

CHAPTER 11

From Mourning to Activism

Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura

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Like Shi'i Muslims around the world, Lebanese Shi'is commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hosayn, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, each year during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Moharram. Lebanese metonymically refer to the entire ten-day period as Ashura—technically the term for the tenth of the month, the day on which the battle actually took place. Commemorating Ashura in Lebanon involves holding and attending both private and public *majales*, or mourning gatherings in which the history of the martyrdom is retold, and tenth-day *masirat*, or lamentation processions, during which men often perform *latam*, a ritualized striking of one's body in grief. In observation of the standard mourning period, some continue attending *majales*, with less regularity, for forty days after the tenth.

Historically, both the structure and the meaning of Ashura and these lamentation events have been fluid, incorporating different elements in different locales and reflecting the changing political and social status of Shi'i Muslims in Lebanon. However, a particularly dramatic transformation has been taking place over the past two decades, mirroring shifts in the Lebanese Shi'i Islamic movement,¹ particularly the growing popularity of the Shi'i political party Hezbollah. This change is characterized by many Lebanese Shi'is as a shift from what they label a “traditional” Ashura to what I am calling an “authenticated” one.

There are a wide range of Ashura meanings and practices—indeed a continuum of Ashura commemorations—that are not reducible into two static and absolute categories, but I have found it useful to follow the contrast set up by my interlocutors in order to trace these recent changes. Participants in both types of commemorations labeled Ashura as it was commemorated

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for much of the twentieth century (and continues to be commemorated) as “traditional” (*taqlidi*). Those who instead participated in what I call “authenticated” Ashura often opposed their commemorations to these “traditional” ones, using temporal and value-laden oppositions (“now” versus “before,” “developed” or “cultured” versus “backward”) in order to underscore the distinction.² Advocates of “authenticated” Ashura generally used the adjective *haqiqi* to describe their commemorations and interpretations, a term for which the range of meaning includes “true,” “real,” “genuine,” and “authentic.” I have chosen to use the latter term in translation because it captures both the truth claims being made and the emphasis on accuracy of method included in those claims.

One important element in this shift in Ashura commemorations involves the reinterpretation of the behavior of Sayyedah Zaynab at Karbala, a reinterpretation bearing consequences for the participation of Lebanese Shi‘i women in their community. Inherent in the details of this transformation, both generally and with regard to Zaynab, lies a paradox—that Ashura has been made modern through attempts to reauthenticate it, or make it more authentic than tradition.

In what follows, I will first provide the particular context for this change in Lebanon, followed by a description of the transformation and its inherent paradox. I then focus more closely on a comparison of two women’s *majales*, moving to a discussion of the specific changes in the depictions of Zaynab’s behavior at Karbala and how she represents an ideal standard for emulation by women in the community. Finally, I conclude by touching briefly upon women’s self-conscious engagement with the authentication of Ashura and their utilization of these newly emergent social ideals.

A short side note is necessary before I continue: in Lebanon, as in many places, religion and identity are often conflated. Obviously, not all Lebanese Shi‘is commemorate Ashura, just as not all Lebanese Shi‘is embrace “Shi‘i” as part of their identity. However, since the 1970s, identification with, and support of, Shi‘i-specific political parties and movements has grown exponentially in the country. This is due to multiple factors, including a charismatic leadership, the perceived failures of the Lebanese Left in resisting the Israeli occupation, successes of the Islamic Resistance, a general polarization of sectarian identities during the civil war, and the continued consolidation of those identities by postwar politics. This paper is based primarily, though not exclusively, on field research conducted from October 1999 through July 2001 in a particular Lebanese Shi‘i community located in a Hezbollah-dominated area of the southern suburbs of Beirut. This is a community in which people are religiously active—praying, fasting, and tithing

regularly—and where many explicitly embrace either “Shi’i” or “Muslim” as a part of their identity.

Catalysts for Change in the Lebanese Context

So-called “traditional” Ashura commemorations have occurred in rural Lebanon and in what are today the southern suburbs of Beirut since the beginning of the twentieth century. However, the urban visibility of Ashura grew in tandem with the urbanizing Shi’i population in the 1960s. These commemorations were viewed by many nonparticipants³ as a frightening display of the “backward” (*motakhallef*) traditions of Shi’i Muslims and were cited as one of the points of difference marking the Shi’is as less modern and developed than other communities in Lebanon. For Lebanese Shi’is, this stigma followed a history marked by political and economic marginalization: in a nation-state in which sectarian political-economic power translated to selective access to modernization for particular areas of the country, Shi’i Muslims resided primarily in the least developed rural regions and did not have access to infrastructural and institutional developments occurring in the rest of Lebanon.⁴

Aside from being stigmatized as “backward” and not modern, until the mid-1980s, “traditional” Ashura was not strongly opposed within the Lebanese Shi’i community. The initial signs of reform of the Ashura paradigm came in 1974 with the first inclusive mobilization of the Shi’is as a confessional group. In March of that year, Sayyid Musa al-Sadr founded the “Movement of the Deprived”⁵ (*harakat al-mahrumin*). Since Sayyid Musa’s “disappearance” in 1978,⁶ his legacy has been claimed by both of the Lebanese Shi’i political parties, Harakat Amal and Hezbollah.⁷ Norton notes that “under Imam Musa’s considerable influence, religious commemorations became vehicles for building communal solidarity and political consciousness.”⁸ However, while Sayyid Musa was the first to link contemporary Shi’i political mobilization in Lebanon with Ashura, transformation of the ritual with regard to both practice and meaning did not take root for another decade. Around that time a combination of factors, including the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978), the Lebanese civil war (1976–1990), the Israeli invasions (1978 and 1982) and continued occupation (until 2000), and the formation of Hezbollah, led to the emergence of opposition within the Shi’i community to “traditional” commemorations.

This opposition reflected trends in Iran, where reformist and Islamist intellectuals had contributed to the emergence of a new Ashura discourse

that linked it to an alternative and revolutionary Shi'ism, in contrast to a politically quietist one.⁹ Indeed, many Lebanese Shi'is point to the 1979 Islamic Revolution as the pivotal catalyst for mobilization and religious reform within their community. Furthermore, the transformation of Ashura in Lebanon took place in a context of war and occupation. While the horrific consequences of the Lebanese civil war¹⁰ were felt throughout the country, it was the predominantly Shi'i regions of the south and the Bekaa that bore the brunt of the two Israeli invasions and the Israeli occupation that continued until the summer of 2000.¹¹ Finally, the growing popularity and widening scope of Hezbollah¹² in the late 1980s and early 1990s provided a structure within which the transformed version of Ashura could thrive.

Ritual Reconfiguration: From "Traditional" to "Authenticated" Ashura

The shift from "traditional" to "authenticated" Ashura is especially apparent with regard to three areas: the *masirat*, the *majales*, and, most crucially, the meaning of the events of Moharram.

