

Frank Korom

*This paper explores the dialectic between local ritual practices and globalizing forces within the context of an annual Shi'ī Muslim observance performed on the island of Trinidad. Hosay, as the rite is known on the island, is the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. The performance is central to the Shi'ī ritual calendar throughout the world, but takes form in unique ways wherever it is practiced. In the Caribbean, the rituals for Husayn display both local innovations and familiar symbolic manifestations from other parts of the world. The article suggests that this bringing together of local and global concerns is part of an ongoing process that does not necessarily give priority to one over the other. Instead, the two interact dialogically to result in a unique form of localized practice that defines both the community of worshippers and the nation within which it is situated.*

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### LOCAL KNOWLEDGE(S)

The concept of the “local” developed in the ethnographic fields as a way of offsetting ethnocentrism and the biases associated with comparative studies of cultural phenomena, as pointed out by Melville Herskovits (1973) and his students (Fernandez 1990).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it remedied the dangerous tendency toward the construction of universals in the human sciences. From the turn of the century—that is, from Malinowski onward—the notion of the specificity of cultural traits allowed for the gradual emergence of an anthropological theory of relativity, moving the discipline away from the banal generalizations about the nature of culture that plagued nineteenth-century speculation. Pike’s (1954) emic categories, it was thought, were better ways to understand the indigenous meanings attributed to things by the specific people under investigation.<sup>2</sup> Indeed they did, for a while, at least, and this emphasis allowed Clifford Geertz to craft carefully a sub-field based largely on culturally relative epistemologies; what he termed “local knowledge” (1983). One obvious constraint pointed out early on in the debate between relativists and generalists is that cultural relativism emphasizes difference at the expense of similarities and, in its most extreme form, negates comparison altogether (cf. Downs 1971:15-28). Extreme cultural relativity, obviously, is not in line with the establishment of any general theory of culture, and naturally has led to a wide range of criticism from humanists searching for common threads woven across national, linguistic and ethnic borders.

More recently, the concept of the local has been problematized by a number of writers dissatisfied with the idea of a bounded, monolithic and superorganic culture impervious to external influences. The transnational anthropology advocated by Appadurai (1991) and others (Hannerz 1987) has taught social

scientists to decenter the notion of culture, allowing us to seek out regional, national and international connections within what Hannerz has termed the “global ecumene” (1989).<sup>3</sup> Amy Shuman, for example, in her article titled “Dismantling Local Culture,” draws on Frantz Fanon’s (1990) taxonomy of marked and unmarked categories in order to demonstrate that the local always serves “larger-than-local” interests because of its participation in a politics of culture that addresses issues of global relevance. As she states (1993: 357), “any definition of the local is marked and involves a contest with something outside it; even claims for homogeneity serve larger-than-local interests.”<sup>4</sup> In a sense, a marked category such as “Caribbean Islam” tends to be marginalized and labeled as “less authentic” due to its marked status (cf. Korom 1994a; Thaiss 1994). The issue of authenticity is, of course, a highly contested terrain in the politics of culture, becoming even more heated when religion is evoked to advocate or condemn the canonical nature of a given practice, rite or custom (cf. Williams 1990). Ritual loci may thus become sites of contestation where global concerns are debated and negotiated for political, economic and ideological reasons.

Having stated this, the problem of positing a relationship between the “local” and the “global” is still something that has vexed scholars of Islam for quite some time, and precious little has been written on possible ways to reconcile these categories. Dale Eickelman’s programmatic essay “The Study of Islam in Local Contexts” (1982) signaled a move in the direction of theorizing about the local while maintaining a sense of the global. As he writes (Eickelman 1982: 1-2),

The main challenge for the study of Islam in local contexts is to describe and analyze how the universalistic principles of Islam

have been realized in various social and historical contexts without representing Islam as a seamless essence on the one hand or as a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices on the other.

But there is still a great deal to be done before we have an adequate working model to account for the diverse ways in which specific Islamic communities maintain a sense of local practice even as they participate in the transnational flow of pan-Islamic philosophical values and performance traditions. Herein lies the methodological need to bring together the work of the textual scholar in the field of the history of religions and the contextual scholar of ethnography (cf. el-Zein 1977). However, the role of the "politics of place" in the study of Islamic communities, as noted by Abu-Lughod (1989), has hindered the development of an interdisciplinary field of study equipped to deal with the zigzagging contours of the local and the global.<sup>5</sup>

Eickelman's statement is certainly valid, needing critical attention in specific contexts throughout the world. Nonetheless, his emphasis on class relationships as the definitive marker between the "transnational" and the "local" hints at earlier unsubstantiated theories having to do with the unbridgeable divide between other questionable categories such as "classical" and "folk." It seems to me that a more appropriate direction to take the study of the "local" is toward the concept of ethnicity, since sociocultural realities in Islam, or any other so-called "world religion," are never simply a question of economics or hierarchical status. This is especially true when dealing with diasporic communities, in which a broad range of contested social matters (e.g., language, rites, customs, employment, marriage patterns etc.) interact in historically and geographically specific ways to create sets of indigenous meanings that force us to question universal models of culture and society on hermeneutic grounds alone (Mall 1995). Yet there is also a continuing need to situate locally deduced meanings in their multicultural and religious settings (cf. Lawrence 1995).

I personally do not see an opposition between the agendas of universalists and particularists. Instead, I would have to agree with Geertz's most recent statement on the matter. In "Local Knowledge and Its Limits," he argues that what we need instead of dichotomies is "a shifting focus of particularity" that acknowledges differences between one sort of local knowledge and another (1992: 129). In this essay I intend to

describe the way that one small community of Muslims on the island-nation of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago creates its own peculiar brand of local knowledge through discourses concerning the construction of ritual space and the subsequent presentation of self and community. But in so doing, I also wish to suggest some of the ways in which Trinidadian Shi'i Muslims theologically connect with their global brethren.

I do not want to argue that the local succumbs to the global in Trinidad, nor do I want to claim that global has had no noticeable effect on the local. I merely wish to point out that there is a crisscrossing of influences, ideas and practices that force us to consider the local in a broader transnational context. However, this context is difficult to unravel, and must be approached cautiously in all of its cultural complexity to understand precisely where local concerns intersect with the global. These occasional intersections, mostly found on the ideological level, do not necessarily translate as permanent convergences, as I shall suggest in my conclusion; rather, I view them as moments of reflexivity during which local actors perform within larger global dramas that fit into a transnational paradigm of Shi'i ritual action. Before taking up the latter point at some length, a few words about the Indo-Trinidadian community's history is necessary to provide the broader context for my description and analysis.

