



SERMONS AND RITUAL AMONG IRAQI SHI'I IN EXILE

طقوس العراقيين الشيعة
في المنفى

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خضع البحث لبرنامج الاستلال العلمي
Turnitin passed research

Abstract

The present paper collects sermons and conducted interviews within the communities to assess the narratives of self-identity that were emerging among Iraqi Shi'i in exile during the time of Occupation and War in Iraq. What emerged was a study on the essential themes and narratives among Iraqi Shi'a in England and Ireland during this time. In my study on Shi'i sermons, In my study there is a main line focusing on the role of the preacher to interpret religious narratives as meaningful and meaning giving to the social and political reality of the local congregation in light of the methodology of sermon analysis.

ملخص البحث

تحتوي الدراسة الحالية على خطب ومقابلات أجريت على مجتمعات من أجل تقييم المرويات التي شاعت بين العراقيين الشيعة في المنفى خلال فترة الاحتلال وال الحرب في العراق.

والذي ظهر للعيان عبارة عن دراسة تجول المواقع الأساسية للمراديات بين الشيعة العراقيين في بريطانيا وأيرلندا خلال هذه الفترة. لذلك ركزت الدراسة على دور الخطيب في ترجمة المرويات الدينية على أنها ذات معنى ونظم بين طياتها وسائل في صميم الواقع السياسي والاجتماعي للمجتمع المحلي، وهذا تم تحت ظل إجراءات التحليل الخطابي.

Introduction

Between September 2004 and November 2010, I attended gatherings and majlis among the Iraqi Shi'i community in London and Dublin, in particular I attended, Dar as Islam Community, Wilsden Green, London; the Al Khoei Foundation, London; Abrar House, Edgeware Road, London; the Imam 'Ali Foundation, Brondersbury Park, London and the Ahul Bayt Centre, Dublin. I collected sermons and conducted interviews within the communities to assess the narratives of self-identity that were emerging among Iraqi Shi'i in exile during the time of Occupation and War in Iraq. What emerged was a study on the essential themes and narratives among Iraqi Shi'a in England and Ireland during this time. In my study on Shi'i sermons, I focus on the role of the preacher to interpret religious narratives as meaningful and meaning giving to the social and political reality of the local congregation.

I have adopted the methodology of sermon analysis as employed by Toby M. Howarth in his reflections on preaching among the minority Shi'a in India.⁽¹⁾ There are some parallels between the religious content of the sermons collected by Howarth and those I wish to present from among Iraqi Shi'a in Dublin and London.

Sermon One, Condemning Violence and Intolerance in Islam

1. When we face violence and crimes like we witnessed over the past few days in Iraq one must be ready to condemn those who perpetrated this. This is not a time to say one must sit and discuss, when we should allow for dialogue.
2. Sometimes you can find yourself defending Islam when in fact we are defending criminals. We used to spend years defending Islam, but then it was not the true Islam of Rasul Allah. We need to be careful when we are being critical of Islam, also when we are critical of the Pope. We were very quick to come forward to criticize the Pope. However we quickly defend Islam when in fact sometimes we are defending something that is not just, but rather violent and intolerant.

3. I told those leaders who came from Iraq to Belfast, you must deal with this problem of violence that is going on in Iraq. These Muslims, Sunni and Shi'i, who came to learn from the Christian how to resolve their difference. You are Muslim, above Christians, are you not aware of your history, that you have to come here to learn to promote peace. The regime has been targeting the Shi'a. Don't say that the Shi'a are taking ground from the Sunna.
4. Last week you heard that before the time of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq. It was this person who was the founder of the subsequent schools in Sunni Islam. Up until then there was only the Shi'a. But many Umayyad became corrupt, this was not the time to teach Muslims Islam, he did not teach them Shi'a, no, he taught them Islam. The imam of Maliki school had learned from Imam as-Sadiq, before this time, there was only one school: the Shi'a. These sects and legal schools grew out of the Shi'a. The divisions in Islam did not emerge out of different understanding. Before the time of 'Ali Imam as Sadaq people did not ask what is Shi'a, no, they all prayed the same, went to Hajj the same.
5. I am a noble person, I am not accusing the Ahal Sunna, only those who defend terrorism, I only condemn those who commit the crime. For that reason we can see that dictators are undermining Islam and the Arab world. After attacking the regime Sayyid al Hakim was attacked by those "guns" who were supporting Saddam. This shows that those criminals know where the power of the Shi'a is, i.e., among their religious leaders.
6. We should take seriously the role of our Marja this does not mean like in Iran and Islamic state, rather once you respect the 'Ulama, the hausa and marja this is enough. If we are practising our Shi'a in London and Dublin, and nobody feels that they are oppressed then it is enough.
7. Pray to Allah, in the face of such violence, we pray that we will see such criminals humiliated as we have seen Saddam humiliated. We recalled Sayyid al Hud (who died in Qom recently) and those who were killed in the recent violence in Iraq.
8. Please recite Al Fatiha for those who fell in Iraq last week.