Masirat

The most obvious change in the *masirat* has occurred in the style of *latam* that men and boys perform following the *majles* (sing. of *majales*) on the tenth of Moharram. The traditional style of *latam*—best exemplified by the Ashura *masirat* in the southern Lebanese town of Nabatieh¹³—involves the shedding of one's own blood. Those performing *latam* form small groups and march quickly, almost at a jog, as they invoke the names of Ali and Hosayn and hit the small wounds that have been cut at their hairlines, so that blood flows down their faces and stains their white shirts (representing shrouds) or bare chests a bright red.¹⁴ Women generally do not participate in these *masirat*,¹⁵ though they make up at least half of the crowd that lines the street and leans over balconies and from nearby rooftops to watch.¹⁶

As the revolutionary Shi'i Islamic movement in Lebanon took shape and grew in popularity, the shedding of blood during *latam* was criticized as un-Islamic because it involves purposely injuring oneself. Again following the lead of Iran,¹⁷ Lebanese Shi'i clerics issued fatwas condemning the practice, and Hezbollah banned it outright in the mid-1990s. In Lebanon, this was accompanied by calls for those who feel the need to shed their blood during Ashura to do so for the community good, by instead donating blood

to local blood banks.¹⁸ In addition to condemning *latam* involving blood, the mobilizing Lebanese Shi'i movement, in typical fashion, called upon women to participate actively and publicly in Ashura commemorations, as well as in the community more generally.¹⁹

A sharp contrast to “traditional” *masirat* and *latam* is presented by Hezbollah’s “authenticated” *masirat* in the southern suburbs of Beirut. These *masirat* exhibit military order, with large groups of men and boys performing *latam* organized by age and dressed uniformly as scouts or entirely in black. They march in three neat rows behind a microphone-bearing leader, who initiates *nadbat*, lamentation songs or elegies, and chants and ensures that the groups perform *latam* in perfect unison so that it provides a percussive accompaniment. Crucially, the style of *latam* performed does not involve blood;²⁰ instead, those performing it begin by swinging both arms downward, then up, then out away from their bodies, and finally in to strike their chests loudly with their hands.²¹

Another significant difference is that women are no longer relegated to an observational role. The Hezbollah *masirat* include women and girls, dressed in full ‘*abayeh*,²² who are organized by age, like the men. The women’s groups form the second half of the *masira* (sing. of *masirat*), and, while they do not perform *latam*, each group is led in chants, or *nadbat*, by a leader. Often, one group of young women will walk chained together, with their faces covered, representing the women in the Imam’s party who were taken captive by Yazid’s army. Both the active participation of women in the *masirat*, as well as the new style of *latam*, are viewed by many Lebanese Shi’is as both “more developed” (*mutatawwur*) and more authentic historically—perhaps a response to those stereotypes that link traditional Ashura to being less modern than the rest of Lebanon.

Majales

During a *majles*, a recitor (*qari*)²³ narrates a part of the events of the first ten days of Moharram in a lamentation style reminiscent of a liturgy, detailing graphically the suffering and martyrdom of Imam Hosayn and those with him. Some recitors include a sermon that explains lessons to be learned from Karbala and the meanings of the events. The effect on the audience parallels these shifts in tone, with the lamentation liturgy evoking intense crying that quiets to a pensive concentration during the sermon sections.

While all *majales* include the lamentative narration of the *masa’eb*, the tragic events of Karbala (lit. calamities or misfortunes), recitors characterized as traditional will include as much detail of suffering as possible in this

narration, in order to elicit maximum levels of emotion from the audience. Many add poetic embellishment and dialogue among Imam Hosayn, his sister Sayyedah Zaynab, and others who were with them. The ultimate goal for these recitors is to move people to cry as much as possible for the martyred Imam and his family and companions. Shaykh Abbas,²⁴ at the office of Sayyid Mohammad Hosayn Fadlallah, undoubtedly the most prominent Lebanese Shi'i *marja' al-taqlid*, explained that this resulted from the lack of proper training:

Our problem is that many recitors do not go to school to learn to recite, they just learn at home. Especially in the villages, anyone with a good voice can decide, "I want to become a recitor." There is no organization to change this, or to forbid such incorrect recitations. The recitors do not have to be trained in a theological seminary [*hawza*] and this is the big problem. There are some who are very traditional [*taqlidi*] and backward [*motakhallef*] and others who are cultured [*muthaqqaf*].²⁵ The backward ones read only to make people cry, but the cultured ones teach lessons in their recitations.²⁶

As alluded to by the shaykh, *majales* considered authenticated are characterized by longer sermons and a more restrained narration of the events of Karbala. Eliciting an emotional response is still a goal, but a secondary one. These *majales* are intended to teach religious, social, and political lessons; to instruct the audience about the "true" meanings of Karbala and to link the history of the past to the present. Those who recite *majales* and strive for authenticity are concerned with the historical accuracy of their narrations and avoid including unfounded exaggerations that they see as being "merely" to heighten emotions and make people cry. Again, links can be seen between being authentic and being modern—namely in the promotion of "scientific" and textually based, and therefore "accurate," histories over exaggerations, which are viewed as "myth."

The perspective of a woman who has attended *majales* over the past three decades is provided by Hajjeh²⁷ Dalal:

They are reciting the same story about Hosayn; this person who reads the *majles* recites the same basic story as another person who is reciting. But the lecture differs among people. It depends on the audience and the lecturer and the topic he is explaining and his own relationship to Ashura. But they are better than before. They are better because they are being tied into our daily lives, this linking of the past

to the present and the future, this is better. Before we used to just go and listen to the story of Hosayn, it was rare that you found a lecture. Now, we are not just going to cry for Imam Hosayn, we are going to learn from his school. The lecture is important, it is clarifying why it is that you are crying, and why Imam Hosayn was martyred. It is not just the crying for Imam Hosayn, it is about learning the lessons from the school of Imam Hosayn.²⁸

Meaning

As can be inferred from these descriptions of traditional *majales* and *latam*, the emotions surrounding Ashura commemorated in this way center on both grief and regret. Tears shed for the martyrs of Karbala are tears that are *mustababb*, or religiously commendable. It is believed that both evoking these tears and shedding them are acts that bring *'ajr*²⁹ (divine reward) and that may increase one's chances of entering heaven.³⁰ Blood spilled in memory of the events of Karbala is similarly an embodied demonstration of grief and an empathetic expression of solidarity with the Imam's pain and sorrow. Yet it can also be an expression of regret or remorse.³¹ Some of those who perform the traditional style of *latam* explain that this demonstrates their regret for not being at Karbala with the Imam—a reference to those Shi'is who originally called upon the Imam to come and lead their revolution, but who then failed to arrive at Karbala in time to either protect the Imam or stand and die with him. In the context of pre-1970s Lebanon, when Shi'i Muslims were the least politically organized group in the country, all these meanings can be seen as related to the Lebanese Shi'i community's general political quietism. The emphasis during Ashura was on individual religious experiences of mourning and regret, embodied through tears and blood. While at first glance the association of blood and quietism may seem contradictory, in this instance the shedding of blood is directed at the self, rather than outward, implying a personal expression of grief, an internal struggle with regret, and the potential for individual salvation, rather than collective political or social action.

Yet from the perspective of the emergent alternative Shi'ism that espoused the authentication of Ashura, the blood and tears of these commemorations are considered to be both un-Islamic and passive:

Too much crying leads to personalities who cry—the Shi'is will become equated with crying, the Shi'is will take on crying as a cultural trait, and this is not a good thing, it is wrong. Emotions are neces-

sary, but they should be understood as a way of arriving at learning the lesson of Hosayn. The heart should be used to reach the head, not as an endpoint in and of itself.³²

Accompanying the discouragement of traditional *latam* and the historical authentication of the *majales* was a redirection of the message of Ashura outward, shifting the meaning from one of personal mourning, regret, and salvation to a revolutionary lesson. This is not to say that notions of *'ajr* and personal salvation have been stripped from Ashura, but rather that the primary emphasis and tone of the commemorations have undergone a shift. Indeed, those who advocate authenticated Ashura insist that *'ajr* comes from attending or holding *majales* and remembering Hosayn, Zaynab, and those who were with them, but *not* from the act of crying itself.