#### COMING TO TRINIDAD *INCOGNITO*

When I refer to "Trinidadian Shi'i Muslims," I point, of course, to a small portion of the East Indian population, for, as far as I am aware, no Afro-Trinidadian Muslims claim to be descendents of an original Shi'i Muslim community in Trinidad. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (1994a:137-138), it is even difficult to establish the Shi'i origins of select members of the East Indian Muslim community. East Indians arrived in Trinidad after successive colonial infrastructures had already been firmly developed. The Spanish legacy in Trinidad left a well established estate or plantation system to be exploited by later colonialists.<sup>6</sup> For the first 35 years of British rule, African slaves provided the necessary labor force to keep the large agricultural complex in good and profitable working order, but after abolition in 1834 a dire need for laborers arose. East Indians filled this gap. Laborers from the subcontinent had already started arriving in other regions of the Caribbean rim (e.g., British Guiana) as early as 1838, but the first did not arrive in Trinidad until 1845. Figures compiled for the period

between 1851 and 1908 suggest that a total of 129, 224 contracted Indians landed in Trinidad. Most chose to remain on the island after their period of indenture; less than 12% returned to the homeland.<sup>7</sup> Today, Indo-Trinidadians are the Republic's second largest ethnic group, comprising roughly 36% of the total population in the 1960's, and quickly approaching the 50% mark in the 1990's. Of these, approximately 70% are Hindu, 15% are said to belong to various Christian denominations and the remaining 15% are Muslim, all being subsumed under a general category of Sunni.

The Shi'ah, on the other hand, have not received separate mention in the historical record. Based on a perusal of numerous official documents, Robert Smith, for example, misleadingly claims that there are no Shi'ah on the island.<sup>8</sup> Given the fact that many Shi'ah practice a theological principal termed *taqiyya* (dissimulation) to guard against religious persecution or discrimination, it is easy to see how Smith could have made this oversight.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it is impossible to know what percentage of Trinidad's Muslims adhere to Shi'i doctrine. We do know, however, that Sunni Muslims were among the earliest immigrants, and a number of Shi'i adherents must have been among them.<sup>10</sup> My working assumption is that some Indian Shi'ah were recruited along with people of other faiths early on, arriving as generic Muslims who only later asserted their sectarian religious identity; and even then, only in subtle ways, if and when it suited their collective aspirations.

Even though we can never be sure, a Shi'i oral historian (whose name must remain confidential) residing in St. James suggested to me that a male ancestor nurtured the *muḥarram* ideals in his mind during the long voyage from Calcutta. After arriving, he quickly took steps to establish the emotive expression of sorrow for Husayn by introducing the construction of cenotaphs and the beating of drums. His view is consonant with one observer's contention that Islamic culture was initially carried in the "hearts and memories" of those who were transported (Smith 1963:xxix). Although the exigencies of life on the plantations did not allow for the easy maintenance of cultural norms and religious praxis, such inward preservation allowed Muslims to reestablish their own sociocultural patterns in a timely fashion once their period of indenture had expired. At any rate, while other religious and cultural practices seemed subdued under the constraints of indenture, *Hosay* continued to be observed persistently on a number of plantations (cf. Kale 1994:83-86).

After the plantation period, Muslims and Hin-

dus alike began squatting on unused land. Some founded permanent villages in low-cost areas, giving them Indian names. With the economic freedom stimulated by revenues generated from wet rice cultivation, Indians were able to exercise a great deal of cultural autonomy. Living together, working side-by-side without a great deal of economic constraints, produced the appropriate conditions for an attempted replication of Indian culture on Trinidadian soil, implicated in the reestablishment and steady growth of Indic kinship patterns, sociopolitical organizations and religious institutions. Inhabiting inaccessible rural areas also allowed Indians to minimize their contact with non-Indians. Thus, East Indians began to reassert their cultural and ethnic identities through an informal policy of isolationism.<sup>11</sup>

Isolationism seems to have been even truer of Muslims when we compare their behavioral patterns with Hindus and Christians of East Indian descent. Aside from the minimally required economic and political interaction necessary for survival, Muslims did not mix very much with non-Indians because they were especially concerned about religious conversion and acculturation. Furthermore, during the years immediately following the end of the indenture period, they rarely lived in urban centers. Living "in the bush" aided Muslims in forestalling the impact of external forces that could have potentially influenced the realms of belief, ritual practice and family structure. Muslims thus lived in an isolated sociocultural milieu, having extensive contact only with other East Indians. Due to this early self-imposed insularity in which most East Indians lived generally, the *Hosay* observance slowly began to acquire an ethnic and cultural flavor that reflected coexistence and transcended Muslim/Hindu communal differences. This seems to have been the case onward from the plantation period.

In the diasporic situation, cut off from the homeland, through a process of what I have elsewhere called "cultural amnesia" (Korom 1994a:139), time slowly continued to erode the memories of the first generation of Indo-Trinidadians' early experiences. The gradual decline of collective memory is due to a number of complicated and interrelated factors, ranging from the constant pressure for Christianization prior to independence in 1962 and absorption into the majority Afro-Trinidadian community afterward, to a lack of formal religious education.<sup>12</sup> These pressures, intensified by the change brought about with modernity and growing religious factionalism in all communities after World War II, gave rise to a renewed sense of political weakness and uncertainty of belief among East

Indians. This, in turn, led to further indigenous interrogation of an Indian identity, already being reconstructed from earlier fragments.

A post-war oil boom (cf. Vertovec 1990), however, created new jobs, which resulted in a more mobile East Indian community. Mobility then led to greater interaction with non-Indians, allowing for a heightened degree of ideological and ritual cross-fertilization. Simultaneously, urban ideas were penetrating deeper into the bush as communication channels became more efficient with the increased availability of electronic media.<sup>13</sup> These processes gave rise to the need for a reasonable amount of free play in interpretation to reconcile the incongruity between self-perceived notions of unchanging tradition and the growing need for innovation as a strategy for cultural adaptation (Korom 1999). While cultural adaptation took place in virtually every sector of public life, it was most visible in outward religious practices. Thus even as the pious imaginings of East Indian Muslims continued to transform aspects of ritual and belief, the need to come to terms with being citizens in an emerging nation-state grew into an important concern. No doubt, the concern to be simultaneously Trinidadian and Muslim conditioned the way that the island's Shi'ah presented their religious practices and secular culture to the world-at-large. External ritual was—and still is—a major vehicle for the self-conscious presentation of local culture to the global community of believers. Moreover, rites central to a whole community, being expressions of what Connerton (1989) has termed “embodied culture,” are one of the most powerful ways to keep a particular ethnoreligious group's traditions alive and dynamic.

