deeper into Indo-Pak

Shiite immigration into the GTA itself. The reasons and means powering immigration are just as

diverse as the community. I emphasize one core reason why the GTA is a kneejerk choice for

many Indo-Pak Shiites within the Muslim community. Shiites are a minority and, even if

Muslims reside in other areas of Canada, the lack of Shiite representation can deter their interest.

I, for one, migrated from the United Arab Emirates to Canada to secure my academic future as

well as my citizenship – although I was born in the United Arab Emirates, existing laws meant

that I was not eligible for local citizenship. Canada, and more acutely the GTA, was a comforting

option for my parents to pursue for my future. Despite having no biological family in Canada,

knowing that Indo-Pak Shiites have a strong presence in the GTA allowed for my parents to see

an opportunity for me to maintain my religious and cultural heritage and, possibly, settle into the

Canadian mosaic. Of course one must not dismiss the impact of financial capacity in securing

immigration: as members of the Khoja community, we amassed a sizeable economic capital with

which to invest in the country and secure residency. My own economic future was built on

managing these portfolios and contributing, almost immediately, to the local economy. Similarly,

coupled with socioeconomic reasons, individuals and families migrate to join their loved ones,

flee persecution, expand family businesses and explore alternate opportunities. Many immigrants

rely on an established network of family and community friends to assist them during their early

years in the GTA and bring with them myriad skills and interests to further locally. Accompanied

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[43] Kazemipur, Abdolmohammad. The Muslim Question in Canada: A Story of Segmented

Integration. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.

by the ethnic and cultural diversities, the term Muslim itself is gripped by the sectarian and theological diversities within Islam itself. According to the 2001 census, approximately 300,000 Ithna-Asheri Shiites resided in Canada. While Shiites remain a minority, Aziz Sachedina says they account for 30 percent of overall Muslims in North America (Jafri 2000: 9). Unfortunately, the statistics do not examine the sectarian diversities within Canadian Muslim communities to any major degree and there is an acute shortage of related data. In brief, I understand that a majority of the Shiite immigration into the GTA came from Middle Eastern (Iranian, Iraqi, and Lebanese) and Indo-Pak countries. As discussed in earlier chapters, these communities bring with them their culturally specific rituals and congregate around renewing these in Canada. Most of the Middle Eastern Shiite immigrants, who were also the earliest Shiite immigrants into Canada in the early 1900s, have established large religious and community institutions in Hamilton, Waterloo and Ottawa[44].

The Ahlul Bayt Assembly of Canada is one example of the mega structures within which Shiites from Middle Eastern backgrounds are mobilized and supported to engage in their religious duties. By establishing such institutions, Shiites establish infrastructure to cater to more than just the religious needs of their members: from social assistance programs to mobilizing community resources, these institutions offer multiple services to their members. The bulk of Indo-Pak migration into Canada was post 1950s (including the twice-migrant East African Indian Khoja community) and they have now formed concentrated communities across the Greater Toronto Area and in the bordering Peel, York and Durham regions. In 1979, the Khoja

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[44] Sachedina, Abdulaziz. A Minority within a Minority: The Case of the Shia in North America. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994.

community established the Jaffari Islamic Centre and have grown ever since. In 2003, the Jaffari members began fundraising for a major community centre project, issuing bonds in compliance with local tax and savings regulations. Although lesser in number than their Sunni counterparts, the Shiites have grown their community. Today, there are over 10 Imambargahs spread across Brampton, Mississauga, Pickering, Scarborough and Markham that are managed by Indo-Pak Shiites. And, as per recent counts, this diaspora is growing. Indo-Pak Shiite centres are also being established in Milton and Etobicoke.

3.2   BECOMING A DIASPORA

Regardless of the thin immigration data, of more immediate concern to my work is the theoretical analysis around the diaspora: questions around why people migrate to begin with and their socioeconomic situation open vital doors into understanding how religious institutions and rituals are re-established in the host country. While this holds true, the more urgent question is why I classify a community as diasporic to begin with and what methodological study emerges out of the use of the term diaspora. And, lastly, what is the role of religion in understanding the diaspora? In my readings on diaspora, it became clear that ethnicity was the primary lens to study the diaspora and theoretical connections with religion were rarely made (Cohen 2008: 153). As such, I need to outline a conceptual understanding of a diaspora in order to progress: the discussions around religion in diaspora or diaspora religion will be contextualized in the section on the Hussaini brothers' initiatives.

Becoming a diaspora is a long-term process of managing change, continuity and negotiation (Smith 2006: 29). Although rooted in experiences of dispersion, dislocation (and often dispossession) the term diaspora cuts across a variety of academic understandings as rooted

in different disciplinary orientations. It certainly has become one of the buzzwords of the postmodern age (Cohen 1999: 3) that has seeped into common sense use albeit hesitantly so. Definitions and understandings of diaspora get modified in translation as they are applied to new groups (Butler 2001: 191). However, much like the term ritual, diaspora is a complex phenomenon that can easily slip into misuse. Vertovec suggests that there is an over use and under theorization of the term (Vertovec 1999). A search on Google, for example, shows 16, 100, 000 web pages of where the term diaspora has been used with barely any attention to the technical utility of the term (Rai & Sankaran 2011: 6). In unpacking the concept of diaspora, Kim Butler makes an intriguing observation: human beings have been moving across the globe's expanse for a very long time but not all these movements have resulted in a diaspora (Butler 2001: 189). This, necessarily, invites the question of what distinguishes a diaspora from the other movements of people. Etymologically, the word diaspora has its origins in the Greek verb speiro (to sow) and the preposition dia (over). It denotes how a group of geographically scattered people maintain connections to one another through kinship and communication tools amongst other things. The word has evolved from being exclusively tied to Jewish experiences of dispersion. Robin Cohen argues that the word diaspora has gone through four essential stages in academic use:

1. Firstly, the term was used, negatively by large measure, to conceptualize the uprooting of the Jewish people and the traumatic experiences associated with a forced displacement. In essence, a diaspora emerged out of a cataclysmic, unfortunate event and led to the displacement of people from their kin and sustenance. The features of this classical, victim diaspora definition were also extended to encapsulate the experiences of Armenians, Irish and Africans.

2. By the 1980s, the term was extended and employed to denote different categories of people who were living in nation-states without being permanent residents or citizens. Importantly, the term now accounted for various reasons of people moving from their homelands and was not limited to forced dispersal. As Indo-Pak workers moved to the Middle East, for example, the term labour diaspora emerged as a category of diaspora.

3. The term then grew out of its limited conceptual cage to identify the forces of globalization and view identity beyond the constraints of a particular geography. The term was appropriated to various migratory communities. The focus here was on using diaspora to view identity as de-territorialized

4. Lastly, diaspora finally emerged to reflect on migration in a globalized world with a specific eye on the relations maintained between the old and new homelands[45].

Adding to this, Butler provides us with three core features that distinguish a diaspora:

1. Diasporas are communities impacted by dispersal to more than one country.

2. These communities maintain some relationship to the original homeland.

3. Members of the diaspora posit a sense of self awareness and identity.

In Vertovec's often cited model, diaspora can be discussed as a social form, a type of social consciousness and as a mode of cultural production (Vertovec 1999). Diaspora as a social form is the most common application and it refers to how people in a diaspora relate to each other based on their country of origin and ancestral roots – in essence, Vertovec explains that it refer to a people who are characterized by relationship-despite-dispersal. Almost all diasporas

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[45] Cohen, Robin. Global Diasporas: An Introduction. New York: Routledge, 2008.

are a social form of sorts and the onus is on studying the relationships developed within. As a type of social consciousness, one can study the diaspora to examine how members emphasize their sense of belonging or exclusion in a new space. Diaspora consciousness, especially within the context of religion, looks into the state of mind within members of the diaspora. In many ways, it is the road which leads to self-questioning and brings individuals to rethink their religious rituals and practices from within a transnational perspective. And, lastly, as a mode of cultural production, the diaspora provides an optic into how immigrants create their cultural meaning and adapt it, or not, to their new space. In many ways, as a mode of cultural production, diaspora brings into question the essential fixities within identity and religion. I argue that both Cohen and Butler see the social relations within and around the diaspora as the term's academic potency. In a technology infused age, dispersed communities are able to connect with their original homelands and further their religious rituals. Rai and Sankaran suggest that religion has a 'cementing' role in the diaspora and that it, indeed, mends the fracture between the old and new homeland. Importantly, however, they recognize that this cementing role is not immune to change. Stuart Hall suggests that contemporary cultural identities oscillate between two opposing movements – reactive attempts to reinstate boundaries that reify the groups' collective identity, affirming their difference from mainstream belief-systems, yet also, contrarily, as an outcome of globalization, inculcating greater cultural hybridity (Hall 1992:304). Hence, in the next section, I put these theoretical frameworks to work and analyze the establishing of the Bab Ul Hawaij Imambargah.