Analysis

This sermon took place during the height of the sectarian trouble in Iraq in 2006⁽²⁾. At that time there was a delegation who travelled from Iraq to Ireland to dialogue with Nationalist and Unionist politicians about developing a peace process in Iraq. The preacher is lamenting the sorry state of religious sectarianism that is the reality in Iraq and fully aware of the suffering that the Shi'i community has endured under Saddam over the past decades. This has been the intimidation of the Religious Hausa and Shi'i religious leaders.

In reality the speaker sees no division between the Shi'a and the Sunna in early Islam⁽³⁾. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq was the father of all the schools of Islamic law and the teacher of the other schools of Islamic law. The division in Islam came following the political divisions that emerged under the Beni Umayyad and the Beni Abbassid. These turned away from the noble Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and sought to return to a tribal and sectarian Islam that did not respect either Imam 'Ali or the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims can be quick to criticize others, for example, Pope Benedict following the Regensburg Lecture, where he was perceived to criticize Islam and the Prophet⁽⁴⁾. However Muslims are slow to criticize the violence and intolerance that has been and is going on in Iraq by terrorists and dictators. Sayyid Al Hakim was murdered in Iraq on the 29th August 2003⁽⁵⁾, yet many Sunni did not respond or criticize this act of violence against a religious and saintly Muslim, because he was a Shi'a.

Saddam is perceived as a violent dictator who is following in the tradition of the Umayyad rulers of old in their opposition to Shi'i Islam and the family of the Prophet. Yet he was defeated and humiliated. The Shi'i community interprets the violent displacement of Saddam as an act of liberation made on their behalf by the Occupation forces, contrary to the dictum that says that dictatorship is better than political chaos. The preacher is delighted to have witnessed the displacement of Saddam and prays that all dictators will suffer a similar fate⁽⁶⁾. Sermon Two, Ashura, Democracy and Human Rights

1. Imam Hussein asked for one night of prayer before beginning the Battle of Karbala. Imam Hussein would address the group each night after prayer that the consequences of this journey would be different from what the people expected. Many people began deserting because of the need of a great sacrifice. Sura 37:107-8. There was going to be a martyrdom on the way. There was a need to purify the hearts of those present, so that they could offer a pure Islam, those who would offer only the pleasure of Allah. Imam Hussein said: "Brothers, you are mistaken, if you think that tomorrow's battles will fulfil any of your worldly desires, I will be butchered, Abbas will lose his arms, my son 'Ali will be killed. All will be rolling a pool of blood even my son 'Ali Askar will be killed; only my son Al 'Ali will survive. They are only after my life. You are free to go if you wish. Please put out the lamps so that people may walk away in darkness." Many deserted him, only a few people were left, the pure of the pure. Only 72 who stood fast in the battle for the truth. They said: "We are ready to sacrifice our lives for the sake of truth, sincerely we desire to follow Allah and be martyred."
2. Many things happened on this night, Abbas guards the camp of Imam Hussein, a ditch was dug around the camp and a fire was lit within it. Hussein offered his last prayer on the morning of Ashura, 61/680 he said: "Oh, 'Ali Akbar, let me hear again the Azhan as you resemble the Prophet in your voice". The arrows started coming just as the prayer finished.
3. Imam offered the sermon on the day of Ashura. He said to the forces of Yazid, "Do you know me, am I not the grandson of Rasul Allah, do you know that my father was 'Ali and my mother is Fatima? My grandmother is Khadijah, was Hamza not my Uncle? These were the first to join Islam and the most learned in Islam. The Prophet said of 'Ali, 'he is from me and I am from him'. Why are you killing me so?" It is from Yazid that has come the order. Tomorrow there will be a great battle. This night is the night that was requested for prayer.
4. It is important to celebrate Ashura. We need this Ashura to develop our faith, our humanity, we need to refresh ourselves by

coming to Ashura. It is important for those to know and attend Ashura, as it is important to attend Ramadan. Depression can be cured by attending these religious celebrations. Living in exile here in Ireland can lead to depression. We need to socialize with each other by attending Jummah prayers, Ashura, etc. We need to encourage ourselves to pray each day, to attend the Hussania. Many don't know their religion; when the time for majlis comes the man will not bring the children to the Mosque and they grow up not knowing about Islam. Yes, children need to come and learn in order to be rooted in their Shi'i belief.