### AN OLD RITE IN A NEW WORLD

The central ritual complex for the Shi'ah of Trinidad, as for the worldwide community of Shi'ah, is the series of events performed during the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar, Muharram. In Trinidad, the rites are collectively known as *Hosay*. *Hosay* is derived from the name of Husayn or Husayn, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson (the son of his daughter), who was killed during the quintessential battle over political succession at Karbala, Iraq in 61AH/680CE. The outcome of this historical event led to rapid factionalism within Islam, resulting in a majority who believed that succession should be a democratic process based on a vote (the Sunni) and a minority insisting that sacred and political lineage must pass through the family of the Prophet (the Shi'ah). The narrative of Husayn's martyrdom eventually acquired a mythi-

cal quality for Shi'i Muslims throughout the world and his suffering became a paradigm for both religious and political life (Ayoub 1978).

The “Karbala paradigm,” as it has come to be known by scholars of Islam,<sup>14</sup> is a subtle force that underlies much Shi'i ethos in the modern world. The Karbala paradigm can be understood in Kenneth Burke's terms as a “representative anecdote,” or as Roger Abrahams explains it, “a proposition, not necessarily in narrative form, that is so conventionally recognized and understood that it can organize and analyze experience in common for those who draw on it together.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, every aspect of the pious Shi'i Muslim's life revolves around this anecdotal paradigm and is ordered by it. But the expression of the Karbala paradigm varies through time and space, even as it suggests itself for comparative speculation. Such variation in meaning and interpretation can best be gauged through a survey of the annual cultural performances that commemorate the martyrdom of Husayn.

Each year during the first ten days of the Muharram, Shi'i Muslims throughout the world join in a common observance: the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. Husayn is the primary figure in Shi'i theology, whose soteriological role is paramount because of his ability to intervene on behalf of individuals on the final day of judgement (*qiyāmat*). This dramatic commemoration, known variously as *ta'zīyeh* in Iran, *muḥarram* in India and *Hosay* in Trinidad, is a focal point in the religious life of the Shi'i mourning community. Because Imam Husayn's suffering and death is seen as the most important tragedy in history, the annual reactualization of the event is the most important Shi'i ritual observance of the year. In the words of Nobel Prize winner in literature, Elias Canetti (1978), the suffering of Husayn and its commemoration “...becomes the very core of the Shi'i faith...” (146), which is “a religion of lament more concentrated and more extreme than any to be found elsewhere.... No faith has ever laid greater emphasis on lament. It is the highest religious duty, and many times more meritorious than any other good work” (153).

It is on the ideological level that the rites are transnationally construed, connecting pious practitioners in local contexts to a common core of worldwide practice. *Muḥarram*, in this sense, is a metahistorical phenomenon, since the observances related to it make possible individual identification with and direct experience of Imam Husayn's suffering. What I call “subjective apprehension” (Korom 1994b:81) is not bound by time and place during the observance; rather, the

historical battle which occurred in the seventh century is made present through the pious actions of Shi'i Muslims the world over. The temporal and spatial transcendence, the timeless quality, of the tragedy fits in well with anthropological notions of liminality coined by van Gennep and propagated by Turner. As has been pointed out by Chelkowski (1986:209), "this places the passion of Imam Husayn at Karbalā' at a time which is no time and in a space which is no space." Because of this timeless quality, the Shi'ah are able to measure continuously their own actions against the paradigmatic ones of Husayn. This is especially true whenever the community of believers regards itself as deprived, humiliated or abused. In fact, one of the main slogans during the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1978-79), chanted in public by protesting crowds or scribbled as graffiti on town and village walls, was "Every day is 'āshurā'; every place is Karbala; every month is Muharram." This same slogan was intoned on radio and television broadcasts; it was also graphically depicted on posters during Iran's protracted war against Iraq (1980-88). Moreover, the exact same slogan has been used by militant Muslims in Trinidad and Tobago to suggest that "local Islam" in the Caribbean has larger sociopolitical connections that go beyond the provincial concerns of the average worshipper (Korom 1994a:146).

Such symbols, slogans, metaphors and paradigms are transnational, ideologically connecting Shi'i adherents living in different parts of a loosely knit global community of worshippers. Thus, much of what I have said so far about the rites for Husayn is a theological universal applicable to *muḥarram* observances throughout the world. But if we go beyond generalizations we find that the event is a complex, polysemic affair. In actuality, the student of the *muḥarram/ta'zīyah/Hosay* ritual complex in context is confronted with a plethora of regional and local symbols. We find a variety of observances unique to given locales.<sup>16</sup> This is one ritualistic scenario within which local practitioners can draw on a healthy reservoir of global symbols, practices and narratives to create a richly textured local realm of possibilities.

Like all Shi'i observance, the modes of ritual action expressed during the month of Muharram share the common aforementioned goal of identification with the martyr Imam Husayn. This identification pervades all domains of Shi'i life, as exemplified by the still indelible effects of the Iranian war maneuvers against Iraq in the Persian Gulf, which were appropriately termed "operation martyrdom." The ways in which this goal is reached, however, differ considerably in

their performative aspects in Iran, India and Trinidad, or elsewhere in the world where the Muharram rites are performed. Participants share a common core of cross-cultural and symbolic meaning, but create separate emergent realities unique to their respective environments.

Common sense tells us that the performance of a shared core of faith and belief can take peculiar turns in specific geographic locations even when tied to a "master narrative" (Jameson 1981) with relatively stable motifs attached to it. But the ethnographic record also demonstrates that firm links with the original event are maintained in diverse religious milieux through ritual enactment. The narrative events of Husayn's passion and death provide much of the common, transnational knowledge through which the lasting reenactment is constructed to suit local needs.

Reenactments of Husayn's tragic death have been performed for centuries in southern Iraq, the place of the martyr's violent death.<sup>17</sup> They eventually extended far beyond their natural habitat and moved, *via* Iran, to the Indian subcontinent and from there to the Caribbean basin. Even today, more than 1300 years after Husayn's death, the rituals devoted to his sacrifice have not lost any of their potency and power. On the contrary, they seem to have become more powerful than ever. In some countries, such as Iran, the power of these rituals has been channeled into the political arena, as has been suggested above, and has been used as a psychological mechanism for the mobilization of the masses against injustice and oppression. The farther the rituals moved from their place of origin, however, the greater the influence of other cultures, religions and customs on them became (Korom and Chelkowski 1994:151-152). And although the lament for the death of Husayn in the form of public self-mortification by ritual participants is prevalent in Iraq, Iran and South Asia, this aspect is not visible at the extreme end of the Husayn ritual spectrum; that is, in Trinidad.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the sacred period surrounding Husayn's annual death observance is still a ritual highly charged with unusual emotions throughout the countries of the Caribbean rim where the observance is maintained. No matter what geographical area in which the ritual takes place, Husayn remains a spiritual and political redeemer, as well as a personal role model for participants. Yet, local exegesis conditions specific understandings of Husayn as symbol. This is a topic to be taken up below, but first a few words about the historical evidence for the Muharram rites are in order.