3.3   THE FIRST IMAMBARGAH IN THE GTA

In 1972, the Bab Ul Hawaij Midland Imambargah is a registered charitable foundation and was formally established in the basement of the Hussaini brothers' bungalow – the name of

the Imambargah loosely translates into the "Door of Fulfillment" and is a title attached to the memory of Hussain's warrior brother Abbas and infant child Ali Asghar. The naming conventions around Imambargahs are of deep interest to me. Abbas was the last standing warrior with Hussain on the day of Ashura and his gallantry towards Hussain's harem is the central ethos around him – numerous poems speak of Zaynab's grief at the death of Abbas and it is frequently mentioned that she called onto him for endurance during her struggles in Damascus. As such, Abbas is seen as a companion in harsh times and a redeemer of the faithful from situations of hopelessness and loneliness. Similarly, during Hussain's final moments in Karbala, the 6th month old child Ali Asghar is narrated to have fallen from his cradle in a symbolic attempt to assist Hussain in battle. As with Abbas, Ali Asghar showcases how loyalty to Hussain is demonstrated in the most trying circumstances. Both Abbas and Ali Asghar are embalmed deeply into the Shiite psyche and their characters are often referenced to inspire the community. Being one of the earliest Indo-Pak Shiite families in the GTA, the Hussaini brothers probably felt a sense of isolation and, perhaps through Abbas and Ali Asghar, sought the strength needed to affirm their identity. The concept of including a "door" in the name is also quite intriguing – that the Hussaini brothers established the Imambargah in their home and opened their doors to the small community suggests the brothers' deep attachment to the Shiite faith and willingness to apply their chief assets in serving the Shiite message. Today, makeshift Imambargahs are often established in homes of affluent community members. However, the Hussaini Brothers' basement is the only permanent Imambargah which has legal, charitable status and is open to the public throughout the year.

The Hussaini brothers traced their lineage to the elite, ruling dynasties of Lucknow and Hyderabad. They were raised with Shiite mourning rituals that included recitations of poetry

written by Mir Anees and Mirza Dabir[46] and their families were the chief organizers of mourning rituals in their local communities. They migrated to the GTA with their extended families to pursue better healthcare for ailing members, advance their children's educational prospects and further their investments in the textile industry. As active mourners back home, they also brought with themselves a capital of audio recordings of Urdu speeches from esteemed Shiite clerics, religious symbols and traditional recipes for the Niyaz. Upon arrival, in the absence of a religious centre, the brothers converted their Scarborough apartment into a makeshift Imambargah and conducted private ceremonies for fellow Indo-Pak Shiites. Shiite Indian and Pakistani families in the GTA congregated here, daily during the first 10 days of Muharram and then bi-weekly during the mourning period to preserve their mourning practices from Lucknow, Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. While the brothers coordinated most of the arrangements, congregants volunteered to lead various rituals and fund related activities. Eventually, as a growing number of Shiite Indian and Pakistani families began to settle down in the cities of Scarborough, Mississauga and Markham, the brothers purchased a home on 731 Midland Avenue. With their families living in the upper two floors of the home, the brothers converted the basement into the first Imambargah for Toronto's Indo-Pak Shiites and gradually furnished it with shrines, flags and texts from Imambargahs in Karachi and Lucknow.

The Midland Imambargah is also commonly and affectionately known as "House". Since its inception, the basement Imambargah has been renovated extensively. It has approximately 2000 square feet and is divided into two separate sections for men and women. Both sections are fully carpeted and accommodate a maximum of 200 congregants. Although dealing with an aging infrastructure, repeated renovations have also allowed for two fully functioning

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[46] Abbas, S. <u>The Immortal Poetry of Mir Anis</u>. Karachi: Majlis-e-Milli, 1983.

washrooms, a seating area for elderly attendees, a small library of religious texts and a kitchenette. The separate sections are divided by a thick black curtain and, over the years, the brothers have added audio and visual equipment to record proceedings and upload videos onto their YouTube channel. Recently, the Hussaini brothers have moved out of the house and rent the upper floors to students and low income earners. The brothers have also been in contact with the city to amend zoning laws to allow for a major renovation project to extend the basement and accommodate more parking spaces around the house.

It is fascinating to experience how much has been achieved within a relatively small unit. Important to my work, the linkages to the homeland come alive in the rituals organized by the brothers.

3.4   RECREATING LAHORE & LUCKNOW

I examine the role of collective memory in transmitting cultures from one generation to the next and the ways in which memories circulate and migrate in and between cultures (Rigney 2008). I also examine how collective memories are created. Since the early Greeks, memory has been an important aspect of life and the survival of oral cultures depended on concentrated, disciplined remembering[47]. During the 1980s to 1990s, there was a significant growth –a 'memory boom' - in research on memory and immigration. Psychologists, for example, distinguish between long-term and short-term memory, episodic, semantic and procedural memory and have advanced approximately 256 types of memory (Roedeger and Wertsch 1998: 11). The breath of memory studies research is quite large and I do not intend to provide an exhaustive analysis of this. Instead, I look at the understandings of memory within cultural

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[47] Casey, Edward. Remembering: A Phenomenological Study. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

studies and apply this to the immigrant experience. Memory studies offer an interdisciplinary understanding of the role of memory in human societies. In immigrant communities, despite the pressures for immigrants to assimilate into a new culture, many retain the traits of their old homeland. In this section, I briefly examine the importance of memory to this retention and study it through the developments at Bab ul Hawaij at Midland. The term memory, much like the other discussed theoretical concepts, has a general use in the English language. To frame it simply, a memory is a recollection of a particular event or circumstance in one's life which invokes a sense of nostalgia, pain and other feelings. However, in the context of the diaspora, memory has a particular function and is one of the structural bases of the immigrant experience (Rosinska 2010: 31). Julia Creet argues that the physical movement of people creates memories and that this plays a crucial role in the context of immigration and diasporas. Memory is deeply enmeshed with who we are and underwrites a variety of institutions in our daily lives[48]. It is a source of remembering practices and lifestyles from the old homeland – in essence, it is a recollection of how things used to be done. Rosinska writes that memory plays a triple role in the diaspora. It is identity forming and emerges as a site where the immigrants' new identity is in constant conversation with their previous one. It is therapeutic and allows the immigrant to bear the difficulties of a new environment through a sense of melancholic longings. And, lastly, it creates community around remembrances and establishes a means for the memory to be recreated and experienced in a new home. Rosinka establishes an important point in that memory is not simply glued to the past and that is a continuing force in the present and future. For my work, I consider collective memory as an important aspect of processes of resistance (Hua 2005: 8). One of the

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[48] Denison, John. <u>History, Time, Meaning and Memory: Ideas for the Sociology of Religion</u>. Boston: Brill, 2011.

foremost worries of many Indo-Pak Shiites when migrating to the diaspora is the erasure of their cultural traditions and religious ritual. Perhaps, for this reason, the Hussaini brothers not only saw an immediate need for an Imambargah, but also began to structure it around the core memories they had of mourning rituals in Lucknow. Halbwach argues that memories are constructed within social structures and institutions. Wertsch (2002) expands the notion of collective memory and the processes by which collective memory is materially constructed by exploring the different cultural tools or technologies of memory available in a particular socio-cultural setting. Both Freud and Heidegger remind us that memories do not necessarily store the past unchanged. To a degree, memories can also be manufactured. However, given the deep involvement of the Hussaini brothers in the mourning back home, their efforts were close to replicating their old home in the GTA diaspora.

The main gatherings at the Midland Imambargah are during the Ayam e Aza mourning period. Since 1975, the brothers have followed a routine procedure that, to this date, can be found at various Imambargahs in Lucknow. Back in Lucknow, each gathering can potentially attract up to 5000 people. Of course, in the GTA, the crowds are much smaller. Nonetheless, the brothers organize the mourning rituals to recreate their early experiences. Much before the onset of Muharram, the brothers and the extended family meet to discuss the plans for the mourning period. In much of the Indo-Pak, Shiite families typical arrange these meetings to discuss funds, responsibilities and calendars. Although the patterns of the mourning rituals stay relatively unchanged, each family member participates in general discussion to address any issues. Importantly, one of the main topics of discussion is the involvement of the family children in the rituals and various responsibilities are gradually being handed off to the next generation. The first and foremost action item is to invite a religious scholar from India or Pakistan to deliver

lectures to the congregation in Urdu. Typically, the invitation is extended to a scholar who is known previously to the family and is well known for his oratory prowess. Many of the scholars also come, specifically, from Lucknow and are known to the family. The costs of inviting and hosting the lecture are taken from a fund into which the family regularly contributes to. Various Shiite communities attach each night of the mourning period to a specific Karbala martyr. An important aspect of the rituals is the preparation of the special foods, Niyaz. Each night, mourners are served dinner after the rituals and the women take turns in preparing the food. The cost of the foods for each night is shared amongst family members and female members volunteer to cook specific foods for each night. During the mourning period, families in Lucknow cook simple meals of rice and lentils along with sweetmeat offerings – the same menus are followed at Bab Ul Hawaij Midland. The cleaning and maintenance work is shared between female and male members – after each night, the Imambargah quarters is cleaned and immediately prepared for the next night of mourning. A few days before the mourning period, though, the male members gather at the Imambargah to cover the walls with black cloth and construct the Taziyahs and Alams – the cloths, religious symbols and memorabilia have all been imported from Lucknow and other parts of the Indo-Pak. The mourning rituals on each night follow much of the same patterns I had witnessed in Dubai's Muhammad Shah Imambargah.