5. Islam allows freedom in religion. The Qur'an says you cannot use force to change the heart. Why I change is I have questions that make me seek peace of mind, in Saudi and Egypt you can see people turning to Shi'a. In Riyadh you can see 3 majlis in the heart of Wahhabi Saudi Arabia.
6. In Karbala you can find the answers to all of the questions that emerge. You can see the head of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad was killed. We not know what is going on in the world. At the time of Beni Umayyad the movement start to take another direction, following dictators, Imam Hussein redirects Islam back to human rights, democracy, you can see until today no single country run by democracy in the Muslim world. How we can see India beside Pakistan, Turkey and Greece, these countries do not have democracy, Lebanon has democracy only because of the Christians. Ahu al Sunna promotes dictatorship. Iran and Iraq are run by the Shi'a. In Iran you can see democracy, there Rafsanjani lost election, this cannot happen in the Arab Middle East. However only in Iraq do Islamic scholars promote democracy. Beni Umayyad point to the sword when they are proposing leadership; only the son may succeed. Muharram is good to enlightened people about the Shi'a and what happened to Imam Hussein, he was a prisoner of war. Zainab his sister is mourning the loss of Hussein. She too is a role model for women fighting for women's rights, freedom of choice and democracy.

Analysis

This is the only sermon which occurred during the mourning period of Muharram. It takes place on the 9th of Muharram the day before commemorating the Battle of Karbala. Usually on this night the preacher will focus on the martyrdom of the infant 'Ali Asgahar, the youngest son of Hussein, who is killed by an arrow while in his father's arms.⁽⁷⁾ On this night the preacher focuses on the fact that Imam Hussein is aware that tomorrow there is going to be a great battle and that he is outnumbered. He dims the lights and gives his followers the opportunity to flee without shame. Only seventy two faithful and family members remain. Next, Hussein challenges the forces of Yazid to recognize his heritage, his parents and grandparents as that of the Prophet and his family. These were the greatest and the most faithful of Muslims. Imam Hussein challenges his opponents to understand the nature of this conflict and why it is at odds with the message of Islam. This is the crucial claim of the Shi'a. The preacher is presenting the Shi'a as standing in the way of integrity and justice. They are opposed to violence and rather seek the way of prayer and reconciliation. However, they are not prepared to see their religion distorted to comply with the political and ethnic desires of the political class, who seek power and privilege.

In part 4, the preacher addresses the Shi'i community in exile directly.⁽⁸⁾ He encourages them to participate in the celebration of Ashura. Many in the community are isolated, struggling with integration, language, psychological conditions associated with their asylum and social difficulties. Coming to the Ashura ceremonies allows these people a safe environment to express their grief, their loss and their vulnerability. They can grieve for their families who are living in Iraq, many suffering because of violence and intimidation. They can grieve for their own particular exile, linguistically, culturally, socially and religiously. The grief expressed from Hussein and his followers becomes a therapeutic catharsis, expressing the pain and depression of a whole community. Through these rituals the children become socialized into a religious way of life that has survived for centuries and is now finding expression in a new context in the West.

In part 6 the preacher makes the crucial connection between Ashura, human rights and democracy.⁽⁹⁾ Imam Hussein is associated with the revolutionary freedom fighter, who is fighting for freedom from oppression and freedom of religion. Here the preacher is adopting the language of the liberal West and applying it to Ashura. We are made aware of how the language of human rights and democracy has been accepted into this particular discourse on Islamic politics and history. The Beni Umayyad are perceived as supporting dictatorship and suppressing freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of human rights. The Shi'i Imams are righteous and infallible saints who are promoting transparent leadership and integrity. When westerners consider in the Middle East, the antipathy towards western discourse about human rights and democracy among radical Islamic groups it is refreshing to hear a community accepting this language and discourse as their own. The preacher makes the point that democracy has not taken root in many Islamic countries that continue to be dominated by monarchy or dictatorship and have only partial freedom.⁽¹⁰⁾ He sees the problem in Sunni Islam that from the time of the Umayyad dynasty it has failed to accept accountability and transparency into its political model, whereby the real religious leaders were suppressed, murdered and martyred.

Examination of the Sermons and their Analysis

In the analysis above I have identified most of the points of concern that emerged within the interviews of Iraqi Shi'i with regard to their understanding of these sermons and the sentiments expressed by the preachers. It is necessary however to examine in more detail what is being said in these narratives and to identify more common themes for reflection. I suggest the following themes and headings

Retaining links with and Interpreted History

Shi'ism and particularly its Ashura narrative maintain, narrate and display the central tension in Islamic doctrine and history between the Meccan and the Medinan paradigm. Following the death of the prophet, his charismatic authority became routinized into the

Islamic caliphate. The charismatic figures of the Imam in Shi'i Islam personified the speaking to power, the Meccan spontaneity, the alterity that contrasts with the Medinian propensity to institution-building and consolidation. Thus, Shi'ism encapsulates the insurrectionary moment of the nascent Islam as a religion of protest. For Dabashi, this is the dream of Islam as well as the historical other of Islam: Shi'ism must remain always the Other and yet dream of the Same.⁽¹¹⁾ The Ashura narrative speaks of the universality of protest, the universality or resistance to oppression and the manipulation of political power. It thereby provided and provides revolutionaries and theologians alike with a paradigm of liberation.