### RITUAL DRAMAS OF HUSAYN'S PASSION

The first written evidence for observances in commemoration of Husayn's death was noted by a tenth-century Arab historian, whose records suggest observances performed in Iraq.<sup>19</sup> Mourning rituals, however, did not receive royal patronage and official sanction until the beginning of the Safavid dynasty in sixteenth-century Persia. It was under the Safavids that Shi'i Islam was declared the state religion by Shah Ismail I. The annual commemorations developed into ritual dramas known as *ta'zīyeh* (the so-called "Persian Passion Play") in Iran. Curiously, staged dramas of Husayn's martyrdom did not develop to any great extent in the Indian subcontinent,<sup>20</sup> even though other forms of processional rituals, known collectively as *muḥarram*, did.<sup>21</sup> In South Asia the Persian-derived Urdu word *ta'zīya* (Trinidadian *tadjah*) came to stand for the model tombs used in these processions.

The occasion for taking out *ta'zīyas* is central to Shi'i theology in many parts of the world, but other Muslims and non-Muslims also participate in the event, albeit for different reasons. In countries like India, where Shi'ism is a minority religion, the process of absorbing foreign ritual practices has inevitably developed as a mechanism of survival. This has been the case in Trinidad as well, where the observance has been adapting to Caribbean life for the past 155 years. Prior to that point in time, the observance was unknown on the island. Although certain Afro-Trinidadian revisionist historians would like to claim that some of their enslaved ancestors may have been Muslims prior to conversion to other faiths in the New World, there is no evidence to suggest that *muḥarram* observances predate the arrival of East Indians in the New World. Having said this, it is important to point out that the explanations given by Indo-Trinidadian Shi'i Muslims of the event are, first and foremost, highly localized and contested (Korom 1994a; Thaiss 1994). This seems to be the case because while local Shi'i Muslims know that they come from India and that the rites were brought from there, they have been historically cut off from their original roots in the homeland. Their rites thus demand to be understood on their own peculiar terms. As the late Ibrahim Ali, a senior *Hosay* drummer, once stated to me, "You can't compare us with them. This is Trinidad, man, not India or Iran!"

One possible place to begin sorting out the complex and contested local nature of *Hosay* is with Husayn's miniature mausoleum (*tadjah*), the main object of veneration. Being the central ritual objects of the processions in Trinidad, the *tadjahs* act as uni-

fyng symbols for the Indo-Trinidadian community of Shi'i Muslims on many levels; as such, it can tell us much about the way citizens of the Republic express their beliefs about the problem at hand. For example, *tadjah* makers in St. James, Trinidad, of which there are four, speak of the cenotaph's structure itself as hinting at the relationship between the local and the global. In the center of the *tadjah* is a cross-section of *roseau*, a locally grown swamp reed. This bind structurally holds the physical *tadjah* together, as it metaphorically does the community of participants. On the first order of significance, this "knot that binds" (Eliade 1961: 92-95) connects the members of the nuclear family to each other. This kinship bond then ties the family religiously to the local Shi'i community, from which social links are made to other national, ethnic and religious groups on the island. Through friendship networks, economic exchange, political affiliations and, finally, participation in national expressive traditions such as steel drum ensembles (Stuempfle 1995) and cricket (Yelvington 1990), the local is connected to the regional and the national. However, this essential series of connections also allows for a broader, conceptual link with sectarian associates in India and Pakistan. Finally, the chain allows local Shi'ah to conceptualize an abstracted, ideological link with other Shi'i Muslims throughout the world. In short, locally derived conceptions of linkage begin at a commonly constructed center, moving out in larger and larger concentric rings, ultimately engulfing the whole world.<sup>22</sup>

The symbolism of this central knot is not just something created out of the theoretical worlds of scholars, but a secret reality voiced by the older generation of Shi'i Muslims in Trinidad.<sup>23</sup> One can find further evidence of this transnational link in the ritualistic performances that take place during the annual observances. First of all, many of the rites prepared by and for the local community and executed in Trinidad have structural parallels in India and Iran. Second, their historical and legendary diffusion from one culture to the next establishes a fairly reliable chronology. This is a series of events not consciously known by most participants in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, the recall imposing itself upon members of the community when building the *tadjah* or viewing the rite in other geographical contexts suggests an important theoretical clue for linking such seemingly disparate observations. Relying on Connerton (1989) again, the often informal institutionalization of ritual in its local contexts allows for a loosely conceived, embodied form of transnational Shi'i culture, presented

for self and other through sets of conventionalized performances.<sup>24</sup> So let us turn our attention, then, to the performances in question.

### PERFORMING THE LOCAL, THINKING THE GLOBAL

There are two major centers of Muharram observance in Trinidad today. One is in St. James, a suburb of Port of Spain in the north, which is largely inhabited by Indo-Trinidadians. These urbanites attempt to maintain a strong sense of East Indian ethnic and religious identity. The other site is in Cedros, a fishing village near the southwestern tip of the island, where, in the absence of a majority Muslim population, the *Hosay* rites have been perpetuated for over a century primarily by Hindus and Christians of East Indian descent.<sup>25</sup> For analytical reasons, however, I shall describe only the rituals performed in St. James.<sup>26</sup>

It should be clear by now that in St. James, the four yards, also known as “camps,”<sup>27</sup> organizing the Muharram observances are family-based operations. In addition to the construction and parading of the *tadjahs*, two huge moons (one green and one red) are constructed over a crossed frame of wood in seclusion by two secret men’s guilds that jealously guard their esoteric knowledge from inquisitive outsiders. These two guilds, also organized around a pair of family-based yards, parade the moons by “dancing” them through the streets in a twirling motion.<sup>28</sup> The moons are corporeal representations of Husayn (red for blood) and his older brother Hassan (green for poison). In St. James the Shi’ah believe that the latter was martyred along with his younger brother at Karbala.<sup>29</sup> As one community elder, Shair Ali, told me, “there is a traditional story that the moon turned green when Hassan was poisoned and again turned red when Husayn was beheaded.”

The core of the observance is an act of the Shi’i community’s piety. Among the broader fellowship of predominantly Sunni Muslims, those who belong to more orthodox and/or fundamental groups stand apart from the others, regarding themselves as staunch defenders of the purity of Islam. Such groups are often highly political and very critical of the Muharram observances in Trinidad. As a result, those who are involved in the Muharram activities, particularly the Shi’i organizers, must constantly be on their guard against the criticisms and accusations leveled by such groups against them. Most of the accusations focus on the multicultural nature of the event and its tendency to secularize an Islamic observance for the purposes of mass consumption. However, it should also

be pointed out that many Afro-Trinidadians see this as a positive development (cf. Jacobs 1964; Korom 1994a:46-47).