However, the core difference is in the style and pattern of Hath Ka Matam. The Hussaini Brothers maintained the tradition of Ek Hath Ka Matam (striking the chest with one hand) along with eulogies written in Urdu. Typically, after the scholar would end his sermon, one of the brothers would melodiously chant the name of Hussain and the mourners would line up in rows facing each other. Some men remove their shirts and perform the self-flagellation bare-chested. A single individual reciter then commences the recitation of the eulogy, Noha, and the mourners

strike their chests in a rhythmic beat. Typically, the Matam would last for about 15 minutes and end with a collective invocation to Abbas. This style of Matam has been replicated at various Imambargahs in the GTA, since.

3.5   MARKAZI MATAMI SANGAT TORONTO

The name Markazi Matami Sangat Toronto translates loosely into Toronto's central group of Matamis. The In 2006, approximately 10 second generation Indo-Pak Shiite immigrants created a group dedicated to Matam. Inspired by groups they had met at Zaynab's shrine, the group decided to form their GTA equivalent with dedicated eulogy readers and individuals to conduct Matam. Most of the initial members were spread across the GTA – the majority, however, lived in the regions of Brampton and Mississauga. While their efforts seemed relatively normal within the Shiite frame of things, the group initiated a couple of changes to how Matam was known to be performed in the GTA. Taking cues from YouTube videos of groups in Pakistan, the group organized sessions in mini Imambargahs established at their members' home and gradually grew in size. As of 2012, MMST had approximately 50 – 60 members and now organizes sessions across North America. When MMST began to engage in Matam across different Imambargahs in the GTA, they received a mixed reception. Some members of the diaspora deeply appreciated their efforts and applauded them as youths who were furthering the community. While MMST visited a number of Imambargahs, the Bab Ul Hawaij Imambargah in Brampton welcomed them and supported their weekly Matam sessions. Such support, though, was sparse. The group became the subject of much criticism. Many elders of the community reacted to them as a gang that would take over the Imambargah with their particular style of Matam. Furthermore, MMST placed a heavy emphasis on Punjabi Nohas – a majority of Indo-Pak Imambargahs in the GTA are Urdu speaking and this caused further tensions. The weekly,

structured sessions were seen as contradicting the dictates of the faith and MMST was accused of overdoing Matam and turning it into a form of physical sport. In fact, many felt as though with an over emphasis on Matam, MMST was ignoring other responsibilities of the faith. MMST also revived Zanjeer Ka Matam which had, by 2006, been discontinued by the community. The tensions between MMST and first generation immigrants remain till today. Personally, I began to attend sessions hosted by MMST not long after my immigration to Canada – I met them during a Muharram session at the Imam Ali Centre in North York. By the summer of 2007, I attended most of MMST's sessions and immediately noticed the tensions. Although MMST were not completely disregarding the Matam traditions already embedded within the community, their sole focus on Matam was not received kindly – MMST does not usually invite a cleric for a lecture and do not do the typical prayers that lead into the mourning session. In all other respects, the Matam with MMST is no different from what I have described in my formative years in the Dubai Sangat. However, the context and the extension of intense Matam beyond the mourning period brewed much of the tensions. There is also the reconfiguration of the public procession by MMST that has furthered the tensions. In the GTA, approximately 3 annual mourning processions are taken out by the Imambargahs – the processions take place in downtown Toronto, Scarborough and Brampton. In the past, these processions have been less focused on Matam and more attuned to sharing information about Shiites and the history of oppression they have suffered. With the emergence of MMST, Matam has begun to feature prominently in the processions and community elders have expressed concern with how the wider Canadian community will receive such practices.

Thus, in the interviews, I inquire into the reasons behind the formation of MMST and address the worries around this. Furthermore, I look to understand how crucial Matam is to the

identity of these mourners and how it impacts them as Muslims in a Western society.

CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEWS

This chapter is an analysis of how the changes in Matam relate to the identity of MMST members. Identity is undeniably complex and the subject of numerous theoretical advances. These inquiries are not the subject of this chapter and, in the scope of this chapter, I do not focus on why religious identity takes precedence in certain immigrant communities and contexts. Instead, I provide a general overview of how I use identity through my interviews. From a social sciences perspective, a sense of identity draws from the dialectic between individual and the society and the focus is on how membership to a social group determines an individual's perception of identity (Jessica 1998: 9). As opposed to seeing identity as fixed and immutable, identity is more often considered an evolving process of "becoming" rather than simply "being" (Peek 2005: 216). It is an active process. The concept of "social identity" further emphasizes an individual's group membership and studies identity by looking at how the individual understands, evaluates and relates to a particular group membership. In earlier discussions on the arrival of the Hussaini brothers in the GTA, it was clear that religious identity and rituals were a prime focus of theirs because it tied back into claiming a sense of self in a new community and in supporting members with other social and communal needs through the Imambargah. However, the relation to the mourning rituals and the Imambargah has been reimagined with MMST - thus, in these interviews I peer into how individual MMST members parlay their identity and how they think/act within their diasporic context. Although the question of Canadian Citizenship is one that came to me much after the interviews, I provide sufficient discussion on how my interviewees consider their situation as Shiites in Canada. I also deepen

the conversation by relating the influence of Lady Zaynab on the creation of MMST. One crucial element in the shift in Matam could, possibly, be within the reinterpretation of the Lady Zaynab – in what follows, I will analyze this possibility and provide a commentary on her influence. In essence, I search for what it means to be a Shiite mourner of Zaynab in the Canadian context. Within the context of the diaspora, identity is relational, contextual and time-bound (Safran 2004: 11). Through my series of interviews, I analyze how MMST members are relating to their homeland, developing a sense of being Shiite in the GTA and addressing the concerns of senior members within the Imambargah. This analysis deepens the earlier conceptualizations of ritual, diaspora and memory – it synthesizes these conceptualizations by peering into individual narratives, personal meanings and viewpoints. Religious rituals become modified in different ways within the diaspora (Hegland 2005: 223) and the interviews will look to highlight the core influences behind these modifications. The goal of this chapter is not to simply narrate the interviews. Instead, I provide my critical analysis on what I hear from the interviewees and tie these back to my core themes.

Many of my interviewees are key members of MMST and play important roles in organizing year round Matam sessions across the city and North America. I first met members of MMST at the Imam Ali Centre in North York during the 2007 Muharram mourning sessions. At the time, their group was significantly small and comprised of no more than 10 active members. To me, it was apparent that the MMST group felt beleaguered by the majority attendees: it seemed as though they realized that their best strategy in the Imambargah was to partake in proceedings and organically attempt to shift the Matam to their preference. Given that their style of Matam was similar to what I had left in Dubai, my participation within MMST was a natural and welcome progression. I immediately bonded with their members and started to learn more

about the circumstances within which they were emerging. Although, in 2007, MMST was at a nascent stage, it was apparent that their members were fluent in the Punjabi language and had been inspired deeply by touring Sangats they met in Syria. Between 2007 and 2012, MMST organized 7 pilgrimages to Lady Zaynab's shrine and had accompanied some of the largest Sangats from Pakistan. Furthermore, not only did most of the MMST member have multimedia recordings of Matam sessions from the Indo-Pak, some of them also maintained phone and social media contact with key figures in foreign Sangats and had committed many of their eulogies to memory. I could relate closely with their commitments and was regularly invited to members' homes for meals and recitation practices. Membership into MMST does not entail a formal application process. Instead, it is deeply informal and rooted in how actively one participates in their sessions. MMST announce their sessions via group text messages and a private Facebook Group - as such, being involved in these broadcasts and attending sessions ultimately allows an individual to engage and cement friendships within the Sangat. I am familiar with MMST's tireless efforts to further their particular style of Matam and, for my interviews, easily identified individuals who would be best suited to articulate the importance of MMST. Their narratives will speak to how they understand ritual change and the difficulties that are tucked into these changes. They will also discuss the necessities of these changes and its relevance to the diaspora. I have ensured to interview both active and less active members and analyze these interviews to forward a range of understandings. Although my participation with MMST has considerably lessened over the past years, the impact of their changes, growth and popularity has transpired before me. At the time of the interviews, MMST had successfully completed their first Matamdari in Chicago and were planning to invite Sangats from New York, Houston and Virginia to their local Imambargah in Brampton. My interviews with Syed, Mesam and Mahdi

parlay the intensity with which MMST has heightened the community's attention to Matam. To varying degrees, all 3 individuals have been influenced by MMST and speak candidly about how this shapes their identity – admittedly, they are biased in favor of MMST but offer useful insight into how the Sangat shifted proceedings at their local Imambargahs. They also assist with understanding the transnational element embodied within MMST and explain how MMST's Matam has been punctuated by Sangats in Pakistan, India and other Indo-Pak diasporas in the Middle East. Although I discuss their interviews separately, I draw on common threads and themes in each section. I also close their interviews by offering a personal understanding of why Matam has appealed as it has to the MMST. Changu and Zahra look at the impact of MMST on the community and communicate a hope to see the community resolve the internal disputes around Matam: I have combined their interviews into one section. Given that the Shiite community does not seek to completely abandon Matam, both Changu and Zarah talk about how issues around how Matam is done or its intensity can be productively approached and resolved. They also reference unwelcome events involving MMST and advance a vision to see a united Shiite community. My interviewees consistently pay tribute to Zaynab's strength and see her as a well of motivation and perseverance. They also reference the current political turmoil in Damascus and violence surrounding Zaynab's shrine.

