

PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAM AND THE BODY¹

PERSPECTIVAS SOBRE ISLAM Y EL CUERPO

Abstract

Islamic ritual practice and law, including the various ways in which they govern the body, distinguish Islam from other religious traditions and thus are, in part, constitutive of Muslim identity. In spite of the undisputed centrality of the body in the formation of subjectivity and identity, Islamic ritual practices are often contested. This compilation of works on the body aims to make sense of some of these contested spaces, as well as the roles that ritual purity and discipline play in training the body to perform rituals effectively. Furthermore, it also traces the historical origin of a few of these ritual practices—especially those that center upon role of the Prophet Muḥammad's body and his personal example—and examines the different ways that the Prophet's legacy is interpreted theologically and legally within the Muslim community.

Keywords: Islam; Body; Relics; Ashura; Sufism; *Baraka*.

Resumen

Los ritos y jurisprudencia islámicos, los cuales regulan la gestión del cuerpo, distinguen el Islam de otras tradiciones religiosas y son entonces, al menos parcialmente, componentes constitutivos de la identidad musulmana. A pesar de la centralidad evidente del cuerpo en la formación de la subjetividad e identidad en el contexto islámico, existen disputas sobre cómo mejor llevar a cabo la práctica ritual. Este grupo de ensayos sobre el cuerpo tiene como fin describir y explicar algunos de estos espacios en disputa, además del papel que la pureza ritual y la disciplina juegan en el entrenamiento del cuerpo para poder realizar los ritos de manera efectiva. Busca además trazar los orígenes históricos de algunos de estos ritos, especialmente los que tienen como modelo el cuerpo del Profeta Mahoma y su ejemplo personal, y examina las distintas formas en las cuales su legado se interpreta teológica y legalmente en la comunidad musulmana.

Palabras clave: Islam; Cuerpo; Reliquias; Ashura; Sufismo; *Baraka*.

1 Editor's Note: The authors of this work wrote these essays as undergraduate students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Nota editorial: las autoras escribieron estos ensayos mientras eran estudiantes de grado en la Universidad de Tennessee, Knoxville.

I. Introduction

This essay offers a broad overview and theoretical framework for understanding the body in Islam. Islamic ritual practice and law, including the various way sin which they govern the body, distinguish Islam from other faiths and thus are, in part, constitutive of Muslim identity. In spite of the centrality of the body in the formation of subjectivity and identity, Islamic ritual practices are often contested. This compilation of works on the body aims to make sense of some of these contested spaces, as well as the roles that ritual purity and discipline play in training the body to perform rituals effectively. Furthermore, it also traces the historical origin of a few of these ritual practices, especially those that center upon role of the Prophet Muḥammad's body and his personal example, as well as differences in how this legacy is interpreted theologically and legally within the Muslim community.

II. Islam, Ritual Practice, and the Body: An Introduction

Katherine Harwell

Religion in the public sphere often requires a physical body. The body is central to ritual practice, and thus, to normative understandings of Muslim identity. As Shahzad Bashir states, "the body is the fundamental ground on and through which a person

constructs one's identity as a Muslim."² In constructing one's identity, the body places the individual within environments and societal structures that come to shape what it means to be a member of society, individually as well as communally. In this sense, the body becomes paradoxical; it has the ability to unify individuals to a larger community of believers while simultaneously marking them as distinct from one another. This is evident in how canonical laws, texts, and practices of the faith describe Islamic orthodoxy, often by dictating what the body can and cannot do. Through these regulations and interpretations, the body is layered with social, personal, and legal meanings, which can shape what it means to be—or to be recognized—as a Muslim. What the body does can be interpreted as both a personal and social statement, as actions can be done privately, with no audience or community, as well as publicly, which pushes the tradition into the public sphere. In this way, the paradoxical nature of the body works in tandem with the mind to create identity, personal and public, unifying and individualizing, the body provides a space for the mind to collide with the social world in order to create a sense of identity. *The ritualized body, the gendered body, the cultural body, and the body in community all come together*

² Shahzad Bashir, "Body," in *Key Themes in the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 74–75.

to shape religious identity; in the merging of the mental and physical, Muslim bodies become individual testimonies of their own beliefs, giving them an additional means through which to understand the truths of the faith.

In her discussion on the body in ritual, Catherine Bell describes the ritualized body as “a body invested with a sense of ritual.”³ She states that “ritualization produces this ritualized body through the interaction of the body with a structured and structuring environment,” and that it is through “a series of physical movements [that] ritual practices spatially and temporally construct an environment organized according the schemes of privileged opposition.” In other words, Bell explains that ritual practice creates an environment through the movements and meanings it consists of. In constructing this environment for the body to inhabit, the ritual environment influences the body with “schemes of privileged opposition” that the body then internalizes and reinforces. This ritual environment is made through certain principles that come to constitute the ritual, and once that environment is established, the social body can take part within it and thus take on the principles it contains. Bell argues that this is a cyclical process, as social bodies, once ritualized

through the ritual environment, will generate the same principles and begin the process over again.⁴ In this discussion, Bell draws attention to the fact that the ritualized body contains this ability to create the ritual environment as well as take part within it, yet does not make mention of a ritualized mind that could take part in this process as well. However, in order to internalize and reinforce the “schemes of privileged opposition,” a ritualized mind is also required. Through ritual practice, the ritual body creates these environments, and the ritualized mind can at that moment become present within them. Then, these two entities can work together to create Bell’s cyclical nature of ritualization that comes to recreate the process. This same notion of a ritualized body and a ritualized mind can be applied to Bell’s ideas of resolving social contradictions as well, as the ritualized body and ritualized mind work together to create the meanings Bell mentions. Bell goes on to say that “ritualization does not resolve social contradiction, but instead it catches up into itself all the experiences and conventional conflicts and oppositions of social life, juxtaposing and homogenizing them into a loose and provisional systematicity.”⁵ In other words, ritualization does not resolve social contradiction in that it does not produce significance.

3 Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 98.

4 Bell, “The Ritual Body,” 98–99.

5 *Ibid.*, 105.

Even though one may come out of a ritual as a “ritualized individual,” that process does not provide final signification, or even perhaps a solution to all of the social contradictions through the ritual itself. Rather, the ritual seems to embrace all of the contradictions and place them into a system of binary oppositions and hierarchical patterns.⁶ This does not resolve contradictions; however, it gives individuals meanings and terms to validate older means of dealing with the same contradictions. Bell argues that rituals and the environments they create merely provide the terms for a possible resolution, without ever offering a real one.⁷ Here too, the ritualized body and ritualized environment require a ritualized mind in order to create the meanings and terms needed to deal with these contradictions. The ritualized body, through actions and movements, ritualizes the mind, and together the two work to create the ritualized environment that can enable the individual to find the terms needed to experience the social world.

Thus, the ritualized body and ritualized mind must work together in constructing identity. The physicality of the ritualized body merges with the beliefs and ideas of the ritualized mind to create the ritual environment, all culminating in a space that can provide

significance and meaning to social contradictions. In creating a Muslim identity, the ritual act of prayer exhibits this idea. Among *‘ibādāt*, or acts of worship, the one most commonly practiced is *ṣalāt*, or ritual prayer. The ritual prayer is recited by Muslims five times a day, requiring them to adjust their routines and affix their mind and body toward reverent worship of Allāh. This physical act of the body that is repeated throughout the day requires the mind to follow suit, which sets the structure of the day around the practice of the faith. Beginning with the call to prayer, or the *‘adhān*, *ṣalāt* prepares the mind and body for worship through *takbīr*, or the glorification of God:

God is most great! God is most great! I bear witness that there is no God but God I bear witness that there is no God but God. I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God. Come to prayer! Come to prayer! Come to success! Come to success! God is most great. There is no God but God.

Through this call to prayer, both the mind and the body are summoned to worship together. The verb *to come* in this instance calls upon action; not only is it the coming of the mind to worship, but the coming of the physical body as well. Both the body and the mind come together to push one’s being into the full act of worshipping

6 Ibid., 105–106.

7 Ibid., 106.

through prayer. This ritual call summons the body to begin the movements of the prayer, and thus calls the body to begin creating the ritual environment. The ritualized mind follows and becomes present within this ritualized environment, and both the body and mind work together to perform this ritual that is central to Islam. In order to fully take part in the daily prayer, the ritualized body and the ritualized mind must work together. As a key component of the faith, the prayer is central to forming Muslim identity.

In addition to the examination of the ritualized body and mind, the analysis of certain legal regulations of the body can also be used to examine the connection between body and mind. Ultimately, “the bodily practice is conveyed through the narrative discourse of legal requirements, marking them as means through which actual bodies get molded and as the social practices that tie individuals to each other in a community.”⁸ Within the tradition, Muslim bodies have testified religious truths to different communities who witness Islamic ritual practices. Thus, the regulation and constant awareness of the body is vastly important as it may come to shape Islamic identity. Returning to the ritual prayer, there are many interpretations of the laws surrounding the act of worship. For instance, the influential Sufi scholar Ibn

‘Arabī of Murcia (d. 1240) had “elaborate interpretations of the standard rituals as symbolic actions relating to the relationship between God and human beings.”⁹ Ibn ‘Arabī focuses on the positions of the ritual prayer as they relate to the relationship between God and man, with each position taking human beings a step further on the path to reach God. *Ṣalāt*, for instance, begins with a gradual descent towards the ground, which Ibn ‘Arabī reads as the lowering of the ego in order to please God. After the first three positions of descent, the prayer ends in a sitting position, which he sees as “an act connected to the Qur’ānic verse that states that ‘God created the heavens and the earth in six days, then He sat upon the throne’ (Q57:4).”¹⁰ His interpretation shows the importance of the body as it physically brings human beings into a position of prostration before God, taming the ego and bringing the body to rest, thus “affirming the necessary religious relationship between human beings and God.”¹¹ Given Ibn ‘Arabī’s explanation of ritual prayer, it is possible to say that the focus and meaning behind it simultaneously describes the human being’s journey on the path towards God, and joins together body and mind in worship. Here, the ritualized body physically lowers the physical body into

9 Ibid., 82.

10 Ibid., 83.

11 Ibid.

8 Bashir, “Body,” 80.

prostration, ritualizing the mind in the remembrance of the relationship between the ego and Allāh. This creates the ritualized environment in which Muslim bodies testify religious truths, thus making the body a fundamental aspect that can shape Muslim identity.

On the other hand, the Ḥurūfī interpretation combines the articulation of the name of God with the recognition of creation through the bodily positions of the ritual prayer. A sect of Islam originating in Iran during the fourteenth century, the Ḥurūfīs believed in a “cataclysmic apocalypse” in which they were the only righteous group to whom God had granted the precise meaning of *ṣalāt*.¹² The Ḥurūfīs focused specifically on the three Arabo-Persian letters that constitute the name of God (*Allāh*). The three letters, *alif*, *lām*, and *hāʾ*, were said to correspond to the first three positions of the ritual prayer, as well as have the shapes of all that existed in the created world: straight, bent, and rounded.¹³ Thus, the first three positions of the ritual prayer mimic these letters, paying tribute to the whole of the created world and the physical articulation of the name of God. In both Ibn ‘Arabi’s interpretation and the Ḥurūfī interpretation, the precise movements of the body have personal, communal, legal, and even cosmic repercussions.