Although Muharram as performed in Trinidad must be regarded first and foremost as a Shi’i phenomenon and second as an East Indian one, it cannot be denied that the observance is a concrete example of the nationalization of a specific ethnic group’s performance tradition. As I have attempted to suggest above and explain elsewhere (Korom 1994a), *Hosay* is currently a cultural phenomenon in the process of being co-opted by numerous groups for their own purposes. Despite today’s observance being an amalgam of many different cultural influences, those Trinidadians who are passive participants (i.e., audience members) regard *Hosay* as an East Indian *fête*, a time for celebration and gaiety. A significant part of this “secular” perception is due to media coverage and political intervention, which has been occurring gradually ever since the mid-sixties, when government organizations began their attempts to promote the St. James *Hosay* as a budding tourist attraction. Press and television coverage also lauded this most sacred of Shi’i observances as a mini Carnival, that bacchanalian event known throughout the world for its gluttonous excesses and cultural transgressions.

The latter factor has influenced popular perceptions of the event to a great degree, resulting in an exoteric understanding that is radically different from the esoteric one cautiously nurtured by the local Shi’ah (Korom and Chelkowski 1994: 168-170). Moreover, some non-Muslims who are involved in the construction of the *tadjahs*, but less aware of *Hosay*’s spiritual or esoteric significance, suggest that the observance is more of a cultural performance in Milton Singer’s (1972: 67-80) sense, than a religious one. Such ongoing regional discourses certainly have great local ramifications. However, they also tap into global issues of theology and missionary activity, since many Muslim missionaries from the Indian subcontinent, sometimes trained in the Middle East, use contested issues like these to infuse their own influence into the local scenario.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, such local scenarios fall prey to larger agendas devised by individuals, organizations and institutions far beyond the borders of the immediate community. This example clearly suggests that interventions from the outside reinforce Shuman’s (1993) notion of the local serving “larger-than-local” interests, as I discussed at the outset and shall return to at the conclusion.

In St. James, the *Hosay* consists of the building of replicas of Husayn’s tomb, which in reality are not

replicas but rather artists' imaginative renderings of the original structure located at Karbala. The cenotaphs are called *tadjah*, although these days the use of the term in everyday language is less popular. The term *Hosay* has thus come to stand both for the ritual complex and the edifices themselves. In addition to the construction of the model tomb in each participating yard, smaller *tadjahs* constructed by young apprentices who wish to become *Hosay* masters in the future are dedicated to Husayn's brother Hassan.<sup>31</sup> The preparation of flags to be carried in the processions also takes place, as does the cooking of special foods during the nine days of abstinence preceding 'āshurā,' the tenth day of the month. During this same period the drums rooms, located adjacent to the structures within which the *tadjahs* are constructed, remain hubs of activity throughout the ritual period. While *tadjahs* are being built, new *tassa* and bass drums are constructed, while other people attach new skins to older, worn drums. During this special period each yard stages rehearsals to practice the beating of special "hands" (rhythms) performed exclusively during Muharram.<sup>32</sup>

The process of building the large *tadjah* used to take forty days,<sup>33</sup> but now, due to modern construction methods (e.g., power tools) and materials (e.g., styrotex), the length of time spent on construction has become more flexible. The minimum required, however, is to begin on the first day of Muharram. In St. James, work on the *tadjahs* usually begins on Bakr Eid, the tenth day of Zil-Hajj, the last month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

Although the whole event, beginning with the first cutting of *roseau* in the nearby Coroni swamp, can be construed as a ritual process, the most intense ritualistic portions of *Hosay* begin to increase from the first of the month of Muharram. Like *muḥarram* participants in other parts of the Shi'i world, those who are involved in *tadjah* preparation in Trinidad perform physical sacrifices to cultivate discipline of the body. Austerities among *tadjah* builders include abstaining from eating meat and fried foods, from drinking alcohol and from sexual intercourse. In the past, the prohibition applied to everyone for the whole forty-day period. Today some individuals engaged in *tadjah* building follow the proscription due to a vow, but it is more a matter of personal volition, not a general rule. The key to a successful observance is adaptability and tolerance because many of the proscriptions serve more as an ideal type, a mere reflection of proper behavior and utopian reality. Shoes must also be removed while working in the *imāmbarah* or "tent," the temporarily sacred structure consecrated for the purpose of hous-

ing the *tadjah* while it is being built. Technically, the structure is off-limits to women, but in reality, they may enter so long as they are not menstruating. Thus, whoever works on the *tadjahs* is supposed to be ritually pure. Because these acts of abstinence, long hours of hard work every night and the burden of financial investment to purchase the necessary raw materials are hardships not experienced during the rest of the year, the overall performance is viewed as a sacrifice by community members. Ritual negation is, once again, something shared by all pious believers, regardless of location.

Like the drama of Husayn's martyrdom on the plains of Karbala, participants give up much during the ritual period in order to show grief and austerity for the prototypical martyr, thereby experientially identifying with his suffering. This experiential identification allows the Trinidadian Shi'ah to participate in a global renewal. As one *tadjah* builder told me late one night when he was feeling especially hungry: "Whenever I get an urge, I think of all the people in other parts of the world who are suffering even more than me." Here we see a reinterpretation of the modern ecological movement's norm of thinking globally and acting locally. So how do *Hosay* participants act locally? As mentioned above, ritual activities begin to increase from the first of Muharram. In St. James, an *imām* begins a journey at seven in the evening to each active yard for Quranic prayer in front of the *chowk*, thereby sanctifying it as a sacred space for the duration of the ten days. The *chowk* is a freshly painted white square in front of the tent in which the *tadjah* is built. After its annual consecration, the *chowk* is demarcated by a fence and decorated with plants and a glass of sweet water to represent the Euphrates River environment near the historical stage of events at Karbala. In this sense, the *chowk* parallels the Iranian *ta' zīyeh* stage, which also bears representations of vegetation and water.<sup>34</sup> Each participating yard has a *chowk* large enough for the *tadjah* to be placed on when it is brought out of the tent. After being transformed into sacred space through the process of prayer, this area becomes the locus of much familial prayer, camp drumming and other acts of devotional piety.<sup>35</sup> After the daily prayers are recited, *maleeda*, a sweet made of flour, sugar and butter, is distributed to all in attendance, not unlike the distribution of *prasād* in the Indic tradition. Intense drumming in front of the *chowk* every evening until well after midnight follows the sanctified food offering. As the drummers rehearse, work on the *tadjahs* takes place throughout the night. This basic pattern of worship continues in the same



fashion each night until the seventh of Muharram, although the pace quickens as an increased sense of urgency grows with each passing day.

Up to this point, the activities have been primarily yard-based; that is, performed by and for family members and people who make up the collective yard group. In other words—aside from the drumming, which is performed for anyone who wishes to listen—the ritual activities in the yards are an insider phenomenon, small and kin-oriented. These activities function as a social bond to bring together the various participating groups of musicians, cooks, builders and clergy in ways unknown to outsiders. But the last three nights of the *Hosay* open the observance up to the general public, since the central activities performed on the eighth, ninth and tenth of Muharram are processional rituals performed outside of the yards. In St. James, participants insist that *tadjahs* must be brought out onto the streets in order to complete the event successfully. Making the observance public by bringing the ritual objects outside not only allows for a conspicuous spectacle but also for a large audience to experience the aesthetic beauty of the *tadjahs*.

