

7 ‘It ain’t religion; it’s just culture, man!’ Muḥarram controversies in the Indo-Caribbean diaspora

Frank J. Korom

Interrogating the sacred and the profane

In 2011, the Rajkumari Cultural Center in New York invited me to screen my film titled *Hosay Trinidad*, which is about Muḥarram performances primarily in St. James, Trinidad, one of the two locations where the event was practised back in the early 1990s when I conducted my initial fieldwork there.¹ The screening took place as part of the 13th Kitchrie Festival of Indo-Caribbean Arts and Culture in Flushing, Queens, New York.² The entire multifaceted event, which included various arts and crafts, song and dance, lectures, exhibitions, etc., was billed as ‘Hosay: Tadjah and Tassa’ (Figure 7.1).

As the title suggests, the event was intended to be an educational celebration of diasporan arts and culture. Very little was mentioned in the literature and advertisements about the sacred side of the Shi‘i ritual known as Muḥarram in South Asia, from where the East Indian Caribbean population’s ancestors originally came. The event was, in other words, billed as a secular event, in much the same way as Easter is marked popularly not by the resurrection of the Christian God but by bunnies, chocolate, and egg hunts.³

The film screening was scheduled for the evening prior to the staging of a non-religious Muḥarram performance that would occur at the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens, which is known for its Unisphere that was built for the 1964 World’s Fair. A large *tadjah* (*ta‘zīyeh*) representing a martyr’s tomb in Karbala, Iraq that would be paraded around the Unisphere to the accompaniment of *tassa* (kettledrum) drumming throughout the following day was being completed at the Queens Museum of Art as part of Hosay Heritage Day (Figure 7.2).⁴

The film hall was packed with people speaking the distinct English patois of the Indo-Caribbean, as well as some scholars and a representative of the Folk Arts Program of the New York State Council for the Arts (NYSCA), the organisation that had funded the extravaganza as an aspect of ‘folk art.’ After the film was over and the question-and-answer session had ended, the usual post-lecture banter and social mingling occurred. While greeting and shaking hands with various people, one rather large and outspoken woman came up to me and said in her thick Trini accent, ‘I didn’t like your film.’ Somewhat taken aback, I asked why, to which she responded, ‘You showed only St. James, man; you didn’t bother with Cedros!’

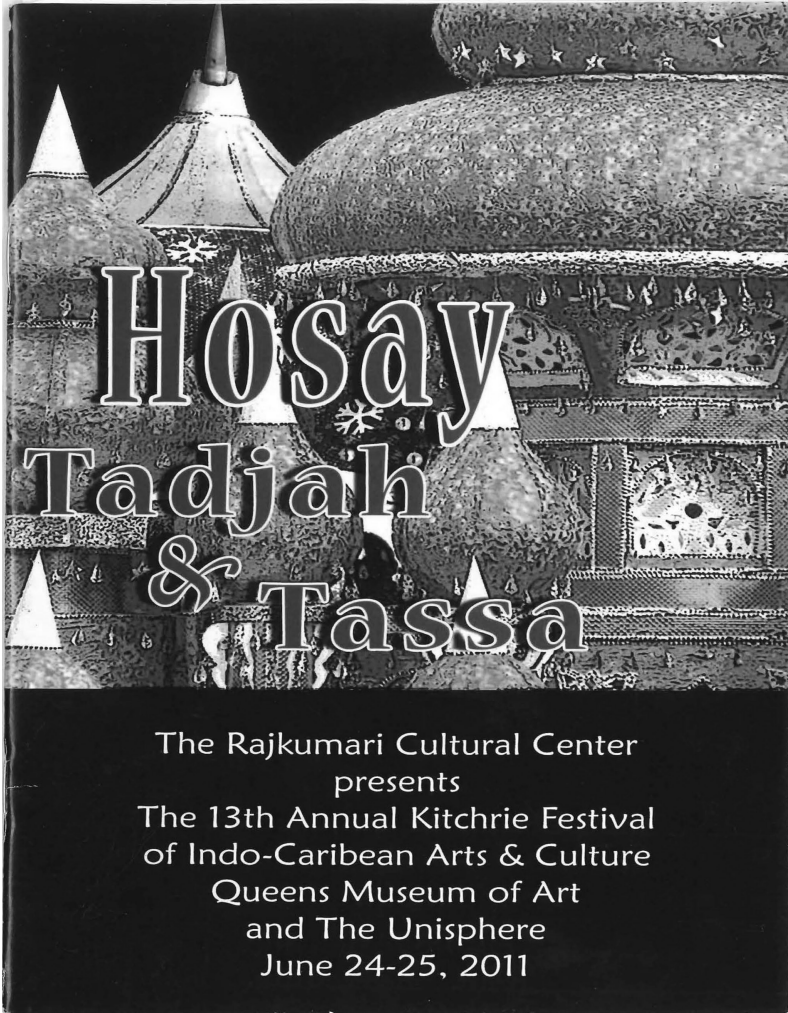


Figure 7.1 The cover of the program pamphlet for the 13th Kitchrie Festival of Indo-Caribbean Arts and Culture in Flushing, Queens, 2011 Source: Frank J. Korom.

Her point was well taken, even though I tried to defend myself by explaining to her what my rationale was. My explanation that telling two stories instead of one would have made the film too disjointed apparently appeased her temporarily, but it still wasn't satisfying. She frowned and remarked something concerning it being about culture, not religion, and that I should go to Cedros to see how it is *really* done (emphasis added). I promised her that I would do that, but thinking to myself that I probably would not get the opportunity to do so in the near future – as I had already spent more than a decade studying Hosay, which culminated



Figure 7.2 The parade around the Unisphere at the Flushing Meadows-Corona Park in Queens on Hosay Heritage Day, 2001. The procession is structurally marked with drum and cymbal players at the head on the far left, followed by flags, then a red moon (marked by white crescent and star), and finally the *tadjah*, which was constructed in the adjacent museum that served as a substitute for the *imambara* in which the sacred structure is normally built. Source: Frank J. Korom.

with the film, a series of essays, and finally a book of the same title published in 2003 – I simply let the thought recede to the back of my mind. Little did I know then that I would soon be destined to return to Trinidad.

A couple of years later, in 2013, I was once again invited to be a cultural consultant for another secular Hosay project, but this time in a location tellingly called Plantation, Florida (Figure 7.3). It was hosted by Jayadevi Arts, Inc.⁵ Run by a charismatic East Indian woman from southern Trinidad, the overall goals of her organisation are to preserve, teach, and present Indo-Caribbean arts and culture, while rejuvenating traditions and restoring self-esteem.