Legal regulations also tie Muslim bodies to the greater community, making the body an important locus of Islamic traditions. Social constructions of gender also play a large part in the role of the body in Islam. As Scott Kugle explains, “the Qur’ān depicts human beings in gendered pairs, contrasting female with male. It pictures the process of creation through the union of distinctly gendered bodies and represents them as embodying different elements of the holistic process.”¹⁴ In other words, the language of the Qur’ān presumes contrasting gendered pairs to speak to its readers and assigns different elements of the faith to these genders. Thus, normative Muslim identity takes root in the ground of the gendered body. Islamic law contributes in the construction of a gendered body as well, as different interpretations and fundamental principles dictate what a male or female body is or is not, and what it can or cannot do.

In these ways, the gendered body becomes layered with social, personal, and legal meanings that shape what it means to be Muslim. As many feminist scholars have debated, the question of whether “the Qur’ān’s scriptural bifurcation of the human being into a gendered pair irrevocably inscribe[s] patriarchal values into the core of

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Scott Kugle, *Sufi Saints’ Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 81.

Islam as a religion” informs the study of the body in Islam.¹⁵ This question speaks both to the social norms of the Qur’ān’s first recipients as well as the tensions that lie in the discourse involving female bodies and Islam. While the answer to that question is left ambiguous, it still remains clear that the gendered ideology works in conjunction with the body and belief to create an identity for the individual. Through the body, a Muslim can come to take part in traditional methods of worship, interpret laws and regulations as a means of finding a place within the tradition, and come to use the body as a means of fitting into a larger society in the social realm. The gendered context takes this idea of the body and specializes the experience; female bodies take on specific rituals, are interpreted differently than the male body, and carry with it different associations and functions. Through these different facets of religious life, female Muslim bodies become their own testimony, giving women an additional means through which to understand the truths of Islam.

In Islamic law as in other legal and taxonomical systems, two main components are determinant in legally distinguishing and defining the female in body: childbirth and the womb. The womb is often seen as a place of nourishment; a life giving and

sustaining part of the body that houses and continues life; the womb can be thought of as a sacred place that is a necessary and important vehicle for life. The Qur’ān itself describes a gendered body, and highlights the female body as one that plays an integral role in God’s continuing, sustaining, and re-creating of humankind, it states:

To God are the hidden aspects of
the heavens and the earth

And the day of reckoning is like a
flash of the eye, or even more sudden

For God is capable of all things.

God has brought you forth from the
bellies of your mothers

When you knew nothing, and made
for you ears and eyes and mouths

That you might give thanks.¹⁶

These two verses string together the capabilities of God and the bellies of mothers; in the reading of these two verses together, the creative power of God is extended through the female body and manifests itself within the belly. God creates ears and eyes and mouths and does so within the sacred space of the female belly. The language of the text itself speaks to this idea of God’s creative continuance within the mother, as the name of God, the merciful One (*raḥmān*) shares the same

16 Muhammad A.S. Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur’ān* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16:77–78.

15 Ibid.

root as word for womb (*rahīm*). This grammatical correspondence ties the female body both to God as nurturer and to the ideas of sustenance and life, which allow women to play a unique role. The qualities displayed in these verses place the mother apart from other familial roles, as “through [the association of] women and the womb, the Qur’ān not only advocates the virtue of caring for others and respecting one’s ties to them but also suggests that revering one’s mother is the way to understand the compassionate quality of God.”¹⁷ In this way, the female body is given a role that establishes important ties between the body and God, creating a unique place for the female body within the tradition.

Just as the body is the vessel through which one can perform rituals or interact with others, it can also be the battleground where purity meets corporal regulation. In Islam, *sharī‘a* law governs aspects of the human body and behavior as they pertain to ritual purity, instructing Muslims on when and how to make themselves pure before worship. As Marion Katz explains, Islamic jurisprudence’s “unflinching attention to the least sublime aspects of human existence” and “exhaustive examination of the minutiae of the believer’s biological functions, up to and including the details of elimination and sexual behavior, has provoked the

mirth of seventh century pagans and twentieth century Americans alike.”¹⁸ However, beyond the unease that this emphasis on the body may have caused non-Muslims, the attention to detail within the *sharī‘a* regarding human biological functions shows the great importance placed upon the body and the notion of ritual purity within the tradition. Covering things like urination, defecation, and even sleep, many regulations apply to both male and female bodies. However, for female bodies in particular, menstrual bleeding raises important questions that deal specifically with ritual purity and practice for Muslim women.

Within the bounds of Islamic law, blood that is outside of the body is considered impure and requires that one perform ritual ablutions before partaking in any ritual or form of worship. Menstruating women are subject to regulations that determine whether menstrual blood is impure, and if it is, what steps one must take to purify the body in order to perform ritual acts of worship. Even if it is considered an impurity, menstrual blood (like other forms of blood) is only one that requires *wuḍū’*—minor ablution—in order to prepare the body for ritual participation. Historically, however, there are different accounts regarding the degree to which menstrual blood was

17 Kugle, *Sufi Saints’ Bodies*, 82.

18 Marion Katz, *Body of Text* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 1.

impure, which has led to varying regulations on women's bodies. These ideas about menstrual blood date back to pre-Islamic times, and in fact, "pre-Islamic poetry invokes the impurity of menstrual blood . . . women perform ablutions at the end of their menstrual periods; their blood polluted water, and thus they were given access to the waterhole last, after more prestigious (and purer) male tribal warriors had cleansed themselves."¹⁹ As menstrual blood was polluting, it carried contagious properties that made women susceptible to differentiating behaviors. This placed the female body at odds with ideas of purity; in menstruating once a month, the female body was routinely and unconsciously impure, marking women's bodies as easily susceptible to defilement. This impurity also affected the ways in which women could perform ritual acts, as "Menstrual pollution was, of course, a ritual disability; an early Muslim source notes that the menstruating women were not allowed to come near the idols or touch them."²⁰ This concept gave rise to specifications within the tradition, as menstrual blood was included in the list of impurities requiring *wuḍū'*. Thus, the female body is constructed and regulated through specificities within Islamic law.

Even though the cultural body can be seen in many aspects of religious life in Islam, there are two issues in particular that tie cultural norms of the faith to the body. One method through which the mind and cultural body work together in the faith includes traditions of fasting and pilgrimages, such as the Hajj. In the ritual of fasting, many Muslims abstain from food and drink during daylight hours for one month out of every year. This act withholds sustenance from the body and is "supposed to be accompanied by extra ethical and ritual vigilance" in order to push the mind towards a higher awareness of and devotion to the faith.²¹ On the other hand, the Hajj connects the body in community can also be used as a method of distinguishing, as the physical body can set apart individuals within communities. For instance, Bashir uses the experiences of Malcolm X to highlight this dual process of community making and individualization through the use of the body. As he makes his journey to Mecca to take part in the Hajj, Malcolm X describes the difficulties he experiences in performing the traditional prayer, and explains the validity that comes with correct practice:

With gestures, he indicated that he would demonstrate to me the proper praying ritual postures. Imagine, being a Muslim minister, a leader

¹⁹ Ibid, 5.,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Bashir, "Body," 79.

in Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, and not knowing the prayer ritual. I tried to do what he did. I know I wasn't doing it right. I could feel the other Muslim's eyes on me. Western ankles won't do what Muslim ankles have done for a lifetime.²²

Here Malcolm addresses his ignorance of the proper prayer ritual, and in doing so realizes that there is a right and wrong way to perform it. He works so hard to get the ritual right, as he understands the importance of correct prayer posture in the Muslim faith. In his example, Bashir explains that Malcolm X "captures in these passages the significance attached to performing normative rituals in the Islamic context," and in choosing to struggle for right practice through his body, starts "a process through which he transforms himself into a normative Muslim."²³ Malcolm's wrong practice distinguishes him from the rest of the Muslim community, and he understands that he must push towards right practice in order to be a considered a normatively upright Muslim, or one who looks like his body belongs. In this way, the body as a physical performance of right or wrong practice contains its own language; holding the ability to either connect Muslims to the larger body of believers or separate and distance "non-normative"

Muslims, ritualized bodies take on a key role in speaking on behalf of the "mind in order" to tangibly fit into the social community. Bashir describes the twofold nature of the importance of the body within the tradition, explaining that the "bodies involved in these rituals signify meaning in double since they are, on one side, the very basis of personal experience, and on the other, the central objects that give subjective shape to times and spaces shared with others."²⁴

As Bashir notes, for sixteenth-century Persian author Ḥāfiẓ Ṣulṭān 'Alī Awbahī this idea of the body speaking took the form of a handshake. In telling the story of the most important handshake of his life, 'Alī Awbahī explains that he shook hands with Shihāb al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Ghaffār, who "bore the distinction of being able to connect himself to the Prophet Muḥammad through a chain of handshakes between men."²⁵ This chain of handshakes carried a certain significance, as the chain was considered to be only five links from the Prophet himself. Made possible by a companion of the Prophet who had been granted an unnaturally long life, this handshake traveled across time and space and carried with it an important power as directed by the Prophet. It is

22 Ibid., 79.

23 Ibid., 78

24 Bashir, "Body," 79.

25 Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1.

connected to a statement attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad:

Whoever shakes my hand, I will shake his hand on the day of resurrection and will be obligated to intercede on his behalf. Likewise, anyone who shakes the hand of someone that shook my hand—up to seven subsequent links—I will shake his hand on the day of resurrection and will be obligated to intercede on his behalf.²⁶

Thus, because ‘Alī Awbahī had shaken the hand of a man within the boundaries of the first seven links to the Prophet, he “endows himself with the power to intercede, which he can administer or withhold by shaking or repelling someone’s hand.”²⁷ This physical action of the handshake carries great importance, as it spans time and space to connect others to the Prophet. Joining the physical and the mental, the handshake goes to signify much more than simply the touching of hands; with the ideological concept the Muḥammad’s power to intercede passes with each hand, the body comes to speak for the mind in a shaking and sharing of the Prophet’s power. It is not only the physical handshake itself that gives the recipient connection to Muḥammad’s intercession on the day of resurrection, but the idea and history behind the handshake that embodies such importance. Bashir explains,

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 5.

“the handshake he is offering to his contemporary readers collapses the past and the future into the immediate present, with his own hand acting as the instrument that can, on one side, connect people to the Prophet, and on the other, give them access to eternal felicity in paradise.”²⁸ In this manner, the body becomes a vessel that carries with it the historical memory of the Muslim community, and the power of the Prophet’s example and presence.

III. The Body as a Vessel: The Body in Islamic Law and the Qur’ān

Jenine Omari

“Do not follow blindly what you do not know to be true: ears, eyes and heart, you will be questioned about all these.”²⁹ “On the day where their tongues, hands, and feet will testify against them about what they have done.”³⁰ “On the Day when God’s enemies are gathered up for the Fire and driven onward, their ears, eyes, and skins will, when they reach it, testify against them for their misdeeds.”³¹ These verses, translated by Muḥammad A.S. Abdel-Haleem, are just some examples in which importance of the body is mentioned in the Qur’ān. Given such vexing imagery of the betrayal of one’s own body on

28 Ibid., 6.

29 Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, 17:36.

30 Ibid., 24:24.

31 Ibid., 41:19–20.

the Day of Judgment, it is no wonder that the body and its uses are central to Islamic ethical, political, and aesthetic discussions.