In the context of war and deprivation, where the Lebanese Shi'i community needed to mobilize militarily and socially, the message of revolution in the events of Moharram was highlighted.³³ This was done by emphasizing the importance of historical accuracy and evidence in order to remove the myths and unearth the authentic historical record—one which demonstrated that the battle and martyrdom of the Imam took place in a context of revolution. As with the *masirat* and the *majales*, the paralleling of authentic and modern appears here as well. The notion of “revolution” is distinctly modern,³⁴ yet those who advocate authenticated Ashura find revolutionary meaning in the historical record; a reinterpretation of the events of Karbala couched as the unearthing of “true” history.

Hajjeh Fatemeh, who is considered an exemplary recitor of authenticated *majales*, explained this revolutionary lesson of Karbala to me as follows: “In every era there is an oppressor and an oppressed . . .”³⁵ The role of Ashura was to remind people that

there is a Yazid and a Hosayn in every time, in every nation, in every government, and people should always have the spirit of revolution against oppression, because time repeats itself, history repeats itself, in every age there is injustice. Revolution allows people to fight the oppression and we need these humanitarian principles.³⁶

Two Women's *Majales*

The following juxtaposition of two women's *majales* will provide a more nuanced depiction of the differences appearing in Ashura commemorations

in Lebanon. The basic structure of these two *majales* is essentially the same: in both, the recitor opens the *majles* with a quiet group recitation of *surat al-fatihah*, the opening verses of the Qur'an. Along with the salutations that may follow, this serves to highlight the sacred context of the *majles* and to bring participants into the mind-set of spiritual contemplation. The recitor may then insert a *nadba*, or elegy, though these are more commonly left to the end of a *majles*. The lamentative narration of a portion of the events of Karbala, the *masa'eb*, follows, with a sermon of varying length inserted in the middle. At the close of the lamentation, the recitor will usually lead the singing of at least one *nadba*, with women singing along when they know the words, while striking their chests or thighs in slow time. Especially if held in a private home, the *majles* may be dedicated to particular members of the hostess' family. Finally, *majales* often conclude with everyone standing and facing the direction of Hosayn's tomb in order to recite in unison *ziyarat al-Hosayn*, a supplicatory prayer directed toward the Imam. Hospitality is always immediately apparent following a *majles*, especially when it has been held at someone's home. Coffee and sweets are routinely offered, though some women go so far as to prepare a light lunch for their guests.

A "Traditional" Women's *Majles*

7 Moharram 2001 CE/ 1422 AH.³⁷ As we walked to the *hosayniyyeh*, Um Hasan and the others expressed nervousness that Hajjeh Fatemeh would not be reading this evening; she did not read yesterday because her voice had given out from the pressures of the week. Their worries were alleviated upon our arrival though, as other women there assured us that one day's rest was enough for Hajjeh Fatemeh, who, if at all possible, would not allow anything to interfere with her Ashura recitations. At the entrance, Aziza and I draped scarves over our heads "out of respect for the *hosayniyyeh*," but as soon as we were seated, she told me we could remove them because only women were present. Including the two of us, there were only about ten non-*mohajjeh* (nonveiled) women there. Most participants wore their headscarves over loose dresses or the coat-dresses typical of *shar'i* (Islamically mandated) dress, though a few were in full *abayeh*, including Hajjeh Fatemeh. The room was large enough to hold at least a hundred people, with a small kitchen and bathroom off to one side. Benches lined the walls and rows of plastic chairs filled the room. There was a podium at one end with a large airbrushed painting of a Karbala scene behind it. The podium was draped in black, and black cloth banners hung along the walls with sayings printed on them, including "al-

salamo ‘alaykom ya sayyed al-shohada’” (peace be upon you, Sayyid of the martyrs).

When the room was full, Hajjeh Fatemeh walked to the podium, turned on the microphone, and began. Her voice was shaky and rough, but it seemed to clear as her recitation progressed. After opening with a quiet group recitation of *surat al-fatihah*, she greeted all who were at Karbala, saying, “al-salamo ‘alaykom ya Hosayn, al-salamo ‘alaykom ya . . .,” including ‘*ali ibn al-Hosayn* (Ali, son of Hosayn), *awlad al-Hosayn* (the children of Hosayn), *ashab al-Hosayn* (the friends of Hosayn), ‘*Abbas, akhu al-Hosayn* (Abbas, brother of Hosayn), and finally, with special emphasis and emotion flooding her voice, *Zaynab, ukht al-Hosayn* (Zaynab, sister of Hosayn). She then led a short *nadba*, segueing from it into her lamentative narration of the *masa’eb*.

The focus this evening was on Abbas, Hosayn and Zaynab’s brother and Zaynab’s “supporter.” The instant Hajjeh Fatemeh’s voice broke into lamentation, sobs arose throughout the room. After about ten minutes, Hajjeh Fatemeh paused, took a few deep breaths, and then gave a short lecture, only about ten minutes in length, linking the characteristics of a good Muslim to the character of Abbas. She then returned to the lamentation, and, this time in the Iraqi dialect, described Abbas’ death in vivid detail. She described the thirst of the children, their cries, and the way Abbas decided to try to get water for them. How, on his first attempt, he was wounded on his return from the Euphrates and the water spilled. How, despite his wounds, he made a second attempt to reach the river, but was caught and killed, his hands cut off, leaving bloody stumps. How his lifeless handless body returned to the camp draped over his horse, and how, upon seeing this, Zaynab cried out, “What were you doing leaving us like that? How can you leave us, you who are responsible for us?” And most of all, how Zaynab cried and mourned.

This was the longest lamentation I have heard so far. Again, as soon as the lamentation began, the women listening began to weep loudly. A few young girls, perhaps eight or nine years old, were sitting around the foot of the podium, two of them crying intensely. The levels of emotion in the room were overwhelming, sobs filled the air, some women cried out at moments, screaming, or speaking under their breath as they wept. This was particularly true of the older women, though this entire audience was older than the ones in homes tend to be. Even Aziza, who usually sat calmly and cried silently to herself at *majales*, had pulled her knees up to her chest and wrapped herself around them, her body shaking as she wept.

Hajjeh Fatemeh, too, was overtaken with emotion, throwing her head

back as she lamented, tears streaming down her face, her voice rising and breaking as she cried out the words, sometimes screaming into the microphone “ya Zaynab” or “ya Hosayn.” At one point she stopped articulating altogether, buried her head in her arms on the podium, and just wept like that for about five minutes, while the rest of the women in the room continued crying. Eventually, Um Zein stood and took Hajjeh Fatemeh some water, and she slowly lifted her head and resumed her lamentation where she had left off.