Their *tadjah* was to be constructed by a builder from Cedros in southern Trinidad, who was a relative of one of the organisers of the event. However, he declined at the last minute, saying that he couldn't build the structure 'out of season.' The question we could rightly raise, then, is, 'if Hosay is secular, why would this particular *tadjah* builder then refuse to build out of season?' This issue will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Subsequently, a not very experienced

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Figure 7.3 The Jayadevi Arts poster for the 2013 secular Hosay conducted in Plantation, Florida, which, ironically, is a place where many Indo-Trinidadians have settled as part of a second or third diaspora. Notice the yellow circle on the upper right that says, 'No ceremonies, no rituals will be performed.' Source: Frank J. Korom.

builder from Queens stepped in at the last minute and constructed the *tadjah* in a rented storage locker, using power tools and inferior materials to guarantee that the structure would be ready by the time of the event. I was cajoled into assisting the minute I landed there. Meanwhile, the organiser frantically moved from one place to the other, tending to all of the last-minute details, including securing the permit to hold the event in a public park. Their advertisements emphasised the strictly secular nature of the event, so no hints of religion were present, and not a single prayer or reference to Islam was made, except by me, when I gave my lecture the evening before the event was to take place.

Like the earlier event in Queens, this one was also billed as an ethnic pageant with a colourful architectural display and drumming. The Plantation *tadjah*, however, remained stationary for the entire duration of the daylong event, which was plagued by heavy rains and intense winds that even flooded the pavilion in which the *tadjah* was placed while the finishing touches were being applied (Figure 7.4)! In both cases, the sacred space known as an *imambara* (*imāmbārā*), in which the *tadjahs* are built, were replaced by secular structures; namely, a museum in New York and a rented storage facility in Florida. The implications of this will be explored towards the end of my discussion below.⁶ For now, let us explore more of the context in which Hosay developed over time and through space, and why it has remained so controversial for centuries, even prior to its transportation to the Caribbean in the minds of nineteenth-century indentured labourers from British India.

The event known as Hosay in the Caribbean, derived from the name ‘Husayn,’ is supposed to follow the Muslim lunar calendar, during which the performances are required to occur for ten days, beginning on the first of the Islamic lunar month of Muḥarram and ending on the tenth (*‘āshūrā*), which is the day when Imam Husayn, the younger grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, who is the focal point of the event, was martyred.⁷ It is in his honour that *tadjahs* are built and paraded to the accompaniment of cymbal, bass, and kettledrum (*tassa*) rhythms anywhere in the world where South Asians settled in the diaspora that resulted from British colonialism. Indeed, many of those who went to British plantation colonies around the world never returned home. Most lost touch with their homeland and natal village within a generation, due to a lack of literacy and the inconveniences imposed by the plantocracy that oppressively ruled over indentured labourers.

In places like Jamaica, however, Hosay (sometimes spelled Hussay) does not follow any ritual calendar at all, but is held on the weekend closest to the sighting of the new moon in August, which corresponds to what used to be called the ‘dead season’ on the plantations, when work was minimal. Rural Indo-Jamaicans who still observe the occasion celebrate it as a means of ethnic solidarity and remembering the sacrifices of their ancestors who came as indentured labourers to the British sugar cane plantations.⁸ In other words, Hosay has become completely secularised in Jamaica, and is considered to be an ethnic pageant of sorts, just like the ones in the United States discussed earlier.

Some Indo-Caribbean practitioners of Hosay, especially those from Cedros, would also like us to believe that Hosay is a totally secular occasion for celebrating



Figure 7.4 The secular *tadjah* constructed in Plantation, Florida, for a cultural event sponsored by an East Indian NGO that serves the substantial Indo-Caribbean community of Florida. Source: Frank J. Korom.

Indian culture in the diaspora. Indeed, it has been one of the most common debates revolving around the performance since it arrived in the Caribbean after the abolition of slavery in 1833. But it was already an issue of grave concern to the British in India, who, despite their general policy of non-interference in religious observances, often took positions against or in favour of certain sectarian groups

involved during Muḥarram in India.⁹ I have already addressed many of the issues surrounding the debate over ‘praying’ and ‘playing’ or ‘observation’ versus ‘celebration’ in an earlier book,¹⁰ so here I will try not to simply repeat what I argued there. Instead, I wish to draw on more recent fieldwork that was conducted in San Fernando and Cedros while I was consulting for a documentary made by the Trinidadian filmmaker, Dion Samsóondar, titled *Hosay Cedros: Uniting a Diaspora* (2015).¹¹ Coincidentally, it was in between the two events in New York and Florida mentioned above that Samsóondar and his familial associates contacted me with an invitation to travel to San Fernando, where I would work with them on the film. It was during that period that I was once again hurled into the centre of a longstanding controversy that can easily be traced back to South Asia – and even to Iran – over whether Hosay is religious or not. And if it is not religious, then what exactly is it?

The answer really depends on whom you ask the question to. Thanks to the ongoing missionary work of the Bilal Mission of the Americas, Hosay in St. James is now widely recognised as a religious observance associated with the Shi‘i master narrative.¹² The master narrative refers to the historic event that occurred near Karbala in what is now Iraq and its subsequent mythicisation that provides the underlying logic and justification of the event.¹³ Prior to their missionisation, outsiders largely saw the St. James Hosay as an Indian ‘carnival,’ an ethnic and racial counterpart to the Afro-Trinidadian Lenten one. Even the BBC would regularly broadcast it live for the many Indo-Trinidadians residing in yet another diaspora that led them to the United Kingdom.

Much of the media coverage has focused on its spectacular artistic and musical nature, as an aspect of East Indian heritage. This is less the case in the south, where media coverage has been minimal, mostly confined to local newspapers and television stations. The St. James version, on the other hand, has received virtually all of the international attention, since it has historically been glitzier, louder, grander, and larger than the southern version. The southern version was thus perceived to be more old-fashioned and plain, with simple white *tadjahs* substituting for the more colourful ones made of kitschy materials in the north. One very noticeable difference, however, is that in the south the *tadjahs* are immersed whole in the ocean to float off literally into the sunset, which can be witnessed in the closing moments of the film *Hosay Trinidad* (1998). Due to shipping lanes in the north, however, the St. James *tadjahs* must first be disassembled before they can be thrown into the ocean, so as to not obstruct the water traffic.

North and south

Before I delve into the ideological debates that occur over Hosay between the two communities in the north and the south, it will be useful to provide an overview of some of the surface differences between the two. As mentioned above, there are two major centres of Muḥarram observance in Trinidad today, although the past ten years or so have seen a revival of Hosay in rural areas where it was no longer performed. Of the two areas where the event has been

maintained continuously since colonial times, one is in the northern town of St. James, the suburb of Port of Spain discussed above, and the other is in the Cedros District in the southwest of the island. Although one could speak of a 'unified' Hosay tradition in Trinidad, variation due to rural–urban differentiation, ethnic and religious affiliation, etc., has shaped the observance in subtle ways. Some participants from St. James emphatically state such differences by saying, for instance, 'we have nothing to do with the southern tradition.' In fact, many of the people involved in the construction of the *tadjahs* in the north confessed to me that they have never witnessed the observance as practised in the south, while the southerners insist that their version is the real deal. The reluctance of northerners to relate to the southerners has to do with lingering stereotypes concerning the southerners' 'backward' and 'uneducated' ways. Northerners, on the other hand, think of themselves as 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan.' Parallel traditions have therefore developed out of one imagined parent tradition that was brought to the island by the indentured ancestors of the present generation of Hosay participants. Some of the similarities and divergences are discussed below.