The centrality of Zaynab to the MMST process extends from two observations:

1. The interviewees know that MMST emerged out of GTA Shiite youth being inspired by Sangats visiting Zaynab's shrine. There could be various reasons for this inspiration – however, through the interviews, it becomes clear that recreating the Matam observed at Zaynab's shine in the GTA has allowed for MMST members to voice their ideas and opinions. As discussed earlier, most Imambargahs are run under

the guidance of senior community members and Matam appears to have opened a

door for a voiceless section of the community.

2. Zaynab's heroic stand pre and post Karbala offers immense inspiration to MMST

    members. Her perseverance against a regimented, authoritarian political system

    speaks to MMST and helps them with struggling through their growing pains in the

    GTA diaspora. I also understood that the prevailing political tensions in Syria have

    mobilized the MMST youth into honoring her memory further and paying tribute to

    her through Matam.

As the interviews proceed, I reference Zaynab and the role of Matam in shaping identity.

There is a general sense that Zaynab is the nexus for the Indo-Pak Shiite community. Through

her, MMST members have been able to find a solid reason to remain connected with their Indo-

Pak heritage but also articulate an individual sense of how this heritage dialogues with their

Canadian upbringing. Throughout my discussions, it was clear that within the local Imambargahs

there were polarized camps on Matam. At one end, some Imambargahs were positive about the

performance of Matam and encouraged it – however, many of these Imambargahs were not keen

on shifting from their traditional ways of doing Matam (such as the Ek Haath Ka Matam) and did

not want to replace them with the methods introduced by MMST. There was also palpable

tension on the shift from Urdu eulogies to Punjabi. On the other end, certain Imambargahs were

skeptical of Matam in the Canadian context and felt as though its performance should be limited

and less intense. These tensions do not go addressed directly. Very often, heated conversations

spill over to social media and email threads. In fact, at the end of the 2014 Ashura, a major

debate ensued online about MMST's Zanjeer Ka Matam: unfortunately, abuse and vile language

is all that the debate resulted in. Thus, through the interviews, we understand how MMST brings

significant attention to Matam and interacts with these opposing views.

4.1   ZAYNAB TEACHES ME TO BE FREE

Given that my academic interest in Zaynab and Matam emerged out of my pilgrimage to her Shrine, this section of the interviews aimed to tease out the level of influence her personality has had on MMST members. I reached out to my interviewees personally and did not advertise my search for participants through any public platform. As such, it was quite surprising when Syed contacted me directly with an interest to participate. Personally, I assumed that his interest extended from the fact that the Shiite community in the GTA has hardly ever been engaged academically about Matam. It was thus fitting to begin the conversation by understanding Syed's participation in Matam and MMST. I had also never spoken to him about Matam before or engaged with him in a MMST context. It was, thus, vital to do some initial introductions and understand how Syed engaged with Matam in his formative years leading up to MMST. As a clarification, I have deliberately placed his interview as the first of five analyses: Syed's insights are profound and neatly tie into critical theoretical, inter-disciplinary discussions.

Syed moved to the GTA from Saudi Arabia when he was about four years old – given the persecution of Shiites in Saudi Arabia, Syed's family could not participate in any mourning assemblies and his first experience of these assemblies was in the GTA. Syed explained that he attended numerous Imambargahs in the GTA West and heard about my work from a cousin. Although he is not an active member of MMST, he participates in their Matam sessions whenever he is in attendance. He impressed upon me his support for the MMST initiatives and engaged me with responses that consistently spoke of Matam within the Canadian sociopolitical context. It occurred to me, after talking to him, that I had not quite appreciated the connection between MMST and the second generation in Canada: Syed was pointing to a very tense, yet

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essential, framework that looks at how second generation Shiite youth have been inspired by their lives in the GTA to address their religious identities and articulate it for themselves. He discussed with me about the excitement in the community when Imambargahs were being developed across the region and I saw this as an entry point into the emergence of MMST within the pre-established communities. Syed had also visited Zaynab's shrine on numerous occasions.

Ali:

You have been in the GTA Shia community for a while now. There has been some controversy with how MMST performs Matam. What do you make of this?

Syed:

Human beings are free to express his/her love for Imam Hussain in any way. Matam is a form of self-expression, an art. It is a way to express our raw emotions that are stored in our hearts for Imam Hussain. It is effective as it allows for expression. I choose to express my love and as long as I am not harming anybody, I don't see a problem.

It was obvious that Syed spoke from a defensive as well as critical stance by positioning Shiite mourners as human beings with raw emotions: by explaining that he did not see a "problem" with MMST's Matam, he was suggesting that most had classified the group as problematic to Shiite practice and were, perhaps, actively seeking a solution to the problem. I also felt he was adding the unease of MMST within the Imambargah with the onerous reception Matam tends to receive from non-Shiite observers. I realize that he was impressing upon me the question of agency and tackling all the controversies around Matam as one whole - each mourner should, ideally, be in a position to mourn outside of a prescribed way and freely communicate personal and unique understandings of Shiite patron saints. The idea that the mourning for the martyrs of Karbala should not be locked to Islamic dictates is one that I have heard particularly

from other Shiites who sympathize with more eclectic Sufi schools of thought. It is true that most

mainstream Sunni and Shiite Islamic authorities do not permit for individuals to conduct

themselves in a choice of his or her own (Asad 2011: 36) – although this is not the subject of my

work, it is sufficient to understand that Syed was questioning the essential fixity of Shiite

mourning rituals and applying the lessons from the Shiite patron saints universally. Saba

Mahmood's study of Muslim prayers in contemporary Egypt provides critical perspective on this

by disagreeing with the system of essential meaning that constructs ritual (Mahmood 2001: 844).

By agency, Mahmood argues that individuals, or groups of individuals, ought to realize their

capacity and interests above the weight of custom and tradition (Mahmood 2005: 8). It seems fair

to suggest that Syed was also opening an important discussion on the role of critique within the

Shiite community – in essence, to what level does an individual Shiite have the a right to

disagree with ongoing affairs and rituals within the Shiite community. This question is further

complicated by the context of immigration and the settlement of Shiite communities in Western,

secular spaces that have supposed separations between church and state. Nonetheless, every

critical discourse has institutional conditions that define what it is, what it recognizes, what it

aims at and what it is destroying (Asad 2011: 55). As the subject of an alternate study, the

perimeters around critique within the Shiite community would be worthwhile to measure – this

would also facilitate a crucial discussion on how rituals are thought through and how a process of

change is initiated through inquiry and critique. Syed's critical discourse continued when I

engaged him further on MMST practices that have added to the tensions within the community.

Ali:

What do you think about Zanjeer ka Matam and the Matam with blades that MMST has

revived?

Syed:

Matam, especially when done with chains, is indeed something that is frowned upon by

certain scholars and learned members of the community. But for this matter, I say that

Matam is again an absolute form of individual expression. I have had my share of debate

and discussion with the "learned" and respected scholars. They are also nervous with

passing judgement on Zanjeer. It seems that the final verdict is based upon a Farsi quote

that translates into something like this: I am afraid/ashamed that my actions/decision

would make me guilty in the presence of the Mother of Imam Hussain. Therefore, the

human being is free to express his/her emotions and love for Imam Hussain.

Syed's response, once again, tied into the idea of agency. He was dismissive of the

scholarly community's criticism of Zanjeer ka Matam. He also invoked the soteriological belief

that Hussain's mother and daughter of Muhammad, Fatima, has promised heavenly reward on

anyone who mourns for Hussain. As such, he suggested that nobody else is in a position to judge

the mourning except Fatima. Asher's views have religious, political and social meaning. He

clearly relates Matam to the democratic process and as a fundamental freedom of expression. In

essence, he is bringing me to think about the clash between Islam and democratic values. By

highlighting a tension between the scholarly community and the Shiite masses, Syed was

suggesting that MMST was in conflict with widely held religious values. In my later interview,

Mesam furthers on this conflict and addresses it directly. The tensions between religious and

secular thought is one that Mahmood argues can be well addressed within the academy. My

study in no means forays into the depths of this work. For the sake of my interpretations, I

advance that there are numerous ways to articulate these tensions and Mahmood warns against

unfairly being suspicious and dismissive of religious, metaphysical understandings (2005: 90).

Both standpoints are laden with subjectivity. Syed seemed to be supporting a non-religious

parlance on Matam and it is necessary for more work to be done on understanding how religious

and secular value converse within the context of Shiite mourning rituals. Syed, however, also

shared the importance of communal mourning that included all members of the Shiite

community.

