Sacred texts and identity construction in the Cardiff Muslim community: sojourners' narratives about *majales*

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Language and Communication

By

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Dedication

To the twelfth Imam, the awaited, the Mahdi

Acknowledgments

There are many other people who deserve thanks; unfortunately these are too many to be named. However, I will do my best to do justice to some of them. Oula M. Hadawi and Nadia Elias have proved to be sincere and true friends without whom I probably would not be able to survive my PhD journey. Dear Oula and Nadia 'thanks for being there when I needed you'. Thanks to Tina Schmieder, Idil Osman, Boi Rantsudu and Najwa Alzahrani for the long chats which kept me sane and always gave me hope. Thanks to my office colleagues for their constant support and encouragement: Argyro Kantara, Hayat Benkorichi Graoui, Sally Naji and Ahmed Topkev.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my parents: 'Dad, I know you had waited for me to graduate and I know I kept you waiting for too long but I'm sure that you're watching me from above and smiling. Sorry for not being with you in your last days but hope that now you feel proud of me'. And 'Mum I'm really grateful for your prayers without them I would be totally lost in life, love you so much'. I would also particularly like to thank my husband, Ahmed, for his encouragement and patience.

Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to my participants. I would like to thank them all for opening up and sharing their stories with me, 'thanks for welcoming and accepting me among you and really hope that you will like what I have done'.

Abstract

My PhD research investigates how Shi'i Muslim women in Cardiff participate in religious rituals and draw on religious texts in ways that help to construct their identities as diasporic Muslims. The religious rituals involved are the *majales* of Muharram and Safar, the first two months of the Islamic calendar, which are dedicated to commemorate the memory of Hussein, Prophet Muhammad's grandson and the third Shi'i Imam according to Twelver Shi'a. *Majales* (sing. *majlis*) are gatherings of people for the commemoration of the memory of Hussein and the battle of Karbala. Understanding the dynamics of a particular community is essential in investigating how identities are constructed within this community and by adopting an ethnographic approach this understanding and investigation are expected to be achieved. Considering the intricate relationship between the participants' religious practices and the ways in which sacred texts are taken up and used, an ethnographic approach would also allow me to address these two aspects equally. This is why I carried out fieldwork for four months during two successive years, 2014 and 2015. During this period I undertook participant-observation in an Islamic Centre in Cardiff and conducted interviews with Shi'i Muslim women who participated in the rituals. The women involved in this study are female students, mostly PhD students, or spouses of male students whose stay in the United Kingdom is bound to their study, i.e. they are (academic) sojourners.

The use of interviews as a method, particularly semi-structured interviews, offered the participants the opportunity to talk about their practices through a narrative mode. Deppermann (2013a: 67) indicates that "narratives provide particularly powerful resources for positioning". Through narratives people take positions towards their past selves or towards others. In his seminal article "Positioning between Structure and Performance", Michael Bamberg (1997a) comes up with the idea of 'Narrative Positioning', in which he argues that the process of positioning happens at three different levels. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012: 164) argue that Bamberg's model of narrative positioning has been adopted in many studies that involve interviews and conversational stories because "it affords an analytical apparatus for linking local telling choices to larger identities". Bamberg's (1997a) model is applied to the analysis of the narratives derived from interviews with these Shi'i Muslim women. This model consists of three different yet interrelated levels, where the first level is concerned with

the story world and the relations that exist among characters. The second level is concerned with the story-telling world and the interaction that takes place between the interlocutors. The moral/ social world is what the third level focuses on and how narrators define themselves in relation to the wider context, i.e. beyond the local level of interaction. The analysis has been supplemented with observations from my ethnographic work and suggests how the women use the narratives to perform complex identity work through which they orient to the symbols and core values of their "imagined homeland" and draw on these to validate the diverse roles they fulfil and the practices they have adopted in the diaspora context. In talking about *majales* and their practices in both homeland and diaspora, participants display and reflect on the different roles they take, including being teachers, advice-givers and critics of others' behaviour.

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Transcription conventions

//	The point in a turn where the utterance of the next speaker begins to overlap
=	Latched utterances without a noticeable overlap
(.)	Short pause
( )	Extra-linguistic features like coughing or laughing
[]	Explanations provided by the transcriber
↑	Rising intonation
↓	Falling intonation
-	Cut-off sentence, change of mind or self-repair
Normal font	Word in colloquial Arabic
Italics	Word in Standard Arabic (SA)
Bold	Word in English

Glossary of Arabic terms

Abaya	full-length outer black garment
'ajr	heavenly reward
Abu	the father of
Ahlulbayt	also 'Ahl al-bait', the Prophet Muhammad's household
Arbaeen	the 20th of Safar is the day of the Arbaeen; the Arbaeen in Arabic means the 40th and it marks the 40th day after the martyrdom of Hussein on the 10th of Muharram
Ashura	Ashura is the 10th day of Muharram on which the battle of Karbala took place. The word Ashura is derived from the Arabic word 'Ashara' which means ten. The word Ashura is usually used metonymically to refer to the month of Muharram or to the first ten days of it
Du'a	du'a is the Arabic word for the act of supplication to God, the plural of it is ad'iyah
'Id al-adha	also 'Eid al-adha' a festival that marks the culmination of the pilgrimage (hajj)
'Id al-fitr	also 'Eid al-fitr' a festival that marks the end of Ramadan
Hajj	pilgrimage to Mecca
Hijab	a veil worn by some Muslim women in the presence of any male outside of their immediate family
Hijra	the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D
Hijri calendar	Islamic lunar calendar
Husseiniyia	(also known as Hussainia) is a Shi'i mosque; the name is derived from the name of Hussein since most of the rituals practised there are usually rituals of commemoration for him.
Imam	for Shi'i Muslims, 'Imam' refers to a successor to the Prophet Muhammad
Inshallah	a formulaic expression meaning by God's will
Ithna Ashariyyah	'Twelvers' in English, are the ones who form the majority of Shi'a in the world and who believe in twelve Imams who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad
Khutba	sermon
Latam	chest- beating
Ma'atim	local name for 'majales' in some countries

Majales	singular form 'majlis', gatherings of people where they commemorate the memory of Hussein and the battle of Karbala
Masirat	processions
Mawakib	singular form 'mawkib', tents that offer food and hospitality to the pilgrims of the shrine of Hussein
Muharram	the first month of the Islamic calendar
Qarayat	singular form 'qaraya', a term used in colloquial Iraqi dialect to refer to majales especially women's majales
Ramadan	the month of fasting and the ninth month of the Islamic calendar
Safar	the second month of the Islamic calendar
Salat	prayer
Sayyed	a title given to a male who is a lineal descendant of the Prophet Muhammad
Shahada	to witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger
Sheikh	a clergyman
Shi'a	people who adhere to the second branch of Islam, Shi'i Islam is usually contrasted with Sunni Islam, the largest branch of Islam
Shi'i	the adjective of Shi'a
Taklif	a celebration practised by some Muslims to mark the time a girl reaches the age of nine and starts observing Islamic practice like wearing hijab
Tatbeer	hitting one's head with sharp knives
Um	the mother of
Ummah	or 'umma', an Arabic word which denotes the global community of Muslims.
Ziyara	plural form 'ziyarat', a visit or pilgrimage to the shrines of the Imams, ziyara is also used to refer to the text that is read when doing pilgrimage to these shrines

People and places involved in the Karbala Story

1. People

Abbas   Hussein's half-brother

Hussein   the Prophet's Muhammad grandson and the third Shi'i Imam

for Twelver Shi'a

Um Wahab   a non-Muslim woman who sacrificed her only son for the
sake of Hussein in the battle of Karbala

Yazid   Hussein's opponent

Zayneb   Hussein's sister

2. Places

Karbala   a city in the southern part of Iraq (100 km southwest of Baghdad). It is one of the biggest Shi'i destinations because it contains the shrines of Hussein and his half-brother Abbas.

Kufa   a city in the southern part of Iraq which is about 170 km south of Baghdad.

Medina   a city in Saudi Arabia, it was formerly known as *Yathrib*

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

When I commenced my PhD at Cardiff University in 2013 I had the intention to work on death texts. The aim at that time was to compare and contrast memorial texts such as obituaries and death announcements in two Muslim communities, one in Baghdad and the other in Cardiff. When people announce the death of a person in Iraq, they usually place a banner (mostly a black one) in public places. Whenever I see a banner that announces the death of someone, I stop and read all the details of it, I look at the colours used, the structure and language, where the funeral is going to be held and when it will start. I pay attention to where the banner is placed and why it is put in this place in particular and not in any other place. I watch people as they read it and watch their reactions, how some are shocked and how others show indifference. Death texts, for me, represent a unique world by themselves; they hold a whole society within them. Thus, the study of such texts is a rich area because they reflect the norms and conventions of their societies. I was not able to continue working on this topic because of the unsettled political situation in Iraq. By the time I was planning my fieldwork which was supposed to start in Iraq first and then in Cardiff, ISIS took control over Mosul, one of the major cities in Iraq. This caused a huge disturbance there and going to Iraq was a risk, from Cardiff University's point of view. So my request for the approval to start my fieldwork there was rejected. This rejection meant the loss of a major and substantial data set from Iraq. My preliminary investigation in Cardiff showed that the data I would get from Cardiff was very small in comparison with that expected to be collected from Iraq. So I had to stop working on this project and think of something else.

At the time all this happened, I came across an article about Pakistani Shi'i Muslim women and their use of the *majales* as a means of resistance by an American Anthropologist, Mary Hegland. *Majales* are gatherings of people who practise religious rituals which commemorate the memory of Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson and the third Shi'i Imam for Twelver Shi'a. These rituals have the death aspect in them but not the death of ordinary people but the death of a central religious figure for Shi'i Muslims, i.e. Hussein. Hegland (1998a) has shown that *majales* are not mere religious rituals but they can also be used for other social meanings, e.g. to display and construct resistance or to assume particular identities (e.g. resistant) in specific

contexts. Being a Shi-i Muslim myself, I was amazed by her work and was motivated to explore *majales* and identity construction outside Iraq and particularly in Cardiff which has a minority of Shi'is. Hence I started working in this direction with the intention to focus upon the religious texts that are embedded in the Muharram rituals.

Thus, this study addresses the question of "how do Shi'i Muslim women use sacred texts and practices which are embedded in Muharram as a means for constructing their identities in the diaspora?" By addressing this question, the thesis aims to contribute to existing literature in two distinct ways. First, given that previous studies of *majales* have investigated the rituals involved in this study from anthropological, religious, social and political perspectives, this study puts forward a linguistic perspective to the study of *majales* and identity construction in the diaspora. Adopting a linguistic perspective will assist in enhancing the findings of other studies because it offers an analysis of the language used in the *majales* and the discourse that surrounds them. Such an analysis is expected to give voice to and raise awareness about Shi'i Muslims, a group that is a minority in both the Islamic world and in the diaspora and, thus, underexplored in the literature.

My thesis is about sacred texts and practices of the Muharram rituals, the way they are used as means of identity construction by Shi'i Muslim women within a diasporic community. Ethnographic and narrative approaches have been employed in order to carry out the investigation of this topic. The ethnographic methods employed include participant-observation, interviews, recordings of rituals and field notes. Each method will contribute in having an emic perspective regarding the use of the Muharram sacred texts and the practised rituals in the *majales* setting within a Shi'i Muslim community in Cardiff. Ethnographic methods will help in understanding better the community under study, the way rituals are practised, the significance of these rituals to the participants and the way they talk about these rituals. This understanding is significant because it sheds light on a group of people, i.e. Shi'i Muslims, and their rituals and practices. And this in turn will contribute to the literature about this group which is both under-studied and under- represented. Due to gender restrictions within the context of the Islamic Centre which belongs to this Shi'i community, this study is restricted to women only.

The rituals involved are the rituals of *majales* which are gatherings of people who commemorate the battle of Karbala (680 AD) and Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson and the third Shi'i Imam for Twelver Shi'a.

Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model has been applied to the analysis of narratives that were produced in the interviews with these Shi'i women. The use of this model has been fruitful in showing the identity work the participants undertake because it addresses these narratives from three different, yet interrelated, angles. This model addresses the story world where characters are presented and positioned in relation to each other, the story-telling world where the interlocutors co-construct narratives and thus position themselves to each other and the social/ moral world where narrators define themselves in relation to global, macro discourses/ master narratives. The ways narrators design their stories and tell them assist in the way they position themselves to themselves and to their audience. Bamberg's model has been combined with Labov's (1972a) model. The combination of these two models takes into consideration both the performative and the structural aspects of narratives and, thus, succeeds in bringing out the identity work done by the participants when they engage with narrations.

1.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis is distributed into eight chapters where the current chapter, **chapter one**, gives a general overview of the study and shows the research motivation for choosing the topic under study, the scope of the thesis and where it fits in its research field. The methods employed in this study are presented along with the reasons for adopting them. The description and the distribution of the chapters are also included in this chapter.

Chapter two reviews and evaluates previous research that frames the study theoretically. The literature reviewed is related to identity and the different approaches that have defined this concept and also highlights the constructionist approach that is adopted in the current study. Diasporic identity as one of the constructs of identity is given a special attention in this chapter because of its central position in relation to the topic of the thesis, how diaspora and diasporic communities are tackled and defined in the literature is also included in this chapter. The significance of rituals in the

construction of identities particularly within diasporic contexts cannot be denied and thus rituals are defined and discussed in this chapter with a particular focus on Islamic rituals. It also reviews some of the key studies which have studied *majales* in disporic and non- diasporic places. The chapter ends with a presentation of the research questions.

Chapter three focuses on the methodological approaches adopted in addressing the research questions posed, both in relation to data-collection and analysis. This chapter is divided into two parts where the first part outlines the methodological choices made and shows the evolution of the empirical side of the study, i.e. it introduces and justifies the ethnographic methods which have been adopted in data collection. This first part also discusses the position of the researcher in the particular community under study. The second part introduces and justifies the narrative methodology which has been used in analysing narratives produced in interviews.