The basic notion of an inside/outside perspective is a point of tension in the community-at-large.<sup>36</sup> As various groups' understandings shape and influence opinions about the observance, the event itself subtly changes in response to vying opinions. This same sort of dialectic between inside and outside must be seen as operating on two levels. Not only are Trinidad's Shi'i Muslims negotiating their ethnic island identity through ritual to their fellow citizens but they are also presenting their traditions of worship to international communities of Muslims through transnational communicative forms such as tourism, print media and visual means including television and video. This is a point I shall return to below, but first, let us see what other pan-Islamic motifs and symbols emerge in their local forms during the *Hosay* processions of St. James.

#### NEGOTIATING MEANINGS THROUGH PERFORMANCE

On the evening of the seventh of Muharram, called Flag Night, the rituals become public when each yard brings out a wheeled platform covered with flags, reminiscent of the *'alams* or standards paraded in parts of India and Iran. The flags not only represent the standards of Imam Husayn's party but also visually signify "promises" (vows) made by individuals.<sup>37</sup> In Cedros the flags are mostly red and some are green, colors signifying Islam in general and the brothers specifically.<sup>38</sup> In St. James one finds a plethora of

colors, each signifying a particular sort of promise. Some of the standards are further topped with a *panjah* made of pounded metal.<sup>39</sup>

Before taking the standards out onto the street, they are blessed with communal prayer on the *chowks* of the yards. The "marching hand," a specific rhythm devised for this purpose, then signals the emergence of the flags.<sup>40</sup> The flags of each yard are brought out to the sound of drumming at approximately the same time. When they turn onto the procession route, each yard's group lines up at an equal distance from each other. The "beating" then continues while the flag platforms begin moving along the main road. For the community of believers, this portion is a reenactment of Husayn's peace march, but the many intoxicated bystanders who surround the platforms on the street use this occasion as an opportunity for a *fête*. As the standards solemnly move along the road, audience members dance and sway rhythmically to the beat of the drums. The procession lasts until the early hours of the morning and Flag Night ends when each group returns their standards to their own respective yards.

The following evening, the eighth of Muharram, is dedicated to Husayn's older brother Hassan. This night is locally known as Small Tadjah (or *Hosay*) Night. The sequence of prayer, drumming and procession continues, but this time a smaller *tadjah* is placed on the platform along with some of the flags. Once again, the platforms move onto the streets to the accompaniment of drumming. The crowd is larger on this evening, even though the largest audience will gather the next night for the processional display of the big *tadjahs*.

On the day preceding Big Tadjah Night, the *tadjahs* are brought out of the tents and "crowned" with the large domes (*gumjee*) that complete the structures. The completed *tadjahs* are then placed on the *chowks* and prayers are once again recited prior to their leaving the yards. The "big night" is an exciting time for participants and audience alike, and the drumming is considered to be the best on this evening. When the *tadjahs* move onto the street, then joined by the moons shortly thereafter, the spectacle begins. The throng is overwhelming, and the excitement is equal in fervor to a great festival.

Spectators openly admire and comment on the shape and decoration of the *tadjahs*. They further note the stamina and agility of those carrying the two hundred-pound moons. Simultaneously, the "competition" among the various camps concerning who built the finest *tadjah* is openly discussed by the crowd. There is competition among the drummers as well in the form

of a "clash," when two yards face off to beat the "war hand," symbolically recreating the final encounter between Husayn and his enemies. The two moons add an extra dimension to the spectacle. The two moons, as already noted, represent the brothers. After they leave their respective yards, they meet at a roughly pre-designated spot in front of the local mosque to "kiss" or "touch." This symbolizes the last meeting of the brothers and their final departure for battle. As this is performed the crowd applauds joyously, reversing the somber, mournful and esoteric meaning embedded in this act for the community of builders and their families.<sup>41</sup>

The onlookers consider the kiss a joyous occasion, a cause for celebration. At this point, it is very difficult to contain the crowd because the public is more interested in the profane dimension of the event, the carnival-like atmosphere. Frequent drinking of rum and beer by spectators increases with the steady crescendo of the percussive intensity and decibel level. The behavior of the crowd becomes more antinomian as the *Hosay* participants beat and mourn ever more fervently till the early hours of the morning. Each *tadjah* and moon is then finally moved back into its own respective yard, where they rest until late in the morning. Although opinions vary from yard to yard, local tradition holds that the *tadjahs* are "dead" from the end of this evening's performance, since the spirits of the brothers abandon the objects of veneration at that time.

After their brief rest, the *tadjahs* are moved once again in procession around noon on the next day. The *tadjahs* and moons move along the same route and onward to the grounds of Queen's Royal College (QRC), where land was granted during colonial times for the purpose of serving as a local Karbala. Here again we see a concept which binds faithful Shi'ah across national borders, namely the idea of the transposition of space. In essence, every place where Muharram is performed becomes a Karbala for the local community, allowing each and every Shi'i Muslim to participate in a global pattern of pious performance. The local Karbalas become a substitution for the real pilgrimage to Husayn's real tomb in Iraq.<sup>42</sup> Since the *tadjahs* are now considered dead, the focus of attention shifts to the moons in St. James. The members of the moon yards dance and twirl ahead of the *tadjahs*, reaching the QRC grounds first. Once arriving, the moons are erected upright, facing each other. Then an *imām* recites the *janaaza* or funeral prayers. By the time the *janaaza* is completed, the other *tadjahs* begin arriving at QRC. The moons then depart the area

and begin their return journey to St. James. As each of the *tadjahs* pass QRC, they also begin their return. All of the moons and *tadjahs* are once again resting on their respective *chowks* by six in the evening. A complete day of rest follows before Teeja Day, the occasion for destroying and immersing the *tadjahs* in a local body of water, again replicating another South Asian pattern of observance: the immersion (*visarjan*) of a sacred object after its period of veneration is completed.

The next day, when the *tadjahs*, or parts of them, wash up on shore, the people of the camps gather the remains and bury them. Rather abruptly, the labor of many days and the creative craftsmanship of numerous artisans are now annihilated within a short span after completion. It is a sad moment for the builders who often do not accompany their creations to the water. As one builder, Noble Bishnath, told me, "I know it has to be done, but I can't stand to watch it."<sup>43</sup> But for many it is a cathartic moment, signaling the end of abstinence and the beginning of a festive period.<sup>44</sup> Even though local meanings have been shaped by contextual exigencies, the ceremony's final moments hint at a larger transnational consciousness. One drummer standing near me during such an immersion in 1996 poignantly stated, "You know, here we are in Trinidad and I think about people all over the world doing just what we're doing for Husayn."