One interpretation of the aforementioned verses is that Muslims must treat the body in a way that pleases Allāh, or their own skin will speak out against how they mistreated it during their time on earth. The body, then, remembers everything that the person has done, even if the person forgets or lies about their life. How the body is important, though, varies amongst different Muslims scholars and schools of thought, who interpret the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth* corpus and *sunna* (or the example the Prophet Muḥammad) differently. In fact, the body is conceived of differently in *ḥadīth* reports, Qur'ānic verses, and legal opinions. Some highly debated issues involved in the discussion of the body include the *sunna* of beards, tattoos, premarital sex, homosexuality, and the drinking of alcohol. Moreover, there are multiple sources of authority that help, and sometimes vex, Muslims trying to decide what to do with their bodies.

The legal status of the beard (whether it is a requirement for men and if so, how long it should be and what is required to take care of it) is one of these long-contested issues in Islam. The same is true for the permissibility of alcohol consumption: there

are certain Muslim groups that argue any kind of alcohol that can intoxicate in large quantities is *ḥarām*—or forbidden, and others that say that wine is the only kind directly mentioned in the Qur'ān. Even when attempting to become pious through their bodies, Muslims can never be completely sure about *how* to be pious.

As Bashir explains, “The beard, replaceable by the head cover or veil for women, stands for religious coding of the body, marking it as a site for implementation and display of a religious order.”³² The beard can be an important factor in a Muslim man’s piety, and it reflects on the body as a whole: the bearded man is using the body that God has given him to reflect his devotion. In Shī‘ī cleric ‘Allāma Majlisī (d. 1699)’s manual on proper habits and ethical behavior for Shī‘ī Muslims, beards were seen as sign of beauty and masculinity; “his view that a beard signified virility and even patriarchy was unequivocal throughout the manual . . . he cited the following original event, supposedly related by Prophet Muḥammad himself: On the day God accepted Adam’s repentance for having tasted the apple of knowledge, Adam declared, ‘Oh, God, make me more beautiful.’ So God gave him a thick black beard. But Adam had never seen a beard before and he asked God, ‘What is this?’ ‘This is your ornament,’

32 Bashir, “Body,” 72.

replied God, ‘and that of your sons till eternity.’”³³ The followers of his *ḥadīth* consider this an important rationale for the necessity of the beard in Islam to achieve a higher piety by following the footsteps of the Prophet.

On one of the many websites devoted to the subject of beards and Islam (which perhaps should the subject of another study), it is also noted that the prominent jurist Ja‘far Ibn Muḥammad Al-Ṣādiq said that there were ten things granted to Prophet Abraham—five of which were for the head and five of which were for the body.³⁴ Of the head, one included “wearing the beard” which both some Sunnis and Shia found to be authoritative to them.³⁵ The beard, to many, is a signal of virility, and of having reached the age of “manhood” which different groups of Muslims have found to be an important part of the beard. These are amongst some of the *ḥadīth* and verses in the Qur’ān that believers use in order to point to the importance of the beard Islamic ideas of piety.

Another debate about the beard is whether one is allowed to trim or shave it at all. Scholars of the four

major Sunni *madhhabs*, or schools of law—the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī, and Ḥanbalī—have different opinions about whether beards can be trimmed, shortened, or shaved and if so, in what cases and to what lengths. Some legal thinkers of these schools say it is forbidden for men to trim or cut their beards, some say it is unadvisable, and others claim it may be permissible. It is easy to find many sources that forbid the trimming of it, which leads to this opinion being common in some communities. This opinion is often derived from the Qur’ānic verses condemning the alteration of Allāh’s creations.³⁶

However, other scholars say it is *sunna* to trim men’s beards (in other words, it is in keeping with the Prophet’s example). For instance, *shaykh* Hisham Kabbani, a Lebanese-American Sufi of the Naqshabandī *ṭarīqa* and scholar who is well-known in the Middle East and the United States, decreed that it is in fact *sunna* to trim the beard and keep it kempt (it may be worth noting that Kabbani himself has a striking, long, white beard). He uses examples of prominent scholars and the *ṣahāba* (Companions of the Prophet) to prove that trimming beards follows the example of the Prophet Muḥammad. One example is that of Ibn ‘Umar, who used to grasp his beard and cut what was excess from his hands. Another *ḥadīth* states that

33 Touraj Daryaei, *The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 301.

34 Allamah Murtada Baghdadi, “The Islamic Perspective Of The Beard,” *Al-Islam, Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project*, www.al-islam.org/articles/islamic-perspective-of-the-beard.

35 Ibid.

36 Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur’ān*, 4:119.

the *ṣahāba* used to trim the sides of their beards.³⁷ Other scholars who are against the shaving or trimming of the beard often turn to the Qur'ānic chapter *al-Nisā'* in which, after God curses Satan, Satan responds with:

I will mislead them and I will incite vain desires in them;

I will command them to slit the ears of cattle;

I will command them to tamper with God's creation.

Whoever chooses Satan as a patron instead of God is utterly ruined.³⁸

The key verse for scholars who find cutting beards inadmissible is “to tamper with God's creation.” By trimming or shaving one's beard, they are then altering God's creation or, according to some these scholars, obeying Satan. By that same stroke, others debate that trimming one's beard could not possibly be unacceptable in Islam, for, if it were indeed necessary to keep one's beard unaltered, then why would circumcisions and clipping nails or shaving/cutting hair for the purpose of *hajj* be allowed (and, for some, even required) in Islam?

Another contested topic among Muslims is the consumption of alcohol.

37 “Trimming the beard is Sunna,” *The Modern Religion*, accessed April 30, 2018, <http://www.themodernreligion.com/misc/hh/trimming-beard.html>

38 Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur'ān*, 4:119.

In relation to food taboos, Bashir states, “Between food taboos and universal rituals, one may get the impression that to live consciously according to Islamic precepts requires constant preoccupation with the body's entrances, exits and postures.”³⁹ Again, disciplining the body is an important part of the Islamic tradition. Answers from different imams, *shuyūkh*, and schools of law about how to regulate the body can be contradictory, and, in some cases, require that Muslims navigate how to express piety as corporeal beings. The difficulty with the status of alcohol first comes from how different Muslims interpret the meaning of the word *khamr* (usually translated as wine) in the Qur'ān. In *The Rhetoric of Sobriety: Wine in Early Islam*, Kathryn Kueny discusses the many Arabic terms in the Qur'ān that relate to alcohol, wine, inebriation as well as their roots, such as *sakar*, *rahīq*, *nazafa* and others. According to Kueny, the great variety in terms and meanings in the Qur'ān leads to potentially ambiguity regarding the permissibility of consuming alcoholic beverages:

Since the Qur'ān employs a fairly large repertoire of words to refer to various types of wine and intoxicating beverages and to different states of drunkenness, philology suggests that the Qur'ān expresses a highly nuanced and ultimately ambivalent attitude towards wine and its

39 Bashir, “Body,” 79.

effects. The Qur'ān's ambivalence in terms of diction is manifest on the level of content. As stated above, zigzagging across the various Suras in no apparent order and according to no obvious logic, wine simultaneously clouds the eye, stems from the hand of Satan, and serves as a paradisiacal reward for those righteous enough to enter the Garden of Repose. If a believer were to search the Qur'ān for the answer to the questions—"Am I allowed to drink wine?"—he could find many relevant passages to support a variety of stances.⁴⁰

This ambiguity about the status of alcohol aptly captures how befuddling the Qur'ān may seem to anyone who reads it. Philological interpretations of the Qur'ān by different people lead to different interpretations of the same rule. Some leaders of schools of thought will subscribe to a specific opinion on the matter and will command those that listen to follow that legal opinion while others will come to a different conclusion, which is one of the many causes for controversy on topics like that of alcohol.

As previously mentioned, the Qur'ān uses the word *khamr* in relation to alcohol. Even though many interpretations render it as "wine," *khamr* can be best translated as fermented drink, which, especially during the

time of the Prophet, would have been made out of dates or, less commonly, grapes. In the Qur'ānic verses 5:90, 2:219, and 47:15, we see the use of the word *khamr*, but when reviewing the Abdel-Haleem translation of the text, sometimes the translation is "intoxicants" (5:90 and 2:219) and other times it is "wine" (47:15). This can become very confusing to people who read the Qur'ān, especially those that must read it translated into a language other than Arabic. In verse 4:43, however, the word used is *sukāra*, which is a more accurate translation of "intoxicant." The multiple connotations of each word make deciphering what exactly is allowed or forbidden (i.e. is it only fermented drink from wine or dates the only thing that is forbidden, or are all intoxicants in any quantity forbidden?).

Adding to this confusion, there is a ḥadīth that says the Prophet pointed to a grapevine and date palms and said, "Intoxicants (or wine) are from these two trees."⁴¹ Michalak and Trocki mention the same ambiguity in their analysis of alcohol and Islam. They explain that, in a ḥadīth from the Sunan Abī Dāwūd, the Prophet Muḥammad "defines *khamr* as the produce of grapes, dates, honey, wheat, or barley (to which list the Caliph 'Umar added

40 Kathryn Kueny, *The Rhetoric of Sobriety: Wine in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 5.

41 *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 6, Book 51, Ḥadīth 5576 (English translation), <https://sunnah.com/nasai/51/35>. (Consulted on April 28, 2018).

millet and left out honey),”⁴² does this mean that alcohol from the fermentation of products other than these is allowable? Furthermore, the Prophet is reported to have consumed fermented liquid to which water had been added, saying, “If these drinks climb to your head, break their benefit with water.”⁴³ Therefore, we see ideas about alcohol translated into Muslim communities in dozens of different ways.

The followers of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa (an eight-century Iraqi scholar and jurist, founder of the Ḥanafī school of law, which became the official school of the Ottoman Empire), claimed that fermented drink itself is not prohibited, but drinking to the point of intoxication was *ḥarām* (and the “point of intoxication” was nearly unconscious from drinking).⁴⁴ Ḥanbalis, on the other hand, are stricter their interpretation and legislation of alcohol both in regards to what is forbidden (all alcoholic beverages) and what kind of contact a Muslim can have with intoxicants. On the opposite end of the spectrum, among the Ḥanafis, some jurists often interpret the word *khamr* to mean only fermented date and grape drinks, which means that other kinds of spirits

(especially those that were not around during the time of the Prophet and thus not mentioned in *ḥadīth* reports or the Qur’ān) are allowed.⁴⁵

Furthermore, different Muslims and communities have also interpreted what amount of alcohol would be necessary to cause inebriation. For example, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a notable Egyptian cleric often seen on TV, made a *fatwa* that alcohol with content levels of 0.5% or less is permissible in Islam, causing outcries amongst other Muslims.⁴⁶ The differences in these opinions are so controversial that the sheikh was refused entry to the UK because the government feared his opinions had sparked too many issues and would result in violence.⁴⁷

When the body is concerned, many people think that it is necessary to police their own body in order to please God (or themselves). Establishing a single, definitive ruling on matters of the body becomes difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, since the tradition itself allows for flexibility and diversity (albeit within limits). For every issue, there are dozens of scholarly opinions and even more case studies of how that is actually adopted into

42 See Laurence Michalak and Karen Trocki, “Alcohol and Islam: an overview,” 33 *Contemporary Drug Problems* (Winter 2006), 533.

43 Ibid.

44 Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 55–56.

45 Michalak and Trocki, “Alcohol and Islam,” 11

46 Frances Harrison, “Alcohol fatwa sparks controversy,” BBC, April 11, 2008, accessed April 29, 2018, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7342425.stm.