Syed:

The mourning rituals are meta-physical in nature. I personally believe that emotions keep

an ideology alive, the communal mourning brings together people from all walks of life;

there is a radiant-effect at these communal mournings. I mean people mourn the death of

their loved ones of about a year or two, and then they move on with their lives,

occasionally remembering the loved one at particular occasions. But the communal

mourning for the tragedy of Karbala has been passed on for generations. I believe that

this communal mourning keeps us in sync with the path laid out my Imam Hussain. At

the end, of Imam Hussain's 72 companions, each of us forms a likening with one or more

of them. We are our own persons and need to make our own decisions. Love cannot be

contained by rules, let alone love for Imam Hussain.

Syed stretched the idea of an expansive freedom for Matam. Although his participation in

MMST is limited, his understandings of their emergence spoke heavily to how Matam related to

his identity as both a Shiite and a Canadian. I also found that by identifying Shiite mourners

explicitly as human beings, Syed was suggesting that the mourning for Hussain should not be

understood as a strictly Islamic, Shiite phenomenon: in my own experience, I have met numerous

mourners from the Hindu, Christian and Jewish faiths. The interfaith aspect of mourning is most

certainly a future academic project and initiatives such as the Hussain Day or the 10th Day call for more rigorous study on the transformation of Shiite rituals in an era of globalization.

Towards the end of our discussions, I proceeded to ask him a little about his understandings of Zaynab and how it related to his identity. His comments effectively summarize the role Zaynab has had in bringing him to voice his affection and affiliation with Hussain: in some ways, I found that Syed was aspiring to be like Zaynab.

Syed:

Zaynab is the result of standing with Hussain. I think everyone who mourns for Hussain wishes to stand for his cause as Zaynab did. Just like Zaynab endured pain yet remained free to speak out for Hussain, we, too, endure struggles and remain defiant in our love for Hussain.

As I think through our discussion, it was fairly interesting to note how Syed continuously spoke in the first person pronoun. While I am not qualified to make any linguistic analysis of this, I can generally suggest that this speaks to his own sense of empowerment – he has a degree of confidence in speaking about his faith for himself and is not entirely reliant on other, authoritative discourses. Often, when engaging with other individuals in the Shiite community, commentaries on religion are frequently referenced back to the clerics and seeing very little of this in Syed could open up future discussions on the grip of Shiite, Iran and Iraq based clergy on Shiites in the diaspora.

4.2   ZAYNAB MAKES MY VOICE HEARD

While Syed's perspective was more of an outsider looking in at MMST, my next conversation allowed me to engage deep within the Sangat. Not everyone connects as distinctly with MMST as Mesam - Mesam is amongst the most active members of MMST. He is also one

of the youngest members and is involved in organizing weekly sessions, finalizing and rehearsing the choice of eulogies and managing the online announcements – Mesam also helps with coordinating transport for individuals who do not have vehicles to reach the Imambargahs which are usual inaccessible by transit. I met Mesam in 2010 shortly before he began his University studies: Mesam and I have travelled together to various MMST sessions and frequently discussed ways in which the Sangat can collaborate with Sangats across North America. Mesam has travelled frequently to Pakistan and been involved with a variety of mourning rituals. His family is well-known to most Shiites in the city of Markham and hosts regular mourning assemblies at their home during the Ayam e Aza. Mesam was born in Canada and it was immediately interesting to inquire into what motivated his entry into MMST. Mesam joined MMST in late 2009 and got involved at a time when the Sangat was gaining significant traction at various Imambargahs. I must accept that I already had a conceptual idea of why he joined MMST – but, within the context of the interview, I found that speaking with Mesam in English pushed him to be more analytical about his decision. It is unclear, in theory and practice, how the choice of language impacts the interview process – I did, nonetheless, sense an impact on the amount of effort invested by Mesam. Typically, my conversations with Mesam were in Urdu and some broken Punjabi. However, in conversing with him in English on an academic study of his involvement in Matam, I found Mesam was far less defensive than Syed and quick to make relational statements about his involvement in MMST, his family and the local Shiite community. I am uncertain on exactly how the language impacts the interviewee process and it is an element for future study.

Ali:

Which Imambargah did you attend as a child and how did you end up meeting MMST?

Mesam:

I started seeing the Sangat in Al-Mahdi Imambargah, Pickering. My parents always

encouraged me to do Matam and I liked the Sangat's organized style. My relatives in

Pakistan are part of Sangats and I have seen many videos of them. It felt pretty cool. The

Sangat is young too – my age group! And, you know what, I like the idea of meeting with

my Sangat and doing Matam every week. I am not some temporary Shia. I am Shia,

Matam is who I am.

I analyze Mesam's comments within the context of knowing that he lives what would

typically be considered a regular Canadian lifestyle. Mesam enjoyed going to the movies with

his school friends, playing basketball, listening to rap music and following popular North

American sitcoms – I also know that Mesam has a deep mistrust of the Islamic clergy and views

his Matam as something that he has complete control over. It appears as Mesam is conveying

both a successful integration into Canadian society as well as a unique religiousness that is

personal and profound. In an age where religious Muslim youth are easily branded extremists,

Mesam advances a standpoint that differentiates him from radical thought. It is very powerful to

note that Mesam equated being a Shiite with doing Matam. This is certainly outside of any

orthodox definition of the Shiite faith and a sign of Mesam's empowerment through MMST and

Matam. This idea of an Islamic self-understanding has come under substantial criticism from

Islamic scholars. Many see the elements of the 21st century as contributing to a "copy-paste

Islam": this so-called 'individualization-thesis' also assumes the delegitimization of religious

authority (Moghissi and Ghorashi 2010: 126). Mesam did not consider following religious clergy

as necessary act towards fulfilling a Shiite identity. In fact I know that many MMST members

wait outside the Imambargah until the cleric's speech is done before entering to engage in

Matam. Mesam grew up at the Al Mahdi Imambargah in Pickering – from personal experience, I

know that this establishment heavily reveres the Islamic clergy and has been active in

denouncing public performances of Matam and Zanjeer Ka Matam. Although Mesam's family is

favourable towards MMST, they still attend the Al Mahdi Imambargah as it is closer to their

home and easily accessible. Mesam's involvement with MMST is, to some extent, rebellious but

also emblematic of how MMST evolved despite community pressures. Mesam felt a sense of

belonging in the Sangat and Matamdaris were giving him a way of expressing himself and

creating community around like minded others. It is of no surprise then that Mesam, now, rarely

attends the Al Mahdi Imambargah except for when MMST sponsors an event. Since 2011,

Mesam has been attending mourning ceremonies independently and not accompanying his

family to the Al Mahdi Imambargah. Membership into MMST appears to have cemented his

independence and autonomy to articulate his religious identity. Mesam has younger siblings

whom he hopes will soon begin to join the MMST sessions more actively. Mesam's strong

advocacy for Matam brought me to immediately discuss with him some longstanding worries

about MMST and their fervor around Matam.

Ali:

Many argue that Matam is not useful within the Canadian context and that it should be

kept to a limit? What do you think?

Mesam:

Matamdaris have increased in the GTA because the message of Karbala is important to

our times. Look around you, oppression is rife. By doing Matam, I am feeling the pain of

the Imam. But importantly, I am provoking people to ask me why I do what I do. A lot of

my friends see our YouTube videos and question me! You know, they usually know

about Matam but are shocked that I am so heavily involved. I try and explain the history

of the oppression. I also tell them about Bibi Zaynab and, usually, they are sympathetic.

People think Karbala ended on Ashura. It did not. It continues till today. Go look at her

shrine. I mean, what was her crime? Bibi Zaynab is so important to us today. I learn from

her to stand for what is right and I think now people need to know more about her. We

need to mourn her now more than ever because she is still under attack.

Mesam's energy and passion were quite evident. I did not see any value in further

engaging Mesam on the legitimacy of Matam within the established Imambargahs. Instead, it

seemed important to examine how he thought Matam and MMST related to his Canadian

identity. The ways in which MMST have shared and gathered attention to themselves via the

internet is interesting. The Internet has been described as a tool, a space, state of mind and a

social network: I am particularly interested in how the internet is used as a worship space and a

social network (Campbell 2005: 14). Campbell explains that numerous religious groups are

consciously designing online worship spaces that attempt to re-create traditional religious

worship experiences in a digital environment (Campbell 2005:16). Various Imambargahs in

Toronto have created online presences with limited to no attention to Matam. Mesam, on the

other hand, in collaboration with other MMST members, has co-designed public and private

online communities dedicated to sharing Matam videos, eulogy texts and MMST schedules.

Mesam explained the internet as the primary route for MMST members to maintain connections

with Sangats in Pakistan. It also serves as mechanism to recruit new members – Mehdi, in the

next interview, found out about MMST through a YouTube share. Through the creation of such

communities, Mesam is able to reaffirm the MMST ethos and the internet serves as a place to

also affirm their identity (Campbell 2005: 20).Through social sharing, the public often sees Mesam's posts and conversations have resulted around them. It is evident that Mesam has discussed the efficacy of Matam and mourning with outsiders: the narratives of pain and survival surrounding Hussain and Zaynab inspired Mesam and these formed the basis of his discourses on Matam. Much like Syed, Mesam seemed more concerned with establishing the primacy of Shiite patron saints as universal figures and that the mourning for them is an individual choice. He was particularly conscious of the role of Zaynab and suggested to me that her tireless efforts towards preserving the message of Hussain inspired his Matam – Zaynab's success despite the obvious odds motivated Mesam into continuing his efforts with MMST and standing up to authoritative figures. I was curious to pry further into how Mesam discussed Matam with the public by seeing if he engaged in Zanjeer Ka Matam and whether he knew of the controversy around it.