This is the rise of an entirely different set of circumstances to colonial invasion and American imperialism. The perpetrators are Muslim and essentially though not exclusively Sunni. This theodicy has deep historical roots in early Islam. The defining moment of Islam and particularly Shi'ism is the doctrinal sanctity of mazlumiyyat, of having been wronged, as is clearly outlined by Dabashi in *In Authority in Islam*.⁽¹²⁾ Dabashi distinguishes between the charismatic and the institutional, in the context of the emerging Imamate under the establishment of the Umayyads. The instant Islam succeeds to power it negates itself. Thus Islam is determined to be in perpetual insurrection or negation. The present crisis in Islam is not due exclusively to its colonial history. The binaries of the past are breaking down under the influence of globalization. The sites of conflict and the sites of support are no longer situated along the fault-lines of history. The pre-modern and pre-colonial binaries of Dar al Islam and Dar al-Harb, are no longer the geographical binaries of the West and the East. More modern designations are needed to describe the reality of Muslims living in the West today. Tariq Ramadan suggests the use of Dar al Dawa to describe these realities.⁽¹³⁾ There are currently Muslims dispersed and displaced throughout the entire world and those in Europe and America have been more vocal and influential than most. Civil society is no longer the territorial possession of any particular state or category, uniting the unlikely and the unthinkable in common values and praxis.

According to Alastair Crooke⁽¹⁴⁾ we stand at another key moment in history. Islamic ideology has in the last century passed through the

shadows. Sunni Islam was shocked and disorientated, dealt a psychological blow to a narrative that was already defensive. Muslims in the Middle East have seen their social and political continuities severed, their societies individualized and anaesthetised. The colonial project and the impact of neo-liberalism have left citizens in the throes of great secularization and modernisation, weakened society, broken capacity, eroded self-regulation, destroyed community and increased ethnic tension. Significant and growing proportions of Muslim populations now live in absolute poverty, while their elitist overlords become richer and more powerful. Many societies in the Middle East are police states with little civil society and little civil freedom. Yet, this experience has not been one of entire isolation. New thinking is emerging, resistance is taking place that places the suffering Muslim population at the centre of its theodicy. There are green shoots of Islamic liberation theodicy, resistant to oppression and attentive to grief, best expressed in the political movement referred to as the Arab Spring.

Double minority status in a pluralist world⁽¹⁵⁾

Within the process of globalisation it is often difficult for minority views and non dominant narratives to be expressed and heard. Yet a critique of dominant narratives is imperative to gaining insight into powers-relations within globalization. In the light of dominant narratives of expansionism, radicalism and fundamentalism in the Islamic world, it is important to defend minority voices within Islam and in a pluralist world. One of the efforts of this study is to give the Iraqi Shi'i minority voice intelligibility and coherence in the world of Islam and in the larger pluralist world. Shi'i Communities in the West occupy a double minority status, this minority status can contribute to a greater desire for integration and an active public profile.

Apologetic in relation to Sunni Islam

The most common “other” addressed in the general discourse is the Sunni community locally, in Iraq and worldwide. The general discourse argues that, though the Shi'a are a minority, they are the

possessors of the original, pure and true Islam that was by the majority of Muslims after the death of the Prophet. It is the personality of 'Ali as the first Imam and successor to the Prophet that is the key to the Shi'i belief. There is much criticism of the Wahhabi who are seen to represent the Beni Umayyad of early Islamic history in their opposition and intolerance towards the Shi'a. The reality is most clearly seen in relation to the Shi'a of Saudi Arabia Wahhabi teaching has been influenced by Ibn Taymiyya a central character in Shi'i apologetical preaching in relation the Sunni.

Ibn Taymiyya has many criticism of the Shi'a. He was at pains to point out that the Twelver Shi'a were misguided. His main criticisms of Shi'ism in general can be summarised as follow by Hamid Enayat:⁽¹⁶⁾

1. There is nothing in the Qur'an or the Sunna to support the Shi'i claim that the Imamate is one of the pillars of religion.
2. The claim and belief that 'Ali was the rightful successor to the Prophet on the basis of divine designation are contradictory to that of divine justice.
3. The doctrine of 'ilm is the belief in a special knowledge inherited by 'Ali's descendants from Muhammad, thereby endowing them with the unique capacity to perceive the correct rules of religion.

These criticisms are often laid against the Shi'a by Sunni and particularly the Wahhabi, who criticize the Shi'a of idolatry and the worship of the Imams. The worship of one other than Allah is regarded as the greatest sin (shirk) in Islam.

These criticisms reach the core of much of Shi'i narratives and preaching. They strike at the core Islamic identity of Shi'i Muslims. The Shi'a are aware of their minority status and the history of oppression and intimidation over many centuries and contexts by Sunni rulers. Shi'a relate to the suffering of victims of religious violence and terrorism, have no difficulty in condemning radical Islamist activity and in identifying elements in Islam that has in the past supported dictatorship and oppression.