47 Ibid.

singular communities from Morocco to Indonesia to the United States. The example of the beard demonstrates how seemingly innocuous verses and ḥadīth reports can spark years-long debates about the true meaning and application of God's word in everyday matters. Regarding the consumption of alcohol, where the verses and ḥadīth reports seem to be more definite, the rules are never clear enough to avoid all ambiguity.

IV. Sacred Bodies: The Prophet's Nails and Hair

Ellie Eggink

The Prophet Muḥammad is the ultimate exemplar of pious excellence and asceticism for Muslims, who often seek to emulate his example in daily life. The prophet's authority is established through his selection by God, his status as the messenger of the Qur'ān, and his exemplification of Muslim life.⁴⁸ Islamic communities memorialize, praise, and embody the virtues of the Prophet through prayer, literature, architecture, daily habits, and through relics. These objects associated with or once belonging to the Prophet come to embody his pious authority. They have been preserved and transmitted by the Prophet Muḥammad himself, his family, and his followers in order

to evoke religious experience and collective consciousness.⁴⁹ As enablers of historical memory, relics of the Prophet symbolize piety and power. While the veneration of relics remains a source of dispute for some Muslims, for others relics imbue spaces and places with spiritual and temporal authority. Through this interpretation, the body of the Prophet lends itself as a perpetually evolving medium, suspended between cosmic ideals and realities.

Ḥadīth literature (recorded deeds and sayings attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad) promotes the emulation of the asceticism and submission to God's will practiced by the Prophet himself, and sometimes describes his body as sacred and incorruptible.⁵⁰ For instance, Aws ibn Abī Aws al-Thaqafī narrated that the Prophet said, "Verily your best day is Friday, so invoke blessings upon me in abundance on this day, for your invocation is shown to me". [The people] said to him, "O Messenger of God! How can our invocations be shown to you after your bones have turned to dust?" He replied: "Verily God has forbidden the earth from consuming the bodies of the Messengers."⁵¹ During the final year of his life, the Prophet reportedly conducted a final pilgrimage to Mecca during which he sacrificed portions of his body to

48 Devin DeWeese, "Authority," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 36.

49 Josef W. Meri, "Relic of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam," *Past and Present* 206 (2010): 99.

50 *Ibid.*, 98.

51 *Ibid.*

those he encountered.⁵² According to the tenth-century ḥadīth of Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bustī, the Prophet and, his son-in-law, ‘Alī sacrificed and distributed portions of the meat and skin of 100 camels along with clipped nails and hairs shaved from his head to his followers.⁵³ This sacrifice is often interpreted in relationship to the Last Supper in which, before death, Jesus offered bread and wine as his flesh and blood to his disciples which allowed his disciples to spread of the religion in his absence.⁵⁴ Through this interpretation, it can be argued that the Prophet Muḥammad’s body, including relics, is/are intimately intertwined with the spread of Islam.

The relics of the Prophet Muḥammad embody a religious experience rooted in the deep spiritual connection between Allāh, the Prophet, and the believer.⁵⁵ The Prophet’s authority is established through his selection by God, his status as the final messenger and the disseminator of the Qur’ān, and on his exemplification of Muslim life. All these factors bolster the assumption that his entire being is infused with spiritual “grace” or *bara-*

ka.⁵⁶ As a way to acquire or maintain the Prophet Muḥammad’s *baraka*, the boundary between the Prophet’s extraordinary embodiment of God’s will and the ordinary human body is often culturally negotiated through relics.

In the sixth century, the Umayyad Caliph Mu‘āwiya provides one of the earliest known examples of individuals citing and deriving *baraka* from the Prophet through relics. He reportedly stated, “The Prophet once clothed me with a shirt, which I put away, and one day when he pared his nails I took the parings and placed them in a bottle. When I die, clothe me in that shirt, and chop up and pulverize the parings; sprinkle them over my eyes and into my mouth, on the chance that God may have mercy on me through their Baraka.”⁵⁷ Mu‘āwiya assumed that the gifted shirt and nail clippings from Prophet were inherently endowed with great power and would facilitate God’s forgiveness in the afterlife. Furthermore, as the tradition continued to develop and contextualize, examples of the Prophet Muḥammad’s Companions and family using the relics to derive *baraka* to heal diseases emerge. For instance, it is reported that ‘Uthmān bin ‘Abdullāh bin Mawhab said, “My people sent me with a cup of water to Umm Salama—Israīl put

52 Brannon Wheeler, “Collecting the Dead Body of the Prophet Muḥammad,” in *The Image of the Prophet between Ideal and Ideology*, ed. Christiane J. Gruber and Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 35.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Meri, “Relic of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam,” 99.

56 DeWeese, “Authority,” 36.

57 Meri, “Relic of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam,” 104.

three fingers together indicating the size—for the container in which was one of the hairs of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. When someone was afflicted by the Evil Eye or some other affliction, he would send a vessel [containing water] to [Umm Salama]. I looked in the bell-like vessel and saw some red hairs.”⁵⁸ As illustrated, if an individual suffered from the evil eye or another disease, it was advisable to drink substances infused with the body of the Prophet in order to derive *baraka* and, as a result, receive blessing from God for healing.

In this way, relics are metonymies for those pious individuals endowed with *baraka* or “divine blessings.”⁵⁹ The *baraka* of bodily relics is thought not only to protect and sustain the piety of individuals, but institutions as well. For instance, during the medieval period, the presence of relics in mosques and secular buildings around Damascus and Mecca were believed to bestow *baraka* upon the architecture and thus afford the city a measure of protection from invaders.⁶⁰ In this light, the Prophet’s body is constantly evolving, in parallel with its growth and decay.⁶¹ The symbolic functions of his relics are in flux between individual consciousness and social influence of varying origins.

For some Muslims, the bodily relics of the Prophet emulate authority through the transmission of his divine *baraka*, while for others; relics confer a kind of authority on their possessors.⁶² Through the presumption that the Prophet’s bodily remains would not be allowed to fall into impious or otherwise improper hands, relics have become an emblem of power for the beholder.⁶³ Therefore, just as bodily relics are thought to provide protection through *baraka*, they also symbolize the incorruptibility and piety of the individuals or institutions that possessed them.⁶⁴ Relics thus transition from symbolizing the inherent authority and piety of the Prophet Muḥammad to symbolizing the power of those to whom they belong.

In this view, the relationship between the distribution of bodily relics and the expansion of territory and political legacy is palpable.⁶⁵ When the physical remains of the Prophet Muḥammad, such as his hair and nails, were transported by his followers from their supposed origins to expanding territories under Muslim rule, they socially codified the boundaries between dynasties, rulers and the

58 Ibid., 105.

59 Ibid., 103.

60 Ibid.

61 Bashir, “Body,” 91.

62 DeWeese, “Authority,” 37.

63 Ibid.

64 Meri, “Relic of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam,” 103.

65 Alexandra Walsham, “Introduction: Relics and Remains,” *Past and Present* 206 (2010): 27.

common people in Islamic states.⁶⁶ For instance, the hairs of the Prophet often provide the foundations for buildings in Damascus such as the Madrasa al-Manjakiyya, and the Ayyubid Mosque in Cairo symbolizing the reification of power and the expansion of empire, particularly in the case of the Ottomans.⁶⁷ Relics do not appear to primarily serve to commemorate the Prophet's physical features; rather they seem more concurrent with the spread of his *baraka* and of Islamic religiosity into new territories.⁶⁸ This is best illustrated through the expansion of relics from Mecca (the place of the Prophet's final pilgrimage) to new emerging Islamic lands. Under the Ayyubids and Mamluks in the later Middle Ages, additional cities became significant centers for the display of relics. These relics brought legitimacy to new powers and, in cities like Hama and Damascus, facilitated the development of new pilgrimage sites associated with the Prophet.⁶⁹ This evidence suggests that social forces institute the veneration of relics for political as well as religious reasons. The distribution the Prophet's relics may or may not provide magical links to a living presence but do serve to memorialize the Prophet Muḥammad and legitimize the pow-

er of a given Islamic social body.⁷⁰ Thus, they transcend the limitations of materiality.

When faced with the presence of bodily relics, the body of the Prophet is often understood in relation to an aura of sacrality that is both a mark of *baraka* and a mark of authority that lies beyond the physical body.⁷¹ However, if molding oneself in relation to the Prophet highlights the importance of spiritual identity, the role of devotional practices around relics raises more ambiguous questions for some regarding the boundaries between the nature of memorialized spiritual identification and ideology.⁷² The question of the rationality of relics in Islam often looms over contemporary Muslim communities.

The Qur'ān does not explicitly sanction the veneration of relics, and therefore, in order to find answers, many Muslims turn to the second source of scriptural authority in Islam—Ḥadīth. For individuals who support the veneration of relics, multiple ḥadīth reports provide

66 Meri, "Relic of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam," 103.

67 Wheeler, "Collecting the Dead Body of the Prophet Muḥammad," 80.

68 Ibid., 88.

69 Ibid.

70 Kevin Trainor, "Introduction: Pars pro toto: On Comparing Relic Practices," *NUMEN* 57 (2010): 257.

71 Finbarr Barry Flood, "Bodies and Becoming Mimesis, Mediation, and the Ingestion of the Sacred in Christianity and Islam," in *Sensational Religion Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally M. Prome (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 460.

72 Ibid.

theological justification.⁷³ For instance, Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī in *Fath al-Bārī fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* narrates that it is “permissible to employ relics of the righteous and their garments in order to derive Baraka and good fortune.”⁷⁴ However, the authority of various ḥadīth reports is subjective and, for some, does not provide substantial or valid affirmation of relics. After the Prophet’s death, Islamic jurists such as Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) objected to the use of relics and claimed them opposite to the Islamic principle of indivisible unity with the divinity, despite Ḥadīth literature that suggested the contrary. Ibn Taymiyya argued that relics wrongfully supported the blind obedience to tradition (*taqlīd*) instead of independent reasoning (*ijtihād*) since they were not scripturally based.⁷⁵ In his work, *Basic Principles of the Hisba* (c. 1300) Ibn Taymiyya asserted that the Qur’ān condemns the veneration of relics and saints through the *āya*, “Worship God. You have no deity but Him. To worship Him is to obey Him and to obey His Messenger.’ This is goodness and pi-

ety and devotion and good works and noble deeds and proper conduct. For this Man must fight, as the Exalted One said: ‘Fight them till there is an end to sedition and all religion is God’s (8: 39).’”⁷⁶ However, the veneration of relics is nonetheless a part of the practice of a number of Muslims around the world.

Rather than sheer ideology, it could be said that relics provide receptacles for *baraka* and act as sacred symbols of power and knowledge supported by the actions of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁷⁷ In a historical context, the Prophet’s authority plays a central role in the construction of Muslim juridical, ethical, and behavioral norms, while simultaneously, in a metaphysical sense, his authority embodies an extraordinary cosmic connection with God.⁷⁸ As a means to synchronize his historical and sacred qualities, Muslim communities have developed various ways of flirting with affirming the unity of divinity and maintaining the possibility of contact either with the Prophet himself or with the prophetic vocation of relics.⁷⁹ Based on Ḥadīth literature, relics do not appear to primarily serve to commemorate

73 Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 80.

74 Meri, “Relic of Piety and Power in Medieval Islam,” 105.

75 “Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, *Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e959> accessed (April 29, 2018).

76 Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah, *Basic Principles of the Hisba*, trans. M. Holland (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1982), 19 (Original work published c.1300).