In St. James, the five yards that are also called 'camps' or 'tents' organising the Muḥarram observances are family-based operations, while in the south, the yards only have loose family associations. The southern yards are based primarily on a community network that follows plantation estate antecedents. Within each yard, an enclosure known as the imam house or *imambara*, a term of Urdu/Hindi derivation, is constructed to serve as a workshop where the large *tadjah* is completed in secret. In addition to the construction and parading of the *tadjahs*, two huge moons, known as *sipars* in India, are constructed and paraded by two other family-based yards. The two moons, one green and the other red, are corporeal representations of Hasan (green for poison), the elder brother, and Husayn (red for blood), the younger brother who lays down his life in the historical and mythical master narrative that underlines the theology of the event.¹⁴ Despite the fact that Hasan died elsewhere, his presence in the Hosay performance is quintessential and remains to be a critical part of the contemporary observance.

In the north, the core of the observance is drawn from the Muslim community, especially from the Shi'i sector. It must, however, be underlined that the sectarian distinctions in Trinidad used to be downplayed for most of the year in the past, but during *Hosay* the distinction becomes more pronounced due to debates over 'correct' practice and doctrine. Among Trinidadian Muslims, those who belong to the more orthodox and/or fundamental groups stand apart from the others, regarding themselves as staunch Sunnis, defenders of the purity of Islam. Such groups are often highly political and very critical of the Muḥarram observances in Trinidad. As a result, those who orchestrate Muḥarram activities, particularly the Shi'i organisers, must always be on their guard against being criticised by such groups. The aforementioned Bilal Mission's reformist activities as well as the recent academic attention that the event has received, however, has emboldened and empowered the small community of Shi'ah to assert its sectarian identity much more than they ever have in the past.¹⁵ Indeed, the Shi'ah of Trinidad do not

even have their own mosque and generally pray alongside of their Sunni brethren at the St. James mosque.¹⁶

The number of Muslims involved in the observance in the south is miniscule. As a result, Hosay is organised, controlled, and performed mainly by Hindus and Christians. This is partly due to the fact that Muslims are less in number in the south than in the north. It also has to do with the fact that there has been a strong anti-Hosay lobby there since the events surrounding the infamous 1884 massacre, during which government troops opened fire on the processions, killing at least 22 individuals and injuring many other participants and audience members attending the event as it was being performed in San Fernando.¹⁷ Although Hosay is no longer commemorated in San Fernando, the 1884 incident is reenacted annually there on the site where the killings occurred.

It would be incorrect, however, to consider the conspicuous absence of a significant Muslim population in the south a new development, since it seems that their small numbers there has been a persistent factor in the maintenance and transformation of the tradition in that part of the country. When I asked one of the main organisers of the event in southern Trinidad whether he saw a contradiction in being a Hindu who organises, participates in, and believes in the power of the Muslim ritual, he thought pensively for a moment, then responded, 'I presume I am a Muslim one month each year.' Being a Hindu who respects Muslim customs, therefore, is something relevant to the debates over who owns the tradition and to what its essential meaning is. Moreover, Muḥarram, as performed in Trinidad, must be regarded not as a solely local East Indian phenomenon but also as a global one, since Muḥarram has appeal for people of all sorts, not just Shi'i Muslims or ethnic South Asians. The moment that the Hosay drums begin beating, multicultural and polyethnic crowds are sure to gather. As Hamdoo Emamali, one of the yard patrons in the north, pointed out to me during fieldwork in 1991, 'Trinidad is a mini United Nations. When the drums start beating, you can't control the people on the streets because Trinidad is not a Muslim nation. No, you can't keep them from jumping up or get them to close their rum shops' (paraphrase).

The observance in the Cedros area in the south could serve as an example of cultural mixing, what I elsewhere call 'creolization,'¹⁸ but people there say that their version of the tradition is much older and 'realer' than the northern version. In other words, theirs is more 'authentic.' It is 'older' and 'purer.' But despite such claims to authenticity, today's Hosay performances are amalgams of many different cultural influences that have developed over time, due to the encounter between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians, who both had to strategise to keep their own traditions alive, while negotiating tolerance of the ethnic 'Other.'¹⁹

Trinidadians who are passive participants, however, regard it as an East Indian 'festival' or *fête*, an Indian carnival, perhaps because of the colonial legacy of representing it as such. This observation should not surprise the astute reader, since the same is true in India, where the process of cultural mixing and cooptation had already been occurring for centuries prior to the arrival of the tradition in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the British Empire after the abolition of slavery that resulted in the indenture system.²⁰ Moreover, some non-Muslims who are

involved in the construction of the *tadjahs* suggest that the observance is more of a cultural performance in Milton Singer's sense than a religious one, in which an ethnolinguistic group's identity is celebrated.²¹

Another important socioeconomic aspect of *Hosay* is that the southern version has not been subjected to great amounts of commercial exposure in the sense that media coverage of the event has been severely limited, as hinted at above. The lack of exposure is partially due to the rural nature of the Cedros area. Having once been coastal sugar cane and coconut plantations, the surrounding villages have retained their rural flavour as stereotypical 'sleepy fishing villages' in the 'deep south.' The Hosay observance has not attracted many spectators from beyond the immediate area as a result.

The St. James Hosay, in contrast, is an urban phenomenon that has received a great amount of attention in the press, on television, and by word-of-mouth, resulting in more extravagant and lavish productions. The government has been partly responsible for this by promoting Hosay as a tourist attraction. A nickname of St. James is now 'Hosay Town,' which is marked by a green archway with characteristic, domelike features over the main road leading into the area. The latter factor has influenced popular perceptions of the event to some degree, and needs to be considered when discussing the variety of meanings embedded in Hosay. To complete this brief overview, let me continue with the essentials of the observance as performed in both the north and the south, before returning to the issues relating to the interpretation of the practices described below.