## CONCLUSION

New *tadjahs* are built each year. After their own short spans of life they too sink in the waters of the Caribbean, at an unfathomable distance from the harsh desert plains of Karbala where Husayn met his ultimate demise. This reality, the reality of connection with a tradition that seems so alien to a local audience, provides a common substratum of meaning to connect individuals as far afield as Trinidad and Jamaica on one end of the ritual spectrum to Iraq and Iran on the other. I have attempted to show that while local culture asserts an overwhelming influence on the *Hosay* rites, the community in question can maneuver within the very confines of a national culture in the making to reconnect with a global community on theological and performative grounds alone. This is not to say that there are no contradictions within the global/local dialectic. Trinidadian practitioners of *Hosay* resist external missionary activities to conform to a normative global tradition dictated by Iranian clerics. They also view Iranian flagellation as barbaric and inhuman, and are quick to point out that their way of thinking and

acting is contextually appropriate for the island's lifestyle. As Hamdoo Emamali, spokesman for the *Hosay* Organizing Committee once emphatically stated to me, "This is Trinidad, not Iran! You can't expect us to act like them. Trinidad is a mini United Nations. You can't stop people from doing what they want."

I have attempted to suggest that there is ample room for both conformity and dissent within the local constraints of a global tradition. At the same time, the Indo-Trinidadian Shi'ah participate in something so large—often so subtle—that they are not always fully aware of the transnational links providing the underlying meaning for their rites. Although this small community of not more than two hundred people consisting of a handful of families acknowledges *Hosay's* deep-rooted connection to rites elsewhere in the world, participants insist, in the end, that they must be judged on their own terms: as Trinidadian Muslims. Here I would return to where I began.

I suggested at the outset that the human sciences are currently engaged in deconstructing a marked category defined as the "local" to privilege much broader issues that affect people across national, ethnic, political and geographical borders. Even though this is a necessary move in the postmodern world, there is still a great deal that needs to be done on the local level to understand how global paradigms are reworked for a specific community's own purposes. Indeed, I have attempted to show that there are a number of alternative paths for a sociology of knowledge to take in the context of ritual performances, where both global continuities and local innovations can be displayed in public and negotiated between numerous ethnoreligious communities of interpreters. These paths intersect at various times and in various places, but do not necessarily converge into a seamless whole. Intersection in complementary opposition to convergence highlights the need to study, as Geertz (1992: 129) has stated, the relationship between one form of local knowledge and another. Perhaps the use of the plural for religious epistemologies, as suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith (1990), makes more sense in our fragmentary world than a futile search for unity. This, of course, moves us beyond the unquestionable Islamic category of *tauhīd* (unity), forcing us to search for a system of signification to account for both universals and particulars in the study of world religions. It is all the more significant to underscore the resilient quality of the local in the face of globalizing forces in Trinidad, since it is an area of the world where the practitioners of this particular religious faith are already perceived by their global brethren as being on the

margins. In this sense, the Indo-Trinidadian Shi'ah are a "marked" community, to use Fanon's (1990) term, removed from the mainstream of orthodox life. But local ritual practitioners feel strongly that through perpetuating their East Indian traditions they are practicing religion in the most authentic way possible, feeling no dire need to be overly apologetic for their customs. As the late Ibrahim Ali told me repeatedly, "This is Trinidad, man! Don't judge us according to what you see in other parts of the world."

#### NOTES

\* Field support for the research upon which this article is based was provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Studies, the International Folk Art Foundation and the American Philosophical Society. The paper leading to this article was first read at the University of Pennsylvania's South Asia Seminar on November 15, 1995 and subsequently at the University of Lund's Anthropology Colloquium in November of 1996. I thank Margaret Mills and Jonathan Friedman respectively for the invitations as well as those people in attendance whose comments contributed to this revised version. I also wish to thank Joseph Falaky Nagy, Peter Chelkowski, Jan Magnusson and an anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of Ritual Studies* for comments on earlier versions. Portions of this article draw upon data first presented in Korom (1994a) and Korom and Chelkowski (1994). I dedicate this essay to master drummer Ibrahim Ali, my most supportive Trinidadian critic, who passed away before he was able to view the film (Bishop and Korom 1998) on which I collaborated for him and all of the other *Hosay* participants

1 Recently, however, the concept has been philosophically questioned and challenged by Norris (1996). See also the comments by Spiro (1986).

2 For assessments of the term and its current usefulness, see Harris (1976), Headland, Pike and Harris (1990) and Baumann (1993). Gothóni (1981) provides an interesting and useful application of the emic concept to foreign cultures.

3 Here, the emphasis is back toward what Lyotard (1984) has termed *grand récits* at the expense of *petit récits*. While I am in sympathy with this analytical shift, I feel it is equally important to keep the local within site, as I have argued elsewhere (1997a, 1997b), and continue to do so here.

4 Most recently, in a review article assessing the literature on the "global" and the "local," Kearney (1995: 549) suggests that a major shift is occurring in sociocultural anthropology, in which "the new perspective should be expressed as a reconfiguration of the images and assumptions of several basic world-

view universals, namely space, time, and classification."

5 For an important work on the historical constraints of opening up anthropological inquiry to global concerns, see Fardon (1989).

6 All of the estates were designed for export. Of the 468 estates functioning during the waning years of Spanish rule, 159 were in sugar cane, while the remainder were in coffee, cotton, cocoa and indigo. See Smith (1963:11).

7 Smith (1963:22). His figures are based on the reliable Sanderson Report. In 1907, the total population of Trinidad was 338,992, of which 102,849 were East Indians. For a comprehensive study of Indian indenture in Trinidad, see Weller (1968). Kale's recent study (1998) provides a more critical perspective on British indenture in the Caribbean.

8 Smith (1963:154). Of the 63 mosques in Trinidad today, only one claims to be a strictly Shi'i place of prayer. This single faction may not be based on philosophical grounds, but on political and economic ones due to "infighting among the owners of mosques," as the late Dan Crowley had indicated (personal correspondence).

9 For an explication of this theological principle, see Goldziher (1906) and Kohlberg (1975). Further, emigration records housed in Calcutta do not clearly list the sectarian affiliations (one can only surmise from surnames) of the first indentured laborers. It is thus not clear how many Shi'i Muslims, if any, were among the earliest immigrants. But it is impossible to conceive that no Shi'ah came to Trinidad, since they constituted a large minority population in Avadh, the area where the heaviest recruiting took place.

10 For a list of the original passengers on board the first ship in 1845, see Brereton (1992:221).

11 For a complete historical account of Muslims in Trinidad, see Smith (1963). Smith's ethnohistorical study of Charlieville is the most thorough, although outdated, exploration of an Indo-Trinidadian Islamic community to date. Khan's 1995 dissertation provides more updated information, as well as a welcome addition to the literature on East Indian ethnicity.