77 Wheeler, “Collecting the Dead Body of the Prophet Muḥammad,” 80.

78 DeWeese, “Authority,” 36.

79 *Ibid.*, 37.

the Prophets physical features; rather, they seem related to the *baraka* of the Prophet and the spread of Islam into new territories. In this sense, bodily relics become emblems of piety and power in Islam. More generally, the relics of the Prophet Muḥammad symbolically establish the irreducible limits of the human body as a sociohistorical connection between God and the material world.

V. Muslim Bodies in Ritual Celebration

Norlina Bahrom

In the Islamic tradition, there are two major holidays celebrated by all Muslims that are preceded by the hallowed activity of fasting during the month of *Ramaḍān*: *ʿid al-ḥiṭr* and *ʿid al-aḍḥa*. Both celebrations have social aspects that enable the individual's place in the local and global context of Islamic society. By making the body repeat ritual practices established hundreds of years earlier, Muslims are united by sets of movements that transcend temporal and spatial limitations. Through the rituals and prayers of these holidays and of *Ramaḍān*, the individual partakes in physical and symbolic behavior that not only has social but also spiritual value. The rituals and prayers intertwine the body, mind, and soul to the self (by way of personal reconditioning) as well as to

the *umma*—the Muslim community—across spatial and temporal lines.⁸⁰

ʿId al-ḥiṭr is the ceremonial three-day feast that Muslims celebrate after the month of *Ramaḍān* and is marked by the first sight of the crescent moon, signalling the fulfilment of one of the Pillars of Islam—*ṣawm*. The importance of *ʿId al-ḥiṭr* varies among cultures whose ritual practices are localized to meet the goals of community-building. *ʿId al-ḥiṭr* stands in contrast to *Ramaḍān* where ritual actions—such as almsgiving, remembrance of others' suffering, the practice of abstinence from physical cravings, and the reverence of Muḥammad's first revelation during the Night of Power, or *Laylat al-Qadr*—are more standardized. While *ʿid al-Ḥiṭr* has historical dimensions that are replicated in ritualistic vigils, *ʿid al-Aḍḥa* likewise is the symbolic simulation of the substitution of the ram for Ismail when God tested Ibrahim's faith.⁸¹ The word "*Ramaḍān*" comes from the Arabic word

80 The ethos of community that transcends geographic borders is evident in the occasionally inter-regional advertisements that are emotionally-laden with themes of unity, nostalgia, and tradition. The very symbol of the date palm further ties the Muslim diaspora to the geography of the Middle East. The historical ties are compounded by constant reminders through prayers, recitations of the Qur'ān, the vigils during *Ramaḍān*, and the very act of sacrifice during *ʿid al-Aḍḥa*.

81 Definitions and historical background of *ʿid al-Ḥiṭr* and *ʿid al-Aḍḥa* were taken from the Oxford Islamic Studies Online's subject entries on the respective topic.

ضمر which implies a scorching heat or intense incalcescence from the Sun. This heat was historically so severe that sheep “burned while they were grazing... to the extent that their livers became damaged.”⁸²

The journey that the physical body goes through during the month of *Ramaḍān* and the connotation of suffering under oppressive forces is a figurative journey that purges sin and atones the self of past transgressions. The physical body plays a central part during fasting month as Muslims are meant to curb physical desires of the body such as food, drink, sexual intercourse, and other forms of consumption such as smoking.

While the month—and by extension the rest of the months of the Islamic calendar—heeds to the lunar cycles, the imagery of the cosmos is reiterated in the many symbolic roles of the sun. The sun is a symbol of desire⁸³ and oppression but it has another role as time keeper. The length of the daily fast is determined by the sun’s position in the sky. The sun is a reminder of the ordeal of fasting (i.e. desire, oppression, heat, sin) that Muslims carry during the month. The interconnection of the Muslim body to the systems of the universe relates to the idea that

the body is a microcosm.⁸⁴ The body is the intermediary between the physical world and the universe (i.e. to the larger power, God). This dependency on the microsystem’s efficacy therefore places a responsibility on the individual to improve oneself for societal and metaphysical reasons.

Ramaḍān thus engages the body in ritual action, governing the daily life of Muslims. By partaking in the communal rituals of prayer, fasting, and the *hajj* (the annual pilgrimage to Mecca), the restrictions of time and space collapse to allow for Muslims to forge a shared identity that affect—but not dictate—the spiritual experience of the individual.⁸⁵ Shahzad Bashir borrows from Michel Foucault’s notion of the “technologies of the self” to expound the idea that the willingness to shape the body to habitual practices by ways of actions in both communal and heuristic arenas present a religious identity that is perceived by insiders and outsiders.⁸⁶ The intention and commitment involved in submitting the body to physical action requires internal effort as well.

While the experience of *Ramaḍān* embodies tangible activity to resist corporal sustenance, other Islamic rituals additionally require mental discipline. *Jihad* relates atonement to an expiatory

82 Ar-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Mufradat al-Qur’ān*, 203.

83 Desire for material things that satisfy the “heat”. The imagery of heat is also a motif of immorality that burns within.

84 Bashir, “Body,” 72.

85 Ibid., 79.

86 Bashir, “Body,” 80.

struggle. The *hajj* stitches the individual into the social fabric of “greater Islam”⁸⁷ by eliminating the needs of the self.⁸⁸ The *Ramaḍān* fast and the dietary restrictions prescribed by Islamic law, like *jihad* and the *hajj*, are exercises in self-restraint and self-control. Indeed, all three practices involve a degree of spiritual suffering but are seen by Muslims as opportunities to transcend carnal behavior and enter a higher plane of existence that unites the physical with the metaphysical.⁸⁹

The word “*sawm*” which means “to fast” in Arabic is from the root word *صام* which denotes restraint and “remain[ing] silent.”⁹⁰ In 2:183 of the Qur’ān, fasting operates as a vehicle to become pious, a tool to learn restraint, and a shield to evil. This protective element during *Ramaḍān* entails the encouragement of physical expressions of goodwill (like patience and generosity) towards others so as to promote harmony within the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The patterns of positive

action and vocalizations suggest an influence of the activity on the mental capacities which therefore alters attitude. In one *ḥadīth qudsī* (divine saying), *Ramaḍān* is not just a protection from evil and ignorance, it is a means of attaining delayed gratification (in the afterlife and are thus not bodily pleasures) and an offer of submission to God.⁹¹ Fasting during the month of *Ramaḍān* is a physical activity of abstaining from the desires of the body. The schedule of rituals syncs the Muslim body with other Muslims as the mind sacrifices earthly yearnings to conquer obstacles. Abstinence thus cleanses the corporeal and spiritual body, an act that capitulates to God and connects the bodies to the ethos of the *umma*.

‘Ibādāt, acts of religious worship or servitude, combine ritual practices and prayer to produce a ritual body that is purified and conducive to successful submission to God through intention (*niyya*).⁹² The Islamic tradition puts an emphasis on purity which, without this prerequisite, makes the fulfilment of the Five Pillars impossible. Purity, in this sense, is purgation though bodily acts of purification such as ablution and restraint of unintentional impurity (e.g.

87 The intention behind this label is to imply inclusivity of a general perception of religious identity and awareness that surpasses ethnic, political, class, and geographic lines.

88 Nayaqiyyah U. Muḥammad, “Body Situations Mirroring Belief Attitudes: Female Bodies, Impurity, and Rituals in Islam” (master’s thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 2013), 34.

89 Muḥammad, 35, 65.

90 Sheikh Shu’aib contends that according to 19:26 in the Qur’ān, the use of *اصوم* cannot mean to fast because Mary was told to eat and drink. Muahmmad, “Body Situations Mirroring Belief Attitudes: Female Bodies, Impurity, and Rituals in Islam,” 65.

91 The *ḥadīth* was reported by Abū Hurairah. Tajuddin B. Shu’aib, “Essentials of Ramaḍān the Fasting Month” (Los Angeles: Islamic Book Center, 1991), 109.

92 Amina M. Steinfels, “Ritual,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 317.

menstruation).⁹³ Further, purity has an abstract element –it is the *state* of purity that gives the individual access to the sublime. As previously mentioned, *Ramaḍān* is the opportunity to purify oneself but it also requires purification. The customs of the *ʿids* are related in the ḥadīth of Sahih al-Bukhari; first and foremost, during the *ʿids*, prayers had to be said before religious lectures, the sacrificial slaughter, and celebrations with musical accompaniment.⁹⁴ The difference between the obligatory daily *ṣalāt* and the *ṣalāt al-ʿidm* demonstrates the break in habitual ritual to signify a special occasion. The performance of the rituals during the *ʿids* satisfies the minimum definition of *ibāda* as a compulsory act.⁹⁵

Evidently, the purposes of the *ʿids* are communal in nature as celebrations are enacted by cultural expressions of joy rather than mandated sentiments. The ḥadīth encourages individual assertions of cultural identification⁹⁶ and therefore make the *ʿids* flexible to the demands of the culture while legitimizing

celebration with historical and religious conviction. Ritual and tradition imply continuity; the *ʿids* and *Ramaḍān* have three historical layers: pre-Islamic (Ibrahīm’s submission is marked by the sacrifice of the ram and his association with the Ka’ba; the revelations of the *Tawrāt* (Torah) and *ʿInjīl* (Gospel) to Moses and ʿĪsa (Jesus) respectively establish the importance of the word during *Ramaḍān* and foreshadows the revelation of the Qur’ān), Muḥammad’s lifetime (his followers’ participation in the holiday rituals), and present day (practice of these living traditions).⁹⁷

However, historical and sociological connections do not fully explain the religious aspect of rituals during the *ʿids* and *Ramaḍān*. Islamic tradition places significant value on intent as it is only observable by the self and by God and so it is only with the correct intention that the performance of ritual is valid.⁹⁸ During these celebrations, this can be fulfilled by the practice of *zakāt* and is even prescribed in the form of *zakāt al-fiṭr*. The harmonization of charity and prayer are further entrenched in the Qur’ān.⁹⁹ Intention

93 Muhammed ibn Ismaʿil al-Bukhari, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih Al-Bukhari Arabic-English*, trans. Dr. Muḥammad Muhsin Khan, vol. 2 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997), ḥadīth nos. 971, 974, 980-981.

94 Ibid., ḥadīth nos. 951, 955–965, 968, 972–973, 975–977, 983–987, and 989.

95 Steinfels, “Ritual,” 308, 312.

96 *Sahīh Al-Bukhari*, ḥadīth nos. 949–950, 952, 987–988. A notable quote from ḥadīth no. 952 is Muḥammad’s response of “There is an *ʿid* for every nation and this is our *ʿid*” on extra-Islamic musical celebrations.

97 Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, “16536,” trans. Abū Amina Elias, “Ḥadīth on Ramaḍān: The Sacred Scriptures Were Revealed in the Month of Ramaḍān,” *Daily Ḥadīth Online*, 2014.

98 Steinfels, “Ritual,” 309.

99 Toorawa notes that in a third of all mentions of *ṣalāt*, *zakāt* is also mentioned. Shawkat M. Toorawa, “Prayer,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 270.

is also carried out during Ramaḍān by reminding oneself of the word of the Qur'ān. Recitation and staging vigils have roots in the early Muslim community in Mecca as they were thought to have salvific properties.¹⁰⁰ The power of the word is accentuated by the *Laylat al-Qadr* or the Night of Power where the message of the Qur'ān descended upon Muḥammad during the month of Ramaḍān.