In **chapter four**, I introduce the story related to the battle of Karbala which will be of help in understanding the religious narratives told by the participants of this study. The researcher's personal background is also included in this chapter as it is significant in contextualising the researcher's position within the current study. The site in which the fieldwork was conducted is introduced and the programme which was followed during the period of collecting the data is presented. The details of the ethnographic work that has been carried out are also included along with the challenges that have been encountered in the field. The four key participants of the study are introduced in this chapter, information regarding their place of origin, marital status, position and number of children if they have any is provided in addition to the justifications behind choosing them as key participants.

Chapter five is the first analytical chapter which investigates and discusses the presentation of characters within narratives and the depiction of relationships among these characters. This investigation is employed to figure out the way the participants 'do' the *majales*. Bamberg's first level of his narrative positioning model is employed in this chapter. This level is concerned with how the characters are positioned in relation to one another within the narrated events. Bamberg's first level of positioning is combined with a Labovian analysis in order to explore the story world in the participants' narratives regarding the Karbala story, Hussein and their own participation

in the *majales*. Four questions have been posed and exploited in the analysis included in this chapter. Addressing these four questions is expected to show how these women 'do' the *majales* and how this 'doing' is related to their identity as Shi'i Muslims in a diasporic context.

Chapter six addresses the investigation of the co-construction of identities that is done by both the narrator and the audience, i.e. the interviewee and the interviewer when they talk about *majales*. This chapter employs Bamberg's second level of positioning which is concerned with the speaker's positioning of themselves to their audience. This chapter focuses on the interaction that takes place between the interviewer and the interviewee when the latter engages with narration. Special attention is paid to the interviewer's position as someone who shares the same cultural and religious background with the interviewee. Since interaction is the focus of this chapter, attention is paid to both the interpersonal and the interactional features in the interlocutors' discourse.

In **chapter seven** Bamberg's third level of his narrative positioning model is employed, this level explores the ways narrators define themselves in relation to master narratives which is done in this study within the context of discussing *majales*. Attention is paid to how these women use the sacred texts of Muharram and their experiences of the *majales* to define themselves as particular kind of people in relation to key master narratives. Analyses made in the previous two chapters, i.e. chapters five and six, will pave the way to reaching the master narratives these women orient to in defining themselves.

In **chapter eight**, I summarise and discuss the findings in light of theory and answer the research questions. A summary of the analysis done in the thesis along with a discussion of this analysis are included in this chapter. Research reflections regarding different aspects of the current study are also included and discussed in this chapter. The chapter is rounded up with concluding remarks and avenues for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This study examines the connection between the rituals of Muharram and ongoing identity work of Muslim women in the diaspora, with a particular focus on *majales*. I studied *majales* which were held in an Islamic Centre in Cardiff, Wales in the United Kingdom. The reason behind choosing *majales* rather than any other kind of rituals is that *majales* are held on a regular basis and they include the use of different kinds of texts. These *majales* give me the chance to participate, observe and interview women whom I intend to investigate the role of the story of the battle of Karbala in their lives. The *majales* witness the performance of rituals which can function as important identity markers.

In this chapter I will review and evaluate previous literature which has tackled the main themes and topics in relation to identity, rituals, Muslim rituals and diaspora. This chapter reviews previous literature related to identity and how it is defined within literature, shows the different approaches to identity and highlights the constructionist approach adopted in the study. It also offers a review of how diaspora and diasporic communities are defined by sociologists, political scientists and cultural studies researchers. The term 'ritual' is defined and a review of the most prominent Islamic rituals is provided. Then a review of a number of previous studies that have investigated the rituals of *majales* in both diasporic and non-diasporic places is included. The research questions this study answers are provided at the end of this chapter.

2.2 Approaches to Identity

This section provides an overview of how identity is defined and the different approaches that have dealt with the concept of identity. Identity, as De Fina (2003: 15) acknowledges, "is an extremely complex construct and simple definitions of what the term refers to are difficult to find as there is no neutral way to characterize it." Despite this difficulty in defining identity, scholars have proposed some definitions. For example, Bucholtz and Hall (2005: 585) define identity broadly as "the social positioning of self and other." This definition of identity is in line with what positioning

theorists advocate. Positioning theorists, like Bamberg (1997a; 2004b); Davies and Harré (1990); Harré and van Langenhove (1991; 1999), investigate the co-construction of identity that is achieved by the speaker and her/ his audience. In a similar vein, Woodward (1997: 1–2) argues that identity

> gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not. Often identity is most clearly marked by difference.

Woodward's (1997) definition, to some extent, echoes relationality (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005:598), i.e. positioning involves making claims about how we relate to others, by focusing on attributes we either share or not with others. In this process, binary oppositions like man/ woman or black/ white may be used as sources to do this kind of identity work.

Positioning theory falls under 'constructionist' approaches which have an ongoing debate in regard to identity with the essentialist approaches. Constructionist approaches emphasise the dynamic nature of identity in opposition to the essentialist's view of identity as something static and given. Essentialist theorists, as Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 9) argue, conceive identity to be located "'inside' persons, as a product of minds, cognition, the psyche, or socialisation practices. From this perspective, identity is a taken-for-granted category and a feature of a person that is absolute and knowable." However, under the constructionist view, identity is defined "as a fluid, dynamic and shifting process, capable of both reproducing and destabilising the discursive order, but also one in which people's identity work is analysed in talk." (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006: 34). This last definition emphasises that identities are produced within discourse, a point which is picked up by De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006:2) who argue that within the realm of social constructionism, identity is also viewed as a process that

> (1) takes place in concrete and specific interactional occasions, (2) yields constellations of identities instead of individual, monolithic constructs, (3) does not simply emanate from the individual, but results from processes of negotiation, and entextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990) that are eminently social, and (4) entails ''discursive work'' (Zimmerman and Wieder 1970).

According to this argument identities are emergent and context dependent. Zimmerman (1998) also highlights the role of discourse as a medium through which identities are produced and the influence that contexts have upon identities. Zimmerman (1998: 90-91) comes up with a classification of different levels of identity; according to him there are discourse, situational and transportable identities. According to Zimmerman (1998: 90), participants claim discourse identities when "they engage in the various sequentially organized activities" such as speaker- listener, story teller- story recipient, questioner- answerer and so on. Situated identities refer to those identities that are enacted within "particular types of situations" (Zimmerman, 1998: 90) such as complainant- call-taker within the situation of emergency telephone calls. Transportable identities refer to identities that "travel with individuals across situations and are potentially relevant in and for any situation and in and for any spate of interaction" (Zimmerman, 1998: 90) such as ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg (2006: 14) argue that both the discourse and the situated identities, which they label as 'local' identities, help in the "emergence of more global, transportable identities". The relationship between local and global identities is similar to the one that relates the micro and the macro levels of interaction within narratives. Such relationships have been echoed in Bamberg's (1997a) three levels of positioning. The first of these three levels is concerned with the content of the talk (the story), the second level is concerned with the positioning interaction that takes place between interactants (the telling of the story) while the third level is concerned with the ideological orientation within which speakers define themselves (Bamberg, 1997a; 2006; 2011; Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2011; Korobov and Bamberg, 2004, see also chapter 3 for full discussion of Bamberg's model).

Identity has been viewed by scholars from the fields of social psychology and linguistic anthropology from the perspective of belonging to 'social groups'. According to Tajfel (1981: 255), identity is 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." Kroskrity (2000: 111) views identity as "the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories". Both Tajfel's (1981) and Kroskrity's (2000) definitions emphasise the aspect of belonging to social groups but the orientations of the disciplines they belong to are reflected in these definitions. Tajfel, as a social psychologist, puts emphasis on

the conscious knowledge of being a member of a particular social group and the emotional significance of this membership while Kroskrity, as a linguistic anthropologist, emphasises the linguistic aspect of constructing a sense of belonging to a particular group. Scholars have also discussed different constructs of identity based on the analytical aspect from which they tackle identity; for example, 'national identity', 'public identity', 'sexual identity', 'social identity', etc. (Baker and Ellece, 2011).

Diasporic identity, which is one of the constructs of identity, is of special importance to the current study as it represents a potential resource to do identity work and this is the reason for discussing it in detail below. According to Brah (1996: 181) the dictionary's definition of the word diaspora is "dispersion from" which she interprets as carrying a "notion of a centre, a locus, a 'home' from where the dispersion occurs." Brah (1996) argues that the image of a journey is included within the meaning of diaspora, but not any journey can be treated as diasporic. Diasporic journeys for Brah (1996: 182) "are essentially about settling down, about putting roots 'elsewhere' […] The question is not simply about *who travels* but *when, how, and under what circumstances*?" For Paul Gilroy (1997: 318), the circumstances that trigger diasporic movements are usually associated with what he calls "push factors" like wars, famine, ethnic cleansing, enslavement and political oppression. Gilroy (1997: 318) maintains that the term diaspora "identifies a relational network characteristically produced by forced dispersal and reluctant scattering." Gilroy does not negate the fact that there are other positive motivations for diasporic movement but he emphasises the negative factors. Brah (1996) aligns with Gilroy in relation to the negative factors that lead to dispersion; Brah (1996: 193) maintains that the word diaspora "often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation". But at the same time Brah (1996: 193) sees diasporas as places of hope and new beginnings. For Brah (1996: 193) diasporas "are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure."

Diaspora or diaspora community, for William Safran (1991:83), are "metaphoric designations" which are used to refer to different groups of people like "expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities". Safran (1991:83) claims that the term diaspora is used in the same way as

the term "ghetto" or "holocaust" are used where under the former comes "all kinds of crowded, constricted, and disprivileged urban environments" while under the latter comes "all kinds of mass murder." The analogy Safran makes between diaspora and the terms 'ghetto' and 'holocaust' suggests also the negative aspects related to diaspora and how this dispersion is sometimes forced rather than voluntarily chosen. Safran elaborates on a definition of diaspora given by Walker Connor, who is a prominent scholar in the field of nationalism studies; Connor as cited in Safran (1991:83) defines diaspora as "that segment of people living outside the homeland". Safran (1991:83) argues that this definition can be elaborated to refer to "expatriate minority communities" whose members according to Safran share the following characteristics:

> 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

Safran's characteristics of the diasporic people contain the idea of the dispersion from the centre to the periphery which has been highlighted by Brah (1996) above. This idea of the centre draws on sociological approaches to the process of migration that see place as organised into centre and periphery (Baynham, 2003: 354). The participants of the present study, who will be introduced in the following chapters, clearly fulfil the spatial category in the list of characteristics above. They have moved from Iraq to the United Kingdom, i.e. they have left their homeland and they have settled, although temporarily, in the United Kingdom. Paasi (2001:10), who emphasises the spatial aspect in the formation of identity, claims that identity "is not merely an individual or social category, but also – crucially – a spatial category, since the ideas of territory,

self and 'us' all require symbolic, socio-cultural and/or physical dividing lines with the Other." The ideas of having a shared collective memory about the homeland and conceiving this homeland as the true home and the belief that they will return to it one day are also highlighted. The idea of non-total integration in the host country is also considered primary according to the characteristics given above.

Moving into a new foreign place affects both the ones who move into that place and the ones who originally occupy it. For example, Bhatia (2013: 235) maintains that "the very act of moving into a new geographic and religious space and coming into contact with 'alterity' opens up avenues for creating new forms of identities". Gilroy (1997: 304) shares the same opinion and advocates the idea that diasporas offer "inevitable opening" of one's culture to the influences and pressures of the new culture. Diaspora, from Gilroy's (1997: 304) point of view, "offers new possibilities for understanding identity, not as something inevitably determined by place or nationality, and for visualizing a future where new bases for social solidarity are offered and joined, perhaps via the new technologies." Gilroy's point regarding identity as something that is not fixed or determined resonates with the idea of identity as fluid and dynamic which is presented earlier. Smith (2002: 6) also argues that in many Western countries measures were adopted to segregate Muslims from the rest of society and these measures were reinforced by Muslims themselves who preferred to be segregated lest they get integrated into the "western secular culture." The fear of being integrated in the new culture or the host country for most people and for Muslims in particular comes from the fear of losing their (Muslim) identity. The act of mixing up with new people and being exposed to a new culture, despite best efforts to maintain separation and home identity, might result in the production of new identities.

The acts of mixing up and opening up to new cultures might have their own consequences in terms of the rituals the diasporic community engages and which may be changed, modified or, in extreme cases, abolished in the process. According to Flaskerud (2014: 116) a major issue related to the reestablishment of rituals in a migrant context is "the extent to which a ritual might continue to be perceived as meaningful to its participants when methods and practices change." For Pedersen (2014) rituals are not only meaningful but also the practice of them in the host country works as a means of creating social bonds with the new people and the new place. For

Pedersen (2014: 4) the practice of ritual "does not necessarily symbolise relations to one's place of origin: it may also be a means of creating social relations and belonging in the place where one is currently living". Diaspora or the experience of migration offers new perspectives to conceive rituals, practices and belongings. In the following section I consider the role of ritual in identity work in more depth.

2.3 Rituals and Identity

Having established that rituals play a significant role for the construction of identities in diasporic communities; this section probes more into the concept of rituals as defined by anthropologists and migration and religious researchers. It then discusses the major Muslim rituals and reviews some of the key studies that have investigated the Shi'i rituals within Muslim communities or non-diasporic communities, especially the *majales* rituals.

Rituals are defined by the anthropologists Gardner and Grillo (2002: 183) as "purposive and expressive ceremonialized performances, which […] serve to mark, often to celebrate, the classic 'life-crisis' events of birth, marriage and death." Erdal and Borchgrevink (2017: 132), who combine research into migration and religious studies, go further in linking rituals to characteristics of specific groups by arguing that rituals are "human actions that are both expressions and reinforcements of particular ideals". Gardner and Grillo's (2002) definition emphasises the ceremonialized aspect of rituals in celebrating major life events while Erdal and Borchgrevink's (2017) definition emphasises the reinforcement aspect of the rituals in preserving or evaluating an ideal. In this thesis the two aspects will be brought together. People, countries and nations all have their own rituals; rituals that they practise and keep alive because through them they keep living as well. Rituals vary in their scope and dimension. Some rituals can be practised on a daily basis like greetings or Muslim prayers; others are practised on certain dates like celebrating birthdays or national days. Rituals are practised to mark different events; some of these events are joyous while others are sad. They are also practised to cover a wide range of events and life cycles.