Hosay in Trinidad consists of (i) building replicas of Husayn's tomb, which in reality are not replicas but rather, like those of South Asia, imaginative renderings of the original structure located at Karbala, the place where Husayn was eventually buried after his beheading. These are called *tadjahs* in Trinidad, although nowadays the use of the term in everyday discourse is less current.²² 'Hosay' is now used interchangeably for both the performative practices and the edifices themselves. For purposes of clarity, I will refer to the edifices in the processions as *tadjah* and the overall ritual as Hosay. Both areas also (ii) build a small *tadjah*, which is devoted to Husayn's older brother Hasan. It is worth noting that some of the active participants still believe that Hasan died together with Husayn at Karbala, despite the Bilal Mission's attempts to standardise the narratives underlining the historical events that inform the performances surrounding Hosay.²³ In reality, Hasan died 12 years earlier than Husayn, probably poisoned by his wife. The coalescence of the two brothers in Trinidad, however, could be the result of the influence of Hindu epics and Indian lore regarding the heroic exploits of twin brothers. Hasan and Husayn are known in much of the Muslim world by the Arabic dual form of *hasanayn*, and in many countries Hasan is also remembered during Muḥarram. In Bengal, for instance, the tragic saga of Hasan and Husayn is even included in a vernacular rendering of the pan-Hindu epic *Mahabharata*.²⁴

Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the local communities' history has been reformulated to suit their own sensibilities. The Karbala paradigm's master narrative of Husayn's passion continues to undergo change as the creative process of imagining the past produces ever-newer versions of religious and ethnic

identities but nevertheless provides some semblance of continuity with an imagined Indian past.²⁵ Preparations in both locations also include (iii) the making and parading of flags that parallel the *'alams* or standards of Iran and South Asia, (iv) the cooking of special foods during the ten days of partial abstinence, and (v) the construction of new *tassa* and bass drums, re-skinning older ones, and beating special 'hands' (rhythms) performed exclusively during Muḥarram.

The process of building the large *tadjah* used to take 40 days, according to builders, but now, due to modern construction methods, such as the introduction of power tools and easily manipulated materials like styrotex, the length of time spent on construction has become more flexible.²⁶ The minimum required, however, is to begin on the first day of Muḥarram, as is common in many places in the south.²⁷ In the north, work on the *tadjahs* usually begins after the holiday feast called Baqra Eid (*'īd al-'adhā*), celebrated on the tenth day of Zul Hijja, the last month of the Islamic calendar.²⁸ Although participants in both locations loosely adhere to the temporal framework of the Islamic lunar calendar, many differences in structure, technique, and design exist between northern and southern *tadjahs*. The north, for example, is more 'traditional' in building the *katheeyah* (base) and internal frame, which is made primarily of *roseau*.²⁹ Today four of the five *tadjah* building crews in St. James employ *roseau* in binding the base and strengthening the frame. Otherwise, they have departed quite significantly from tradition in the scheme of colour, shape, and external décor, making them more colourful and glitzy, such as the costumes and floats of Carnival. The northern *tadjahs* exemplify what we might call 'material creolization,' which visually reflects the multicultural and cosmopolitan nature of the event in St. James, where it is often compared to the island's famous Carnival.³⁰

In the south, the frame is now made solely of wood. However, the exterior is more 'traditional,' sometimes referred to locally as the 'old style.' The structure of the *tadjah* is angular, the colour predominantly white, and the external decoration based on white crêpe paper flowers called 'knot rose.'³¹ In both north and south the height of the *tadjah* is currently limited to 15.6 feet due to the placement of electrical and telephone wires hanging over the streets. Earlier *tadjahs*, however, resembled Indian ones that were 20 or more feet high in the past, with as many as 6 or 7 tiers. In both areas, each *imambara* or camp has a headman, whose function is similar to the *sirdār* of the plantation period.³² The headmen are collectively responsible for making financial arrangements, securing parade permits from the police, and, in theory, maintaining the orderly behaviour of the crowd during the processional performances and drumming. The latter, however, is the task of the police in reality. Each camp also includes a master builder, his crew, drummers, and the men in charge of maintaining the drums.

Although the whole event, beginning with the cutting of the *roseau*, can be construed as a 'ritual' process, a term I have avoided until now, the most intense portions of Hosay begin to increase from the first of the month of Muḥarram, when those who are involved in *tadjah* preparation abstain from the intake of meat, fried foods, alcohol, salt, and from sexual intercourse. In the past, the prohibition applied to the whole duration of the 40 days, but nowadays most

only follow the customs associated with abstinence during the 10 days. Some individuals engaged in building the *tadjahs* at present follow the proscriptions as a form of sacrifice, but it is more a matter of personal volition rather than a general rule, for some people involved in the construction of the *tadjahs* in the south continue to drink when they are busy building the structures, while others continue to sleep with their wives during the observance. Regular Muslim prayers led by an itinerant imam hired for the purpose also begin from the first of Muḥarram in the north. He leads the communal prayers in Arabic each evening in front of the *imambaras*, after which specially prepared sweets are distributed to all in attendance. The practice of daily prayers at sunset generally was missing in Cedros for much of the past, although they are now performed, as will be discussed below.

The key to a successful observance here is adaptability and tolerance because many of the proscriptions serve more as ideal types, reflecting reality, not replicating it. Shoes must be removed while working in the *imbarara*, which is technically off-limits to women. In reality, however, post-pubescent girls may work inside as long as they are not menstruating. More and more women have been joining Hosay as both drummers and builders in recent years, especially in the south, as well as in the diaspora. Thus, whoever works on the structures is supposed to remain ritually or customarily pure. Acts of abstinence, combined with long hours of hard work during the evening hours and financial investment, are all viewed as ongoing sacrifices made by community members throughout the first ten days of Muḥarram. 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. By doing this, they participate locally in the global Shi'i master narrative and paradigm of Husayn's suffering on the esoteric level. At least this is the Shi'i version of it. The reality on the ground, however, is much more complicated, as we will see below, for the meanings underlying the practices are topics of hot contestation. In the next section of this chapter, I turn to a discussion of some of the contested issues at stake.

To pray or to play, that is the question

I intentionally avoided using the word 'ritual' above, since it most often refers to something considered sacred and therefore religious. However, as I already adumbrated, not everyone involved considers Hosay to be religious. Ritual thus becomes custom and religion becomes tradition, thereby breaking down the sacred–profane dichotomy.³³ This became even more clear to me when I returned to Trinidad to do a brief stint of fieldwork in Cedros during 2012 to satisfy my critic from the year before, who had scolded me for presenting Hosay as something religious and only from the St. James point of view. According to her, 'it ain't got nothin' to do with religion. It's culture, man!' I formulaically heard this same refrain made over and over again by various people, but it was especially true in the south when I visited Cedros several times during my latest period

of fieldwork. Scholars in other parts of the world, such as in South Africa and Indonesia, have also noticed the same types of discourses.³⁴