Laylat al-Qadr is another opportunity for Muslims to improve themselves. However, instead of producing a negative act (i.e. atonement), the opportunity presented to Muslims pertains to the creation and multiplicity of good deeds while simultaneously ensuring protection of Muslims until dawn.¹⁰¹ The miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is not only in its presence but its content; the Qur'ān is laced with eloquent Arabic verses and dips into personalized events of the past and future.¹⁰² Verbalizations of and concentration on the Qur'ānic texts during *Laylat al-Qadr* serve as ritualistic devices that merge action and intention.

By adding a salvific function to ritual reading, the act itself becomes more important than comprehending the content.¹⁰³ However, the problem with this notion is the assumption that power from the Qur'ān could be absorbed, thus entitling the reader to appropriation of the knowledge of God's mind.¹⁰⁴ It is because of this that lone, secluded sessions of reading the Qur'ān are discouraged and the inverse is encouraged;¹⁰⁵ the Islamic tradition is replete with the enjoining power of the Islamic community and Qur'ān. In addition to the congregation of *ṣalāt al-'id* as well as the cultural enforcement of the 'id holidays, *Ramaḍān* has an *'ibādat al-nafl*, the *tarawīḥ* which spreads the power of the word over the community.

The concept of the *umma* is traditionally regarded as an imagined and idealized concept that attempts to forge a culture of Islam, but many Muslims believe that there exists a real religious community.¹⁰⁶ So although a monolithic Islam does not exist, an awareness of a fortified bond runs through the community. An observance of the ways in which the 'ids and *Ramaḍān* rituals function to strengthen the *umma* clarifies this understanding. A study of the practices of Moroccan immigrant women in the

100 Walid A. Saleh, "Word," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 364.

101 "Laylat al-Qadr," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, *Islamic Studies*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1753>.

102 Devin Stewart, "Prophecy," in *Key Themes for the Study of*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 290.

103 Saleh, "Word," 370.

104 Saleh, "Word," 371.

105 Saleh, "Word," 371.

106 Karamustafa, "Community," 94.

Netherlands supports the argument that the strong cultural presence within 'id celebrations is significant in the individual identity in the *umma* as well as religious identity in general.¹⁰⁷ Sensory as well as implicit signals indicate the shift to sacred time.¹⁰⁸ Karin van Nieuwkerk's study of how Moroccan immigrant women celebrated Islamic celebrations featured Kenza, a north Moroccan first generation immigrant to the Netherlands. According to Kenza, "In Morocco, you cannot forget [the events of the Islamic calendar] . . . But in the Netherlands, it is difficult."¹⁰⁹ Van Nieuwkerk argues that sacred events prove to be an imposition on secular time. It is in an exhaustive self-perpetuating cycle. The interruption of secular time on the daily and annual religious rituals are also hurt by the lack of cultural anchors that are often taken for granted such as the 'adhān and the synchronization of a society shifting to sacred time such as preparing for religious events, communal eating, and public ritual praying.¹¹⁰ If the ritual schedule affects Muslim body and mind as previously asserted, the departure from the schedule alters the individual's place among the

umma. The lack of cultural cohesion is also hindered by the failure of the realization of the idealized *umma* to provide set cultural behaviors. This leads to a power vacuum in which representatives of different cultures and ethnicities fight for religious authority on the ritual behaviors of the new, inter-cultural landscape under Islam.¹¹¹

In another case that studies the practice of rituals in a space absent of cultural and religious enforcement, Susan van Baalen's 2011 work focuses on the incarcerated black Muslim Americans whose religiosity was influenced by the Black Power movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Van Baalen argues that the religious rituals of black Muslim inmates were in direct and constant opposition to the secular institution.¹¹² Members of the Nation of Islam¹¹³ and the Moorish Science Temple of America¹¹⁴ established the base

111 Ibid., 388.

112 Susan Van Baalen, "From 'Black Muslim to Global Islam: A Study of the Evolution of the Practice of Islam by Incarcerated Black Americans, 1957-2007" (Master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2011).

113 The Nation embraces some rituals and events of Global Islam (term used by Van Baalen) but lacks formal understanding of Islamic tradition. Instead, the teachings of Elijah Muḥammad, Black Nationalism, and the worship of Jesus Christ influenced the tradition. See, *ibid.*, 83.

114 C. Eric Lincoln describes the Temple as influenced by Black Nationalism, Gullah culture, Christian revivalism, and the teachings of the Prophet Muḥammad and whose holy book has no similarities to the Qur'ān. Van Baalen, "From 'Black Muslim to Global Islam," 44.

107 Karin van Nieuwkerk, "Time and Migration: Changes in Religious Celebrations Among Moroccan Immigrant Women in the Netherlands," *25 Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 4 (2005): 385–398.

108 The Van Nieuwkerk study offers the imagery of the smell of barbecued lamb replaced by French fries.

109 *Ibid.*, 385.

110 *Ibid.*, 390–92.

for observances of *ʿid* and *Ramaḍān* in prison. Prison authorities were also given some power to determine which practices were religiously legitimate and which were not. On December 1957, the first communal *Ramaḍān* was observed and federal penitentiaries began to offer dietary accommodation to Muslims.¹¹⁵ The members of the Nation and the Temple—and by extension the American prison institutions—understood the *Ramaḍān* fast to occur at a static point in the Gregorian calendar, in December, rather than by the lunar cycles of the Islamic calendar from its inception to 1998. A marker of the value of tradition in prison is the December fast; black Muslims were invested in preserving the prison tradition of the December fast despite the broader Nation’s transition to mainstream Islam.¹¹⁶ Although black Muslim culture eventually accepted the shift toward the conventional *Ramaḍān* times, they preserved the prison custom of separating themselves from the incarcerated Sunni Muslims both physically in the dining halls and by maintaining a unified body against mainstream Muslim practices.¹¹⁷ The omnipresent power of the secular institution on Islamic ritual practices is further recognized in the 1984 standardization of the *Ramaḍān* observance that dictated

its time, activity, and diet.¹¹⁸ However, the general Muslim body enjoyed an emerging food culture in the introduction of palm dates by inmates reading the *ḥadīth*. Dates thus became regarded as a symbol of privilege and a physical religious act that inmates fought to preserve when federal funding was reduced, and dates became a black-market item.¹¹⁹ Although the intrusion of secular mandates set the codes of behavior for black Muslims, black Muslim inmates reserved autonomous power in what they decided to continue, accept, or reject as legitimate religious ritual behavior.

These two cases describe a relocation of sorts of Muslims into foreign spaces. While the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* reports address traveling during *Ramaḍān* and *ʿid*, neither have any mention of religious practices that were “out of this world.”¹²⁰ In the past 50 years, nine out of 528 astronauts that left earth’s orbit? identified as Muslim. However, there has not been much debate on practicing religious rituals in low-Earth orbit.¹²¹ The problem

118 Ibid., 110.

119 Ibid., 114.

120 Cathleen S. Lewis, “Muslims in Space: Observing Religious Rites in a New Environment,” *Astropolitics: The International Journal of Space Politics & Policy* 11, no. 1-2 (2003): 108-115.

121 However, Lewis highlights that in contesting the idea of the opposing dichotomy of religion (specifically Islam) and science, it is important to note that Iranian-American astronaut Anousheh Ansari’s 2006 expedition to the International Space Station was generally lauded in Iran, void

115 Ibid., 69.

116 Ibid., 83.

117 Ibid., 112.

lies in the fact that fasting in low-Earth orbit cannot depend on solar activity. In low-Earth orbit, the sun rises and sets a minimum of 16 times a day, every 90 minutes.¹²² However, on October 2007, at the tail-end of *Ramaḍān*, Datuk Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor began his expedition to the International Space Station, becoming the first Muslim to dedicate himself to ritual practice in space.¹²³ The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia produced the “Guidelines for Performing Islamic Rites at the International Space Station (ISS).” This set the ritual behavior for Muslims in space that range from performing ablution, determining the *qibla* and prayer times, the actions of the *ṣalāt*, fasting, handling the dead, dietary concerns, dress, and behavior.¹²⁴ Stated in the purpose of the guidelines is the intention for its pronouncements to standardize ritual prayer in space in order for future Muslim astronauts to fulfil

their dual responsibilities as Muslims and astronauts.¹²⁵ The function of the guidelines mirrors that of al-Bukhārī’s *ḥadīths* relating to holidays: they are merely suggestions of behaviors that have no moral value outside of the fact that they are religious in nature, nor do they have repercussions if an individual deviates from them. The spiritual intent of the reader is therefore assumed for the purposes of perpetuity or for personal gratification. The inclusivity of the guidelines for all Muslims to adhere to in space expands the boundaries of the *umma* beyond the physical realms of the earth which in turn invites people to no longer preclude Islam from the ventures of science and progress.¹²⁶

The standardization of the ritual of *Ramaḍān* in the cases of prison and space comport with the Qur’ānic and prophetic visions of the community. In its broadest possible interpretation of these visions, the *umma* is a pluralistic community that is united under

of political or religious criticism. One *Ramaḍān* joke consisted of a claim that clerics could not check the Moon to chart the *Ramaḍān* month as they would see a woman without a veil. Ansari additionally attributed her faith to her accomplishments as a scientist and explorer.

122 *Ibid.*, 108–111.

123 *Ibid.*, 114.

124 Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia), “A Guideline of Performing *‘ibāda* at the International Space Station (ISS),” Word Document, 2007. https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:WKks20j3H-4QJ:https://www.wired.com/images_blogs/wiredscience/files/a_guideline_‘ibāda_at_iss.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us

125 The first issue that the guidelines address is that of purity which supports the argument that the Islamic tradition requires ritual purity of the environment as well as the individual before ritual prayers can be conducted.

126 The emphasis here is on Islamic tradition and not Muslims. Muslims have always been a part of the fields of science but the idea from the Enlightenment Era that resonate to today that science is a secular realm with impartial and indifferent lenses, is weakened by virtue of this structuring of ritual to assimilate to science. It suggests that reason and development does not exclude Islam, nor vice versa.

a shared sense of identity and a set of ritual practices.¹²⁷ The pluralistic connotations of these ritual practices are epitomized in the themes of the *ʿids* and *Ramaḍān* where it is possible to join in non-canonical expressions, where tolerance and patience are meant to be exercised for those in and out of the *umma*, and where the individual's presence in society is recommended. But these elements are only accepted as a collective, when a group of Muslims are secure in their belief and their identity of culture, ethnicity, and expression is not threatened by foreign and social norms and if there is not a struggle for authority or pressure to conform.

The Muslim body in religious celebration can be summarized into two components: the first is sensory in nature. The presence of other bodies of similar conviction are significant to the individual's satisfaction of ritual practices. Mirroring movements and expressions affect perceptions of Islamic behavior and enforces belief systems held by the community. The synchronization of the surrounding bodies act as tangible reminders either through audio-visual-olfactory signals (such as decorations, vocalizations, food culture, communal gatherings, etc.) and emotive signals by the atmosphere created through socialization. The second component is incorporeal

and is intimately tied to intent. The *ʿid* holidays have an historical dimension but their legitimization is only through trust and reverence in the power of the Word of the Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, and *sunna*. The purification of the body in preparation to be presented to the divine combines the physical act of ablution and the mental act of restraint and discipline which is then communicated through the performance of *ʿibādāt*. The power of celebration thus has sacral power and practical functions in enjoining Muslims to a sense of community.