In Islam, the two major Muslim sects of Sunni (or Sunnite) and Shi'i (or Shiite) share some common rituals as markers of their identities as practising pious Muslims. Shared rituals between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims can be divided into three categories. The first of these are called the five pillars of Islam which involve formal and ritualistic practices. The second category refers to the rituals which are practised to mark life-cycles. In the third category are the rituals which are related to calendar events (Elias1999; Marranci, 2008).

The five pillars of Islam are *Shahada*, prayer, fasting, giving charity and doing pilgrimage. These five pillars are rituals because they are practised to emphasise an ideal. Since *Shahada* has two parts, i.e. the first which confesses that there is no God but Allah and the second which confesses that Muhammad is his messenger, Elias (1999: 66) argues that:

> Shahada makes one a monotheist but not necessarily a Muslim; it is something that could be said just as faithfully by Christians or Jews. The second half of the formula ("Muhammad is the messenger of the God") distinguishes Muslims from other monotheists, because belief in the finality of Muhammad's prophetic mission is what sets Muslims apart from followers of other religions.

Prayer (or *Salat* in Arabic) is practised on a daily basis and it is very formal and ritualistic, i.e. it is practised at regular times, it follows certain routines, it sets the doer apart in terms of identity as a pious person and it reinforces an ideal which is the relationship of the worshipper with God. During the month of Ramadan Muslims practise fasting. Although Muslims do fast on other days, fasting in the month of Ramadan is an obligatory ritual for pious Muslims who are fit to do the fasting. During fasting which starts from sunrise to sunset; Muslims have to abstain from food, drinks, smoking and sexual relationships. Giving alms (or charity) is also one of the established rituals in Islam where Muslims have to give away certain amount of their income to the poor. Pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca is supposed to be done once in a life time by those Muslims who can afford for it. Those five pillars contain either verbal rituals or physical rituals or a combination of both. For example *Shahada* is a verbal act, fasting is a physical act, while pilgrimage and prayers combine both verbal and physical acts. Those pillars set the people who practise them apart from the others who do not and in this way they contribute to identity work.

Concerning the rituals that are related to the life-cycles in Muslims lives, three major rituals are highlighted by researchers (Elias, 1999; Marranci, 2008). These are circumcision for men, marriage and death. Circumcision is not mentioned in the Quran and it is said to be a pre-Islamic practice that was kept in Islam. According to Elias (1999: 74) "Muslim boys are circumcised from early infancy until the onset of puberty, depending on the culture to which they belong and the social class of their parents". In certain countries like Turkey and Malaysia, circumcision occurs at the age of thirteen and it is usually a celebrated event because it marks the movement from childhood into adulthood and the person gets to be "considered a full member of Islamic society" (Elias, 1999: 74). Marriage, on the other hand, is highly encouraged in Islam and a life of celibacy or monasticism is to be avoided because it is viewed as incomplete. This encouragement to marriage is derived from the many references of marriage in the Quran and the example of the Prophet Muhammad who was married himself. A person is said to fulfil half of their religious duties when they get married (Elias, 1999).

Death for Muslims marks the end of life in this world and the start of another journey in the other world. Certain rituals are associated with death like preparing the dead person for burial, praying for the dead, the process of burial and mourning. The first three steps, i.e. preparing the dead person for burial, praying for the dead, and the process of burial, are usually communal practices. It is highly advised in Islam that Muslims help in others' burial activities in order to create a sense of collaboration and community. In relation to mourning, crying over the deceased is permissible in Islam, but wailing is disliked and according to some sects it is forbidden because it might be interpreted as a sign of dissatisfaction with God's will. According to Assous (2013: 291), who has studied death and mourning in an Arab Sunni Algerian community, shedding tears in Algerian society is allowed among women but it is considered a sign of weakness among men. Assous (2013) also maintains that from a religious point of view composure and calmness are highly recommended but excessive showing of emotions over a long period of time can be interpreted as a profound love for the deceased. Assous (2013: 292) sums it up in this way:

> So, instead of being regarded as destructive, excessive grief triggers deep compassion. And, this is in sharp contradiction with the Muslim culture that expects moderation in expressing sentiments in public life as far as women of all strata are concerned.

The quote above can be linked to the present study that focuses on *majales* that commemorate the death of Hussein. Although excessive mourning is not encouraged by Shi'i Islam, mourning Hussein in the Shi'i sect is encouraged. Shi'i Imams and scholars have praised people who mourn Hussein on different occasions[1].

Similar to mourning practices in the Sunni Algerian community, in the Awlad 'Ali Bedouin community in Egypt it is more accepted for females to mourn (Abu-Lughod 1993). Abu-Lughod (1993: 189) states that in any Muslim community there are certain actions and behaviours which are derived from the Islamic teachings but at the same time there are others which are not. For example:

> When a woman laments, sings songs of loss, or throws dirt on her head, people must interpret that as an assertion that the massiveness of her grief has overwhelmed her ability or desire to maintain the ideals of faith—to worship God and accept His will— that are so central to definitions of the good person, male or female, in Awlad 'Ali society
>
> (Abu-Lughod, 1993: 196)

Abu-Lughod argues that although women confess in the will of God, they also express that the power of death dwarfs them by tearing their clothes, wailing or beating their cheeks. To use Abu-Lughod's (1993: 203) words: "This is not to say that they do forget God and honor but rather that their actions can serve as a general commentary on the power of death".

Moving to the rituals that are related to calendar events, all the religious holidays in Islam follow the lunar calendar (known as *Hijri* calendar) which is related to the migration (*Hijra*) of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D. The *Hijri* calendar is different from the solar one in that the lunar year has 354 to 355 days (ten to eleven days shorter than western calendar year). As a result, the Islamic holidays and events do not have a seasonal character as the Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter (Elias, 1999: 78). Concerning festivals, two major events are celebrated by all Muslims regardless of the sect they belong to: *'Id al-Fitr* and *'Id al-Adha. 'Id al-Fitr* marks the end of Ramadan, which is the month of fasting and the ninth month of the

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[1] For full details about the merits a person can get for mourning Hussein according to Shi'i scholars see Ayoub's (1978) chapter five.

Islamic calendar. *'Id al-Adha* marks the culmination of the pilgrimage (*hajj*) which takes place in the last month of the Islamic calendar. In addition to these two events, the Islamic calendar is marked by the mourning ritual of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. This ritual is mainly observed by and holds special significance for Shi'i Muslims, particularly Twelver Shi'a who, as the name indicates, believe in twelve imams after the Prophet Muhammad. Among the three calendar events mentioned above Muharram is a sad event unlike the first two events which are joyous ones.

The reason behind the special importance of the month of Muharram for Shi'i Muslims goes back to the tragic events that are commemorated and which are of particular focus in the present study. On the 10th of Muharram 61 AH (680 AD), Hussein[2] the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad along with 73 people of his family and companions were killed brutally in the battle of Karbala (Hegland 1998a: 243; Hegland, 2003: 415). A number of scholars have emphasised the key role played by the battle of Karbala in the history and lives of Shi'i Muslims. For example, Ayoub (1978: 141) highlights the significance of Imam Hussein's martyrdom for Shi'is by indicating that: "the martyrdom of *Imām* Ḥusayn has been regarded by the *Shi'i* community as a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves". Chelkowski (1985: 19) also notes that for Shi'i Muslims the battle of Karbala represents "the example of supreme self- sacrifice, the acme of human suffering and the greatest redemptive act in history. […] Kerbela is to Shiite Islam what Calvary is to Christianity". Furthermore, Nakash (1993: 161) declares that "[p]erhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping Shi'i identity and communal sense as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala." In the same vein, Moghadam (2007: 129) endorses the idea that "[t]he incident that proved most formative for the emergence of Shi'ism, however, was the martyrdom of Ali's son Hussein on a desolate plain in Karbala in today's Iraq in 680." The way Shi'i Muslims commemorate their religious figures, in this case Hussein, helps in setting them apart from Sunnis and this contributes to their identity as Shi'is. From a religious perspective, the aim behind attending *majales* for some Shi'i Muslims is to get salvation on the Day of judgement (Ayoub, 1978; Chelowski, 1985). According to Ayoub (1978: 142)

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[2] Throughout this thesis, I will use consistently my preferred spelling for the names of characters and places involved in the story of the battle of Karbala. When these names are cited from other sources, the spelling may vary in line with the form used in the original source.

weeping within the context of *majales* helps the people who participate in these *majales* to remember the calamities of the imams but "it is the remembrance more than the weeping that is important." Through the remembrance of these calamities, especially Hussein's, people are connected to the imams. In addition, participation in *majales* helps in community-building especially for people who live in the diaspora as Blomfield (2014: 322) argues that holding *majales* "creates cohesion in the Shi'a community and serves as a timeless, symbolic act of solidarity" (see 2.4).

Below I will review some of the studies that have investigated the holding of *majales* within different social and geographical settings. I will start first with the studies that have explored *majales* within Shi'i communities then I will move to studies that have investigated Shi'i *majales* held within communities that have a Sunni majority.

Majales have been studied extensively by Hegland who is an American anthropologist. Hegland's (1983) study of the changing perception of Hussein in rural Iran shows that "a transformation in the understanding of the central meaning of Shi'i Islam among the Iranian masses coinciding with changing economic and political conditions was instrumental in bringing about the success of the Iranian revolution". Hegland's (1983) study is an anthropological study that conducts longitudinal fieldwork in rural Iran. Hegland argues that the Shi'i community in Iran in the months that preceded the Revolution witnessed a struggle between supporters of two opposing ideologies. One ideology is named as "Imam Husain as Intercessor" (Hegland 1983). According to this view of the Imam "the individual believer is relegated to a position of dependency" (Hegland, 1983: 222), i.e. the individual takes the position of a passive person who cannot attain her/ his goals and, as a result, expects the Imam to intercede for the achievement of any life goals. The other ideology is named as "Imam Husain as Example" (Hegland 1983). According to this view, Hussein's willing self- sacrifice for the sake of justice is highly appreciated and recommended and, thus, "Imam Husain serves as an example for the behaviour of other believers" (Hegland, 1983: 226). Although the story of the battle of Karbala is the same within the two ideologies; the difference lies in the interpretation of this story and the behaviour it is supposed to inspire (Hegland 1983: 226-27).

In the quote below, Hegland (1983: 224) highlights the role of religion, symbols related to religion and the sacred and how they might influence and affect people's lives and political stances:

> Villagers did not explicitly state that the expected behaviour toward the imams taught them how they should behave toward political superiors in real life. I would suggest that it is precisely because these political messages are disguised in the religious symbolism that they are so effective. Because the realm of the sacred is almost by definition unquestionable and unquestioned, political "realities" and messages couched in religious terms are all the more persuasive and powerful.

Hegland had witnessed how participation in the Muharram rituals motivated the people of Iran to raise against the Shah; *majales* helped in reminding people of the courage of Hussein and how he rose against the oppressive Caliph at his time. In this way people were motivated to emulate Hussein and revolt against what they deem to be unjust rather than taking a passive role and ask Hussein for intercession.

The two views to Hussein which Hegland refers to above are also echoed in research on Shi'i Muslim communities in Lebanon. Deeb (2005) conducts longitudinal field research which is mainly, but not exclusively, based in a particular Shi'i community located in an area dominated by Hezbollah in the southern suburbs of Beirut. Deeb (2005) maintains that there was a transformation in the way people perceive and practise the rituals of Muharram. Deeb (2005) makes a distinction between 'traditional' and 'authenticated' Ashura. This shift in perception was motivated by different political reasons, such as the outbreak of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1978, the Lebanese civil war, the Israeli occupation of some parts of Lebanon and the formation of Hezbollah, which had all combined to witness the emergence of a new perception to the Muharram rituals.

Deeb (2005: 245-46) highlights the features of these two types of *majales*, i.e. traditional and authentic. Traditional *majales* are characterised by including as much details as possible of the sufferings of the Holy Family; the purpose of this inclusion is to trigger "maximum levels of emotion from the audience" (Deeb, 2005: 246). According to Shi'i sources, weeping for Hussein and the Holy Family is believed to bring reward (thawāb) and salvation on the Day of Judgement for those who choose to participate in the commemoration (Ayoub, 1978). Authentic *majales,* on the other hand,

also encourage the emotive aspect but as a secondary, rather than primary, goal. The main goal of such *majales* is "to teach religious, social, and political lessons; to instruct the audience about the "true" meanings of Karbala and to link the history of the past to the present" (Deeb, 2005: 246). Deeb (2005: 248) also indicates that in this transformation process there "was a redirection of the message of Ashura outward, shifting the meaning from one of personal mourning, regret, and salvation to a revolutionary lesson". This view does not deny the spiritual aspect of the *majales* but as Deeb (2005: 248) emphasises *'ajr* (heavenly reward) "comes from attending or holding *majales* and remembering Hosayn, Zaynab, and those who were with them, but *not* from the act of crying itself". Deeb's study coincided with a period of time in which Lebanon was going through war and deprivation. The Lebanese people had to act in order to change this situation and this could be the reason behind the evocation of the ideas of revolution and resistance in the *majales* which was done "by emphasizing the importance of historical accuracy and evidence in order to remove the myths and unearth the authentic historical record−one which demonstrated that the battle and martyrdom of the Imam took place in a context of revolution" (Deeb, 2005: 248).

Deeb (2005) stresses an important element of this transformation process which is related to the perception of rituals' purpose and perception of key figures, e.g. Zayneb, Hussein's sister, among others. Deeb (2005: 242) argues that the reinterpretation of the actions of Zayneb at the battle of Karbala has its own influence upon the participation of Lebanese Shi'i women in their community. In the traditional *majales*, Zayneb was portrayed as a passive person, someone who is full of grief and pain for the loss she has encountered. In the authenticated *majales*, this picture has changed where her courage, strength and resilience are highly praised. This change in portraying Zayneb as a courageous strong woman has inspired the Shi'i Muslim women in the southern suburbs of Beirut to take her as an example, a role model and take active roles in the *majales* and in their daily life practices.