There are a number of stock Traditions and Qur'anic texts that are cited in order to prove the original centrality of the Family of the Prophet and the right to succession of 'Ali.⁽¹⁷⁾ The most popular are the so called Hadis-e Kisa (Tradition of the Cloak), when the Prophet gathered his immediate family under the cloak, the Confrontation with the Christians of Najran known as the Mubahala, referred to in Sura-e Al Imran 3:16 and the Tradition of Ghadir Khumm.

There are a number of cited passages from the Qur'an that refer to the centrality of the Imamate and the Ahul Bayt. These include Sura-e Nisa 4:59. "O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority from among you." This ayat is interpreted in relation to the Imams, in whom it is necessary that believers have faith and obedience. Sura-e Shura 42:23 quotes the Prophet as saying "I demand not of you any recompense for it (the toils of apostleship) save the love of my relatives", which is interpreted as referring to love of the Ahul Bayt. Another popular text is Sura-e Baqara 2:124: "And remember when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words then he fulfilled them. He said 'Verily I make thee Imam for mankind.' (Abraham) said 'And of my offspring' He said 'My covenant reacheth not the unjust.'" This makes of 'Ali and the Imams divinely sanctioned leaders within the community.

Within a rereading of early Islamic history the leadership of the community by political personalities is under dispute by minority groups within the Umma. These political rulers, Umayyad and 'Abbasid Caliphs oppressed the religious and political authority of the Shi'i Imams, confining them and having them killed. There is a parallel made between those political leaders, who opposed the Prophet in early Meccan times, those who opposed the Imam during Umayyad and 'Abbasid times and those today who are committed to terrorism and violence against the Shi'a. In the context of a violent and unstable Iraq, radical and violent elements within the Sunni camp who are committing violent acts against innocent Shi'a are associated with the tyrants who defeated Imam Hussein at Karbala and successively martyred Imams. Particular hostility is reserved for those Wahhabi and Salafi Muslims whose intolerance of the Shi'a has become institutionalized and nationalized in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East.

Apologetic in relation to Christianity

Although the Sunni Muslim community is the most common “other” spoken to in the general discourse, preachers also speak of the Christian other in the general discourse. The role of religion in society is promoted. Religion is seen as a civilizing and a humanizing influence, giving meaning, purpose and value to life. It is about the values that are cherished and promote peace, reconciliation and love of one’s neighbour. Islam and Christianity are seen as within the great narratives of history, influencing peoples’ lives and creating a world ethic of global responsibility. Islam is presented as superior and the “fastest growing religion in the world” with the greatest numbers turning to Shi‘i Islam. This is evidence of its diving origin and favour.

There is little of the antagonism expressed towards radical Islam and there is a real appreciation of the values promoted in Christianity, among religious groups, Church communities and religious orders. There is an appreciation of the role of the clergy and the episcopacy within the Catholic Church, its centralized authority and its centralized teaching. The experience of interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue have created a discourse of appreciation and mutual support, working with government groups as faith communities and seeking representation as faith communities on education and political platforms.

Apologetic in relation to the West

Given that these preachers are living in the West, western civil society figures greatly in the discourse. Preachers living here are aware of the perceived superiority of the West in areas of science, technology, human rights and political management. They are aware of how civil society and political society provide for its members within the social services in the fields of education, health and the law. There is a well-established welfare system and many Muslim immigrants have benefited from this system. There is among preachers an awareness of Christian values at the heart of civil society that promote the welfare of the human person and their flourishing within society.

The situation in Iraq has changed radically for Iraqi Shi'a their perception of American foreign policy. There is a clear identification with promoting democracy and supporting human rights despite the horrors of war and occupation. There is an alignment with the marja in Iraq which see the Americans there as guests, unfortunate but necessary, in order that dictatorship can be replaced with democracy. Shi'i preachers in the West have been instrumental in changing attitudes within their community through their condemnation of violence, radical Islam and terrorism in the name of Islam.

Uniting the Community in praise of Shi'i personalities

The faza'il follows the general discourse in the sermon. This is a section often phrased in poetry or poetic prose, recited in Arabic, and that corresponds to an exposition of the great Shi'i personalities, particularly 'Ali. The word faza'il means excellencies. The faza'il is often composed of a series of short units strung together and made up of mini-narratives, mini-expositions of Qur'anic passages or Traditions. The discourse is decidedly 'insider' and Arabic. There are poetic references not only to 'Ali but to members of the Ahul Bayt, e.g., Amir al-Mu'min, (Commander of the Faithful), Saqi-e Kawsar (The Cupbearer of the pool who distributes its water to his followers at Judgement Day), and Qasim al-Nar (Distributer of the Fire, sending sinners to Hell). The Masters of the Youths of Paradise are, according to tradition, Hasan and Hussein.