VI. Corporeal Mediation: Sufis, Salafis and the Prophet's Example

Carrie Grace Pody

Much of the preceding text has focused on the ways that ritual purity, understanding of the body, and theological understandings of humanity inform Muslim identity. Although these elements are constitutive of identity, Muslim identity is also contested. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of this disputed identity is the theological divide between Sufis and Salafis. Defining the precise bounds of these sects is a difficult, if not impossible task. But by broadly analyzing the theological tenets of these sects, the disputed identity, particularly these sects' relationship to the body, is brought into clear relief.

127 Karamustafa, "Community," 96.

“This imperative leads Sufis to become joined to each other in widespread social webs that emanate outward from the most famous saints.”¹²⁸ Sainthood’s deep connection with Sufism compels Sufis toward each other in devotion to God and some mainstream Muslims away from Sufi communities, in an effort to “purify” the Islamic tradition. Yet, millions of Sufis continue to engage in saint veneration and pilgrimaging to shrines, so by what authority do Sufi Muslims retain this tradition? What are the sources for Sufis engaging in these practices? Are they sourced from scripture? Developed from tradition? It is important to examine where Sufis derive authority from when looking at sainthood. The Salafi appeal to original, text-centered belief and tradition has cast a dark shadow on what they deem as non-Islamic and by some groups, heretical, specifically the veneration of saints and their shrines by Sufis.¹²⁹

To begin, one must inevitably highlight the dismissal of *sharī‘a* by some Sufi Muslims, thereby placing importance upon *dhikr*, or remembrance, of God and other means unto salvation. This has been a cause of contention among many Muslims, specifically the Salafi rejection of a number of practices (saint veneration, “whirling dervishes,” music, etc.)

that Sufis see as traditionally Islamic. Authority explains the literal interpretations of the Qur’ān combat the “expanded possibilities afforded by the respective prototypes of the holy book and prophethood,” that Sufi communities cling to so tightly.¹³⁰

These “expanded possibilities” can be defined differently, but generally engage the self, the inner-being, or the *nafs* on the search for unity with God. Many Sufis claim Muḥammad himself was the initiator of this idea, citing *sūra* 50:16: “And We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein.”¹³¹ This is not to say Sufi religious practice is a free-for-all with no rules or limits, it still retains normative Islamic practice of *ṣalāt*, *zakāt*, *hajj*, *shahāda*, and *ṣawm*, the five pillars of Islam, and “operate[s] on the same foundation and methods of authority as the ‘*ulama*.”¹³²

If this is the case, where then do Sufis derive the authority of saints from? Why do most mainstream Muslim schools of law engage in or support saint veneration? For students of Islam from areas with predominately Protestant influence, the first instinct is to look at the text, yet as discussed earlier, this is not possible. It is from the

128 Bashir, “Body,” 90.

129 DeWeese, “Authority,” 46.

130 DeWeese, “Authority,” 46.

131 Abdel Haleem, 340.

132 DeWeese, “Authority,” 48.

personhood of Prophet Muḥammad himself that sainthood is derived from. DeWeese explains,

If, in connection with the Qur'ān and the juridical context, we tend to link authority with texts, (i.e. the texts of revelation and of injunctions and laws), the case of the Prophet reminds us of authority linked with persons, and here too Sufism readily invests authority along the Prophetic example. It is on the model of the Prophet that the Sufi saint becomes a new source of authority in his own right, in accord to the famous dictum that the master's role in his local community is equivalent to the Prophet's role in the universal community.¹³³

The Prophet Muḥammad's personhood, life, and legacy is the source by which many Sufi Muslims look to in their search for authority as keepers or guardians of saint veneration. This is abstract and difficult to document, which may explain the diversity among Sufi communities in how saint veneration is practiced. Yet the overall theme is that in the same way followers of Muḥammad interacted with his habits, sayings, and experiences, Sufi Muslims involve themselves in the lives of those seen as closer to Allāh, having a more direct link with him. The hierarchy of saints acts as a connection from the physical world to God and “for anyone who wants to

advance on the Sufi path, it is necessary to, first, recognize those who are already a part of the hierarchy and then become attached to them through discipleship, either directly or through one of their close companions.”¹³⁴ This deeply echoes the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, and how the early community functioned, at least in the memory of many Muslims. In this way, by attaching or following a saint or his followers, one is emulating the followers of Muḥammad and their commitment to learning his ways—the *sunna*, the example of the Prophet Muḥammad. Here again, Muḥammad acts as the archetype for action and practice of Sufi Muslims.¹³⁵

This hierarchy is also important when it comes to Qur'ānic interpretation among Sufi communities, “Sufi approaches to the Qur'ān typically are open to non-literal readings and assumptions of hidden spiritual meanings that reveal themselves hierarchically according to individual spiritual attainment; the Prophet is understood as the exemplar of the Sufi path.”¹³⁶ With this approach to the Qur'ān, the mysticism related with Sufism is therefore inherent to Islamic practice. In response to the hostility of reformer groups such as Salafis, the necessity of specific instructions is non-existent,

133 Ibid., 49.

134 Bashir, “Body,” 90.

135 DeWeese, “Authority,” 39.

136 Ibid., 48.

instead Sufis rely on the literary example of the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers, compelling many Sufis to follow a person with a seemingly better link to God,¹³⁷ producing “a source of immediate and undeniable religious authority,” from “the living reality of the Prophet.”¹³⁸ Many times, the saint’s miracles and teachings were recorded and preserved for future study and to preserve the legacy of the person, just as is the Prophet Muḥammad’s. Thus, veneration of saints is supported by Muḥammad’s example and not necessarily a textual source.

A specific example of this is in the Sufi community of South Asia, where the literary metaphor of love of God is taken very seriously.¹³⁹ As Elias explains, the rituals on the death anniversary of saints are, “celebrated as his or her, ‘*urs*, the Arabic word for ‘wedding’. The implication that, in death, the Sufi unites as a bride with her beloved is explicit.”¹⁴⁰ By performing traditional aspects of a marriage ceremony, the community is celebrating the saint’s reunion with God in death.¹⁴¹ While this is geographically specific, it speaks to the metaphorical nature that many Sufi traditions embody.

It is the same “dramatic literary pattern,” of humankind loving God seen throughout Islamic literature, yet developed further as a ritual instead of staying metaphorical.¹⁴² This parallels sainthood in the way that the original idea of following Muḥammad and his follower’s example is mostly accepted by the general community of Muslims. Where the split begins is how they decide to follow that example.

From the sainthood practices, one can see that following *sunna* for many Sufis means attaching oneself to a saint just as Muḥammad’s followers attached themselves to the Prophet. Their interpretation of *sunna* gives them the authority to do such practices and become like the first followers. This is the issue for many mainstream communities, not following *sunna*, but the way Sufis do it. God says it like this, “it is not love for God that is contested but rather the manner in which this love is demonstrated and understood.”¹⁴³

Those venerated generally begin as religious leaders in the community and began to develop reputations as saints (*awliyā’*; sg., *walī*) who had supernatural power or divine blessing (*baraka*) granted by God. Through this power, it was believed, the saint could work miracles (*karāmāt*) such as foretelling the future, mindreading, flying

137 Ibid., 46

138 Ibid., 48.

139 Jamal J. Elias, “God,” in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (London: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 178.

140 Ibid., 179.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid., 178.

143 Ibid.

in the air, treating illness, and other extraordinary acts, just as the prophets did.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, their tombs became locations to receive a blessing or connect with the divine. While even many scholars doubt these miraculous events occurred, it doesn't stop the millions every year from visiting and engaging in shrine culture along with mainstream Muslim practices.¹⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, (d. 1328), one of the most famous opponents to saint veneration, was a jurist in the Ḥanbalī *madhhab* and claimed saint veneration and shrine visitation could lead to saints being revered as divine, thus making it polytheism, the original enemy of Islam.¹⁴⁶ Ibn Taymiyya also claimed Islamic Law forbade the presence of large attractions during the feasts, making visitation contrary to the Law during the height of travel for many Sufis, although he did not condemn the majority Sufi practices.¹⁴⁷

Sufi scholars exercise *ijtihād* when it comes to saint veneration. The way Muḥammad's followers were committed to him is a source of authority to attach themselves to the saints of today and centuries ago. In a way, saint veneration is also a *qiyās*, or analogy, to the way the Prophet and his first

followers interacted. By examining the life of Muḥammad, Sufis realize what most mainstream Muslims only take figuratively or metaphorically. This highlights the main difference found between mainstream and Sufi Islam. Attributing the practices of sainthood to the person of Muḥammad is difficult due to the lack of textual evidence, but this further intensifies the role of mysticism and mysterious spirituality in normative Sufi practice.

VII. Ritual Practice and the Body

Kayla Heslin

Contrary to popular belief there does not exist a united, global Muslim community.¹⁴⁸ Islam is rich and diverse, and instead, there are various groups of Muslims who draw from, change, build, and contest the Islamic tradition. Each group has their own way of interpreting their religion and their sources, and as a community, they set themselves apart through various rituals, traditions, celebrations, and laws. The Shī'ī community has a particularly interesting ritual in which they set themselves apart from all other Muslim communities. On the tenth day of the Islamic month of Muḥarram, Shī'ī Muslims take

144 William C. Chittick, John O. Voll, and Kazuo Ohtsuka. "Sufism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*. Edited by John L. Esposito.

145 Ibid.

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ahmet Karamustafa, "Community," in *Key Themes for the Study of Islam*, ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 93.

part in what is known as ‘Āshūrā’.¹⁴⁹ ‘Āshūrā’ is the time in which Shī‘ī Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet’s grandson Ḥusayn in 680 A.D. One of the world’s greatest religious processions takes place in Karbala, the site of Ḥusayn’s tragic end, and as many as two million Shī‘ī Muslims gather together in Karbala to communally express their solidarity with Ḥusayn, and what he stood for, through the ritual of ‘Āshūrā’.¹⁵⁰ However, this practice is not limited to those Muslims who can attend the events in Karbala, and Shī‘ī Muslims around the world merely alter their tradition to their specific geographical areas.¹⁵¹ The interpretation of the events that transpired in 680 through ‘Āshūrā’ serves as a mechanism of reinforcement for Shī‘ī identity and community and may sometimes serve as a political mechanism as well. As will be seen through a discussion of the ritual’s place in the Shī‘ī Islamic tradition, ‘Āshūrā’ is far more than self-flagellation, dramas, dancing, and mourning. Rather, ‘Āshūrā’ is a key element in the identity and community of Shī‘ī Islam.

To fully understand what ‘Āshūrā’ means to Shī‘ī Muslims and its place within the tradition a firm understanding of the events that took place at Karbala in 680 A.D. is necessary. Shī‘ī Muslims believe that the successor to the Prophet Muḥammad upon his death in 632 A.D. should have been ‘Alī, his first cousin, and son-in-law. However, when the Prophet died in 632 A.D. he left no clear account of whom his successor would be and, unsurprisingly, violent disagreements of who should take his position as leader of the Muslim community ensued.¹⁵² ‘Alī was not chosen as the immediate successor to the Prophet and was forced to wait twenty-five years before becoming the fourth Caliph.¹⁵³ The prevention of ‘Alī from becoming the first successor to the Prophet Muḥammad was a major point of contention for those Muslims who supported and followed ‘Alī. The delay in ‘Alī’s position created a sense of injustice and oppression that would climax with the death of ‘Alī’s son, Ḥusayn.¹⁵⁴ Shortly after ‘Alī became Caliph he was assassinated and a new Caliph, Yazīd I, who took his place. Yazīd’s character was questionable and he was said to have openly violated Islamic

149 Jean-Marc Pierre, Edward Hutchinson, and Hassan Abdulrazak, “The Shī‘a Remembrance of Muharram: An Exploration of the Days of ‘Āshūrā’ and Arba‘een,” *Military Review* 87, no. 2 (2007): 61.