This aspect of transformation in the ritual practice and in people's perceptions of key religious figures associated with *majales* has also been highlighted by other scholars. Pandya (2010) investigates the role of *ma'atim* (*majales*) in the lives of Shi'is, particularly Shi'i women, in Bahrain. Shi'a in Bahrain have feelings of oppression and

persecution although they are a majority[3]. Adopting an anthropological perspective, Pandya undertakes formal and informal interviews with Bahraini Shi'i women which are then analysed through content analysis. Pandya (2010) aims at examining the evolving function of the *ma'atim* in Bahraini Shi'i women's lives and finds out that the participants highlight some of the key functions of *majales* in their lives. The participants highlight the educational aspect of the *majales*. Pandya (2010: 38) argues that *majales* have helped in "maintaining religious identity." Since the religious education curriculum at schools is Sunni oriented due to the presence of a Sunni ruling government, *majales* in such a case have filled up a gap for the Shi'i students who were not exposed to the teachings of their religious sect at schools. The other role that the *majales* has fulfilled is that they have worked as "a site of refuge' for the Shi'a. Pandya (2010: 39) maintains that the *majlis* "is a liminal space between the public and private realms, in which Sunnis and other outsiders rarely venture uninvited, and where Shi'is can develop and strengthen their communal identity and position in society." In other words, the *majlis* works as a divide between the people who are outside the ritual (e.g. Sunnis or the government) and the people who are inside the *majlis* (i.e. Shi'is). The *majlis* is a refuge for some of the Shi'is in Bahrain because it provides them with a place/space that separates them from the "intolerance and prejudice of some in the wider society, governmental oppression, and feelings of alienation from what some feel are the materialistic ambitions of the ruling al-Khalifa family" (Pandya, 2010: 42). Another role which is fulfilled by the *majales* in Bahrain is their use in political campaigns. Some women who are politically active have started promoting for their candidates and their agendas in the *majales*.

Pandya's study brings out the flexible and multifaceted aspect of rituals as sites of transmission of ideals and identity work as she tracks changes in the way participants take part in these rituals over time. Such changes came about, in this specific instance, in response to the political movements in both Iraq and Iran in the late seventies of the twentieth century. People, especially the younger and educated generations, have stopped looking at the Shi'i figures in the story of the battle of Karbala as victims. Such figures were looked at through a different lens and messages of strength, power and courage replaced the old messages of victimhood and passivity. Pandya's participants

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[3] This situation in Bahrain is similar to the situation of the Shi'a in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime. Shi'a in Iraq are the majority but they were oppressed and persecuted by the ruling government which was Sunni.

also emphasise that this transformation has also included the rituals where in the past women attended the *majales* to cry only but now this has changed and women have started to attend to learn. This learning is not restricted to the religious aspect but to different aspects of life as the participants in Pandya's study state.

In addition to the contexts above, Muharram rituals are perceived as having similar purposes in the context of minority Shia population in Pakistan. According to Hegland (1998a: 241) these *majales* helped "to rally Peshawar Shi'a of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds into a more united front, as well as to connect them with the national and transnational fundamentalist Shi'a community."

Hegland has conducted a number of studies (1995, 1997, 1998a, 1998b and 2003) which all revolve around the Peshawar Shi'i Muslim women in Pakistan. Hegland uses participant observation of the Muharram rituals in Peshawar as a method of collecting data. Male preachers as well as female preachers urge the women, who attend *majales*, to fully obey their husbands, to cover up themselves and stay away from relationships with unrelated males. All these messages emphasise the male-dominated nature of the community and the dependency of females. The males also dominated the rituals, as Hegland (1998a: 246) argues "[m]en took positions as ritual masters, while women assumed positions as ritual managers". Even when women conducted their own rituals these have to be done after seeking males' approval. Hegland in her (1995) study also emphasises this point by indicating that even the religious symbols these women turned to when faced with difficulties were male symbols like "horses representing Imam Husein's devoted mount Zuljinnah and standards representing the flag held by Hazrat-e Abbas (half-brother of Imam Husein) at the Karbala stand" (Hegland, 1995: 68). Messages which emphasised females' segregation, females' dependency and unworthiness were disseminated through the rituals of Muharram. When females attend males' rituals, they have to stay out of sight and not to be heard. Women were also not allowed to practise self-flagellation because they are considered weak and unworthy because of their menstrual blood.

Women in Hegland's studies use the *majales* to their own benefit despite the male domination. The Shi'i women of Peshawar, studied by Hegland, have expressed themselves through different means. Women have used the *majales* as a means to present themselves as women who have talents by introducing new chants, hymns and

new mourning modes which filled them with "self-definition and pride"[4] (Hegland, 1997: 188). What has enhanced the feelings of achievement and self-expression is the fact that in these *majales* women accepted others, regardless of their ethnic or social backgrounds, and their mistakes in matters related to the rituals to the extent that Hegland describes the rituals as "failure-free" (Hegland, 1998b: 413). Hegland (1995: 69; 2003: 421) also argues that these women were taking these *majales* as opportunities to be liberated from the males' controlling eyes, from housework duties, to create social networks with women from other social and ethnic backgrounds, and as opportunities for showing their talents which in its turn would give them self-esteem and feelings of achievement. Hegland contends that the Shi'i women of Peshawar have managed to change the messages of inferiority, dependency and unworthiness of women which are inherent in the mourning rituals.

The situation that the *majales* create is described by Hegland (1997) as a "mixed blessing". On one hand, the *majales* give the women a space through which they can self-express themselves; create social relationships and a space through which they can get prestige and fame. On the other hand, attending the *majales* made the women more exposed to the preaching which emphasised their deficiencies, like their dependency, full obedience to husbands and strict segregation. But as Hegland (1997: 192) emphasises, the advantages these women gained from attending the *majales* outweighed the disadvantages because:

> They were traveling, attaining mobility without male escort, meeting many women, achieving ritual and social competence, and making significant spiritual and political contributions to their religion. Both Indian-Pakistani and Qizilbash[5] women appreciated majles opportunities for gaining fame and status, or at least approval and social interaction, and did not pay much attention to majles gender lessons. They did not take sermon admonitions very seriously.

The Peshawar Shi'i women try to counter this male-dominance because they, as other women, "resent patriarchal demands and that they would like to make their own

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[4] Hegland refers in her studies to one of her former students in Pakistan 'Shahida' who was gaining fame as the best female performer of mourning chants in Peshawar and she describes in vivid detail how Shahida was competing with other girls to prove herself as a performer of chants.

[5] Qizilbash are Persian-speaking Shi'a.

choices" (Hegland, 2003: 414). But their position did not allow them to criticise the "oppressive ritual statements on femininity" (Hegland, 1998a: 250) explicitly. Their family and religious relationships have affected and restricted their agency, "quieted frank protests, and limited their methods of resistance to experiential, practical, or artful assertions" (Hegland, 1998a: 250). Another factor that affected these women and did not let them express overtly their resistance to male-domination is the political situation at the time. As stated above, Shi'is are a minority within the Muslim community in Pakistan. Being a minority has impacted them and led them to be affected by events like the American-led attacks on Iraq and how they felt united with the Shi'is of Iraq who suffered from those attacks and Saddam Hussein's oppressive rule. Such events led the Shi'is of Peshawar to feel "like a besieged minority, reminiscent of Imam Hussein's small band fighting a caliph they considered to be a corrupt interloper" (Hegland, 1998a: 251). This feeling which was shared by both men and women motivated the Shi'i women of Peshawar to avoid "obvious gender-based dissension that might have precipitated a debilitating rift" (Hegland, 1998a: 251). Hegland (1998b) claims that by the year 1991 both Shi'i men and women were attending the rituals of Shi'i communities from other ethnic groups in addition to their own; this in its turn led to the consolidation of the Shi'i religious sect. As Hegland (1998b: 408) argues by doing so they "emphasized sectarian identity and deemphasized ethnic identity". Hegland (1998b) also acknowledges how the Urdu language, the Indian immigrants' language, started to take prominence in the *majales* and even the Indian format of the *majales* started to prevail. This change has its effect on the other minorities' languages and ways of conducting the *majales* but it has a more important role and that is of unifying the Shi'a of Peshawar. According to Hegland (1997: 183) for the Peshawar Shi'i women the *majlis* represents "a central vehicle for Shi'i unification and also for women's accomplishments". The *majlis* helps the Shi'i women in Peshawar to unite in spite of their ethnic and linguistic differences.

To sum up, in this thesis I align with Gardner and Grillo's (2002) definition presented at the beginning of this section. Within this definition rituals are understood as 'purposive', 'expressive' and 'ceremonialized' performances which are practised to celebrate life events like death which plays a central role in the rituals of *majales* which are investigated in this study. Islamic rituals, shared by both Sunnis and Shi'is, are also presented. The section has also dealt with Shi'i rituals which are the rituals of

Muharram. What distinguishes these rituals is that they combine two categories of the ones mentioned above, i.e. they have a calendric nature and at the same time they mark a life-cycle event which is death. According to previous literature, the rituals of Muharram are of special significance because they help to set Shi'is apart from other Islamic sects which would give them their unique identities as people who love Hussein, his family and companions. More specifically, in a range of contexts the rituals of *majales* serve a number of functions among many other functions like being a means of resistance, a means for empowering women, a platform for religious education and a place of refuge and unity.

2.4 Islam and diaspora

As mentioned in section 2.2, diasporic communities have been found to struggle with challenges and tensions arising from fear of integration into host communities and the continuation of rituals being meaningful in new environments. Nevertheless, such tensions also give rise to the dynamic formation of potentially new identities that may appear more fluid and dynamic rather than fixed and static. This section reviews previous literature that examines these themes in the context of Muslim communities in the diaspora.

Takim (2000) investigates the influences of exterior factors on Shi'i Muslims in America and in particular the impact of the imported Shi'i rituals and traditions from homelands on the Shi'is in America. Takim (2000) offers a historical presentation of the religious life of Shi'i Muslim in America supported by surveys he conducted himself. The factors that have influenced the Shi'i Muslims in America and had an impact on the Shi'i institutions there are classified into three factors: political, religious and cultural. The Sunni-Shi'i division which is sometimes shown through the undeclared competition between Saudi Arabia as a Sunni power and Iran as a Shi'i power has its own reflection on the American Shi'i scene. In American universities associations and leagues which are identified as Sunni or Shi'i started to come to surface. The roles played by higher clergymen in the Middle East were also reflected on the American Shi'i communities. People who imitate certain scholars in Iraq or in Lebanon have their own centres and mosques through which they can propagate for the scholars they are imitating. The cultural differences between the countries of origin for those Shi'is have also an impact on the Shi'i community in America.

One of the consequences of living in the diaspora is the issue of alienation of the young generations from the rituals which are imported from the home countries of their parents. This is the case because, as Takim (2000: 468) argues "the lectures are either delivered in languages that are alien to the youths or are in the form of repetitive and highly polemicized discourses, quite distinct from the much more objective intellectual challenges the youth are accustomed to in the universities." In spite of the fact that the *majlis* is an imported tradition from the home countries, Takim (2000: 465-6) emphasises its significance for the young generations of American Shi'i communities,

> By linking events in Kerbala with contemporary society, the majlis although imported from abroad, acts as a source of moral edification, teaching young American Shi'is that Shi'i sacred history demands allegiance to the family of the Prophet, even in a non-Muslim environment. Thus, the majlis becomes an important tool in perpetuating Shi'i heritage and ethos

In this way, the *majlis* works as a unifying element in the lives of the American Shi'is which operates on connecting them with the Prophet and his family and thus shows loyalty.

In spite of this sense of alienation from the rituals which is experienced by the young generations, Takim (2000: 466) emphasises the role *majales* and associated rituals play in the lives of those Shi'is. *Majales* help them to overcome "the spiritual void that is engendered by living in a secularized ambiance" because the practice of rituals allows the practitioners to re-enact Karbala in America. The *majales* contribute to the construction of a distinct Shi'i identity; according to Takim (2000: 466) "[i]t is the Muḥarram rituals that give American Islam a distinctly Shi'i coloring, for they differentiate Shi'is from Sunnis and all other Muslim sects." The public re-enactments of the rituals also help the practitioners to make claims regarding their Shi'i identity, i.e. to show that they are different from other Muslim sects and also offer them an opportunity "to foster a better understanding with their non- Muslim neighbors" (Takim, 2000: 466).

In a similar vein,   Schubel (1996:186), who investigates the role of Karbala as a 'sacred center' for Shi'i Muslim within a particular American community, argues that in countries like the United States and Canada "the ritual evocation of Karbala helps Shi'i Muslims construct a unique and meaningful identity in the midst of an 'alien'

environment". Schubel (1996: 187) claims that "[t]he remembrance of the battle of Karbala as a significant historical religious event is crucial to the way in which Shi'i Muslims maintain their unique identity within the larger *ummah*". This evocation of the concept of '*ummah*' brings to mind Anderson's (1983) idea of the 'imagined community'. This process of identification with the *ummah* has certain manifestations and one of these is wearing hijab. Perdersen (2014: 96) who has studied Iraqi Muslim women in Denmark also argues that the modern veiling practices of Muslim women "symbolises this imagined community because Muslim women appear similar across national contexts". The act of veiling is an example of constructed identity because Muslims are making themselves identified with the non-local *ummah* and distant from the local non-*ummah*, i.e. natives of the host country. Similarly, Dwyer (2000: 477), who has studied the way young British South Asian Muslim women negotiate their diasporic identities, argues that her participants showed a tendency to "respond to globalised discourses about a supranational Muslim identity, which allowed them to make connections with other Muslims across a transnational Muslim community or *umma*."

The portability of sacred places to the diaspora has been advocated by Schubel (1996) who investigates the transportability of rituals, particularly, the ways in which South Asian immigrants have carried Karbala to the North American environment. Through this portability aspect of sacred places the participants keep the rituals they are accustomed to in their countries of origin alive. Holding rituals in the diaspora helps them to draw comparisons between their situation in the host country and the situation of Hussein and his companions and thus "encounters with Karbala serve as opportunities for individual and communal reflection" Schubel (1996: 189).