As I mentioned above, the people involved in Hosay down south are mostly non-Muslims. Many of them thus feel that Hosay is an ethnic pageant that celebrates the history and culture of East Indians living in Trinidad. It is a time of celebration and, therefore, not one of mourning. 'What is all this cryin' for? We supposed to be happy,' said one person after watching my 1998 film, in which an interviewee gets emotionally choked up when recounting her experiences growing up in one of the Hosay yards. It is precisely this attitude that upsets and agitates many of those involved in the process up north. Their response is often something like, 'They don't respect it, man!' One can take this to mean that they are not remaining faithful to the underlying, esoteric nature of the event. In many ways, the debate between the northerners and the southerners mirrors a larger debate on the island between the Sunni and the Shi'ah. The Shi'ah, being a minority within a minority (as they also were and continue to be in India and the rest of South Asia), have developed a survival strategy over the centuries similar to that of the so-called crypto-Jews of the American Southwest, who were able to retain their Jewishness over the centuries by pretending to be Catholics in the Hispanic regions of the New World and elsewhere.³⁵ In the same vein, the Shi'ah practice what is theologically termed *taqīyyah*, literally 'prudence' or 'fear,' which is a precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice for the purpose of avoiding persecution.³⁶

The concept has proven valuable over the centuries to assist the Shi'ah in persevering persecution throughout their history. In India, for example, the Shi'ah who entered from Iran were already considered a minority within a minority before their sojourn to the Caribbean. It is thus not surprising that in an effort at self-preservation, they did not protest too much when Hindus and Sunnis gradually began to coopt and usurp the public portions of the Muḥarram performances, which led to a more noticeable difference between public and private forms of observance.

The public forms, being more open to non-Shi'i participation, became more celebratory in nature, whereas the private portions continued to remain solemn occasions for annually mourning the death of Husayn, the supreme martyr. Also, it is within the public sphere that we notice most vividly the accretions that Hindus and Sunnis added to the public Muḥarram observances. It is therefore quite clear that the criticisms made by Sunnis against the Shi'ah and their observation of Hosay in Trinidad simply cannot be blamed on them, since the very things that they criticise, such as the fetishisation of the *tadjahs* with the accusation that it is *shirk* (idolatry), were due to their own interventions back in South Asia. The carnivalisation of Hosay, to repeat, was not a result of the arrival of Indians in the Caribbean, but one of the intermingling of Shi'i, Sunni, and Hindu elements back in South Asia before the indenture period even began.³⁷ The Sunni also object to the drumming, dancing, and drinking on the streets, collectively referred to as *fêteing* or jumping up. Yet, as the spokesmen for the St. James Shi'ah are quick to point out, they cannot control the crowd's behaviour on the streets and are therefore not responsible for the miscreant actions of revellers.³⁸

If the Sunni had their way, the *tadjahs* would not be allowed out of the yards in which they are built because they perceive them to be a mockery of Islam. The builders in the yards, however, insist that the *tadjahs* must go out, since following the rules of tradition is what makes the rite efficacious. If they do not parade them in the streets, they say, the performance would be incomplete, which could be ‘unlucky.’ Custom thus dictates ritual norms and is seen as integral to them. Due to this constant bombardment of criticism, the St. James Shi‘ah ultimately had to resort to *taqīyyah* as a strategy of survival, so when I first arrived in Trinidad to do fieldwork in the very early 1990s, people in the yards were extremely reluctant to call themselves Shi‘ah by saying things like, ‘we don’t make such distinctions here.’

By keeping silent on the issue of the Shi‘i nature of Hosay, the discourse on ethnic celebration rose to prominence, and it was this interpretation that the government accepted, endorsed, and stressed ever since Trinidad and Tobago’s independence from the British in 1962.³⁹ The T & T Tourism Board even got involved by advertising it globally as an Indian Carnival, in the hopes that tourists would flood the island to participate in the so-called ‘*fête*.’⁴⁰ Feeling underrepresented and helpless in the face of Sunni criticism and government cooption, the practitioners in the yards gradually tended to deemphasise or downplay Shi‘ism and let people think what they may about the external, public portions of the performances, which were largely believed to be ethnic and secular, not religious and sacred, at the core. The private performances, on the other hand, remained ritualistic and metaphysical in nature. The inside was thus esoteric and the outside was exoteric, what Sufis routinely refer to as *bāṭin* and *zāhir*, respectively.

In Cedros, meanwhile, the sorts of debates that went on in the north mostly did not occur. One reason is that the northerners ignored them. The second reason is that the southerners historically never stressed the religious or esoteric dimension of the ritual. For them, it was more of a matter of custom and tradition, rather than religion. Still, the *tadjahs* there were also believed to have some sort of magical power associated with both healing and good luck, but these aspects of the structures were most often written off as superstitions by the intelligentsia. The reasons for this, as mentioned above, is that there are very few Muslims in southern Trinidad, and virtually all of the people who build the structures paraded on the roads and paths in the village of Cedros are Hindus and Christians. Prayer, fasting, sexual abstinence, and all of the other sacrifices that northerners were compelled to observe were more or less ignored in Cedros, except by some pious elders who performed some of the austerities out of respect for the tradition. Moreover, the taboo against women’s participation was also largely bypassed in the south, and people involved in building the structures could often be seen consuming alcohol in or around the premises where the work was taking place. Such drunken processions used to be called ‘rum Hosays’ in the past.

Given the fact that the south has traditionally presented Hosay as an ethnic pageant during which mostly Hindus and Christians of East Indian descent participated both publicly and privately by building during the first seven days, then dancing and drinking on the three days of processions before finally immersing

the *tadjahs* whole into the ocean, why is it, then, that many of the older generations still follow the ritual calendar and perform the event as doctrinally prescribed during the first ten days of Muḥarram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar? Recall that even in Florida, a master *tadjah* builder from Cedros refused to build the structure outside of the prescribed timeframe.

When I asked people why they would not prepare for the event outside of the sanctioned period, I received the expected ambiguity of answers. Some simply responded that they did not know why, some stressed tradition, others said that it was out of respect for their Muslim brothers and sisters, but the majority said, in private, that it was the fear of suffering some sort of personal, familial, or social calamity. In confidence, I was told of miraculous stories concerning people who were either saved from hardship and turmoil as a result of participating in Hosay or of those who faced catastrophic consequences by not following the proper sequencing.⁴¹ One fellow even told me that he was saved from death by practising Hosay, which is why he has been doing so ever since. Some people thus make ‘promises,’ called *vrats* by Hindus and *mannats* by Muslims in South Asia, which both mean ‘vow.’ The promises form reciprocal pacts with the objects of veneration to guarantee the ongoing ‘good luck’ of the practitioner, so that no misfortune should fall upon him or her during the upcoming year. The flags paraded on the first night of processions, literally known as Flag Night, represent the individual promises of yard participants.