The faza'il is participatory and the congregation responds with exclamations such as Subhan Allah, (Glory to God), Ya 'Ali, Ya Hayder, (Bravo 'Ali, Well done 'Ali). The faza'il appeals to the heart and to the emotions. The highlighting of the Virtues of the great Shi'i heroes of faith creates in the hearts of the faithful feelings of pride and faithfulness. It deepens the relationship between the congregation and the Holy Ones. The faza'il helps the congregation to identify values and virtues of heroic self-sacrifice while creating a space of devotion, love and loyalty. In this way this element of the sermon deepens the commitment of the community to its Shi'i faith and to the service of each other.

There is a clear distinction between the general discourse and that of the *faza'il*. The general discourse is reasoned to convince the outsider. The *faza'il* is directed at the Shi'i insider who would be aware of the link between giving Alms and the Tradition in which 'Ali gives his ring to a beggar during ritual prayers, after which Sura-e Ma'ida (5:55) is believed to have been revealed. The *faza'il* is the language of a common, familiar and shared narrative.

The *faza'il* has a moral function also, inculcating values such as generosity, loyalty and piety. There are countless stories of 'Ali's bravery in battle, his simplicity of lifestyle and his integrity in judgement. In this way the *faza'il* both functions to extol the virtues of the Ahul Bayt by glorifying them and inspires Shi'i followers.

Uniting the community in a Narrative of Suffering

The essential core of the *majlis* sermon is the *masa'ib* or the narration of the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs and other Shi'i personalities. The *masa'ib* forms a distinct part of the *majlis* sermon following the general discourse and is always recognizable on the part of the congregation. The preacher may announce the transition to the *masa'ib* through the mention of Karbala and the martyrs involved. During the transition to the *masa'ib* the preacher may take off his turban, take out a handkerchief or unbutton his coat, all signals that he is beginning to grieve. These trigger-words and actions evoke a response of grieving and tears. The congregation cover their eyes with their hands and mourn aloud, grieving the suffering of their beloved Imams and Shi'i personalities.

The central feature of the *masa'ib* is the narration of suffering. This is generally the lead up to the death of the venerable personality. Important Shi'i personalities have their own *masa'ib*, Hussein, 'Ali, Abbas and Fatima. These personalities include the members of Hussein's family killed at Karbala. Members of the congregation have heard the recitation of *masa'ib* narratives since their childhood. This gives the preacher a certain flexibility in the use of the narratives. There are always essential elements of the Kabala Narrative that weave together the story in its particular pathos. These elements include the arrows killing the infant 'Ali Asghar, the cutting

of the arms of Abbas, the spear killing Hussein and young Sakina confronting the severed head of Hussein. The graphic quality of the violence heightens the tragic component of the narrative. The familiarity with the narrative and the emotion bind the congregation in an intimate union of shared grief and a common history.

This is the creation of a “liminal reality”⁽¹⁸⁾ a threshold experience, a liturgical and ritual world in which the events of Karbala are fused with the present painful reality, in this process community identity is reformed, strengthened and healed.

The Ashura Ritual, Memory and Empowerment

The central ritual narrative among the Shi'a is the Ashura Narrative, during which the Shi'a recall the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. During the ten days of Muharram, Shi'i communities gather to recall the final days of Imam Hussein, leading to his death in Karbala. During these ritual majlis, Shi'i comities strengthen their bonds of relationship and identity in the recalling of a historical narrative of emancipation and empowerment despite the defeat of the Prophet's grandson at Karbala.

For Shi'a the event of Karbala has become a “root metaphor”⁽¹⁹⁾ or paradigm upon which many religious beliefs, rituals and practices are based. For Shi'a it constitutes the central narrative in their understanding of human history, empowerment, salvation, socio-political emancipation and religious identity. The rituals and narratives associated with Ashura have historically served as a vehicle for expressing a variety of political, religious and social relationships. According to Martyr Murtada Mutahhari, Shi'a believe that in recalling the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, Muslims believe that “Imam Hussein was killed in order to revive Islamic tradition, Islamic laws and regulations, not in order to create an excuse for the violation of Islamic norms”⁽²⁰⁾. The practise of Ashura has kept alive the dangerous and revolutionary memory of Imam Hussein in a variety of contexts. It has provided the religious foundation for the transformation of history, society, personal grief and faith for many muslims throughout history and the world.

We see, then, that the Ashura narrative is a potent symbol and charged metaphor of “socio-religious reform” and “progressive discourse”. The memory of Karbala becomes a “subversive force” that keeps up an “unyielding resistance” to the status quo. The Ashura narrative becomes a model that demonstrates how a minority can redress the asymmetry of power and can provide a “paradigm for all the oppressed peoples of the world”.⁽²¹⁾ We see that the Ashura narrative has been recognized by many outside Shi'i Islam and Islam as a symbol of liberation, empowerment, revolution and emancipation. Karbala and the Ashura narrative as polyphonic symbol acquire meaning depending upon the social and political context of its use. It is available for overlapping interpretation and is constituted by the ideals of its “interpreting communities”. There are multiple struggles constructed within this symbol that are evident from the narrative. Multiple binaries narrate the struggles expressed in the symbol: Hussein versus Yazid; 'Ali versus Alu Bakr, Uman, Uthama and Muawiya; Fatima versus Aisha; Shi'a versus Sunni; sobriety versus intoxication; affection versus duty, Marxism versus Capitalism; East versus West; and many more. There are themes of commemoration, devotion, sacrifice, celebration, reform, and liberation, themes which are essential to the symbol's textual landscape.