Schubel (1996: 194-5) also discusses the challenges Muslims face while holding *majales* in the diaspora: namely, issues related to female/male segregation in the *majales* and language. Segregated/ non-segregated *majales* in the North American context have resulted in two opposing positions from attendees. Some of the participants did not mind the mixed nature of the *majales* as long as both men and women dress modestly, while others who come from East Africa, who are accustomed to full segregation, opposed this idea of mixing. The other issue is related to the language used in the *majlis*, the participants' language of origin or English. On one hand, the use of the participants' language of origin, which in this case is the Urdu language, will be beneficial to older

generations to whom Urdu is their native language, but it will exclude younger generations who may not be fluent in it. On the other hand, the use of English will get the attention of younger generations and get them involved in the *majlis* but it will not be as expressive in conveying emotions as Urdu. According to Sachedina, who is both a religious scholar and a preacher in the Islamic centre studied by Schubel, Urdu language is "not originally an Islamic language: it only became one as Muslims used it. […] English will only become an Islamic language when it is spoken by North American Muslims in religious contexts" (Schubel, 1996: 195). Another point which is raised by Schubel is a controversial topic which is an act of ritual flagellation popular in South Asia which is called *zanjir ka-matam*[6]. Since this act does not suit the usual standards of living in the diaspora it was replaced by blood-donation instead. Both the adoption of English as a *majlis* language and the replacement of flagellation by blood-donation refer to the flexibility aspect of rituals and how they can be modified to meet the demands of the new environment.

Majales in Sydney, Australia have been investigated by Tabar (2002) as another example of the study of *majales* in diasporic places. Tabar's study aims at investigating the transformation of the Ashura ceremony in Sydney and how it reflects the migrants' conditions of those who participate in this ceremony. This transformation is motivated by the conditions of the Shi'i participants who live in "an urban migrant society" (Tabar, 2002: 289). The data for this study was collected through longitudinal observation and interviews.

Shi'i Muslims who live in Australia have a number of issues that they face in the host society. The loss of parental control is one of them, where parents cannot fully control their children's lives when they reach the age of eighteen for example. Parents usually come from Middle Eastern backgrounds and are accustomed to the idea of practising full control over their children's lives. This fear of losing control over the children's lives is motivated by other fears like the children's involvement in drugs or the fear of losing their Muslim identity within the larger context of Australian society. Another issue that is faced by the Shi'i migrant Muslims in Sydney is the feeling of being oppressed and victimised by the host society. This feeling is triggered by acts of racism

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[6] *Zanjir ka-matam* (or '*zanjiri matam*' which "is hitting one's back with chains that have razor blades attached" (Eisenlohr, 2015: 293)) is similar to tatbeer which is the act of hitting the head with swords or knives.

and social exclusion. Ashura rituals/ *majales* help those migrants to overcome this feeling of victimisation by creating a sense of unity/ community among them. According to Tabar (2002: 295) "'Ashura takes on the function of uniting the Shi'i migrants around their sense of victimisation and, consequently, their sense of solidarity is heightened." The rituals of Ashura also help in creating a 'homely' environment because these rituals help the migrants to overcome feelings of being alienated and uprooted which are usually produced by living in an urbanised city where notions of individualism, exploitation and secularisation are prevalent. According to Tabar (2002: 297) "[h]ome-building in 'Ashura is not a nostalgic practice directed at restoring the past but rather a compensatory act, 'here and now', for losing a sense of 'homeliness' in the broader society in which the Shi'i migrant is located."

Going back to the idea of liminality of the *majales* which is mentioned under Pandya's (2010) study above, Tabar (2002: 297) argues that the Ashura ceremony has many aspects of a liminal experience. Firstly because the Ashura ceremony is practised once a year then it is an opportunity for every Shi'i "to rejuvenate his/her belonging to the Shi'i identity." Secondly, the Ashura ceremony works as a "temporary break" which separates the world of the ceremony from the outside world with all its "inequalities and conflicts and the levelling effect it has on its participants." (Tabar, 2002: 297-8). In this way the Ashura ceremony works as a unifying ceremony because it creates a sense of solidarity among the participants due to their shared values and beliefs which separates them from the harshness of the outside world. Tabar (2002: 298) argues that the Ashura ceremony works as "an intense binding force for the Shi'i migrants whose experience in the outside world is riddled with dispersal, alienation and angst". The idea of liminality will be discussed in relation to the current study in the discussion chapter (chapter 8).

Within the European context, Shanneik (2015) investigates *majales* held in Ireland particularly the relation between religion, specifically Islam, and memory among Iraqi Shi'i Muslim women in two Irish cities. Shanneik conducts in-depth interviews with female informants and participates in the rituals of the *majales* on different occasions and gives a description and analysis of the role of remembering history for Iraqi Shi'i Muslim women in Ireland. She shows how the women of her study keep on drawing comparisons between their personal events, Iraq's historical events and the events of the battle of Karbala. These women find the battle of Karbala and the rituals of mourning inspiring because they can find role models and examples to follow in their daily lives

when they lose a family member either by being imprisoned, killed or being accepted as a refugee in another country. They draw on examples from the story of Karbala when they are faced with difficulties like these.

Sharif (2005) also studies Iraqi Shi'i women who live in the Netherlands. She investigates how these women make use of religious symbols and sacred narratives as means for overcoming their sufferings and feelings of insecurity, loss and betrayal. Drawing on interviews and participant observation, Sharif highlights a number of functions that the *majales* and the sacred narratives circulated within them serve. One of these functions is the healing of psychological and traumatic experiences caused by wars and migration. By mourning Hussein and his family, the women who participate in the *majales* are also crying for their own conditions, like their fear about their family members who live in the diaspora and those who still live in their homeland, the sense of alienation and other feelings. So the *majlis* works as an emotional outlet for these women through which they can vent out their feelings of fear, anguish and alienation. According to Sharif (2005: 143):

> The *majlis* is a space of intensive group therapy that allows the women to escape their houses and realities and to share in a carefully constructed commemoration. They can listen and relate to their history while fulfilling their religious duty. They comfort each other in the conversations that follow weeping.

By sharing mourning and commemoration rituals with other women, these women work on creating ties of solidarity with each other and with other Shi'i Muslims who practise the same rituals, i.e. they help in creating this 'imagined (Shi'i) community'. They are also creating ties of solidarity with the Prophet and his family through which they can express their loyalty to the Holy Family.

The religious rituals of Iraqi Shi'i women in Denmark have been studied by Perdersen (2014). Perdersen aims at investigating how these women construct a sense of belonging to the place they live in through the performance of rituals and how this sense of belonging "is interrelated with their experiences of inclusion in and exclusion from Danish society" (Perdersen, 2014: 2). Perdersen argues that she does not focus on Shi'i Islam as a belief system but rather on the social organisation of the rituals and the ways in which they are embedded in the wider contexts of everyday life" (Perdersen, 2014: 7). Perdersen carried out fieldwork in Copenhagen, Denmark for fifteen months between

November 2003 and July 2005. The rituals that are explored in her book are three main rituals: *'Id al-fitr*, which is the celebration that marks the end of Ramadan, Muharram and *taklif*, which is a celebration practised by some Muslims to mark the time a girl reaches the age of nine and starts observing Islamic practice like wearing hijab. With reference to the classification of Muslim rituals presented under 2.3 above, *'Id al-fitr* and Muharram rituals are calendar rituals while *taklif* is a life-cycle ritual.

Like other scholars who have studied Shi'i Muslims in the diaspora, Perdersen refers to some of the functions that the *majales* of Muharram play in the lives of these Shi'i women. The *majales* help these women to keep their (Shi'i) Muslim identity when living in a non-Muslim society. The *majales* also help these women in creating "a community of empathy" (Perdersen, 2014: 90) which is created because the *majlis* "unites past and present and Shi'a community persecution with individual experiences of violence and loss." (Perdersen, 2014: 90). This "community of empathy" helps in having a psychological effect on these women because as Perdersen (2014: 91) puts it "communal mourning was generally considered an expression of the sharing of suffering that most women have experienced and, as such, healing". The unifying aspect of the *majales* is also highlighted by Perdersen (2014:92): "a central part of the force of Muharram is that the ritual links the participants with more than one past and more than one community of practice. It creates both a community of Shi'a sufferers across time and a community of Iraqi refugees across space". In other words, the *majales* help these women to be connected to their past lives in Iraq and to the battle of Karbala past when Hussein and his companions were killed and to other Shi'is.

Perdersen also draws attention to the educational aspect of the *majales*, Perdersen (2014: 109) argues that children "become socialised into their parents' traditions by both listening to sermons and participating in the bodily practices of mourning." Another aspect which Perdersen highlights and which was referred to by Hegland is the aura *majales* throw on these women. According to Pedersen (2014: 164), *majales* as one of the religious rituals practised by these women offer them the chance "to acquire respect and social recognition among other Iraqi women. The rituals presented a social context in which the women could be identified not only as respectable Muslims, but also as good organisers, performers, friends, mothers, etc"

Iraqi Shi'i women in Denmark appear to be creating their own local community in the diaspora, a community which helps them to keep their Shi'i identity alive. Some of them had visited Iraq after the fall of Saddam's regime and as Perdersen states felt happy to go back to their country of origin after so many years of expatriation. Visiting Iraq helped them to evaluate the situation they have been living in Denmark. They like to visit Iraq from time to time but they prefer to continue settling in Denmark because in Denmark, they have created their own communities and networks. According to Perdersen (2014: 161)

> Iraqi women's sense of belonging to their place of residence and their places of origin is mediated through their personal relations and networks. […] in a transnational social field, changes in migrants' social relations in their places of origin may reshape conceptions of social relations in the migration destination.

The younger generations also have this feeling, they like to visit Iraq but their lives are established and set in Demark. Such attitudes show how the diaspora has become stronger than the homeland which highlights how places can be relational based on the relations that one establishes and the opportunities that places offer.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature related to the concepts of identity, diaspora, rituals and Muslim rituals, in particular. The review of previous research has pointed towards some sort of tension between the homeland and the diaspora. This tension is displayed through the fear of integration into the host country lest that Islamic identities might be altered or lost. At the same time living in a foreign country will affect the way rituals are practised and certain modifications and changes have to be made to meet the requirements of the new environment as indicated above. These changes and modifications give rituals the feature of flexibility. Rituals can be altered to serve different identity work in different circumstances and are capable of absorbing elements from other cultures. This flexibility has different manifestations in the works reviewed above particularly for the rituals that are practised in diaspora like changes in performance aspects of the rituals, the place in which they are practised, and the language in which they are performed.

In terms of the key methodologies used in studies of the Shi'i Muslim rituals of *majales*, researchers primarily draw on fieldwork and longitudinal observations. Furthermore, in most of these studies, the researchers were outsiders to the communities they have studied. Unlike previous research, my position in the current study is slightly different, as I am a semi-insider. This might have its negative implications but it might also add to aspects of the analysis that an outsider might miss out or not consider as an insider does (see chapter 3 for a full discussion of my position as a researcher).

The review of previous research on the Muharram rituals and *majales* in particular has revealed that the *majales* rituals serve different functions. *Majales* have worked as a means for empowering women and allowing them a space through which they can express themselves. This empowerment was either related to the women's effort to take active roles in their daily lives like the situation in Deeb's (2005) study or in their pursuit to face male-domination (Hegland's studies). *Majales* also work as educational platforms and this role has been evident in both diasporic communities and communities that have Shi'a as a minority. *Majales* have offered the young generations of these communities the required teachings regarding Shi'i Islam that were not affordable from other sources like public schools. Another important function which has been fulfilled by the *majales* in the lives of the participants of certain studies particularly in Sunni and diasporic contexts is that the *majlis* functions as a liminal space. The *majlis* provides the participants with a space in which they can be separated from their alien, surrounding environment; nevertheless, this space appears to belong neither to Shi'i nor Sunni communities, on the one hand, and neither to the homeland nor the diaspora, on the other. This liminality has enabled *majales* to be sites of refuge because they allow the participants the opportunity to charge their religious 'batteries' and then be ready to go back to what they perceive as alien surroundings in their new environments like western communities. Above all, *majales* have a unifying function where they work on bringing people who share the same belief values together. This sense of unity is not restricted to geographical places but it goes beyond and enhances the feeling of unity among Shi'i Muslims across countries and continents as is the case with the Peshawar Shi'a who felt united with Iraqi Shi'a when the American-led attacks commenced. The sense of unity which appears across these two countries, i.e. Pakistan and Iraq, enhances the idea of having an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) or *ummah*.

Although previous literature has focused on various aspects of the *majales* like their anthropological, sociological, political and religious aspects, there was limited attention to the linguistic aspects, i.e. analysing discourse about and related to *majales*. This thesis attempts to address this gap by answering the following question: **how do Shi'i Muslim women use sacred texts and practices which are embedded in Muharram as a means for constructing their identities in the diaspora?**

This central question is further divided into sub-questions:

1. How do the women in my study use Muharram and/or texts related to it to reproduce the core values of Islam in the diaspora? In other words, how do Shi'i Muslim women who live in Cardiff approach issues of orientations towards core values of their home of origin and the values of the new location?

2. How does the women's use of Muharram and/or texts related to it demonstrate flexibility in their adaptation to the specifics of their new location? In other words, how is flexibility manifested in the religious practices of these women?

Chapter Three: Data and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodological frameworks that inform data collection, analysis and discussion introduced in the chapters that follow it. The first part of this chapter discusses ethnographic methodology in general and then sets out the specific ethnographic methods adopted in collecting data. The second part discusses the narrative methodology employed in the analysis of narratives collected through interviews.

The data for this study came primarily from ethnographic work carried out in two phases where the first phase was in 2014 while the second was in 2015. After getting permission from the people who are in charge of the Islamic Centre which is the site for this study and after announcing to the audience that the rituals were going to be observed and audio recorded for the purposes of study, I participated, observed and audio- recorded the *majales* during the first phase from 25.10.2014 to 20.12.2014. In the second phase, which was in 2015, I only participated and observed the *majales* from 14.10.2015 to12.12.2015. Interviews that are included under the first phase of collecting data were conducted from 01.11- 17.12.2014 while interviews included under the second phase were collected from 17- 22.12.2015. As mentioned, I will start by providing first the data collection methods employed, specifying the advantages and challenges in employing them and then I will provide the methodological framework adopted in the analysis included in the study.