12 The non-sectarian public school system in Trinidad was started in 1851, but by 1870 religious (read Christian) discourse was firmly implanted in the curriculum. East Indian Hindus and Muslims did not have the right to establish their own religious schools until 1949. See Smith (1963:94).

13 Moreover, electronic media also provided local Shi'i Muslims with access to and knowledge of Shi'i theology and ritual practice. Most participants in the rite described below learned of Muharram rituals in other parts of the world by watching television specials aired on the national station, or by listening to sermons broadcasted on the radio.

14 For recent applications of this model see, for

example, Mottahedeh (1985) and Ajami (1986).

15 Personal communication. I am grateful to Roger Abrahams for pointing out this instructive parallel.

16 Although a number of excellent articles, books and dissertations have been written about the observances in various parts of the Muslim world, there is a conspicuous lack of comparative analysis of the event. Aside from Chelkowski's (1986) survey, there is not, to my knowledge, any study which attempts to account for regional diversity by means of a comparative analysis. This will be the intent of my forthcoming book tentatively titled *Hosay Trinidad*.

17 For a detailed account of Muharram observances in Iraq, see Nakash (1994:141-204).

18 As one practitioner told me when I showed him a video of Iranian Muslims flagellating themselves, "It is inhuman man! How can someone beat themselves in the name of Islam?" Ironically, he is leveling at his own community one of the Sunni critiques of Shi'ism in other parts of the world.

19 The rites associated with Husayn seem to have diffused out toward the Caucasus in one direction and toward South Asia in the other.

20 One notable exception to this rule is the predominantly Sunni observances for Husayn's death performed in Bangladesh. See, for example, Säklāyen (1969).

21 *Muharram* is the name of the first lunar month of the Islamic calendar, during which the annual observance in honor of Husayn's martyrdom is observed. Hagiographic and historical accounts both confirm that Husayn was killed on the 10th day of this month.

22 This interpretation suggests a sort of cosmic homology when we further take into consideration that the *tadjah* is also viewed as a representation of Husayn himself, not just his bier.

23 Unfortunately, I cannot ethically reveal the names of the people who provided this esoteric interpretation, since they prefer to remain anonymous. However, I am at liberty to state that the idea is one remembered and perpetuated by female adherents to the tradition. This initially suggests to me that the women involved in the *Hosay* see the tradition primarily as a "family thing," secondarily as an "ethnic thing" and lastly as a "religious thing," which brings together everyone who believes in the redeeming powers of Husayn.

24 Here we might want to distinguish between the processes of globalization and transnationalism, as Kearney (1995:548) does, for the former is a territorially decentered geographical phenomenon, while the latter is grounded in the social, economic, political and religious interrelationships between one or more nation-states. See also Hannerz (1989).

25 This has been a persistent factor in the maintenance of the tradition in that part of the country.

When one of the main organizers of the Muharram rites in Cedros was asked whether he sees a contradiction in the fact that he, being a Hindu, organizes, participates in and believes in the power of the Muslim ritual, he retorted quite simply: "I presume I am a Muslim one month each year." See Korom and Chelkowski (1994:158).

26 However, for a comparison of the two contexts, see again Korom and Chelkowski (1994).

27 This term, as well as "tent" for *imāmbarah*, are common in the vocabulary of the Trinidad Carnival, suggesting the flexibility of the *Hosay* tradition to adapt to local circumstances. See Korom (1994b:83), Korom and Chelkowski (1994:171) and Gibbons (1979:23-28).

28 The massive weight of the objects is balanced by placing the vertical pole of a moon in a metal cup supported by a leather or cloth waistband.

29 In reality, Hassan died twelve years earlier, probably poisoned by his wife.

30 There has been increased pressure during the last few years for Trinidad's Shi'ah to conform to the more rigid Iranian model of observance. In 1994, for example, Shi'i missionaries from Canada came to St. James during the month of Muharram to preach the "correct" way to perform the rituals, and continue to attend on an annual basis. This has led to new debates concerning the appropriate ways to remember Husayn's passion.

31 What is curious about this is that some of the active participants believe that Hassan died together with Husayn at Karbala. This understanding might be explained by an Indic preference for fraternal dyads in hero traditions. See Korom and Chelkowski (1994:159).

32 The shell of the *tassa* is ceramic and kettle-shaped. It is covered with a cured goat skin and is beaten with two wooden sticks known as *chops*. The bass drums are cylindrical, made out of hollowed mango or cedar stumps covered with heavier goat skins on both ends. Many of the drums must be re-skinned every year as the heads tear due to intense beating, humidity and change of temperature.

33 Forty day periods in Islam are, of course, important for the observance of death rituals. This is especially true among the Shi'i Muslims observing the death of Husayn on the 20th of the month of Safar, which is forty days after the martyr's death.

34 On the latter, see Mamoun (1967).

35 The drumming itself is considered a form of prayer. See Korom (1994b).

36 One could also discuss such variation in meaning in terms of esoteric/exoteric factors, as Jansen (1959) taught us to do. See also Korom and Chelkowski (1994: 168-170).

37 In both India and Trinidad, the *tadjahs* are believed to possess healing power. As such, the objects act as conduits between humans and Allah. They are thus thought to be repositories of *baraka* (divine grace).

38 On the cupola of Husayn's tomb at Karbala a red flag always flies. The color symbolism in Islam is multivalent. In one instance green means the symbol of paradise and the *ahl al-bayt*, the Family of the Prophet. On another level, green indicates poison. According to Shi'i tradition, Hassan was poisoned by one of his wives, as mentioned above.

39 *Panjah* literally means "palm of the hand," but has the symbolic meaning of the five members of the holy family of the Prophet Muhammad: the Prophet himself, his daughter Fatimah, his cousin and son-in-law Ali, and two of his grandsons, Hassan and Husayn.

40 The "hands" used for *Hosay* follow a specific sequence that parallels the tragic events of the historical narrative. For a description and interpretation, see Korom (1994b:78-81). The importance of music in Indo-Trinidadian culture more broadly conceived is described beautifully by Myers (1998).

41 Some Shi'i women also suggest this gesture as a remembrance of the act of departure from the homeland. Just as Husayn left his home, country and extended family, so too did the East Indian indentured laborers leave for the Caribbean.

42 On the performance of this symbolic pilgrimage to Karbala in India, with special reference to Lucknow, see Hjortshoj (1977:245). On the actual pilgrimage to Karbala, see Nakash (1994:163-183).

43 One family of builders destroys the *tadjah* in their yard, then transports the remains to the sea in plastic sacks, where they immerse them.

44 The phenomenological effect of this experience broadly fits into a more general pattern of the religious dimension of what one might call "disposable sacred art" (e.g., Navajo sandpainting, Tibetan *mandala* construction etc.). For cross-cultural studies of this phenomenon, see Gill (1972) and Gold (1994).

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