Mesam:

Yes. I do perform Zanjeer. I see nothing wrong with it. I mean there are so many other things that are giving the religion a bad name. Why pick on Zanjeer only? I have heard people tell me it is not legal and it is dangerous. There is nothing like that.

Much like Syed, Mesam furthered the discussion on Zanjeer Ka Matam as one of personal choice. Mehdi, who also performs Zanjeer Ka Matam, emphatically made the statement, "my body, my choice." This sentiment is repeated in numerous eulogies, including an MMST favorite which includes the Punjabi line "ai dil da faisla ai, Matam Hussain da" which translates into "this (Matam) is a matter/verdict of the heart". The issue of legality, although not my focus, will likely come into the mainframe. There have been reports of legal cases in the United Kingdom where Imambargah management has conflicted with local Sangats over performing Zanjeer Ka Matam. These cases have led to extensive court battles over insurance liabilities and even a case of child

cruelty against Syed Zaidi of Manchester[49]. As discussed earlier, Zanjeer Ka Matam has been

stopped at all the Imambargahs in the GTA: most of the reasons for this revolve around the

health risks and liabilities attached to it. MMST has been a lead force behind its revival and has

organized Zanjeer Ka Matam in private settings at various dates in the Islamic calendar – the

annual Ashura Zanjeer Ka Matam typically hosts about 200 individuals, many of whom do not

participate regularly with MMST. Undeniably, as the sessions grow, it seems only likely that a

public discussion will emerge. This discussion will likely bring provincial legal jurisdictions to

the table and MMST members will be expected to augment their practice openly. In the United

States, Zanjeer Ka Matam happens openly in New York, Virginia, Atlanta and Houston. But

even there, there is widespread disagreement within Imambargahs which could easily flesh out

into legal battles. Any legal discussions around Zanjeer Ka Matam would likely involve

legislative bodies and rules similar to those used in addressing issues around the Nia and Sikh

Kirpan – bodies such as the Human Rights Tribunal and Conseil D'etat would be most likely to

be engaged and the interpretation of freedom of religions in Canada will be interesting to follow

(Barnett 2011: 4). In his closing statements, Mesam appeared ready to take this challenge on and

herald a new standpoint for Indo-Pak Shiites in the GTA. He also hoped to join MMST on

pilgrimage in the future.

> **Mesam**:
>
> I think every community needs to make way for the youth. It is time we get into the
>
> actually day to day operations of the Imambargahs. I feel this will radically change the

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[49] James, Tozer. Guilty of Cruelty, the Muslim who Ordered Boys to Flog Themselves. Daily

Mail, 24 September 2008. (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1049869/Guilty-cruelty-

Muslim-ordered-boys-flog-themselves.html)

way in which Matam is performed. For one, I think you will begin to see more Matam on the streets. Kind of like in Pakistan!

Mesam's emphasis on the youth illustrates their identity within Shiite circles. Beyond modifying Matam, he demonstrates the ways in which the youth are rethinking their identity. The relation back to Pakistan is indeed powerful. Although he has only visited Pakistan occasionally, it is apparent that with the advent of social media and travel technologies, he has developed a sense of being an Indo-Pak Shiite that he hopes to firmly establish in the GTA. The emphasis on Matam and the Sangat could relate back to its historical capacities in unsettling existing authorities and confronting community elders – perhaps, for him, this is a coming of age and the desire to be involved with the day to day operations of the Imambargah is perhaps an innate desire within him to acquire a leadership role in the community. As I know from personal experience, leaders in the community are often entrusted as role models to the youth specifically and the ascendance of MMST members to such positions will certainly have an impact on the youth's access to the Sangat and its form of Matam.

4.3   ZAYNAB UNDERSTANDS ME

Mehdi echoed Mesam's sentiments about the Shiite youth and the importance of their participation in the Imambargahs. Mehdi's family supports mourning assemblies whenever they can – they make annual donations, sponsor food distributions and offer volunteer services whenever possible. However, Mehdi explained to me that his family was not heavily involved in Matam and were more focused on the obligatory prayers, fasts and daily Quranic devotions. Prior to joining MMST, Mehdi had little to no involvement in the Imambargah. Mehdi was particularly vocal on how the connection with Sangats in Pakistan and the pilgrimage to Zaynab's shrine has positively shaped MMST. Mehdi joined MMST in early 2011 and was

immediately attracted to the group because of their organization and youthful membership. He explained to me that MMST brought something unique to the Imambargah and, much like Mesam, felt it to be the ideal age group for him to engage in. He quickly adapted to their style of Matam and gained popularity for assisting with distributing food and drink after the Matam. Mehdi joined MMST during his final years of university and found that his involvement in the Sangat created a network for him. While Mehdi did not identify as a strict Muslim, he did not consume alcohol and preferred to avoid the popular entertainment districts that most of his friends would frequent. His friendships within MMST have extended to engagements beyond Matam – members often socialize outside of the Imambargah and even find employment together. In essence, a sense of community has emerged with the creation of MMST and there is a common ground of religious identity that the members share.

Ali:

Since you participate in the weekly mourning sessions, I gather that these have a significant impact on you. Could you elaborate on how these sessions impact your social life?

Mehdi:

Every Thursday night is pub night. I don't drink. But neither do I want to sit home and not be around friends. Call it what you may, going to the Imambargah for Matam gives me a gathering where I belong and someplace to be on pub night! Other than the pub, of course. My non-Shia friends ask me about where I go. And I tell them! It is great for getting the word out there.

As we discussed the importance of MMST, the conversation steered towards understanding how pilgrimage to Zaynab's shrine and connections to the Indo-Pak are vital to

MMST. In a chapter on Muslim travel as a social action, Eickelman and Piscatori (1990: 5) explain that travel to shrines and other religious pilgrimages are doctrines prescribed in a variety of Islamic schools. However, attention should be paid to the socioeconomic status of those who embark on these pilgrimages. As explained in the earlier chapters, the cost of visiting Syria from the Middle East is a fraction of the travel and lodging costs from North America. Furthermore, given the economic conditions in the Indo-Pak, travel from those regions to Syria is considerably expensive. The fact that numerous pilgrims would make the journey annually suggests the strength of Zaynab on the community and also establishes her shrine as a meeting point for relatives and friends from different countries. Mehdi explained that these connections were useful for MMST so that the second generation youth could create their own connection with their migratory history and choose for themselves how to reflect it in their identity. Mehdi also had an interesting understanding of how the connections with Indo-Pak Sangats and Matam have garnered his attention.

Ali:

Why would you say that doing Matam with other Indo-Pak Sangats in Syria is important for MMST?

Mehdi:

Ask anyone from Toronto who has been to Syria when the Sangats from Pakistan are there – it is like Pakistan in Syria! And everyone wants to recreate that scene in Toronto. I watched the videos and was really impressed by the devotion people would show. Also, through Azadari, many of us have been able to connect with our family background. Often, the youth are accused of forgetting their roots. Through the Sangat, I am closer to my roots than I would have otherwise been.

Both Mehdi and Mesam have found the Sangat as a means to connect and relate with back home. My understanding is that this connects back to the idea of identity as an active process wherein these individuals actively engage with their familial roots and negotiate its meanings for themselves. A question that flits through these discussions is on why Matam has appealed as much as it has. To this I offer a personal observation. Matam is a physical activity which requires a degree of strength and stamina. This fits in well with the age bracket within MMST. This is not to suppose that there are no elderly individuals who engage with them in Matam. Instead, it simply states that the core organizers in MMST are able to control the Matam and stamp their presence in a loud, physical and obvious manner. It is hard not to notice the MMST arrival at the Imambargah. Being involved in Matam and Sangats has given them a voice but also influenced their sense of style and dress: most MMST members always dress in traditional black clothing and wear myriad forms of jewelry that distinguish them from most others. During the period of performing Matam, MMST also claims the Imambargah space for themselves: the lines of Matam are organized with all of the MMST members in the middle of proceedings and everyone who chooses to stay during the Matam follows their cues. On many occasions, most people leave midway through MMST's Matam and it is as though MMST remain as the last person's standing. There is a tremendous sense of power and recognition that emerges from Matam and Sangats – funnily enough, some individuals often refer to Sangat members as gangsters because of the amount of control they have now come to command during Matam. The tensions with MMST still persist and I don't see this changing too soon. However, I have noticed that those who are favorable to MMST will go to great lengths to accommodate them and ensure their comfort pre and post Matam. There is, thus, an existential power to Matam and Sangats and, as MMST grows, perhaps Mesam and Mehdi will see Matam being performed in public spaces

more frequently. I will return to this existential power in my conclusion chapter and offer other areas for further research.