3.2 Part One: Data Collection

My starting point was to investigate the role of sacred texts as a means in the construction of Shi'i Muslim women's identities. This led me to think of adopting an ethnographic methodology and from here the practices of Muharram also became an object of my research. I adopted an ethnographic methodology that comprised participant observation during the religious rituals of Muharram and Safar followed up by detailed semi-structured interviews with a small number of participants. These interviews served a double function in enabling me to explore with my participants the ways in which sacred texts inform their daily lives and also in providing examples of

the use of sacred texts in identity work within the interviews themselves. In order to investigate how identities are constructed within a particular community I need to understand first the dynamics of this community. Adopting an ethnographic approach would allow me to address this aspect. An ethnographic approach would also assist in investigating the participants' religious practices and the ways in which sacred texts are taken up and used by them. In addition to this, adopting such approach within the context of the current study would add to and extend what has been found by previous studies which have applied ethnographic methods in similar contexts to the focus of this study.

Blommaert and Dong (2010:12) indicate that ethnography "is an *inductive* science, that is: it works from empirical evidence towards theory, not the other way around. […] you *follow* the data, and the data suggest particular theoretical issues." Blommaert and Dong (2010: 17) emphasise that ethnography "produces theoretical statements, not 'facts' nor 'laws'." This suggests that the researcher in such kind of approach is led by the data and not the other way round. While Blommaert and Dong (2010) show the general framework of ethnography, Guendouzi and Müller (2006) and Rampton, Maybin and Roberts (2015), emphasise the 'emic' perspective that ethnography provides. Ethnography for Guendouzi and Müller (2006: 42) attempts "to describe a culture from the perspective of the people for whom it is a way of life." In a similar vein Rampton *et al.* (2015) throw light on what ethnography tries to do. Rampton *et al.* (2015: 15) argue that ethnography attempts to "comprehend both the tacit and articulated understandings of the participants in whatever processes and activities are being studied, and it tries to do justice to these understandings in its reports to outsiders." The emic aspect is significant because it gives us an insight from within the studied community.

The general principles highlighted above have been taken up in studies of language use and have led to the development of Linguistic Ethnography as a subfield with its own theoretical and methodological positions. Linguistic ethnography is defined by Copland, Creese, Rock and Shaw (2015:13) as "an interpretive approach which studies the local and immediate actions of actors from their point of view and considers how these interactions are embedded in wider social contexts and structures." It brings together two fields: linguistics and ethnography. According to Creese (2010: 139), linguistics can benefit from ethnography by taking context into consideration while ethnography can benefit from "the detailed technical analysis" that linguistics provides.

Through the marriage of these two fields, linguistic ethnographers attempt in their analysis "to combine close detail of local action and interaction as embedded in a wider social world" (Creese, 2010: 140) and this is what I hope to achieve in this study. A linguistic lens affords the narrow local details of interactions, i.e. identity as construed in the details of talk while an ethnographic lens offers the wider context within which interactions take place, i.e. practices, ideas, values associated with specific community/ culture.

Before moving to the details of these ethnographic methods a note has to be made about the nature of the studied community of Shi'i Muslims in Cardiff. The community under study falls under what is called a 'community of practice CofP' because it possesses the features of a CofP. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992: 464) define a CofP as:

> [A]n aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations-in short, practices-emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor. As a social construct, a community of practice is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the practice in which that membership engages.

The key word in this definition is the word 'practice' because it is "central to an understanding of why the concept offers something different to researchers than the traditional term "community" – or, in the context of sociolinguistic research, more than concepts like "speech community" and "social network" (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 1999: 174).

Wenger (1998) has worked on the community of practice framework as defined above by proposing three conditions that need to be met for a community to be called a 'community of practice'. These are 'mutual engagement', a 'joint enterprise' and a 'shared repertoire' (Wenger, 1998:73). In other words a community of practice has to have a group of people who act together over time and work towards the fulfilment of a shared aim/ goal by developing a 'shared repertoire'. This shared repertoire can be "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (Wenger 1998: 83).

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1999) have also worked on the development of this framework and have indicated that this framework can be expanded to include more global communities like professions and religions. But they draw attention to the fact that "the day-to-day meaning-making through which people construct identities takes place at a more local level" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999:189). And this is where identities like a lawyer or a Catholic make sense. Due to the size and dispersal of such global communities studying them would prove to be difficult and thus the use of ethnographic methods that focus on local communities to investigate how meaning is made within such communities is expected to be fruitful. And this can be an added element which has encouraged the adoption of ethnographic methods in collecting data for the current study which will be discussed below.

3.2.1 Type of Data and Data Collection Methods

This section presents the methods followed in collecting data, explains why these methods were chosen and discusses their strengths and weaknesses. Three methods are followed: audio recordings of the rituals, participant observation, and interviews (one-to-one and focus groups). All data have been supplemented by extensive field notes. As mentioned above, collecting data for the present study has been divided into two phases, two months (Muharram and Safar) in 2014 and the same two months in 2015. In total I spent four months in the field, during the first phase I audio recorded the rituals, did participant observation and conducted interviews. The same procedure has been followed in the second phase except that I did not audio record the rituals because by the end of the first phase I started to have a clearer image of what needs to have more focus and that is interviews. During the first phase I conducted eleven one-to-one interviews and two focus groups. During the second phase I conducted five one-to-one interviews. These five interviews were with interviewees who have been previously interviewed during the first phase, i.e. they were follow-up interviews. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) declare that ethnographers need sometimes to interview some people more than once. The reasons for this may be varied such as: to explore whether patterns have changed over time, to check previous information, or to seek further information on a particular topic (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 136). The interviews in the

second phase were conducted with the aim of gathering further information in light of my analysis of the first round of interviews.

3.2.1.1 Audio recordings

When I first started my fieldwork I was not exactly sure about what is important/ not important or what aspects of the rituals to include in my fieldwork. I had preliminary ideas but those were blurry. However, having practised similar rituals as a Shi'i Muslim in Iraq I was aware of the importance of certain aspects of the rituals like the sermons, the speeches and the laments that were practised by the participants. So I decided to record the rituals motivated by the aim of capturing the different kinds of texts that may be used as a means for identity work by members of this Shi'i community. I managed to make audio recordings of the rituals during the thirteen days of Muharram in 2014. The total recording of these rituals is 20 hours, 57 minutes and 20 seconds. The recorder used in these recordings was a digital voice recorder (linear PCM recorder).

The challenges with recording within such a context were varied. One of the challenges was accessing the men's section. Religious gatherings in Islam are usually distinguished by gender segregation: men are seated in a separate place from women. I needed to record this set of data although I did not have direct access to the place in which the preacher was seated since he is a male preacher and naturally he was seated in the men's section. This meant that I was not the one who was in charge of the recorder; I had to ask one of the men who were present there to take the recorder to the men's section in order to get good quality recordings. That is why the recordings were varied in their coverage of the rituals. On the first day only the sermon was recorded but on other days the whole rituals were recorded. Another challenge was the quality of recording and the level of noise which might affect the recordings. One way which helped in getting this problem solved was tying up the recorder to the microphone used in the Centre. This way helped in having clear recordings of the sermons and the rituals.

3.2.1.2 Participant Observation and field notes

Participant observation has been adopted as a method in collecting data because it allows me the opportunity to be close to the people who are involved in this study. Gans

(1999: 540) argues that participant observation "allows researchers to observe what people do, while all the other empirical methods are limited to reporting what people say about what they do."

Blommaert and Dong (2010: 26) indicate that:

> Fieldwork has to start from the assumption that what is observed will be chaotic. Also, we need to understand that a priori, we never know the boundaries of events. We never know exactly in advance what we will need to include in our observations and what not.

Blommaert and Dong's quote above points to the problem of what to include and exclude while conducting fieldwork. Participant-observation has allowed me to observe and be in contact with the participants and experience the rituals first-hand. Yet, some problems occurred in regard to what to observe and note down especially by taking into consideration my position as a researcher.

My position as a researcher and whether I am an insider or an outsider has been a challenge that accompanied how I perceive myself within this research setting and how others perceive me. In one way I was an insider since I am a Shi'i Muslim myself, one who was born and brought up within a Shi'i community; one who knows well the rituals and their dimensions. On the other hand, I was not very familiar with the Shi'i community in Cardiff. I only moved to Cardiff in October 2013 and within that year I also joined the Islamic Centre that is mentioned in my fieldwork. I had the opportunity to meet some of the people who were also members of this Islamic Centre but it was impossible to be well acquainted with the whole community; as a result, it was possible that they may have perceived me as an outsider. The diagram below shows my position as a researcher:

The rituals   My position as a researcher

The Shi'i community under study
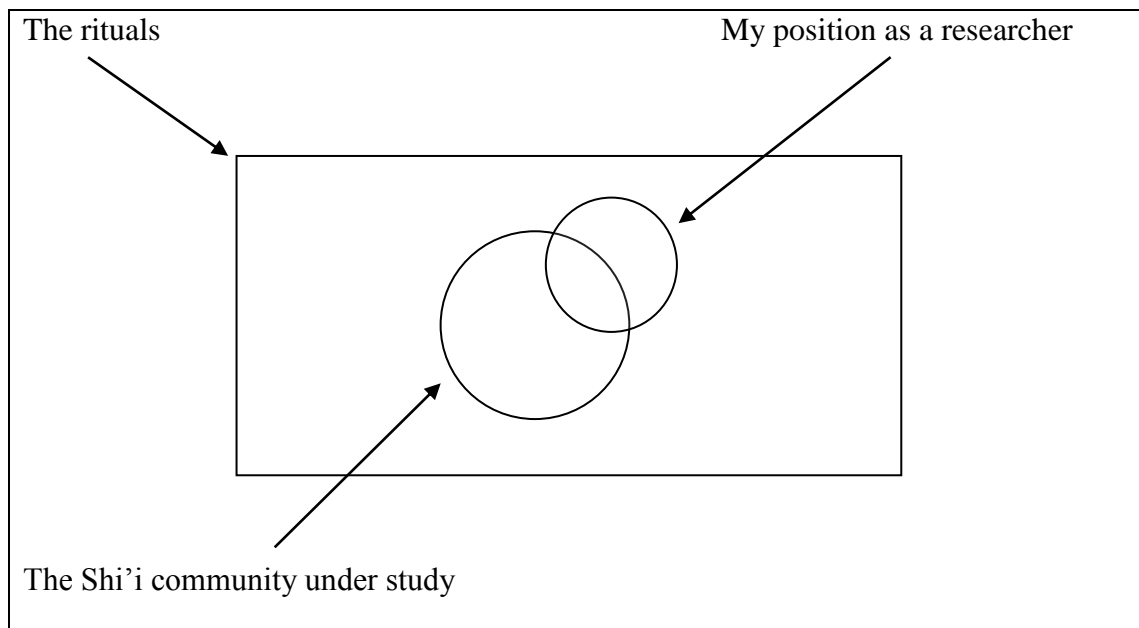
The rectangular shape represents the rituals which I am familiar with. These rituals and versions of them are almost shared by Shi'a everywhere; the idea of them being shared resembles what Anderson (1983) calls "imagined community". Anderson (1983: 7) argues that a nation: "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow- members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion". The big circle inside represents the Shi'i community in Cardiff which I am not very much familiar with. The small circle represents my position as a researcher where I am familiar with some of the shared religious rituals but not fully aware of the ways in which such rituals may be practised by the Shi'i community in Cardiff.

In spite of this semi- insider position that I have, I did not feel that I belonged to the field like a fully immersed insider. This might be attributed to my feeling that the other participants are taking me not only as an ordinary participant but as an observer too. Such a situation is referred to in the literature by the term 'observer's paradox', a term which was first introduced by Labov (1972b) who argues that the presence of a researcher or a recording equipment will affect the interaction. Blommaert and Dong (2010: 27) also allude to the observer's effect as they argue that:

> As a fieldworker, you never belong 'naturally' or 'normally' to the field you investigate, you are always a foreign body which causes ripples on the surface of smooth routinized processes. There is always an observer's effect, and it is essential to realise that: you

are never observing an event as if you were not there. You are there, and that makes it a different event.

I participated and observed the rituals in the Islamic Centre during the two phases of fieldwork in 2014 and 2015. I also took field notes to record my observations of the rituals and what goes on within the context of the observed *majales*. So I have field notes from my participant–observation for the two phases of data collecting in 2014 and 2015.

According to Creese, Bhatt, Bhojani and Martin (2008: 202) field notes are "documents presenting details of practice. They are productions and recordings of the researchers' noticings with the intent of describing the research participants' local rationalities and actions". During the first days of my fieldwork I took notes while I was participating and observing the *majales* but this had two drawbacks. Firstly, I got the feeling that others were watching me and this made me feel uncomfortable and I also feared that they might alter the way they behave because of my note-taking (the observer's paradox mentioned above). Secondly, I did not want to miss anything of what goes around me and since taking notes might distract me, I decided to postpone this activity until I get home after the *majlis* every night. The other context in which I took field notes was during the interviews. Similarly to note-taking during the rituals, I was also concerned about the possibility that taking notes within the interview setting might affect the flow of the interaction between the participants and me. As a result, I decided to write down my notes and reflections after the interview was done. More specifically, my notes concerned the way in which the interview was done, its time and place, the way I felt towards my interviewees, and how I thought they felt. Below the details of these interviews are discussed.

3.2.1.3 Interviews

The importance of interviews is highlighted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who argue that interviews provide the opportunity "to generate information that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain otherwise- both about events described and about perspectives and discursive strategies." In a similar vein, Copland *et al. (*2015: 29) maintain that "interviews are used to support researchers in gaining an *emic* perspective on research, that is, understanding from the participant's perspective".