When the lamentation ended, everyone dried their eyes and slowly began singing two *nadbat* (pl. of *nadba*), mostly in unison. Everyone seemed to know the words, especially to the choruses: *ramz al-‘ata’*, *ruh al-shohada’*, *li-man bakayt huwa al-Hosayn fi Karbala’* (the symbol of giving, the spirit of the martyrs, he for whom I cried was Hosayn at Karbala), and *dammi mu ‘agbla min dammak ya Hosayn, jismi mu ‘agbla min jismak ya Hosayn* (my blood is not more precious than your blood oh Hosayn, my body is not more precious than your body oh Hosayn). As they sang, the women struck the left side of their chests with their right hands, providing a slow percussive accompaniment to the *nadbat*. One of the little girls had moved her shirt to one side and was hitting her chest so hard she left a red welt. The women sitting near me noticed this favorably, one of them saying it was obvious how moved the little girl was and how much she understood. At the conclusion of the *nadba*, several young women stood and brought coffee and sweets.

An “Authenticated” Women’s *Majles*

II Moharram 2001 CE/1422 AH. When we arrived, the door to the apartment was open, but as there were no men in sight, several women began removing their headscarves as they entered. Um Ali was rushing around greeting people and trying to seat everyone comfortably. Chairs were set up in the formal living room in three concentric circles, spilling out into the hallway and onto the adjacent balcony on the other side of the room. My friend and I found two empty chairs and squeezed in. There were around forty women present, ranging in age from very old to young brides with babies. A few mothers who had brought young children sat in the hallway so that they could keep half an eye on their kids, who were playing in a back room. Only four of us were not *mohajjabeh*. Everyone was dressed almost entirely in black, with only a few patches of white or gray here and there: a pattern on a scarf, embroidery trimming an *‘abayeh*, or perhaps a white shirt showing under a black blazer.

About fifteen minutes after we arrived, one of Um Ali's daughters walked around the room distributing tissues to everyone present. On that cue, Layla, the young woman in a full *'abayeh* who was reciting at this *majles*, picked up her microphone and began in a clear voice, leading everyone in a quiet recitation of *surat al-fatiha*, then *salli 'ala Mohammad wa ali Mohammad* thrice.³⁸ She then spoke a few sentences about the importance of Ashura, segueing directly into her recitation. Her tone grew more and more lamentative as she began to detail the *masa'eb*, but she remained clear relative to some of the other recitors I have heard and used only Lebanese dialect. As soon as her voice made the shift from normal speech to lamentation, several of the older women in the room began to weep loudly. Others buried their faces in their tissues; a few, mostly younger women, just lowered their heads, tears streaming silently from their eyes. In her lamentation, Layla detailed the *masa'eb* of the *sabaya* (the young women), and Zaynab in particular, after the Battle of Karbala. She described how they coped with the deaths, the trauma the women experienced as the men were all killed, and the way the survivors were paraded through the desert as prisoners being taken to Yazid, even though they were Ahl al-Bayt (members of the Prophet's family).

At this point, after ten or fifteen minutes, Layla rather abruptly broke her lamentation and returned to her normal speaking voice. The sobs in the room stopped with her, and everyone straightened their backs, lifted their heads, and wiped their tears. Layla then launched into a relatively long lecture about the corruption of Yazid and his followers, the intensity of the loss suffered by Zaynab and the *sabaya*, and the strength that Zaynab then demonstrated in standing up to Yazid and confronting him with his crimes. She then presented an explication of the saying of the Prophet, "Hosayn minni wa 'ana min Hosayn" (Hosayn is from/of me and I am from/of Hosayn). She explained that this meant that anyone who is a friend of Hosayn, who loves Hosayn, is in turn loved by the Prophet and loved by God. Likewise, anyone who stands against Hosayn stands against the Prophet and God.

Layla's voice then began to shake again and she returned to her lamentation. The women listening immediately resumed their weeping, as Layla detailed the approach and entrance of Zaynab and the *sabaya* into the prison of Yazid's palace. At one point, another prisoner hears that the new arrivals are from Medina and inquires, "How are Ahl al-Bayt?" Zaynab has to respond that they are all dead, but continues in a strong voice, "I, I am of the house of the Prophet, I am of Ahl al-Bayt, I am Zaynab, granddaughter of the Prophet Mohammad, sister of Imam Hosayn, I am Zaynab, *ana*

Zaynab!” This affirmation brought the sobs in the room to a crescendo, after which Layla quietly ended her recitation. Faces were dried and tissues thrown away as Layla blessed the house where we had gathered, dedicating the *majles* to the souls of the household’s dead. She then asked the women to recite *surat al-fatihah* three times, once for the dead of the household, once for the martyrs of Karbala, and once for the martyrs of the Islamic Resistance who had died fighting the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon.

Then she instructed us to stand and face the direction of Hosayn’s tomb, in order to recite *ziyarat al-Hosayn* in unison. Following this recitation, she introduced a *nadba*, calling upon the women to strike their chests in solidarity and grief, and reciting the chorus of the *nadba* twice so they would be able to learn it and sing along. During her introduction, Um Ali and her daughters stood and left the room. Layla then sang the verses, allowing the women to sing the chorus on their own in between, with everyone lightly tapping their chests (right hand to heart generally) or thighs in slow rhythm. That marked the end of the *majles*, and Um Ali’s daughters were waiting at the doorway of the living room with trays of coffee and sweets. Most of the women sat and socialized for fifteen minutes or so before beginning to leave. As always, women commented quietly on the voice of the reader. This time several older women noted that Layla didn’t have “the most moving voice” as compared to other readers; the response to this by one of the women’s daughters was “yes, but she was very clear.”

Juxtaposition

The first discernible difference between these *majales* concerns the participants’ ages. The participants at the traditional *majles* were mostly older women, while the authenticated *majles* was attended by women ranging widely in age. In general, privately held *majales* tend to have a wider age spectrum because women invite members of their extended families, as well as friends, colleagues, and neighbors, but the responses of participants often vary by age, with older women more prone to intense displays of emotionality. In part this reflects differing attitudes toward Ashura; traditional *majales* usually attract an older audience, while authenticated *majales* appeal to younger and more educated women. Yet several women also noted that they felt more comfortable “letting loose” in larger public *majales* because household *majales* had a more formal air to them. Public *majales* vary widely as well: in contrast to the participants at the public *majles* at the *hosayniyyeh* described here, attendance at the public *majles* sponsored nightly by Hezbollah in the southern suburbs of Beirut tends to consist of

younger women. Some of the younger women I spoke with questioned older women's tears. Nada, a young woman who attends one or two *majales* a day during Ashura, noted,

Some of these women just go to cry, but they don't know why they are crying or why they are supposed to be crying. It's just tradition and habit. They go from *majles* to *majles* all day long crying. The recitor begins, you begin to cry, this is how it is for them. And worse, some of them are crying about ones they have lost, not the Imam Hosayn.³⁹

When I asked her what the correct way of participating in a *majles* would be, she explained, "You are supposed to think about what the recitor is saying, and understand it, and then it will affect you and you will cry because of what you are learning, for the right reasons, because you understand the true tragedy of it."⁴⁰

The age difference between the recitors is significant as well, with older recitors more likely to present *majales* located toward the traditional end of the spectrum. In addition to placing less emphasis on the didactic aspects of the events of Karbala, older recitors are less likely to have trained in a theological seminary than are younger ones. While Hajjeh Fatemeh has trained in the local women's seminary, she began her training after she had already been leading *majales* for over a decade. She initially began reciting as a way to express the deep extent of her love for Ahl al-Bayt, who often came to her in dreams. Layla, on the other hand, came to lead *majales* through her studies at the seminary. She also reads to express her love for Ahl al-Bayt, but emphasizes the importance of teaching others in her community their history and learning lessons from their example.