4.4   ZAYNAB AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Changu and Zahra provide a neat conclusion to my earlier analysis and reveal the diverse ways in which MMST has influenced those who may not regularly partake in their Matam. Changu is an immigrant from Quetta, Pakistan who has spent much of his formative years observing Sangats. Although his participation with them has always been limited, he applauds their commitment and has found ways to engage with them. Zahra, as a female Shiite, cannot partake directly in MMST activities. However, she has observed numerous Sangats in North America and has close relatives within MMST. While both appreciate the emergence of MMST, they are concerned with the community's future – my sense is that as observers of the Matam, they are attentive to the divisive element that has come into the Imambargah.

Changu's first interaction with MMST was in 2011 at the Al Mahdi Imambargah. He heard about them through a flyer advertising their trip to Zaynab's shrine and decided to join them. He explained to me that although he did not always partake in the Matam, he assisted MMST with preparing meals, washing clothes and caring for all the members during the travel. He also discussed the friendships he formed through the trip and how these have impacted him as a Shiite Muslim. Changu moved to Canada in 2009 and MMST was his first religious group that he assumed some involvement in. He was thus appreciative of MMST's role in socializing him into a religious community and giving him a sense of fulfilment and community. By the time Changu travelled with MMST, he was also benefitting from their growth and larger membership – MMST was instrumental in arranging his visas, tickets and travel necessities which he would probably have struggled to do on his own. He credits MMST as much more than an organization

dedicated to Matam and showed great appreciation for the friendship networks that have emerged as a result of it.

Ali:

You joined MMST in their 2011 travel to Syria. What was that like?

Changu:

When MMST organized the pilgrimage, it took a great burden off me. Firstly, the prices were quite low as they travelled in a group. Secondly, they handled all the arrangements. It was my first time going there. I did not know what to expect. But going with a young, passionate group helped. I am not heavily into their style of Matam. But, honestly, that did not matter. You know, typically, I do not have much to do at the Imambargah. I would go to whichever Imambargah I could reach during Muharram. Sit, listen to the speech. Say a prayer and go home. Being with MMST gave me a role of sorts. In Quetta, I did Zanjeer Ka Matam too and read Nohay. I was not active but people knew me. Here in Toronto, MMST was the first group of Shiites that got to know me.

Changu, however, is slightly cautious with the shifts in Matam and travelling with MMST allowed him to hear, if not participate, in some discussions around the tensions they are experiencing in the GTA Imambargahs.

Changu:

It is great that they have the energy to do Matam weekly. But do they all understand why they are doing it? I think some kids play along because it looks like the manly thing to do. A kind of coming of age. Matam is not meant to do that. I am also concerned with how they (MMST) respond to their elders. The kids are very dismissive. If not everybody

agrees with Zanjeer, it is not a reason to create divisions or have heated arguments. Agree

to disagree. It's healthy.

Changu's concerns call for more attention to how the MMST members understand the role

of Matam. From my previous interviews, some of these understandings clearly tie back to a

sense of identity, community and purpose. However, much like Changu, Zahra too expressed a

deep concern with how MMST is managing its relations with those who disagree with their

formation. The tensions are extremely palpable. My understanding is that while Changu was

open to an individualized understanding of what it means to be Shiite, he did not appreciate the

hyper emphasizing of Matam – Matam, perhaps, is one aspect of being a Shiite and it must be

complimented with other practices and traits. I understand his concerns and worry, as well, that

MMST might be producing an image of the Shiite faith as one that is only concerned with self-

flagellation and grief. Zahra furthered Changu's concerns by talking to me about how MMST

has a responsibility towards community cohesion. She explained that Shiites are not just "people

who beat themselves" and that explicit in their saints' narratives are the respect for elders and

community building.

Zahra:

This is not what Bibi Zaynab teaches us. I know that they are young and passionate about

what they do. But they need to cool off. People are not used to their year round

Matamdaris. The same with Zanjeer. My uncles in New York and Pakistan do Zanjeer on

Ashura and other occasions. I don't mind it. But if there are concerns in Toronto about

health or other things, these should be addressed.

Zahra's concerns are to do with the community's internal and external image. As a

participate in the MMST arena, I appreciate that in a post 9-11 world, Muslims as a whole are in

a public relations nightmare – images of bloody Matam evoke a variety of negative stereotypes that do not need to be compounded by community in-fighting. Zahra explained that she was well versed with how trips to Zaynab's shrine had influenced MMST. But she articulated a concern that I share in too – the purpose of visiting Zaynab is not to simply increase the global performance of Matam but to elevate one's spiritual being and create avenues for the sharing of her story. Shiites already have a minority status and their historical narratives are often unheard of. At a time when Syria is a site of armed struggle, MMST's deep commitment to Zaynab could potentially raise awareness to her story and help in the preservation of religious sites in Syria. Zahra is concerned that MMST might actually be causing damage to the message of Zaynab by igniting tensions and divisions.

> **Zahra:**
>
> Going to Bibi (lady) Zaynab is important. People need to step out of Western life and experience those environments. It makes Bibi Zaynab real. It is also a refreshing experience. There is something to her shrine that cannot be recreated. It's sad that people cannot go. For now, at least.

Zahra's optic is one that I share in. Matam, to her, is a means to community building, cohesion and cultural exchange – these values are central to Canadian life and civil society. Zahra echoes a concern of mine that many of the MMST members appear to have exhausted all of their faculties to Matam and improving its performance in the GTA. As I have regularly seen, MMST discussions typically revolve around ensuring the beat of their Matam remains in sync, the eulogies are well choreographed and that they were well represented at every session. While these elements may assist them in establishing their presence within the community, it does very little to convey the rich historical and intellectual history of Zaynab. In 2013, while the Lady

Zaynab shrine was under siege, numerous scholars in Lahore and Karachi criticized the Matami Sangats for their lack of action and protest – many questioned the bravado with which Matamis were hurting themselves in memory of Zaynab and chastised the Matamis for being obsessed with the performance of Matam and nothing else. I side with this critique and wonder if MMST approaches Matam as an end as opposed to means. As I prepare for the conclusion, I unpack their approach and present a series of questions for myself and the academy.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As I pen the conclusion to approximately twenty four months of writing, I am indebted to my committee for navigating me through the difficult terrain of ritual theory. That this process accumulated such mileage serves as a suitable introduction to the final comments. My personal affiliation with Matam and the challenges associated with stepping out of this to adopt a theoretical lens speak closely to how I wrestled with sociological frameworks. Added to this was the tricky prospect of thinking about Matam and the bloody images circulating it. I had to think very carefully on how an entire thesis dedicated to such mourning would be received within a Canadian context. While I have not unpacked it as a critical discussion, I sense that acquiring Canadian citizenship at birth has had much to do with the bold, brazen nature in which MMST has positioned itself within the Shiite and broader GTA community. I have repeatedly asked myself of whether I am guilty of "otherizing" MMST from the GTA community – I am convinced that by virtue of their distinct names, ethnic backgrounds, language and prevailing political circumstance, MMST and Muslim youth in Canada have fallen into the precarious position of the "other". Yet it is true that along with being Muslim youth, the majority of MMST's core membership are Canadian Citizens: the thought of Canadian Citizens engaging in Matam is emphatic and opens us to layers of analysis. In many ways, acknowledging this position has allowed my research to explore how Matam functions to provide the youth with solidarity, purpose and experience. This landscape has not been easy to navigate. The idea of a group of Muslim youth actively organizing around this in the Greater Toronto Area could easily be paired with discourses around Islamic radicalization – that Zaynab's shrine is in Syria further complicated the terrain. After the arrest of the Toronto 18 in 2006, the Canadian context has been

alerted to the potential threat of radicalized Muslim youth intent on suicidal missions. In fact, when I became a Permanent Resident of Canada, I permanently immigrated to the GTA 4 months after the arrest of the Toronto 18 – my parents, relatives and friends were worried about my safety and urged me not to stand out by growing a beard, adorning traditional clothing in public or partaking in any political discussions revolving around the Islamic world. In essence, any mobilization of Muslim youth, specifically involving males, risked being perceived as suspect. Through the course of my work, I have ensured that the idea of MMST youth being anti-west and anti-Canadian is firmly dismissed. Instead, I have positioned the discussion to allow for the reader to appreciate and contemplate the ways in which Muslim youth are creatively, and at times courageously, addressing their issues within a community and creating reasons for critical engagement – Matam, perhaps, is a starting point into important discussions for the Shiite Indo-Pak community in the GTA. It appears to me that the MMST members are, firstly, aware of the volatile situation faced by their community in the West. Their renewed appreciation for Matam is, in many ways, a critique of how community elders have been guiding communal practice and, through it, mediating how the Indo-Pak Shiite community is perceived. The migration of Muslims into Canada has been detailed in early sections of my work. I have discussed the physical movement of people into a new space as well as provided the theoretical understandings around diaspora, transnationalism, memory and identity that emerge from this. The analysis I have presented tells us that the contemporary situation is not one of merely suggesting that Muslim immigrants into Canada are consistently looking for ways to create and recreate a sense of home – instead it tells us that the second generation of these immigrants are far more empowered and are navigating a post 9-11 world for themselves. As discussed in the interviews, I am not convinced that MMST appreciates the intellectual richness of Zaynab and Matam.