Copland *et al.* (2015:37) also add that "interviews are a valuable research tool which can provide a window onto the lived experiences of research participants and provide interpretation and opinion that might not be available from observation alone". Interviews are usually adopted where little information is known about a topic or where detailed and in-depth information is required from individual participants (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008). In order to get this '*emic* perspective', i.e. to understand how the women participants consume the texts that are circulated in the *majales* and use them as means in identity construction, I chose to interview a small number of them. Interviewing participants in the rituals is expected to give an insider account about these rituals. By an insider account I mean the knowledge and viewpoints of people who participate in the rituals and have no other/ academic interests in the rituals which mean that they come to practise these rituals out of faith only. I conducted two kinds of interviews: one-to-one interviews and focus groups. The one-to-one interviews were semi-structured interviews and these "consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail" (Gill *et al*., 2008: 291). On the other hand, focus groups are usually adopted to collect information regarding collective views (Gill *et al*., 2008: 293).

i.   Focus groups

Focus groups are defined by Kitzinger (1995: 299) as "a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data". The reason for conducting focus groups was to motivate participants to evoke ideas, to share and discuss with others what they think about the rituals they practise. Focus groups can be helpful if one of the participants is shy or hesitant to express opinions; seeing other people express their opinions can motivate others to participate. I managed to conduct two focus groups. The way these two were arranged was attributed to practical reasons. I was limited by the number of women who were available and showed willingness to participate. One consisted of four women who were participating in the rituals and showed willingness to be involved; they are all married and have children. Three of them accompanied their husbands who are studying for their PhD degrees and one was studying for her master's degree. They were all from southern cities in Iraq. Their ages ranged between 30s and 40s. The other focus group consisted

of three women; those three women were all married and have children. One of them is Iraqi and her husband is one of the founders of the Islamic Centre; the other two, one is from Morocco and the other is from Lebanon. Their ages ranged between 40s and 50s. I asked my participants a question or presented an idea and then gave them the floor to comment, discuss or express their ideas about the things said. The first focus group went with no overlapping or conflicting opinions, the second did not. One of the women in the second group came up with interesting ideas that led into discussions and conflicts. Both focus groups were conducted on the 9th of November 2014 and make a total of 56 minutes and 19 seconds.

The data generated by the focus groups provided many useful insights that I have incorporated into my analysis in the same way that my field notes are used: as illustrative and explanatory background information. However, I will not analyse the focus groups data in the same way as the interviews for the following reasons. The problem of finding a suitable time and place has been really an eminent issue with the first focus group. The discussion had to be stopped and then resumed and this led to discontinuity of ideas and the discussed topics. The second focus group was controlled by one of the participants and because she occupied the floor for a long period of time the other participants seemed to be distracted from the topics discussed.

ii.   One- to- one interviews

All the women I interviewed were participants in the rituals that were held in the Centre. The ages of my interviewees ranged between 29- 45 (see appendix 1). Out of the eleven female interviewees, five are single and six are married. They are all PhD students in Cardiff University except one who is married to a PhD student. They are all highly educated and are all from Iraq; two of them are from the Capital, Baghdad, while the others are from southern cities in Iraq.

To answer the research question mentioned above, I asked my participants a number of questions. The reason behind asking these questions was to explore the ways in which the interviewees may make any references to the kinds of texts used in the rituals, and refer to the sermon, to the story of Karbala and to the laments. I also wanted to investigate the ways in which these texts are incorporated in their daily life practices,

have an impact on them and the way they deal with their husbands, children and others. The reason behind asking the sixth question was to investigate whether they take these rituals for granted or question their importance. I did not follow the same order of questions with all my participants as other follow-up questions came up to the surface in light of what my participants said. The questions are:

1. Why do you go to the Islamic Centre/ to Husseini *majales*?

2. Where did you participate in *majales* more, in Iraq or in the UK, Cardiff in particular? (Since all the interviewed women were Iraqis)

3. Do you feel any bond with the Karbala's characters; if so, who are those characters and why you chose them?

4. Do you try to incorporate the information delivered in the religious sermons in your daily lives? And, if yes, how?

5. Do you make sure to bring your children to the *majales*? And, if yes, why? (If they are married and have children)

6. Have you noticed any negative points about the *majales* held in the Islamic Centre in Cardiff? And would you like to talk about any positive points that have been noted?

As the tables in appendix 1 show the first round of collecting data consists of 11 interviews, while the second round consists of 5 interviews which are all follow-up interviews with participants that have taken part in the first phase of data collection. The duration of the interviews varied, mainly because some women were more open and enthusiastic about the things being discussed while others were shy and gave brief answers to my questions. I tried to make my interviewees feel at ease by asking them some general questions at the beginning of each interview about their names, professions and how long they had been in the UK.

The procedure that was followed in recruiting the participants involved first approaching women whom I knew either from my encounters with them at the Centre or at university. Then, some of them volunteered and introduced me to other women who were told about my project and showed willingness to participate. So my initial contacts took the role of gatekeepers in my fieldwork/study. Gatekeepers for Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 133-134) "or other powerful figures in the field

sometimes attempt to select interviewees for the ethnographer. This may be done in good faith to facilitate the research, or it may be designed to control the findings." My gatekeepers were really enthusiastic about my topic and considered it something good to have someone who writes a thesis related to Imam Hussein because through writing such a thesis I will help in spreading the word about him and about his cause. I do not think that they wanted to control or restrict my research in any way but this does not negate the fact that they chose the women they thought to be 'representative' of Shi'i women, i.e. women who they considered eloquent and knowledgeable in Shi'i matters in comparison with others.

Before the start of the interview I explained to all participants the topic of my PhD project, I asked and gained their consent to participate in the study and be recorded (see appendix 2), and I encouraged them to ask questions about my research. I also encouraged the participants to forget that I am a Shi'i Muslim who is familiar with the topics discussed in the interview. Some of them seemed to forget to take this point into consideration and there were many references to people, places, practices that they would consider as shared knowledge among Shi'i Muslims. Only one of the participants really kept this aspect in mind and she told me the basic details related to our discussion about Muharram and Safar rituals. Her talk and the way she explained things made me feel like someone who is not familiar with the rituals and the *majales*. The reason I did this was to get a detailed account from my participants and to distance myself from the topics being discussed. However, Bowern (2008: 7) states that to be unbiased is something hard to achieve because even if the researcher tries to be one, others may not:

> Even if you do your best to remain 'detached' and impartial and uninvolved in the research, your consultants probably aren't going to do the same. They are going to shape their responses based on their relationship to you; for example, how well they think you're going to understand what they tell you, or what they think you want to hear, or in some cases, what they think you don't want to hear. They might have an emotional or political stake in the outcome of the research (just as you do). They might have misunderstood the question you asked, or drawn a different interpretation from what you intended.

In order to let the participants feel at ease and express themselves freely and confidently, I asked them to choose the language in which they would like the interview to be conducted. All of them chose to speak Arabic and the Iraqi dialect, specifically. They justified their choice for Arabic over English by stating that the discussion of matters related to the Husseini *majales* and religion would be more appropriate in a language that would help them in expressing themselves fully. Although they are all fluent speakers of English, they were worried that they might run out of words or expressions in the middle of discussing a particular issue. However, choosing Arabic over English and the Iraqi dialect over Standard Arabic (SA) did not prevent the participants from code-switching. At some points they shifted from the use of Arabic into English and from Iraqi dialect to SA and this is shown through the transcribed and translated interviews.

In relation to the above, a note regarding translation and transcription is needed here. The interviews were conducted in Arabic, as indicated above, then they were transcribed and translated into English (see the transcription key for the transcription conventions used). Every effort was made to ensure that the English translation represented as accurately as possible the content and style of my informants' talk. Interviews included under the first phase of data collection were all transcribed and translated. Interviews included under the second phase were not treated in the same way first phase interviews were treated due to time constraints. Thus only extracts that have been referred to in the thesis were translated. Interviewing fellow Iraqis did not conflict with my linguistic repertoire because I share the same linguistic vocabulary and knowledge of colloquial Iraqi. Possessing this knowledge has saved me issues of translation like the ones encountered by Badwan (2015) who interviewed students from five Arab countries where each interviewee brought their own linguistic repertoires which the researcher was not fully in command over them. This had led to instances of miscommunication due to the use of unfamiliar words which led the interviewer to ask for clarifications.

Referring back to interviews, the interview process presented two major challenges. The first challenge was finding a suitable time that would fit both my interviewees' and my schedule. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) emphasize the idea that the researcher has to take into consideration "how the interview fits into the interviewee's life" because sometimes a researcher falls under the impression of seeing "interviews purely

in terms of his or her own schedule, regarding them as time-out from the everyday lives of participants" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 136). In this regard I had either to contact my participants repeatedly or let my gatekeepers contact them instead until we agreed upon a time that works for both of us. In addition to the time challenge, there was the problem of finding a place to conduct the interviews. To solve this problem, I tried more than once to invite the interviewees to my flat but they were always busy. Meeting at the university was a suitable place but it was not easy to find a quiet and isolated place at which we can conduct the interviews. The quiet room[7] in the School of Engineering, Cardiff University has provided this place at certain times but sometimes my interviewees' chosen times clashed with prayer times. As a result, we had to look for other alternatives such as vacant lab rooms or stairwells. The second challenge concerned the sensitivity of the topics discussed and the emotional involvement displayed by both the participants and myself as a (Shi'i) researcher. My interviewees were emotional because of the discussed topics that were related to Imam Hussein, his family and their sacrifices; topics that are very sensitive to my interviewees and me.

To sum up the discussion related to one- to- one interviews data set, I have conducted eleven interviews during the first phase in 2014 (4 hours and 25 minutes) and five interviews during the second phase in 2015 (2 hours, 5 minutes and 2 seconds). The use of interviews as a method, particularly semi-structured interviews, offered the participants the opportunity to talk about their practices through a narrative mode. Narratives as Blommaert and Dong (2010: 52) argue, help people to "produce very complex sociocultural meanings". The presence of narratives in the data and the reliance of my participants on them motivated me to investigate them closely and this is the reason behind the adoption of Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model. In the second part of this chapter I will discuss narratives and how they are essential in identity work and then I will present the model adopted in the analysis.

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[7] The quiet room is a room that is dedicated for people to practise their religious prayers or mediations. I have noticed that the quiet room in the School of Engineering is for Muslims only; they have modified it to be like a small mosque.

3.3 Part Two: Narratives and Narrative Positioning

As indicated in the first part of this chapter, within ethnography the ethnographer moves from the data to the theory and not the opposite. So after investigating the interviews that are conducted with Shi'i Muslim women who live in Cardiff, it has been noted that they tend to tell many narratives which are used at certain points. They use narratives when they try to convince the listener of a certain way of thinking or the reasoning for a way of behaving, especially by drawing on narratives which are personal accompanied sometimes by parallel religious narratives related to the Karbala story. In other words, these narratives aid these women in defining who they are, and this has suggested the adoption of a narrative approach in analysing the data. Because of this the study of narratives will be an essential part of the analysis involved in this thesis. Narratives will be taken up to show how the women of this study define themselves to the interviewer and to themselves, often in collaboration with the interviewer, through the narratives they tell and the way they tell them within the settings of the interviews.

The interactive function of narratives is now recognised across many disciplines. Through narratives people construct their identities and by analysing narratives we can have a clearer image of these identities. Narratives are described by Schiffrin (1996: 199) as "a linguistic lens through which to discover peoples' own (somewhat idealized) views of themselves as situated in a social structure." Narratives are considered the ground upon which identities are constructed (De Fina, 2003; Benwell and Stokoe, 2006). Narratives for Bamberg (2004a: 358-9) "always *reveal* the speaker's identity. [...] By offering a narrative, the speaker lodges a claim for him/herself in terms of who he/she is." This ties in with Benwell and Stokoe's (2006: 138) claim that "the practice of narration involves the 'doing' of identity, and because we can tell different stories we can construct different versions of self."

Archakis and Tzanne (2005: 272) argue that "the construction of identity can be achieved through narration, more specifically through what is related, to whom and in what way", i.e. through positioning. Positioning has been defined by Davies and Harré (1990: 48) as a "discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines."

Davies and Harré (1990: 48) argue that there are two types of positioning: interactive and reflexive positioning where the former refers to the situation in which when one positions another while the latter refers to when one positions oneself. Davies and Harré (1990) and others have worked extensively on the concept of positioning and one of those who has worked on how positioning contributes to identity work in narrative is Michael Bamberg. Bamberg in his article "Positioning between Structure and Performance" which appeared in the Journal of Narrative and Life History (1997) introduced the idea of 'Narrative Positioning'. Bamberg's work on narrative analysis is premised on the idea that in conversing people take positions in relation to one another. Bamberg's work on the development of the theory of narrative positioning involves a move from "a traditional, structural approach" to "a more performance-based, approach" (Bamberg, 1997a: 335), i.e. a move from what is said and its meaning to a move that focuses on how it is performed in conversational interactions. While the speaker's representation of themselves in the story tells us something about the identity they are taking up, Bamberg argues that we can find further clues in the way in which they perform the story with and to others. Bamberg (1997a) argues that the process of positioning happens at three different levels. These three levels are formulated into three questions (Bamberg, 1997a:337):

1. "How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?"

2. "How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?"

3. "How do narrators position themselves to themselves?"

So, the first level tackles the story; the second level tackles the telling of the story to an interlocutor while the third level tackles the definition of the self in the telling of specific stories. In other words, we have three worlds: the story world where characters and the relationships that links them together in this story world are presented, the story-telling world where the interaction that take place between narrators and their audience when they engage in telling stories is presented and the social/ moral world where narrators define themselves in relation to Discourses/ macro discourses/ master narratives.

According to Bamberg (2009: 139) the first level is concerned with "analyzing the *way* the referential world is constructed, with characters (self and others) emerging in time and space as protagonists and antagonists". In other words, at this level an attempt is made to explore how characters are construed within the story events; are they agents, targets, protagonists or antagonists?