Conclusion

The Ashura narrative has been ritualized in many different contexts and has provided a metaphor for, among others, hegemonic control, revolutionary state transformation and maintenance of the status quo. It is the focus of this study to examine one particular context, namely, that of Iraqi Shi'i communities in the UK and Ireland during the years 2004 until 2010. It is my contention that in this time the Ashura Narrative has taken on one particular interpretation that, though it has universal elements, is in the main peculiar to the Iraqi Shi'i community in exile.

In their native countries Shi'a experienced a monolithic Shi'ism that was not informed by ethnic or cultural diversity. In a migrant space, such as the UK or Ireland, this monolithic and homeland experience is challenged both by the new pluralistic and multiethnic

context and by an Islam that is defined primarily by Sunnism. For, the Iraqi Shi'i community in exile has to deal with a secular, if putatively Christian, and western majority, and with a majority Sunni Islam. However, it also has to deal with other national and regional Shi'i groups with whom it may have to share a ritual and religious space. In this context the challenge to move towards integration or towards isolation is doubly manifested.

In the first generation “the immigrant psyche is shaped by the memory of the homeland”.⁽²²⁾ There is the “myth of return”, “nostalgia for the homeland and the sense of loss that accompanies it”.⁽²³⁾ Iraqis also bring with them a deep sense of religious commitment and a desire to replicate religious services in the West.

Ashura practises are changing and adapting especially in regard to the next generation and with Iraqi youth. During Ashura they run a campaign of blood donation in the name of Imam Hussein. This is an example of adapting the practise of bloodletting, flagellation⁽²⁴⁾ and self-mutilation and turning an ancient tradition towards something beneficial for society. Many Shi'i groups and individuals make use of internet and visual resources during the majlis. There is a wealth of sermons, rituals, and songs online that can be used during Ashura.⁽²⁵⁾ Shi'i youth will visit www.al-Islam.org, a Shi'i internet site that speaks on many Shi'i issues. This indication of integration into western society particularly appeals to youth and those who are computer literate.

Ashura in exile, therefore is clearly allied to identity formation. Through participation in memorial and ritual Iraqi Shi'a engage in a process of religious and ethnic self-identification which begins with what Takim calls a “cognitive process of self-categorization”⁽²⁶⁾. According to Takim this involves making a claim to membership in a group and also contrasting oneself and one's group with other groups and categories. In this way many Iraqi Shi'a are in the process of affirming a western Shi'i identity, especially among the younger generation and those who were educated in the West. This indicates a paradigm shift or a process of post-ethnicity or de-ethnicization. This process is taking place over the span of a generation and in the socio-political context of the so-called “Global War on

Terror", which impacts upon the lives of many Muslims but in a particular way upon Iraqis as they face occupation, war, violence and exile in great numbers.

The paradigm shift that marks the transition from Shi'a in the West to western Shi'a is deeply rooted in both interpreting the Ashura narrative along lines compatible to western values and seeing in Imam Hussein and Ahul Bayt the paragons both of opposition to violence and dictatorship, and of promotion of democracy, human rights and the emancipation of the oppressed, especially women. This has intensified fault lines among Muslims, particularly along radical Salafi and Wahhabi lines, as is well recognized. However, the fault lines among Shi'a becomes apparent in their dialogue with other Muslims and other westerners, in much the same way as I have identified in this study.

1. Toby M. Howarth, *The Twelver Shi'a as a Muslim Minority in India*, Pulpit of tears, Routledge, New York, 2005.
2. Fanar Haddad in *Sectarianism in Iraq, Antagonistic Visions of Unity*, C.Hurst & Co., London, 2011, gives an account of the sectarian divisions that existed in Iraq that became expressed in the violent insurgency. See also, Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2006
3. Barnaby Rogerson, *The Heirs of the Prophet Muhammad*, 2006. Rogerson gives a vivid account of the early history of the Islamic community and the various strands emerging in leadership. See also Hazelton, Lezley, *After the Prophet, The Epic Story of the Shi'a-Sunni Split*, First Anchor Books, New York, 2009.
4. James V. Schall, *The Regensberg Lecture*, St. Agustine's Press, Chicago, 2007. Schall gives an account of the Lecture by Pope Benedict XVI and the ensuing conflict.
5. Anthony Shadid, *Night Draws Near: Iraq's People in the Shadow of America's War*, Henry Holt, New York, 2005, p.255
6. There are many account of the Dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, the most acclaimed was written under an assumed name by Kanan Makiya during the height of political oppression in Iraq. See, Makiya, Kanan, *Republic of Fear*, University Press, Berkley 1998.
7. The impact on women and children of the sanction and conflict in Iraq has been a constant source of reflection. There are many insightful account of this unnecessary suffering. See, Yasmin Husein al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq, The Gender Impact of International Sanctions*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2008,

pp.131-141. See also Kathy Kelly, Other Lands have Dreams, From Baghdad to Pekin Prison, Counter Punch, California, 2005, pp.1-8 and William W. Haddad "Iraqi Civilians under the 1990-2003 Sanctions", in P. R. Kumaraswamy (ed.), Caught in Crossfire, Civilians in Conflicts in the Middle East, Ithaca Press, Reading, 2008, p.189.