150 Ibid., 61.

151 Abir Hamdar, “Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives.” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 39, no. 1/2 (2009): 84.

152 Paul Tabar, “‘Āshūrā’ in Sydney: A Transformation of a Religious Ceremony in the Context of a Migrant Society,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 23, no. 3 (2002): 285.

153 Ibid., 286.

154 Ibid., 286.

laws on more than one occasion.¹⁵⁵ One of 'Alī's sons, Abū 'Abdullāh Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, openly opposed the new Caliph and in 680 A.D. Ḥusayn made his attempt to seize control of the Islamic Caliphate. However, Yazīd gained knowledge of Ḥusayn's intentions and the Caliph sent 4,000 soldiers who met Ḥusayn and his entourage of 100 people outside the small town of Karbala.¹⁵⁶ Ḥusayn was outnumbered and surrounded. Yazīd's army decimated the small Shī'ī party and succeeded in quelling the rebellion with the decapitation of Ḥusayn.

The events that transpired near Karbala in 680 A.D. caused tensions felt by 'Alī's followers to erupt, and the explosion shattered the remaining ties of cohesion and fragmented the Muslim community.¹⁵⁷ Shī'ī Muslims today often point to the Battle of Karbala as the decisive root of their separate identity. The commemoration of these events during 'Āshūrā' reinforces this separate identity and the separation of the Shī'ī community from Sunni Muslims.¹⁵⁸ Although the execution of 'Āshūrā' may differ from each geographical region, the principle ideas remain the same, and at the heart of

'Āshūrā', it is the communal reflection of Ḥusayn's martyrdom and a chance for Shī'ī Muslims to stand in solidarity with Ḥusayn and the ideas that he stood for.¹⁵⁹ Ultimately, 'Āshūrā' can be understood as an essential cultural paradigm for Shī'ī Muslims.¹⁶⁰

Many Shī'īs connect themselves with Ḥusayn during 'Āshūrā' and construct their identity primarily through corporeal practices of pain. While this is not the only way to practice 'Āshūrā', and many Shī'ī religious leaders push against such practices, self-flagellation, or *latum*, is a key component of the commemoration.¹⁶¹ This corporeal practice conditions identity within the individuals who take part in 'Āshūrā' and the ritual acts to imprint ideologies into selves through bodily means.¹⁶² By practicing varying forms of *latam* during 'Āshūrā' individuals share in the suffering of Ḥusayn as well as stand in solidarity with his cause, however, on a much higher-level through these corporeal practices Shī'ī Muslims are constructing and exalting their identity as Shī'ī.¹⁶³ As Shahzad Bashir explains, there is a significance attached to performing

155 Pierre, et al., "The Shī'ī Remembrance of Muharram," 63.

156 Ibid., 63.

157 Lara Deeb, "Living 'Āshūrā' in Lebanon: Mourning Transformed to Sacrifice," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 122.

158 Ibid., 123.

159 Pierre, et al., "The Shī'ī Remembrance of Muharram," 63.

160 Lara, "Living 'Āshūrā' in Lebanon," 124.

161 Augustus R. Norton, "Ritual, Blood, and Shiite Identity: 'Āshūrā' in Nabatiyya, Lebanon" *TDR: The Drama Review* 49, no. 4 (2005): 141.

162 Bashir, "Body," 85.

163 Pierre, et al., "The Shī'ī Remembrance of Muharram," 65.

normative rituals in the Islamic context. Bashir uses the example of ritual prayer and how the ability to perform the prayer is the universal passport to being Muslim.¹⁶⁴ The same idea can be applied to the practice and observance of ‘Āshūrā’ in the Shī‘ī community. Through performing ‘Āshūrā’ and regulating one’s body during the ritual, it becomes a “universal passport” to be a Shī‘ī Muslim. Individuals consciously subject their bodies to *latum*, in order to produce an overarching sense of being and belonging within the community, that is meant to become unconsciously pervasive.¹⁶⁵ As Bashir explains, “this can be thought of as a technology of the self that is a constitutive element in the construction of properly [Shī‘ī] Muslim bodies.”¹⁶⁶ Those individuals who choose to take part in *latum* of ‘Āshūrā’ rhythmically strike their bodies in grief.¹⁶⁷ Through the repeated action of self-flagellation Shī‘ī Muslims seek to develop the “appropriate” religious identity in hopes to mediate a sense of themselves as a religious subject as well as their status in the social sphere of Shī‘ī Islam.¹⁶⁸

However, the practice of *latam* during ‘Āshūrā’ is not welcomed everywhere and for some Shī‘ī Muslims, they must tailor their ritual to

the geographic areas they find themselves in. The continuation of the practice, with mere modifications, attests to the importance of ‘Āshūrā’ in constructing the globally extending Shī‘ī Muslim identity. Two descriptions of ‘Āshūrā’, one in Michigan and the other in Lebanon, will help to illustrate the various methods in which the ritual is employed. Scholar of Islam, Stephen Schwartz, in 2009 observed an ‘Āshūrā’ commemoration of a Balkan Shī‘ī Muslim group located in Michigan. This particular Shī‘ī community held an ‘Āshūrā’ commemoration that Schwartz described as, “resembling a wake held by a fraternal order more than an ecstatic display of emotion.”¹⁶⁹ The annual ‘Āshūrā’ ritual was held within a large meeting hall where there was no weeping, shouting, or self-flagellation. Instead, men and women gathered together as they listened to a speech given by a Catholic priest and afterward came together for a ritual meal.¹⁷⁰ The example of the ‘Āshūrā’ commemoration in Michigan helps to illustrate how Shī‘ī Muslim communities are sometimes forced to alter their corporeal practices of ‘Āshūrā’. Yet, the participation in the commemoration still enforces religious

164 Bashir, “Body,” 78.

165 Ibid., 80.

166 Ibid.

167 Deeb, “Living ‘Āshūrā’ in Lebanon,” 124.

168 Bashir, “Body,” 80.

169 Stephen Schwartz, “‘Āshūrā’ in America; Celebrating a Muslim Holiday in Michigan,” *The Weekly Standard*, January 18, 2009, accessed April 29, 2018, <https://www.weeklystandard.com/stephen-schwartz/‘Āshūrā’-in-america>.

170 Ibid.

identity and provides a way to remain connected to the Shī'ī community. In Lebanon, the picture is quite different. Here 'Āshūrā' is part of a public commemoration, rather than a small gathering within a meeting hall, and a bleeding ritual, although not practiced by all participants, is a vital aspect of 'Āshūrā'.¹⁷¹ Using straight razors participants inflict shallow cuts on their upper forehead and their blood is seen as a testimony to their fidelity to their faith.¹⁷²

While 'Āshūrā' stands as a way for Shī'ī Muslims to come together and express their identities and community, there has been a great deal of discussion of how 'Āshūrā' also acts as a politically charged event for some Shī'ī Muslims.¹⁷³ Shī'ī Islam often melds faith with politics, and 'Āshūrā' has also become one of the ways in which they do so. 'Āshūrā' becomes a reminder that political disputes separate the Islamic community, and it aids in reinforcing political separation from the Sunni Muslim community. By invoking the story of the oppression and political injustice that 'Alī and his son Ḥusayn faced, 'Āshūrā' can then become a linked to present days issues of oppression and political injustice Shī'ī Muslims feel they still face. Such a separation has been labeled the "'Āshūrā'

Complex."¹⁷⁴ What this means is that there are times when Shī'ī Muslims employ metaphors of 'Āshūrā', and the meanings behind the commemoration, to trigger theocratic zeal. Because of the possibility for 'Āshūrā' to be employed in this way, many authoritarian Middle Eastern governments limit the practice and fear its symbolism.¹⁷⁵ However, such uses of 'Āshūrā' are not the norm and for the majority of Shī'ī Muslims the event is used as an emotional commemoration and a physical way to connect themselves to the martyrdom of Ḥusayn. While there have been instances of Shī'ī Muslims employing the "'Āshūrā' complex" in order to serve political agendas, such as the Iranian Revolution in 1979, these instances are led by radical members of the society and should not be understood as reflecting the Shī'ī community as a whole.¹⁷⁶

The methods may vary geographically but the principle ideas at the heart of 'Āshūrā' remain the same, and the ritual can be seen as a way in which Shī'ī Muslims foster their separate identities, whether it be culturally or politically. However, there is a complexity to understanding 'Āshūrā' and the marker of identity it produces. Salafi Islamist groups in the Middle East, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda, target

171 Norton, "Ritual, Blood, and Shiite Identity," 150.

172 Ibid.

173 Pierre, et al., "The Shī'ī Remembrance of Muḥarram," 62.

174 Ibid., 61.

175 Ibid, 65.

176 Ibid.

Shī'ī Muslims specifically due to their ideology of Shī'ī Muslims as *kuffār*, or unbelievers.¹⁷⁷ During 'Āshūrā', Shī'ī Muslims are easily identified, in massive groups, making the celebration an easy target for the attempts of terrorist organizations. In March of 2004, such an attempt was successful and more than 200 individuals were killed as they marked 'Āshūrā'.¹⁷⁸ This attack on the Shī'ī community was not an isolated event and attacks such as this have been made repeatedly during 'Āshūrā'. Another example happened in January 2007 when suicide bombers detonated explosives in a crowd of worshippers at the Shī'ī Mosques in Mandala.¹⁷⁹ 'Āshūrā' is a ritual meant to promote Shī'ī identity and solidarity, not fear of danger, and when terrorist organizations such as ISIS and al - Qaeda attack celebrations of 'Āshūrā' they attack an essential cultural paradigm.

Within Islam, there are numerous groups and traditions. The diversity of the religious tradition creates various understandings and interpretations that are then translated into practices, rituals, celebrations, and traditions. From the Shī'ī community comes the

ritual of 'Āshūrā', which interprets the history of the Shī'ī Muslims as a struggle of the oppressed under the oppressor. This interpretation stems from an event that occurred in 680 A.D, when the Prophet Muḥammad's grandson, Ḥusayn, died in battle at the hands of the Caliph Yazīd. Each year on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muḥarram, Shī'ī Muslims come together to commemorate Ḥusayn's death and to reinforce their identities as individuals of the Shī'ī community. A key component to the practice of 'Āshūrā' is *latum*, or self-flagellation. This corporeal practice allows Muslims to participate in the technology of the self, which means they condition themselves and their bodies through repeated strikes in order to imprint an "appropriate" religious identity and establish their position within the Shī'ī community. While this practice is significant in the majority of Shī'ī Muslims 'Āshūrā' ritual, those living in geographic areas that do not allow such practice, alter their traditions in order to commemorate 'Āshūrā'.

177 Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants," *The Atlantic*, March 2015, 78.

178 "Hundreds of Iraqis Die in 'Āshūrā' Attacks: Shia Targeted during Religious Celebrations (Iraq)," *MEED Middle East Economic Digest* 48, no. 10 (2004): 1.

179 Pierre, et al., "The Shī'ī Remembrance of Muḥarram," 62.

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