Another distinction in these two *majales* is linked to a common tension in vocal expression in the performances of many recitors between clarity (*wudub*) and tenderness/compassion (*hanan*). Recitors who are considered traditional are generally praised for their ability to move people with the tone and quality of their voices, sacrificing clarity for emotionality. For this reason, traditional recitors sometimes shift into the Iraqi dialect during their lamentations. Listeners may not understand every word, but the manner of recitation and the beauty of symbolism is often moving in itself. As one woman explained, many, especially older, recitors had been trained in Najaf, in Iraq, and brought the dialect with them, but others choose to draw on the Iraqi dialect because "it is known that Iraqi is the dialect of compassion and longing," and the Iraqi tradition of Karbala poetry is considered richer than the Lebanese. In contrast, recitors who are concerned

that their audiences understand every word of the recitation and its lessons are apt to use only the Lebanese dialect to ensure comprehensibility.

In both these *majales*, indeed, in all *majales*, powerful levels of emotion are generated and maintained, yet, again, the extent and intensity of emotion varies. Women often take emotional cues from the recitor, though the locale matters as well, and ultimately, the differences are individual ones. In general, however, participants in authenticated *majales* are inclined to more tempered expressions of grief and sorrow. Differences in intensity of emotional expression are reflected in the relative lengths of time that recitors spend on the lamentation as compared with the sermon, and in the affect of the recitor herself. Every recitor I saw was clearly engaged emotionally in her recitation, reliving the events of Karbala with Ahl al-Bayt, yet older recitors—whether because of their longer experience with *majales* or because of differences in their approaches to Ashura—often seemed to enter a trancelike state in which their grief emanated from them to wrap itself around the other participants. The narrations of the *masa'eb* themselves differ somewhat as well; each recitor chooses the poetry she will include in her lamentation, and traditional recitors often narrate bloodier descriptions of the deaths, prolonged dialogue among Hosayn, Zaynab, and others who were with them, and what authenticated recitors often call “exaggerations.” As noted above, ultimately it is the order in which the two goals of *majales* are prioritized that differs; one emphasizing mourning for Ahl al-Bayt and its soteriological effects, and the other focusing on lessons to be learned from their example and applied to life today.

Sayyedah Zaynab: From Mourner to Revolutionary Role Model

By far the most striking difference in content between these *majales*—and what is for many women the most essential aspect of the revolutionary lesson that emerged from this transformation—lies in the reinterpretation of the behavior of Sayyedah Zaynab⁴¹ during and following the events of Karbala:

Before they would present Sayyedah Zaynab as crying, screaming, wailing, but, no, Zaynab set the stage . . . for revolution against tyranny. She didn't mourn Hosayn but thought how to save the rest and how to keep his message going. She was imprisoned, and yet she stood up with all confidence and spoke her point of view instead of feeling defeated. This changed our lives, we are now ashamed to feel

weak, or to feel sorrow. Whenever we are faced with a problem, we remember the words, and feel shamed if we complain. No, we instead feel strong and deal with it and move on.⁴²

Traditional narrations often portrayed Zaynab as buried in grief, pulling at her hair and shedding copious tears over the dead and dying. Representations that had depicted her as a plaintive mourner were transformed to renderings that accentuated her courage, strength, and resilience. Reciters of authenticated *majales*, along with their audiences, criticized these portrayals of Sayyedah Zaynab for their exaggerated emphasis on her tears:

Before, if you were listening at a *majles*, they would describe Sayyedah Zaynab as crying a lot and grieving and tearing her clothing. Now, the shaykhs, of course the experienced ones who know, said that this is something incorrect, and isn't mentioned at all. In fact, it's the opposite, she was in control of herself and patient, and she wasn't affected emotionally in this way.⁴³

Some readers will add talk for Sayyedah Zaynab, things she would not have said, I do not like it when they portray her as crying. Sayyedah Zaynab was strong, she stood up in the face of the oppressor, she was not weak, she told him that she was the victor, she considered herself the victor by the blood of Imam Hosayn. She is the victor in meaning. Sayyedah Zaynab proves that we did not lose.⁴⁴

In particular, three new characteristics emerge in the reformulation of Sayyedah Zaynab's behavior at Karbala: her strength of mind, her compassion and dedication to others, and her courage to speak out publicly. Consistent with their expected role as mothers of martyrs, Lebanese Shi'i women in this community frequently pointed to Zaynab's strength of mind and ability to endure the loss of all the men in her family. Numerous mothers who had lost sons in the Islamic Resistance and sisters who had lost brothers explained that they coped with their grief by emulating the equanimity of Sayyedah Zaynab as she watched her male relatives die. They often compared their losses to hers, and, in so doing, expressed feeling that they had lost little in comparison: "We didn't lose everyone, like Sayyedah Zaynab did. We have to say, if she could go on, why can't we? And we at least have role models; there is acknowledgment in society for the mothers of martyrs; the Sayyedah had none of that."⁴⁵

The other two qualities seen in Zaynab's example that were emulated by

women highlight her ability to act despite her grief and the turmoil of her surroundings. Women often compared their contributions to society with hers, observing that they had given relatively little, and citing her as one of the most salient models encouraging their active engagement with the welfare of their community. In the context of the southern suburbs of Beirut, this translates to hundreds of women participating visibly in the community by volunteering their time and energy to work in Islamic social service organizations (*jam'iyyat*). One woman who is active in a *jam'iyya* explained it thus:

Sayyedah Zaynab, after the martyrdom of Imam Hosayn, she brought up his children, all the orphans . . . she stood by their side, and lessened their pain, even though Imam Hosayn was her brother, when he was martyred, that was her brother who died, and the children of her brothers were martyred, and *her* children were martyred. . . . She was able to handle all the suffering that she experienced, and all the problems and pain, and at the same time she could help others. She has taught us that no matter what we experience . . . it will never be as much as what she dealt with. Because of this she is the model for our community work.⁴⁶

Finally, more than either of her other ideal attributes, Sayyedah Zaynab's outspokenness positions her as the "heroine of the heroes" for many Lebanese Shi'i women. They emphasize that she confronted Yazid during her imprisonment and spoke eloquently, accusing him publicly of his crimes, and that she played an indispensable role in spreading the message of Karbala and revolution after the Imam's martyrdom. As Salwa noted:

What would have happened if Imam Hosayn went to Karbala and was martyred and Sayyedah Zaynab wasn't there? Because the story always begins after the martyrdom. So Zaynab, she went and witnessed, and she was the one who carried the truth of Karbala with her. She stood before Yazid and spoke to him, and she showed the world the events that occurred when Imam Hosayn was martyred. So it was she who carried the message of revolution to others. It was she who made possible Ashura. This is the role of women.⁴⁷

In keeping with Zaynab's role in carrying the message of revolution to others, Lebanese Shi'i women contribute to the authentication of Ashura through their participation in *majales* and *masirat* and through their con-

stant informal conversations about Ashura narratives and events. Whether over coffee in a neighbor's kitchen or en route to or from a *majles* with a cousin or friend, women often debated the historical accuracy of details of the events of Karbala.⁴⁸ For example, sitting on the balcony one afternoon, Aziza and her neighbor discussed at length whether it could be corroborated that—as the recitor of a *majles* the day before had depicted—Imam Hosayn had indeed given his young daughter Ruqayya a cup before his death, telling her that it would turn black inside if he were killed. Some of these conversations were sparked by a listener's skepticism toward a specific recitor, others triggered by discord between the version of an episode recited in a *majles* just attended and the version broadcast over the radio in the car on the way home.