The ‘superstitious’ belief, as some call it, in the power of the *tadjahs* specifically and Hosay in general are based on Muslim folklore about the spirit of the two brothers, Hasan and Husayn, entering into their respective makeshift mausolea during the event. This belief goes all the way back to India, from whence the rite came.⁴² The *tadjahs* are thus believed to be alive, and they remain so until the tenth day, after which the structures are considered ‘dead’ and undergo *janāzah* funerary prayers that are incumbent upon all Muslims. The funeral prayers were not always practised in the south, yet the belief in the living powers of the *tadjahs* during that specific period of time is still quite strong, regardless of religious orientations. Even avowed atheists reluctantly told me that they believed in the powers of the Hosay, based on personal experience. One could therefore think of this belief as a shared form of East Indian folklore or oral tradition that cuts across religious lines.⁴³

Hosay hermeneutics in the global ecumene

The other related issue that must be considered is the question of authenticity. Which is the real version? In 1996, one of the yard heads said to me that ‘one version’s got to be right and the others wrong.’ This was after the missionary from the Bilal Mission began attending the event annually and criticising the way things were done there. The missionary wishes to standardise Hosay through a process that involves purification by removing all of what he perceives to be the ‘creolised’ elements. The yard head quoted above thus could no longer accept a multivocal or polysemic version of authenticity, given that there exist concepts

of 'right' and 'wrong.' And here is where the issue of tradition is invoked. As we have seen briefly, the answer really depends upon whom you ask, when you ask, and why you ask the question. In other words, it is highly dependent upon context. A variety of personal, social, religious, political, economic, and racial factors all contribute to Hosay hermeneutics. For a government official, Hosay can be a part of national patrimony, for a member of the tourist board it can be a *fête* with an economic basis, for an Afro-Trinidadian reveller it can be an Indian carnival, for an non-Muslim Indo-Trinidadian it can be an ethnic pageant to remind one nostalgically of home, and for a member of the small community of Shi'ite Muslims in St. James it can be a passion play with eschatological and soteriological consequences. Finally, for the outside Shi'i missionary, it can be an incorrect set of performances that deviate from the standard model provided by liturgies and scriptures alien to the local community. As a result, there is a 'collision of cultures,' as James Clifford (1994, 302) characterises all discourse in diasporas. At the same time, however, there is another dimension to it that concerns not just contestation but also negotiation.

In the global ecumene, the need for negotiation as a strategy of survival is paramount.⁴⁴ Negotiation is also a part of determinations concerning authenticity. Does anything go? Has the mechanical reproduction replaced the original?⁴⁵ Or was there ever an original, and, if so, where does its aura reside? Benjamin would say that the aura resides in the original, which becomes devalued with mechanical reproduction, but as I have argued in my previous writings on Hosay, any answer one might posit is bound to be limited in scope, for explanatory models do not totally account for the messy nature of culture, especially in the global context, where everything is subject to interpretation and reframing. Thus, all of the perspectives given above have some measure of legitimacy for the people who accept them as viable interpretations. All answers are therefore both right and wrong simultaneously. Authenticity is, from this perspective, more of an issue of nostalgia and desire based on a (post-)modern loss of faith and meaning, as Charles Lindholm has argued.⁴⁶

In his book titled *Culture and Authenticity*, Lindholm argues that authenticity has many guises. It can offer a sense of belonging or connectivity, and, as such, infuses value into things and experiences by emphasising the 'really real' or the pure, yet it is not a fixed concept because it changes over time. Authenticity, however it is perceived, is ultimately about purity, which can result in a harmless nostalgia for a better past or even violent ethnic cleansing to achieve purity in the most extreme and harsh cases. Hosay has thus been prone to violence in the past,⁴⁷ but it also harkens back to an earlier, more harmonious pre-diasporan era utopia.⁴⁸ Authenticity in the global ecumene is thus a force for both homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Tradition, the basis for discourses over authenticity, is inherently conservative, which resists change as best it can to preserve itself continuously over time and through space, yet globalisation slowly eats away at tradition to bring about inevitable change. Tradition persists, though, despite the most powerful forces it faces. With reference to hybridity (what I prefer to call 'creolization'), Bruno

Latour suggests that the constant attempt to purify something naturally leads to change.⁴⁹ Purification is thus an incomplete project. In other words, no matter how much one attempts to mediate the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity, local and global, change is inevitable, for time and history must move forward. How does such theorising play out in terms of Hosay?

As I have previously argued, the Muḥarram rituals, as they developed in Iran, build upon pre-Islamic elements concerning a nascent cult of the dead, with a focus on heroes that we find resurrected in the Persian epic known as the *Shahnameh*.⁵⁰ The remembrance of Husayn then develops into private and public observances until it receives official sanction when Shi'ism becomes the state religion under the Safavids. The fact that the Persian or Iranian *ta'zīyeh* does not simply emerge *ex nihilo*, at the moment of the historical event central to the Karbala paradigm, suggests that it must be seen as building on prior phenomena, some elements abandoned, others emphasised, and yet others reworked. What this dynamic process implies is both convergence as well as divergence, what I have discussed previously as creolisation and decreolisation.⁵¹

Creolisation is something that we normally associate with sociolinguistics, but it works well as a model for global culture, as Ulf Hannerz has convincingly demonstrated. He discusses a 'world' in creolisation, which suggests that cultural mixing is inevitable as it moves from one place to another, encountering other cultures along the way.⁵² It is not just something associated with the Caribbean in the same sense that ritual exchange is not only something associated with Polynesia or caste as something solely associated with India.⁵³ Thus, when *ta'zīyeh* gets to South Asia, it innovatively takes on brand new inflections but retains several key elements from the Iranian observances. Certain things remain continuous, even as innovations creep in. Notable changes occur even to the name of the event and its key performance in South Asia, yet the Karbala paradigm lends continuity to an ever-changing phenomenon that must adapt to survive. It is worth stressing again that the Shi'ah lost performative control of the public portions of the event in South Asia, thereby being somewhat dispossessed of a critical aspect of their heritage. Hindus and Sunnis now controlled the public portions of the event, for better or for worse, as the Indian Shi'ah had to resort more and more to *taqīyyah* as a strategy for self-preservation and survival. After centuries of mingling, during which the dialectical process of creolisation/decreolisation continues, the entire performance complex gets transferred to the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, where it encounters yet another distinct layer of culture associated with Afro-Trinidadians.

In the Caribbean a rite of passage becomes a passage of rites, where it continues to go through a series of creative transformations, some conscious, some not, but still remains true to an imagined original or traditional form brought from India under British colonial rule. Creole is, of course, a term commonly associated with the Caribbean, but my argument is that creolisation and its concomitant decreolisation did not just happen or begin in the Caribbean, for it was already happening in India, and even earlier still in Iran (where ludic elements are also present) and most likely even before then in Iraq.