However, that they have heightened attention towards Matam and are quite open with it tells me that they operate with a strong sense of their position as Canadians. As Canadians and Shiites with Indo-Pak histories, MMST members are free to articulate their identity as they choose. However, in an increasing climate of anti-terrorism and the conservative government's push against terror related activities, MMST will have to remain cautious of how their identity and activities are articulated to the wider society. This situation invites further scholarship on how a variety of Muslim youth groups are responding and organizing themselves in the GTA.

For me, critiquing Matam itself, let alone Muslim youth, was equally tricky. The process of critiquing my sense of ritual, one that is very much a natural element of my life, was throwing me into an existential spin. Passing through this is a matter of training and time. I found that utilizing Bell's notion of ritualization encouraged my attentiveness to the power dynamics and relationships that mediate Matam. Although the academic discussions around ritual are necessary exercises, the heart of the sociological understandings was embedded in ritualization. Ritualization allowed for a moment of applied research. The existential spin was most healthy as it asked me to be critical of Matam by realizing that it is never performed in a vacuum and that it is underpinned by myriad factors. When I proposed this study in late 2012, I recall asking why my work would matter to anybody, let alone the world of sociology. This is akin to asking why I, as an individual, am of any import to society and it takes a significant investment of time and study to augment value and relevance. During a recent lecture, I was asked if I would have studied Matam and Zaynab if I was not a Shiite. I responded within an academic pulse and explained that any social phenomenon which spoke to contemporary times and global affairs would be of intellectual interest to me. Deep within me, however, I was cognizant of how my personal experiences with Matam invigorated my study. In fact, it was this personal element

which troubled me through the writing process. Having gained a variety of undergraduate trainings in writing and digital technologies, the process of writing within a logical, structured framework was not alien to me. However, the process of distancing myself from Matam and viewing it from an optic that questioned its relevancy and impact on social formations was where the trouble was always brewing. If I was asked to merely discuss my involvement in Matam and its relevance to me, my thesis would have simply gone into the numerous narratives of Zaynab to which I pay tribute to through Matam. Instead, from a sociological angle, my project was to fracture Matam and Zaynab into numerous pieces that explained how it impacted a diaspora and the relations within it: and most challenging of all, I couldn't simply narrate this out of memory but had to locate scholarly communications on the development of Shiite diasporas and ritual. This exercise has been most satisfying to me and, I trust, the academy.

In some areas of our modern life, there is the insistent demand that reasons be given for almost everything (Asad 2011: 55) – I experienced the potency of this statement, in a productive way of course, through my research. It has given me a language for my identity that is, to a large extent, global and applicable to contexts outside of Shiite Islam. It has also given me a sense of how to understand and navigate change. Towards the end of the 2014 Fall semester, I lectured on my thesis work to Dr. Michael Nijhawan's third year undergraduate course at York University. I vividly remember the displeasure that the students expressed at seeing bloody Matam – my only ray on engagement was through academic, sociologically language and this, eventually, brought students to be more comfortable with discussing uncomfortable data. I hope that my work will inspire other nascent academics to critically study their own personal experiences. I am humbled to contribute to such studies and hope that I have given a voice to discussions on Islam that go beyond the generic topics of terrorism and extremism. As Michael Mohammad Knight stated in

his documentary film Taqwacores, "There is a cool Islam out there, you just have to find it."

By engaging in this long process, I have realized the wealth of value that emerges out of ritual and change. It is clear to me that the context of immigration, diaspora and transnationalism is now inherent to almost any study of religion within Canada and, I dare say, the world. I agree with various theorists who have warned that various critical terms have now been adopted into common currency with an utter disregard for their theoretical underpinnings: by studying, deeply, the meanings of the terms ritual, diaspora, immigration and transnationalism, I have been able to appreciate how memories mediate our existence. My initial shock at MMST's formation extended from a memory of mourning that I held deep within me. How these memories are traded, negotiated and realized in a globalized world fascinated me tremendously. It is somewhere within this exchange that MMST finds its raison d'etre. Personally, as much as I appreciate the development of MMST, I do share in the concerns expressed by Changu and Zahra. The ritual change is happening at a ferociously fast pace and appears to be pushing the community elders out of the picture. It is important to realize that MMST does not have the capacity to maintain or build an Imambargah like structure and lacks any of the organizational capacities to run a major institution. This is not to say that MMST will not realize these capacities in the future. But, for now, they are still dependent on pre-existing Imambargahs and require these spaces to perform Matam. It will be interesting to see if any MMST members are accepted into Imambargah management positions. Furthermore, just as I hold my own memories of Dubai deep within me, the community elders relate to their own memories – the disregard of this is a dehumanizing experience.

Through my writing, I was overwhelmed by the amount of literature published on Shiite rituals and I hope that my work will contribute to this body by proposing new questions. In

thinking about the relation of Matam and social formation, I cannot deny that I have deliberately distanced myself from discussing gender. There are a lot of questions embedded with this question. Firstly, I have referenced a number of articles written by Aghaie on participation in Shiite rituals. Given that the formation of MMST is strictly male, I wonder if further study could be advanced into how female Shiites in the Indo-Pak diaspora are responding to the formation of male Sangats. While MMST performs Matam, females typically listen along and mildly strike their chests – their participation is, at best, subdued. During public mourning processions, females are either not encourage to participate or do so in relatively smaller numbers. While there has been significant research on Shiite women and their open participation in Lebanese and Iranian communities, there is little commentary on their participation in Matam alongside the men. Zahra explained to me that for some time the community girls did organize occasional sessions devoted to mourning. These, however, lost traction. Nonetheless, many of the MMST members have female family members and friends who share in their energy towards Matam – in fact, the online circles of MMST include female members who comment and post on Matam and Sangat developments. These online circles and interactions are against the orthodox Islamic teachings. But the reality of these are undeniable and many of the eulogies composed by these Sangats are recited by females in female-only sessions. It will thus be interesting to study female participation in these Sangats. I am particularly interested in seeing how the narrative of Zaynab may break some of the notions around gender – given the individualized ideas around Islam emerging from MMST, could the Sangat make room for more open interaction between male and female Shiites? I believe it is also fair, albeit brave, to see how this might speak to the question of sexuality. If Sangats are opening up the Shiite space, it is necessary to test the limits of this openness. From personal experience, I know that in Lahore's infamous diamond district,

Heera Mandi, sex workers and female dancers actively participate in the Muharram mourning rituals. In fact, a specialized search on YouTube reveals transgendered communities openly doing Matam in Lahore and Islamabad. This requires study.

Extending from a study on gender, I think the academy can continue to pursue the shifting nature of Shiite rituals by further examining initiatives such as the Hussain Day. Typically, the Imambargah is open to all members of society and mourning rituals can be attended and witnessed by the public. However, the Imambargah is not the most open space to outsiders and there are dress codes and mannerisms that punctuate the community. Furthermore, critiques within the Shiite community continue to argue that Matam, and the onerous perception it often gets from the public, is pushing people away from the messages of Shiite patron saints. As such, initiatives such as the Hussain Day which open the Imambargah to the public and create open fora for the discussions on Karbala have emerged. I wonder if this evidence of a sort of sanitization of Shiite mourning? The clash between this movement and the growing Sangat, Matam intense community will only increase as I see it. As such, a study of Shiite mourning and commemorative rituals that do not include Matam might initiate a necessary body of work on how rituals are shaped by sociopolitical, diasporic and global contexts. This will also speak to the study of pilgrimage and its wide reaching effects.

While the issue of ritual participation and change can ignite a series of questions, my research suggests to me that it is most necessary for academe to also refresh the analysis on how these mourning rituals are serving as a form of resistance. I have referenced some works on the role of mourning rituals in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Given the ongoing attacks on Shiites in Pakistan and Iraq, it is interesting to see how Shiite mourning rituals have continued regardless – despite the imminent threat of attacks in Karbala, Shiite mourners continued to congregate in

Iraq at record numbers. There is, in my view, a need to refresh our study of these commitments and how ritual is empowering individuals to look beyond death. This commitment to mourning also opens the important question of how the Shiite clergy interacts with a more informed and vocal populace. Many of the MMST members explained that they were merely doing their "own thing" with Matam and that they did not really bother with what was made of them jurisprudentially. The tensions between Sangats and more formal Shiite bodies is undeniably a location for research. From a geopolitical context, for example, it helps rattle the Iranian hold on the Shiite faith and brings more eclectic definitions of a Shiite to the table.

I cannot imagine going through this thesis without the influential presence of the Lady Zaynab. I conclude with a hope that my work has brought colleagues to see the merit in studying her contribution to Islam from an inter-disciplinary perspective. At this final paragraph, I wonder if I can confidently state that Zaynab is the key source of inspiration behind MMST. That only one of the 12 Imambargahs in the GTA is named after a woman suggests to me that a patriarchal pulse still remains within the community and the male dominated Sangat merely reinforces the idea of females obtaining a voice through males. Zaynab is, indeed, a complex phenomenon. I hope she motivates the academy to ask difficult questions of Islam and confront canonical understandings. When Zaynab was mocked by Yazid and asked about how she felt at her brother's death, she replied that she saw nothing in this but the beauty of her creator and nearing of justice. This ethos, I hope, will drive further study and questioning. It may be a painful process – but growing is painful.

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