On another occasion, while walking home from a *majles* at a nearby mosque, Nahla questioned the shaykh who had recited, wondering, “Is it really possible that Imam Hosayn put his tongue on his son's and felt that it was dry like wood? I don't think I've ever heard any evidence for that, and I am not convinced that it is accurate. I am going to ask my uncle Hasan.”⁴⁹ Nahla did later relay her doubts to her uncle, who she felt was more knowledgeable regarding religious matters than she, and he confirmed her suspicions, assuring her that he was unaware of any evidence for that particular detail. Had his response not persuaded her—as occurred on other occasions—she would have telephoned the office of her *marja' al-taqlid* in pursuit of the most “authentic” rendition of the events possible. In these instances, women are not only participating actively in the commemoration of authenticated Ashura, but in the authentication process itself.

In many ways, these authenticated discourses about Sayyedah Zaynab set a standard of behavior to which many Lebanese Shi'i women aspire today. Authenticated Ashura and Zaynab's role during and following Karbala have become one of the most significant narrative frameworks that women draw upon in their daily lives. As articulated emphatically by Hajjeh Um Ali:

Now, whenever I am faced with some problem, I ask myself, am I going to act like Zaynab or not? Do you understand what this means? If someone knocks at my door am I going to help him or not? Am I going to feel with others or not, am I going to give even more of myself or not, am I going to have the courage to face oppression or not? Do you understand how important this is?⁵⁰

Closing Considerations

Within this transformation of Ashura practices and meanings in Lebanon, and the juxtaposition within the community of what is “traditional” with what is “authenticated,” lies a paradox—seen in the conflation of what is modern with what is authentic. The condemnation of drawing one’s own blood during *latam*, the importance placed upon historical and textual accuracy over myth, the emphasis on revolutionary meaning over soteriological aims, and the active incorporation of women into both ritual and public community life are all aspects of the transformation that are cited as modern by members of this community or that draw upon distinctly modern concepts. Paradoxically, it is through these modern concepts and practices that advocates of authenticated Ashura strive to assert authenticity itself. To its advocates, authenticated Ashura is both more modern and more authentic than tradition.

Most interesting, especially with regard to the participation of women, is that this process is in part self-conscious. Women express a keen awareness that “the West” is looking at them *as women* in particular, scrutinizing how they are “treated” and what their societal roles are. One member of the Hezbollah Women’s Committee observed, in a tone both amused and curious, that “all these Westerners come to interview us because they are looking to see if Islam is modern, and ‘how the women are treated’ or ‘what the women do’ has become the sign of which cultures are modern.”⁵¹ Another woman, a volunteer at two local *jam‘iyyat*, one of them affiliated with Hezbollah and the other independent, iterated:

We Muslims in general are accused of being reactionary, going backward, we are accused of concealing women, that women must be only housewives, that the *jihad* of women is nothing. But if we go and research in the history of Islam, what do we find? That Sayyedah Zaynab, peace be upon her, the daughter of Amir al-Mu’minin [Imam Ali, lit. Prince of Believers], whose father and brothers walked around her so that no one would see even her shadow, this Zaynab, she went to Karbala with Imam Hosayn. He knew that he was going to be martyred, and Zaynab went with him. And it was Zaynab who was considered the spreader of Karbala’s message. A woman! So why are we accused like this?⁵²

The incorporation of women into Ashura as active participants in the *masirat*, and the reformulation of Zaynab as the ideal role model for women

to emerge from the Ashura narrative, have occurred in part self-consciously and represent an active engagement with discourses and arguments about Islam, gender, and modernness that extend beyond Shi'ism and Lebanon. At the same time, within their community, women are utilizing the salient example of Sayyedah Zaynab as an outspoken, strong, and compassionate activist to push the boundaries of what is acceptable and expected for pious Lebanese Shi'i women.⁵³

The unprecedented public participation of women in community service through numerous *jam'iyyat* provides an excellent example of the effects of the transformed Karbala paradigm on women's lives.⁵⁴ While discussing the importance of their community work—whether explaining their own reasons for volunteering, encouraging new recruits, or bemoaning what they perceived as the insufficiency of charity or volunteerism—activist women frequently drew upon Zaynab's model. In doing so, they posited themselves simultaneously as good moral Muslim women *and* active and necessary participants in the public welfare of their community.

Notes

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1. Here I use the phrase "Lebanese Shi'i Islamic movement" loosely to refer to what began with the "Movement of the Deprived" (*harakat al-mahrumin*), founded in 1974 by Sayyed Musa al-Sadr. This was taken up in different forms after his disappearance by the political parties Harakat Amal and Hezbollah, as well as by his sister, Sayyedah Rabab al-Sadr, and Sayyed Mohammad Hosayn Fadlallah, among others. For more on the history of this movement, as well as the history of the Shi'a in Lebanon, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986); Majed Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a Community* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992); and Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

2. Shi'is who argued for the authentication of Ashura described this process as the establishment of *al-ma'na al-haqiqi* or *al-fahm al-haqiqi* (the true/correct/authentic meaning or understanding) of Ashura through reexamining and reprioritiz-

ing historical texts. Indeed, people pointed to scholarly attempts to ascertain the most accurate history of the events surrounding the Imam's martyrdom in an effort to combat what they viewed as a misguided mythologization of Ashura.

3. It is difficult to ascertain who participated in these traditional Ashura commemorations. Nonparticipants include non-Shi'i Lebanese, though political leaders would sometimes attend a commemoration held at the home of a prominent Shi'i elite. Nonparticipants also include Shi'i Lebanese who did not commemorate Ashura. I hesitate to call them "nonreligious Shi'a" because that would require a longer discussion of the multiple valences of being *mutadayyin*, "religious."

4. The institutionalization of sectarianism in the Lebanese political system was accompanied by a more subtle process through which the category of sect became increasingly important to the groups themselves. As noted by Suad Joseph, "The Politicization of Religious Sects in Borj Hammoud, Lebanon" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1975), a sectarian political leadership supported the establishment of sectarian social institutions (e.g., schools, hospitals) rather than public secular ones, so that sect became a means of accessing resources. Shi'a underrepresentation in the government led to poverty as government funds were routed into other sectarian communities. Differential population growth added to their underrepresentation so that by the late 1960s, class differentiation in Lebanon fell largely along sectarian lines. See Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), and Nazih Richani, *Dilemmas of Democracy and Political Parties in Sectarian Societies: The Case of the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon, 1949-1996* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998). While there were elites from every sect, the majority of Shi'is fell into the lower classes. For more on the history of Shi'i Muslims in Lebanon, see Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*; Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon*; Halawi, *A Lebanon Defied*; Michael Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon* (New York: Random House, 1968); and Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*.

5. For details regarding Sayyid Musa and the Movement of the Deprived, as well as the linking of Ashura to this social movement, see Ajami, *The Vanished Imam*; Michel M. Mazzaoui, "Shi'ism and Ashura in South Lebanon," in *Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski, 228-237 (New York: New York University Press, 1979); and Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*.