In Fernand Braudel's *longue durée*, mixing and change continue as a forward-moving force involving constant and conscious interpretation and reinterpretation of practices and meanings that converge in some instances and diverge in yet others as part and parcel of larger historical structures.⁵⁴ As Henry Glassie notes, change is the natural state of tradition, for it provides, as he puts it, an 'illusion of stability.'⁵⁵ Such crisscrossing over time and through space has resulted in the rich panoply of meanings associated with Hosay in Trinidad and elsewhere in the world today. It allows us to appreciate the fact that authenticity is in the eye of the beholder, and that an item of tradition can constantly be in the process of change while magically seeming to stay the same, which is what members in the Hosay yards say when outsiders from the Bilal Muslim Mission, for example, tell them that they are doing it wrong. Here the Hosay practitioners can cite tradition as what they perceive to be static and eternal when they say in a paraphrase, 'we're just doing it like our ancestors from India taught us to do.'

What results from the continuous process of tradition making is an ongoing contestation over an imagined form of authenticity that can only be what Max Weber famously termed an 'ideal type.'⁵⁶ The ideal type does not exist in reality, but only as a model in the mind of the analyst. The ideal and the real are mere reflections of one another, but one thing is certain: the utopian ideal type never existed in a past golden age (Williams 1973), for tradition is the ongoing byproduct of human creativity, 'volitional, temporal action,' the 'small acts' that yield 'big patterns.'⁵⁷ Hosay's *longue durée*, therefore, could not have been possible without the individual agency of each of the people involved in it over the centuries who have left their mark, be they Shi'i or Sunni Muslims, South Asian or Indo-Caribbean Hindus, or Afro-Caribbean Christians and Shango practitioners. All forms of agency leave their immutable mark on something as emotionally compelling as Hosay, and for that we should be grateful.

Meanwhile, back in Cedros, despite the claims that their version of Hosay is the real one because it is secular and belongs to all Trinidadians of Indian descent, we see that there, too, change continues to creep in. When I was in Cedros during my last trip, I noticed more and more things that we might associate with the northern Hosay, like communal prayer and abstinence, are beginning to take hold in the southern version, now that a young but charismatic imam who used to be a budding drummer in St. James before he went abroad to study in an Islamic seminary, attends annually to preside over the occasion. His presence has had a bit of a reformist impact on how Hosay is observed in Cedros, but it is still more or less how I found it first in the early 1990s, namely, an Islamic observance performed predominantly by East Indian Hindus and Christians for the purposes of celebrating their ethnic heritage and their contribution to Trinidadian culture. In the end, the popular Trini slogan, 'who say, I say, Hosay,' still applies.

Notes

- 1 Bishop, John and Frank J. Korom. *Hosay Trinidad* (DVD). Watertown: Documentary Educational Resources, 1998.

- 2 The term *kitchrie* (*khicrī*) refers to a well-known East Indian dish made up of leftover rice and lentils, combined with whatever vegetables are near at hand. It is often used as a metaphor for East Indian culture in the Caribbean, which is a combination of ingredients 'leftover' from the Old World and combined with whatever is available in the New World. On the concept and logic of mixing in the Caribbean, with special reference to Trinidad, see Viranjini Munasinge, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad: East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- 3 The event, however, did include a number of shorter talks by members of the community on the history of Hosay in Trinidad, but the religious dimensions of the performances were primarily discussed as historical background and tradition. In fact, the term 'legend' was used in their pamphlet to refer to the tragic historical events surrounding the origins of Hosay. Most of the speakers were, in fact, Hindu, except for the master builder, 'Ustad' Abdool Karatee, who shared elderly memories of past Hosays. The event was thus largely parsed as an aspect of Indian ethnic heritage, rather than a Shi'ite ritual, in which a museum served as the *imambara*.
- 4 The builders were from the 'imambara yard' in Richmond Hill, Queens, where a drum room for *tassas* is also maintained. The self-proclaimed master builder there is the aforementioned Abdool Karatee.
- 5 www.jayadeviarts.inc. Accessed on 13 April 2020.
- 6 These are not the first instances of the sacred structures being built out of context, for John Nunley of the St. Louis Museum of Art had organised for a *tadjah* to be built in his museum as part of a festival arts exhibition that he was curating. See John W. Nunley and Judith Bettelheim, *Caribbean Festival Arts: Each and Every Bit of Difference* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988).
- 7 The observance of this occasion is to the Shi'ah what Good Friday is to Christians. Indeed, many observers over the centuries have referred to the Shi'i Muḥarram rituals performed around the world as a 'passion play,' on the analogy of Christ's passion during the days preceding Easter.
- 8 Guha Shankar, 'Imagining India(ns): Cultural Performances and Diaspora Politics in Jamaica,' Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 2003.
- 9 Jim Masselos, 'Power in the Bombay "Muhalla." 1904–15: An Initial Exploration into the World of the Indian Urban Muslim,' *South Asia* 6 (1976): 75–95; also see Jim Masselos, 'Change and Custom in the Format of the Bombay Mohurrum during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,' *South Asia* 5, no. 2 (1982): 47–67.
- 10 Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muḥarram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).
- 11 Samsouandar is a Hindu Indo-Trinidadian, but he also feels patriotic to his homeland. In his own way of looking at it, he wanted to make the film a statement about the role of Indians in Trinidad and also the role that Hosay played to bring East Indians together, even at times when the Afro-Trinidadian population was hostile to them.
- 12 Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 232–45.
- 13 See Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
- 14 Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 170–76.
- 15 Frank J. Korom, 'Empowerment through Representation and Collaboration in Museum Exhibitions,' *Journal of Folklore Research* 36 (2–3) (1999): 235–41; also see Frank J. Korom, 'Blunders, Plunders and the Wonders of Religious Ethnography: "Archiving" Tales from the Field,' *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 13/1 (2001): 58–73.
- 16 The Bilal Muslim Mission, a Shi'i organisation, was founded in East Africa in 1964 due to the efforts of Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi. Their goal is to promote Shi'i Islam around the world. They first came to Trinidad in 1992 after a failed coup organised by a Sunni Muslim group on the island. Their efforts to revive and support the small group of Shi'ah on the island led to some radical changes in how Hosay was organised, per-