8. Reflections on Shi'i communities in Exile include, Takim, Liyakat, Shi'ism in America, New York Press, New York, 2009 and Hegland, Mary Elaine, "Women in Karbala, Moving to America" in Aghaie Kamran Scott (ed.) The Women of Karbala, University of Texan Press, Austin, 2005.
9. Ali Allawi, The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Loosing the Peace, Yale University Press, Filey, 2007. Allawi outlines the movement toward democracy in Iraq following the American Occupation leading to the election of a National Iraqi Government by popular vote.
10. Filiu makes the point that Arabs are the exception in their demands for democratic rule as seen in the recent Arab Spring in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria. See, Jean-Pierre Filiu, The Arab Revolution, Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising, C. Hurst and Co, London, 2011.
11. Andrew Davison and Himadeep Muppidi (eds.), The World is my Home, A Hamid Dabashi Reader, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2011, pp.57-66. Hamid Dabashi, Shi'ism, A Religion of Protest, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2011.
12. Hamid Dabashi, Authority in Islam, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 2006.
13. Tariq Ramadan, Western Muslims and the Future of Islam, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p.72, 239. Ramadan suggest the formation of Dar al Dawa as that space which Muslims occupy int the West, between Dar as Islam and Dar al Harb. He sees Muslims in the West as occupying a fruitful place of witness and encounter that goes beyond the binaries of the past. This space is open to dialogue and interpenetration.
14. Alastair Crooke, Resistance, The Essence of the Islamist Revolution, Pluto Press, London, 2009, p.277.
15. Oliver Scharbrodt, "Shaping the Public Image of Islam: The Shiis of Ireland as 'Moderate' Muslims", Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol.31 No.4, 2011, Routledge, London, p.528.
16. Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought, I.B. Tauris, New York, 2004, p.35. Enayat presents the main elements of Ibn Taymiyya teaching in relation to Shi'a in this section.
17. A detailed review of this subject can be found in S.H.M. Jafri, Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000; Muhammad Tabatabai, Shi'ite Islam, State University of New York Press, New York, 1979, and Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1985

18. Vernon J. Schuble, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Ritual in South Asia*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 1993, pp.47, 95.
19. Kamran S. Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala, Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2004, p.9.
20. Martyr Murtada Mutahhari, "Ashura, History and Popular Legend", *Al-Tawhid*, Vol.13, No.3, Fall 1996, Foundation of Islamic Throught, Tehran.
21. Ibid., these quotes are taken from the conclusion to the chapter entitled "From Communal to Ecumenical", pp.200-1.
22. This example is taken from research into Shi'i communities in the United States. This reflects the realilty also of communities in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Liyakat Nathani Takim, *Shi'ism in America*, New York University Press, New York, 2009, p.55. In America Shi'a in exile experience the same sense of exile and isolation that those in Europe encounter.
23. Ibid., p.25. Takim contends that Iraqis in the US, especially recently arrived refugees, struggle with integration more than other migrant groups. There is a tendency towards cultural, linguistic and religious isolation, identification with the home country and the desire to return. This may be attributed to in many cases the experience of trauma that could have been associated with the migration, or events preceding exile. Many Iraqi Shi'a experienced great violence, intimidation and terror before arriving in the West as refugees.
24. Flagellation is an important ritual in the month of Muharram. Flagellation included the use of swords to cut the head (tatbir) and the use of chains (zanjir) to strike the chest and back. The shedding of blood is seen as demonstrating grief for Hussein's suffering and identifying with his mortal wounds. Heated discussion emerges in the West with regard to groups who want to engage in this activity. In the main it is discouraged by scholars and the 'Ulama. Many regard it as barbaric and anti-modern, jarring with western sensibilities. Those Iraqi Shi'i groups in the West who identify with western values and promote integration as against nostalgia for the home country oppose it strongly. The practise of blood donation is growing during Ahsura and is supported by the Red Cross and the NHS in the UK, where donation among ethnic minorities is often critical to maintain supplies.
25. Youth who want to hear nawahi, matamor and majlis visit sites like www.yahusain.org. The internet site www.shiatv.net contains over two thousand videos that address specifically Shi'i issues. The internet chatline called www.shia.com addresses and discusses issues pertinent to Shi'a in the West.
26. Liyakat Nathani Takim, *Shi'ism in America*, New York University Press, New York, 2009, p.56.