6. Sayyed Musa disappeared while on a visit to Libya in 1978. While many accept the likelihood that he was assassinated at that time, there are still those in Lebanon who carefully speak of him only in the present tense, in the belief that he will return. This is viewed by others in the community as an unorthodox conflation of his disappearance with that of Imam al-Mahdi, the Twelfth Imam, who is to return on Judgment Day.

7. Amal began in 1975 as a militia extension of the Movement of the Deprived; the latter name was eventually dropped and "Harakat Amal" was used to refer to a larger political organization (Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a*). Hezbollah was founded in 1982 by a group that broke away from Harakat Amal and the Amal-dominated Lebanese National Resistance, citing their overly secular nature and their ineffective efforts at resisting the Israeli occupation. However, Hezbollah did not make its first public statement or announce the establishment of the Islamic Resistance (*al-muqawama al-islamiyya*) until 1985.

8. Ibid., 41. The linking of the Battle of Karbala to politics has a long history. Mayel Baktash, “Ta’ziyeh and Its Philosophy,” in *Ta’ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski, 95–120 (New York: New York University Press, 1979), notes that the first public community commemorations of Karbala—sponsored by Sultan Mu’izz al-Dawla in 963 CE/352 AH, just two years after he declared his opposition to the existing caliphate—were “allegorical affairs, redolent of revolution” (96).

9. Kamran Aghaie, “The Karbala Narrative in Shi’i Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s–1970s,” *The Journal of Islamic Studies* 12:2 (2001), 151–176; Mary Elaine Hegland, “Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village,” in *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi’ism from Quietism to Revolution*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie, 218–235 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983c); Mary Elaine Hegland, “Islamic Revival or Political and Cultural Revolution? An Iranian Case Study,” in *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism*, ed. R. Antoun and M. E. Hegland, 194–219 (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987); and Nikki R. Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

10. For a comprehensive journalist’s overview of the events of the Lebanese civil war, see Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

11. Throughout the occupation, Shi’i villages in the south and the Bekaa suffered regular bombardment. Additionally, most of the participants (and martyrs) in the military resistance to the Israeli occupation were Shi’i Muslims, organized primarily through Hezbollah’s Islamic Resistance, but also, though to a much lesser extent, through Harakat Amal and other Lebanese parties. In effect, war did not end for this community in 1990, as it did for much of Lebanon, but continued until May 2000.

12. Since its establishment in 1982, Hezbollah has grown from a loosely structured military resistance movement into an organized and legitimated political party, with members in the Lebanese parliament, numerous local elected officials, a newspaper, radio and television stations, and numerous varied social organizations, in addition to the Islamic Resistance. For more on the party’s development and political philosophy and goals, see Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu’llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).

13. When Ashura was primarily a rural folk tradition for Shi’i Muslims in Lebanon, it was centered in Nabatieh, and today, people still pour into the town during Ashura, to participate in *majales* and the traditional mourning procession and to watch what has become a spectacle. For another description of Ashura in Nabatieh, see Augustus Richard Norton and Ali Safa, “Ashura in Nabatiyye,” *Middle East Insight* 15 (2000), 21–28.

14. It is this scene that has contributed to the sensationalization and exoticization of Ashura in Nabatieh, and the flood of reporters and tourists that fills the town each year. The opening sentence of the Lebanese English-language newspaper *The Daily Star*’s article on Ashura in Nabatieh provides an apt example of this sensationalism: “The Shiites of Nabatieh commemorated the 10th day of Ashura in traditionally gruesome fashion Wednesday, with thousands of chanting, blood-soaked mourners thronging the town square” (Nicholas Blanford, “One

Way or the Other, Ashura Brings Blood,” *The Daily Star* (Beirut), April 5, 2001, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/05-04-01/art2.htm>).

15. During Ashura in Nabatieh in 2000, I did see six women who had participated in *latam*. My hosts in Nabatieh seemed as surprised as I was to see this, but they later explained that these women had probably shed their blood in fulfillment of vows made earlier in the year.

16. Given the strict gender segregation seen in many Shi'i communities with regard to religious ritual, it is worth making the small point here that the less strict gendering of Lebanese society is reflected in Lebanese Shi'i ritual. On gender segregation, see Hegland, “Two Images of Husain”; Mary Elaine Hegland, “Flagellation and Fundamentalism: (Trans)forming Meaning, Identity, and Gender through Pakistani Women’s Rituals,” *American Ethnologist* 25 (1998a), 240–266; Mary Elaine Hegland, “The Power Paradox in Muslim Women’s Majales: Northwest Pakistani Mourning Rituals as Sites of Contestation over Religious Politics, Ethnicity, and Gender,” *Signs* 23:2 (1998b), 391–427; Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965); Robert A. Fernea and Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, “Variation in Religious Observance among Islamic Women,” in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis in Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie, 385–401 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); Azam Torab, “Piety as Gendered Agency: A Study of Jalaseh Ritual Discourse in an Urban Neighborhood in Iran,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (1996), 235–252; and David Pinault, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave, 2001). While *majales* are gender-segregated—with women’s and men’s *majales* held separately or with women seated in a separate section of the building or room (e.g., in the Hezbollah public *majales*, women fill the rear half of the tent, while men sit in the front half)—men and women mix relatively freely outside while watching *masirat*. Interestingly, this may be particularly true of traditional Ashura, as several older informants expressed looking forward to Ashura in Nabatieh each year during their youth because of the “carnavalesque” atmosphere and the freedom they had to walk around the town looking at members of the opposite sex.

17. Ayatollah Khomeini frowned upon the practice before his death in 1989, and Ayatollah Khamenei officially condemned shedding blood during Moharram rituals in a 1994 fatwa, citing not only self-injury but also the negative image of Islam that these rituals project both within and outside the Islamic community. See Houchang E. Chehabi, “Ardabil Becomes a Province: Center-Periphery Relations in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1997), 235–253, and Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*.

18. Indeed, the Islamic Health Committee’s offices in the southern suburbs report receiving so many blood donations during Ashura that they have a large surplus each year immediately after the commemoration; over the past five years, donations during this time have increased exponentially. According to Blanford, “One Way or the Other,” in Nabatieh itself, Hezbollah has set up a blood donation center on the tenth of Moharram since 1998, attracting over five hundred donors in 2000. The call for people to go to blood banks instead of shedding their own blood is also seen in Pinault’s discussion in *Horse of Karbala* of local criticism to self-flagellation during Moharram in India.

19. The classic examples of women's mobilization as part of larger national or religious revolutionary or resistance movements are Iran and Algeria. See also Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), on women and the Palestinian national resistance, and Hegland, "Power Paradox," on women in the Pakistani Shi'i Islamist movement.

20. Several people who view self-bleeding as un-Islamic only use the standard Arabic term *latam* to refer to the authenticated form of the practice to further distinguish between styles that do and do not involve the shedding of blood. They then refer to the style involving blood only by the colloquial phrase "hitting *haydar*." Also, in spoken Arabic, authenticated *latam* is often simply described by the verb *nadab*, to mourn or lament, with context indicating the specific act that is referred to (e.g., striking oneself versus singing an elegy).

21. This specific style of *latam* is a hybrid of faster-paced Iranian and slower-paced Iraqi styles, and seems to have become the dominant style of *latam* for Hezbollah as well as followers of Sayyid Fadlallah within the past six or seven years.