- formed, and perceived in St. James. However, their impact was rather minimal in the south, where Cedros is located.
- 17 Singh, Kelvin, *Bloodstained Tombs: The Muharram Massacre 1884* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1988).
 - 18 Frank J. Korom, 'Reconciling the Local and the Global: The Ritual Space of Shi'i Islam in Trinidad,' *Journal of Ritual Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999): 21–36.
 - 19 Martins de Araújo, 'Trinidad Século XIX: Estratégias Culturais Entre Indianos e Afro-Descendentes na Festa Muçulmana do Hosay,' *Revista Mosaico* 1, no. 2 (2008): 232–44.
 - 20 Goolam Vahed, 'Constructions of Community and Identity among Indians in Colonial Natal, 1860–1910: The Role of the Muharram Festival,' *Journal of African History* 43, no. 1 (2002): 77–93; see also Goolam Vahed, 'Contesting Indian Islam in KwaZulu-Natal: The Muharram Festival in Durban, 2002,' in *The Popular and the Public: Cultural Debates and Struggles over Public Space in Modern India, Africa and Europe*, ed. Preben Kaarsholm and Isabel Hofmeyr (London: Seagull Books, 2009), 107–40.
 - 21 Milton Singer, *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).
 - 22 Again, the term is derived from a Hindi/Urdu precedent (*ta'zīya*) that goes back to a Perso-Arabic term for the expression of grief. The /z/ shift to /j/ is quite common in eastern Hindi dialects, such as Bhojpuri, which was the form spoken by the majority of people who came to the Caribbean from northern India. Some Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, however, imaginatively refer to it as Urdu, since it has Islamic connotations, being, as it is, the national language of Pakistan, an Islamic republic.
 - 23 Members of the mission now hand out pamphlets every evening to explain their version of the historical events that correspond to each night of public performance. They also urge bystanders to respect the event as a religious ritual by not dancing or drinking, which has led many non-participants to say that Hosay is no longer any 'fun.' Indeed, the crowds have thinned considerably over the years since I did my initial research between 1990 and 1996.
 - 24 For one such example, see Brenda E. F. Beck, *The Three Twins: The Telling of a South Indian Folk Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).
 - 25 'Karbala paradigm' is a term coined by Michael M. J. Fisher, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980) to refer to the all-encompassing impact that the tragic events surrounding Husayn's martyrdom have had on the collective psyche of Shi'ah all over the world. See also Frank J. Korom, 'Reconciling the Local and the Global: The Ritual Space of Shi'i Islam in Trinidad,' *Journal of Ritual Studies* 13, no. 1 (1999b): 21–36 and Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muḥarram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 16–31.
 - 26 It is now also becoming increasingly common for builders to recycle many of the materials, especially the frame, so that they don't need to begin from scratch every year. Cost is an issue as well.
 - 27 The moon yards of St. James also construct their crescents during the first ten days of Muḥarram.
 - 28 For a description, see Christian W. Troll, 'Muslim Festivals and Ceremonies,' in *The Muslims of India: Beliefs and Practices*, ed. Peter Jackson (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1988), 44.
 - 29 *Roseau* is commonly called 'giant reed,' a grass known as *Arundo donax* L.
 - 30 My thanks go out to Regina Bendix for suggesting this provocative term to me back in 2001.
 - 31 One of the structures built in 1991 was covered with 24,000 of these hand-made knot roses. An alternative name for these ornaments in south Trinidad is *batassah*.
 - 32 The *imambara* (Trinidadian spelling) is a roofed shack with three permanent walls and one wall that is removable so that *tadjah* segments can be brought out easily and assem-

- bled in the adjacent yard. Note that in St. James, use of the word ‘camp’ is discouraged, but tolerated.
- 33 Frank J. Korom, ‘Contested Identities and the Uses of Tradition among Indo-Trinidadians,’ in *Folklore, Heritage Politics and Ethnic Diversity: A Festschrift for Barbro Klein*, ed. P. J. Anttonen (Botkyrka: Multicultural Centre, 2000), 86–99.
 - 34 For example, see Chiara Formichi, ‘Shaping Shi’a Identities in Contemporary Indonesia between Local Tradition and Foreign Orthodoxy,’ *Die Welt des Islams* 54 (2014): 212–36, or Goolam Vahed, ‘Contested Meanings and Authenticity: Indian Islam and Muharram Performances in Durban, 2002,’ *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19, no. 2 (2005): 129–45.
 - 35 See Stanley Hordes, *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); also see David Gilitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).
 - 36 Etan Kohlberg, *Secrecy and Concealment* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1995).
 - 37 Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 53–96.
 - 38 Moreover, say the elder spokesmen, the crowds do not know the real meaning of Hosay, since they are not members of the yards in which the *tadjahs* are built. Those who participate in drumming and building generally tend to know the core narrative and they observe the various taboos associated with the 10–40-day period leading up to the climax on the tenth day.
 - 39 Independence was based on an Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom, which granted Trinidad and Tobago independence on August 31, 1962. The newly formed Republic of Trinidad and Tobago then implemented a new constitution, which went into effect retroactively from the moment of independence. Since the newly formed government was almost completely Afro-Trinidadian, one of the issues taken up was the role of Indo-Trinidadians in the new nation, which continues to be debated down to the present, despite the fact that the two ethnic populations have equalled out and East Indians have even served as Prime Ministers of the Republic.
 - 40 In fact, that is how I first discovered Hosay back in 1985, when I stumbled upon an advertisement for British West Indian Airlines (BWIA) that invited the reader to come to colourful Trinidad to experience the India carnival called Hosay. See Molly Ahye, *Golden Heritage: The Dance in Trinidad and Tobago* (Petit Valley, Trinidad and Tobago: Heritage Cultures, Ltd., 1978).
 - 41 The commitment to be a part of Hosay involves making ‘promises’ (vows) that obligate individuals to contribute financially or by providing materials and labour. Women also make promises, then sew the flags as a symbol of their promise to take out in procession on Flag Night.
 - 42 Rahi Masoom Reza, *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* (New Delhi: Viking Penguin Books India (P), Ltd., 1994).
 - 43 In fact, non-Indians who have been drawn to the practice of Hosay also believe in the power of the structures. One Afro-Trinidadian auto mechanic, who was in his eighties, told me that he once had a heart attack during Small Hosay Night. He believed he was dead, but was taken into the *imbarara* where he was miraculously revived. He had been making promises of one kind or another ever since the incident took place back in the 1950s. On miracles in popular Islam, see Torsten Tschacher, ‘Rational Miracles, Cultural Rituals and the Fear of Syncretism: Defending Contentious Muslim Practice among Tamil-Speaking Muslims,’ *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, no. 1 (2009): 55–82.
 - 44 Ulf Hannerz, ‘Notes on the Global Ecumene,’ *Public Culture* 1, no. 2 (1989): 66–75.
 - 45 Walter Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,’ in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana, 1968), 214–18.
 - 46 Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008).

- 47 Subho Basu, 'Strikes and "Communal" Riots in Calcutta in the 1890s: Industrial Workers, Bhadrak Nationalist Leadership and the Colonial State,' *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 4 (1998): 949–83.
- 48 Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia,' *Social Text* 1 (1979): 130–48.
- 49 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- 50 Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).
- 51 Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 194–201.
- 52 Ulf Hannerz, 'The World in Creolisation,' *Africa* 57, no. 4 (1987): 546–59.
- 53 Arjun Appadurai, 'Place and Voice in Anthropological Theory,' *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1988): 16–20.
- 54 Fernand Braudel, 'Histoire et Sciences sociales: La longue durée,' *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 13, no. 4 (1958): 725–53.
- 55 Henry Glassie, 'Tradition,' *Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (1995): 395–412, esp. p. 405.
- 56 Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Free Press, 1949), 90–107.
- 57 Henry Glassie, 'Tradition,' *Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 430 (1995): 395–412, esp. p. 409.