22. *'Abayeh* is the colloquial Arabic word for the Iranian-style long loose black cloak women wear over their hair and clothing, leaving only the face and hands visible. In Lebanon, wearing an *'abayeh* often signifies either membership in or strong identification with Hezbollah or relation through blood or marriage to a prominent religious figure (though not all Hezbollah women wear the *'abayeh*; some opt for the generally more common "*shar'i* dress" instead, which consists of a long coat-dress worn with a scarf [*hijab*] carefully pinned to show only the face). It is far more rare to see a Lebanese Shi'i woman wearing a face veil (*fish*), and women who do are sometimes criticized by others in the community for behaving as though they are as "important" as the women of the Prophet's family.

23. A *qari'* is a "recitor" (especially of religious texts) or a "reader." Most recitors of Ashura *majales* carry and refer to a text, often a notebook or their own notes, but they seem to move fluidly between reading and recitation.

24. With the exception of prominent religious and political figures, such as Sayyid Muhammad Hosayn Fadlallah, or unless otherwise noted, all names have been changed and identities disguised.

25. Advocates of authenticated Ashura commonly use the opposition "backward" (*motakballef*) versus "cultured" (*muthaqqaf*) to structure contrasts between traditional and authenticated commemorations and understandings.

26. Interview with "Shaykh Abbas," June 18, 2001.

27. *Hajjeh* is a term of respect used to address women who have completed the *hajj*, the female counterpart to "Hajj." However, it is sometimes used as a generic term of respectful address for all older women.

28. Interview with "Hajjeh Dalal," September 11, 2000.

29. As used in common parlance in this community *'ajr* denotes divine recompense—afterlife credits one can accumulate through good deeds, among them mourning Hosayn, that will be added up on Judgment Day.

30. See Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*, and David Pinault, *The Shi'ites, Ritual, and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992b), for detailed discussion of the intercessionary importance of mourning the events of Karbala in Shi'ism; Aghaie, "Karbala Narrative," also discusses the soteriological importance of Karbala in the traditional Moharram narrative paradigm.

31. Forms of *latam* that draw blood, including flagellation, are often seen as embodiments of grief leading to intercession, or as the demonstration of solidarity with the Imam. Vernon James Schubel, “The Muharram Majles: The Role of a Ritual in the Preservation of Shi‘a Identity,” in *Muslim Families in North America*, ed. S. McIrvin Abu-Laban E. Waugh and R. Burckhardt Qureshi (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991), expresses this clearly: “This is part of the reason behind such acts as flagellation and firewalking—a desire to demonstrate physically the willingness to suffer the kinds of wounds that would have been incurred at Karbala” (122). I would add “regret” to these meanings—regret stemming from an identification with Shi‘i Muslims from Kufa who did not stand with Hosayn, but also encompassing a generalized remorse for all the times in one’s life that one did not live up to Hosayn’s example.

32. Conversation with a reformist shaykh, June 21, 2001.

33. Again, the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and what Hegland, “Two Images of Husain,” calls the “‘Imam Husain as Example’ framework” fueled this reinterpretation within the Lebanese context. Lebanese Shi‘a supporters and members of Hezbollah persist in using the term “revolutionary” to discuss their goals as well as those of Imam Hosayn at Karbala—this despite Hezbollah’s official withdrawal of the goal of staging a revolution to establish an Islamic state in Lebanon during the 1992 election campaigns. The revolutionary or political meanings and uses of the Karbala paradigm in various contexts have also been discussed by Aghaie, “Karbala Narrative”; Mary-Jo Delvecchio Good and Byron J. Good, “Ritual, the State, and the Transformation of Emotional Discourse in Iranian Society,” *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 12 (1988), 43–63; Hegland, “Two Images of Husain”; Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World*; Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985); and Gustav Thaiss, “Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Husain,” in *Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie, 349–366 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972a), among others.

34. In his explication of the concept of “revolution,” Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), reminds us that while the notion seems to be a natural part of the world, the concept of revolution as “an attempt rationally to design a new political order” did not emerge until after 1789 (1). No doubt the linking of Islam and revolution—originally in Iran—owes much to Ali Shari‘ati and other Islamic intellectuals who were much influenced by Marxism and the political left.

35. Interview with “Hajjeh Fatemeh,” March 21, 2001.

36. Ibid.

37. This description of a *majles*, as well as the one that follows, is taken from my field notes.

38. “*Salli ‘ala Mohammad wa ali Mohammad*”—a phrase that is an element of prayer—is here used as a salutation that assists in the shift to a sacred framework. It is commonly invoked at intervals during sermons or speeches given by religious/political leaders as well.

39. Conversation with “Nada” after a *majles*, March 30, 2001.

40. Ibid.

41. The importance of Fatemeh as a role model for women—with her ideal char-

acteristics being piety and unfaltering support of her husband and sons—has been noted, as well as the shift from Fatemeh to Zaynab as the ideal for women that accompanied the Islamic Revolution and the revolutionizing of Shi'ism more generally. See Nikki R. Keddie, "Women in Iran since 1979," *Social Research* 67 (2000), 405–438, and Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*. Interestingly, Fatemeh was only occasionally mentioned in the *majales* I attended over 2000 and 2001 in Lebanon, and rarely mentioned by women as their primary role model. Instead, women almost always mentioned Zaynab.

42. Interview with "Hajjeh Um Hadi," February 15, 2001.

43. Conversation with "Hajjeh Rula," a recitor, after a *majles*, April 10, 2000.

44. Interview with "Suha," June 14, 2001.

45. Group interview at the Martyrs' Association, January 30, 2001.

46. Interview with "Hajjeh Dalal," September 11, 2000.

47. Group interview at the Martyrs' Association.

48. While some of these conversations no doubt were prompted by the necessity of assuring that the anthropologist present recorded the "correct" version of the Imam's martyrdom, as indeed I was urged to do, heated conversations during which I was not present were frequently related to me after the fact, and on several occasions I joined such discussions already in progress.

49. Conversation with "Nahla," March 12, 2000.

50. Interview with "Hajjeh Um Hadi."

51. Comment made at an open discussion held by the Hezbollah Women's Committee on women and community service in Lebanon, February 24, 2000.

52. Group interview at the Emdad Association, February 24, 2000.

53. For discussion of how women use ritual settings and activities to open new social and cultural spaces for themselves, see Hegland, "Power Paradox," an elegant work on Peshawar women's utilization of participation in Moharram rituals for self-expression and empowerment, and Torab, "Piety as Gendered Agency," an analysis of how Iranian women use prayer meetings to transform gender constructs. For discussions of the limits and expectations of gendered activism, see Sondra Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996), and Peteet, *Gender in Crisis*.

54. This is not to say that both women's participation in the community and the example set by Sayyedah Zaynab do not remain clearly bounded, in keeping with beliefs about the essential nature of women as nurturing. Yet, when clarifying the different natures of the sexes, Lebanese Shi'i women always emphasized that different did not mean differently valued. They actively espoused gender equity (*'adala*) as opposed to gender equality (*masawa*), with the former term embracing difference and the latter entailing "sameness." In doing so, they promoted feminist interpretations of Islam that emphasized what Leila Ahmad, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), calls the "ethical egalitarianism" of Islam. See also Annabelle Böttcher, "Im Schatten des Ayatollahs: Schiitische Feministische in Libanon am Anfang" (In the Shadow of the Ayatollah: Shii Feminist Theology in Lebanon and the Beginning), *Neue Zuercher Zeitung*, March 7, 2001, 5.