The question included under the second level is: "How does the speaker position him – or herself to the audience?" (Bamberg, 1997a: 337). At this second level, the positioning of the narrator when telling a narrative is explored, taking into consideration what the purpose of this narrative is in this setting and how it is co- constructed by both the narrator and his or her audience (Schnurr, Van De Mieroop, and Zayts, 2014: 389). The role of listeners/ audience in the co-construction of narratives is underlined by other narrative analysts. For example Coates (2001: 82) argues that "[t]he terms "narrator" and "audience" set up a false picture of an active story-teller and a passive group of listeners, whereas the reality is that co- participants (the audience) are always co-authors in some sense". In the same vein Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) argue that the way the narrator presents their story is never done in isolation from the interviewer in interview settings, especially in situations where the narrator is so involved in narrating a story (which requires memories). As a result, the listener/ interviewer can be a co-author of the story in two ways. The first way this can be achieved is when the interviewer contributes to the story telling by listening, paying attention, backchannelling and using nonverbal signs. The other way is when the narrator pays attention to and responds to the listener/ interviewer. The narrator would usually have an idea about the listener's preferences and interests and at the same time the narrator her/ himself would have an aim behind this narrative in relation to the specific audience which would have an influence on the design of the narrative (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000: 213-214).

The interaction that happens when people engage in telling narratives might seem focused and locally limited to the interaction that takes place, in my case between the interviewer and the interviewees, but its relation to the more global and wider context – the third level - cannot be ignored since what is accomplished locally can be true beyond the story telling setting. Thus the third level is concerned with how "narrators position themselves to themselves?" (Bamberg, 1997a: 337).Under this third level comes the question of 'who am I' from the narrator's point of view, how the narrator

positions her/ himself in relation to dominant discourses/ master narratives and how s/he constructs her/ himself as "a particular kind of person" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 391). The third level works on connecting the first two levels, which are related to the narrated events in the here and now of the story telling situation, to speakers' ways of making sense of their identities within wider terms of understanding as provided by global macro discourses. The first two levels of positioning lead to the third level in which identity claims are made by linking the story world and the story-telling world to the social/ moral world. The first level deals with how narrators position characters in time and place and in relation to each other in the story world. The second level deals with how narratives are told, how the speaker positions her/ himself to the audience and how s/he "(*is* positioned) within the interactive situation" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 385). The third level then goes on to address the question: "[h]ow do narrators position themselves to themselves?"(Bamberg, 1997a: 337). Deppermann (2013b: 6) maintains that with regard to this level "Bamberg thinks of more general and more enduring, "portable" aspects of self and identity, which transcend the ephemeral, local interactional moment and its action-related contingencies".

The way Bamberg's narrative positioning model is applied in the analysis included in the current study is done in the following way. The three levels have been distributed into three analytical chapters where the first analytical chapter (chapter 5) deals with the first level which is concerned with how women talk about 'doing *majales*', i.e. this level tells us more about *majales* as part of the ethnographic background – narratives of Hussein as part of Muharram and narratives of the participants' own lives as touched by *majales* as part of identity formation in diaspora. Narratives related to *majales* will be analysed in light of the first level of Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model. This first analytical chapter asks the following question: How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events associated with the Muharram rituals? This question will help in contextualising and explaining the narratives told which are related to the doing of the *majales*. The second analytical chapter (chapter 6) which is entitled 'talking about *majales*' uses Bamberg's second level of analysis to address the question of how the interviewees and the interviewer use talk about the *majales* to present and position themselves to each other within the story telling world/ setting, i.e. the co-construction of identity with the interviewer in

reflecting about the *majales* and the Muharram practices. The third analytical chapter (chapter 7) which is entitled 'being through *majales*' is aimed at exploring the portability, the essence of Islamic identity reinvented in terms of the non-local master narratives that can nonetheless be localised. In other words how these women reach an answer to the implied question "who am I?" that corresponds to Bamberg's third level of analysis.

In the first analytical chapter, I investigate the story-worlds that are presented in narratives. I employ Labov's (1972a) model which is a structural model that focuses on the organisation of narratives and divides narratives into six sections that are referred to as narrative components and these are: 1. Abstract: the abstract is a summary of the story that usually occurs at the very beginning of the narrative. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012: 28) argue that abstracts "are usually represented by one or two clauses that describe the gist of a story (e.g. *did I ever tell you about the day I fell from a boat?* or *something funny happened the other day*)".2. Orientation: orientation sections usually provide background information in relation to the 'when', 'where' and 'who' questions. So by orientation we refer to a statement or statements that contextualise the story in respect to time, place and people involved. 3. Complication: this section "represent[s] the main body (skeleton) of a narrative, i.e. the basic events around which the story revolves" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012: 29). Verb forms that are usually used within this section are past tense verbs. 4. Resolution: resolution often answers the question 'What finally happened?' or 'How did it end? So, the resolution is the outcome of the series of acts/events reported in the previous part, i.e. complication. 5. Coda: coda is a statement that links the story with the present time. Because of this linking job, the coda can be represented by different linguistic forms. "For example, the narrator can refer to the present effects of the events told in the story, follow a character's evolution after the story has ended, or offer a moral lesson." (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012: 29). And 6. Evaluation: evaluation is a statement or "statements that tell the listener what to think about a person, place, thing, event, or, more globally, the entire experience described in a narrative" (Minami, 2015: 79). In a way, evaluation answers the 'So what?' question which might be asked by the audience/ listener. Two types of evaluation are distinguished and these are external evaluation, where the narrator stops the narrative to comment explicitly on the aspects of it, and internal or embedded evaluation, where the narrator presents "her or his thoughts as

occurring to her or him at the moment, or through reporting dialogue as it occurred in the story world" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012: 29). The narrative components above are optional apart from the complicating action and they tend to overlap in stories of personal experience particularly evaluation which is often found to permeate a narrative (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012).

It is worth to keep in mind that the analysed extracts in the current study are translated from Arabic into English. Working with the Arabic extracts and even the translated ones poses a problem in terms of applying this model and the distinctions Labov has specified to distinguish these six components. Tense in particular, which plays a significant role in distinguishing some of these components, is expected to be problematic taking into consideration the differences between the tenses in both the Arabic and the English languages. However, Labov's (1972a) model will enable me to explore actions/events, characters in events, i.e. are they agents, protagonists, or antagonists? and evaluations of/reflections on events/actions.

Under each of these six sections, the following questions were asked. Not all questions can be answered under each section but I kept the same questions for each section for the analysis to be systematic:

1. What the story is about?

2. Who are the story characters?

3. What are the relations among the story characters?

4. How are these characters presented/ construed/ portrayed?

5. When and where did it happen?

Labov has been criticised by a number of scholars for neglecting the communicative function of stories. De Fina (2009: 235) states that Labov was criticised for erasing "from his model any reference to the interactional context in which the narratives that he analyzed emerged". This criticism has motivated me to combine Labov's (1972a) which is a structural model with Bamberg's (1997a) which is an interactional, performative model. Such combination is expected to bring out the identity work that is done through the narratives told by Shi'i Muslim women in Cardiff because it will

address the two aspects, i.e. the structural and the interactional aspects of their narratives.

For the second analytical chapter I focus on both the discourse of the speaker and the listener in order to examine how identity is co-constructed in interaction. The question included under Bamberg's (1997a) second level of narrative positioning model is guiding the analysis of narrative extracts taken from interviews with Shi'i Muslim women. And this question is: "How does the speaker position him- or herself to the audience?" By positioning oneself, the narrator/ speaker is positioning others through her/ his speech and by positioning oneself to others and positioning others in interactions people take 'stance'. Definitions of stance as Englebretson (2007:1) argues are "broad and varied" because these definitions are related to researchers' individual backgrounds and interests. Biber and Finegan (1989: 92) define stance as "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message". In a later publication, Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan define stance as "personal feelings, attitudes, value judgments, or assessments" (1999: 966). These two definitions highlight and emphasise the subjective and evaluative aspects of stance. From a social perspective, Du Bois (2007: 163) defines stance as "a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (the self and others), and aligning with other subjects with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field". Thus and according to this definition stance-taking involves three aspects: evaluation, positioning and alignment. From a Conversation Analysis (CA) perspective, stance is "jointly constructed, negotiated, and realized in and through interaction" (Englebretson, 2007: 19), i.e. stance-taking is "interactive and emergent in discourse" (Englebretson, 2007:22).

Bassiouney (2012: 109) maintains that stance-taking is a process that is closely connected to the construction of identity, i.e. "speakers use language to take a stance and by doing so give themselves a specific identity and impose on others a different one". In doing so the use of "linguistic resources, discourse resources and structural resources" is employed in this process of stance-taking (Bassiouney, 2012: 109). The interpretation of stance needs "empirical evidence of conventional associations of codes and meanings gained from ethnographic, conversational, and sociolinguistic data" (Jaffe, 2007: 57). Researchers have signalled certain lexical and grammatical features

that work as stance markers. For example, modals, adverbials, evaluative adjectives and nouns have been identified as serving to mark stance (see Biber and Finegan, 1989; Hunston and Sinclair, 2000; Downing, 2002).

Taking the broad and variety of the definitions of stance into consideration and in order to understand the co-construction of identity that takes place under this level, the following linguistic features will be focused upon: comparative adjectives, adverbs of degree, conjunctions, intensifiers, hedges, pronoun use and in/exclusion, evaluative language, negation, modals, reported speech, tense-shift, expressive intonation, repetitions, intertextual cues, terms of address, backchannelling/ laughing/ crying, corrections, additions and agreements. Attention will also be directed to the types of questions that the interviewer poses and the interview dynamics, i.e. the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The list of features included here is not exhaustive as other features might be present in the data and some of the features mentioned above may not, i.e. the features are context specific and varied.

When the interviewees for this study engage in telling narratives, the positions they take either towards others or their past selves extend beyond the context of this study. This is the case because, for example when one of them positions herself as a changed woman after having experienced a certain situation, there is an implicit message that her state as a "changed person" carries beyond the event described and even when the participant exits the interview setting. In this way, the speaker can be seen to be relating to a more generalizable discourse of change. The third level of positioning (which is the focus of the third analytical chapter), therefore, has been described as a 'middle ground' (De Fina, 2013) between micro and macro approaches of analysis: it is a middle ground because it "allows for linking local talk and identities with socio cultural processes and relations that surround and have an impact on the local interaction in more or less direct ways" (De Fina, 2013: 58). This level of analysis is important from De Fina's point of view because it helps in explaining "how narrators and audiences negotiate less locally produced senses of who they are, i.e. their membership into social identities, moral identities etc" (De Fina, 2013: 43). De Fina argues that the links between the local and the global/ ideological level of interaction can be made by identifying patterns that occur in the data, i.e. "general tendencies in the way issues are viewed and dealt with by the communities to which individuals belong" (De Fina, 2013: 45). The way in which an individual views an issue may be common among the other members of the

community and it might "point to collective positioning processes" (De Fina, 2013: 46).This relation to a macro level feeds into how narrators define themselves not only within the limited and local context of interaction but in general and beyond the specific context of interaction. In order to reach these master narratives within the data of this study, I will go over the transcripts, the recordings, and field notes and code them for themes. Then I will check whether the themes I have coded are shared by the participants and whether or not they are found in the different data sets, i.e. identifying patterns (De Fina, 2013). These patterns are not easily reached and this is where the role of ethnography is manifested. Adopting ethnography and having a semi- insider status will assist in deciding on these master narratives.

3.4 Conclusion

My position within the Shi'i community of the Islamic Centre is a position of in between-ness. I have presented in the first part of this chapter the points that have worked against me having somewhat an insider position. In spite of the difficulties this position has brought, it has enabled me to interview women and gain access to their lives and stories. I was accepted in the Centre and was encouraged for the work I do. Enthusiastic Shi'i women have kept on encouraging me through their words, and deeds. I remember after finishing my fieldwork attending a *majlis* one night I met a woman who is married to one of the founders of the Centre. Upon seeing me she greeted me and urged me to consider the Centre as my own. Those women have also helped me in recruiting other participants which saved me a lot of time and effort. Adopting an ethnographic methodology allows me to investigate the intricate relationship between the participants' practices and the ways in which sacred texts are taken up and used. Doing ethnography gives me the chance to experience rituals and practices first-hand which will contribute to the inductive and emic interpretation of the data.

The kind of data collected for the current study has dictated certain ways of analysis. One of the ethnographic methods that has been used in collecting data was interviews. The use of this method resulted in a series of narratives participants told while discussing and reflecting on the rituals, the texts associated with them and their integration in their daily life. As evident in previous literature (De Fina, 2009; De Fina and Perrino, 2011; Van De Mieroop, 2011), the production of narratives in semi-structured interviews is not rare, as experiences are often shared in that mode. The use

of narratives by the participants has motivated the adoption of a narrative perspective in analysing the discourse about *majales* produced by my participants in the interviews and thus Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model is adopted. This model has three levels which are of significance in bringing out identities in discourse and interaction. Identity work is accomplished on the level of the story world (level 1), the level of narrating/ story–telling world (level 2) and the macro, global world (level 3). The ethnographic methodology adopted in collecting data for the current study has worked on shifting my focus from texts only to include the practices that surround these texts.

Considering that narrators construct an identity for themselves by portraying and positioning characters within a story in particular ways, my first analytical chapter (chapter 5) attempts to answer the question: How do my interviewees portray characters in narratives related to Muharram rituals and practices, i.e. how do they relate to characters of the narrated stories? Assuming that narrators also construct identities in interaction with their audience/interlocutors, the second analytical chapter (chapter 6) explores how my interviewees present/position themselves to their audience when they engage in narrating stories related to Muharram rituals and practices, i.e. how they relate to other women when talking about these rituals and practices? Going beyond the story-line and the immediate story-telling setting and assuming that stories afford narrators to make identity claims in relation to wider discourses, the third analytical chapter (chapter 7) investigates how narratives assist in defining the interviewees as 'particular' kind of people beyond the context of their immediate interaction and in relation to more global master narratives.

By taking all three aspects together and drawing on my ethnographic observations (see chapter 4), I will attempt to shed light on:

How do Shi'i Muslim women use sacred texts and practices which are embedded in Muharram as a means for constructing their identities in the diaspora?

And the sub-questions related to the question above:

1. How do the women in my study use Muharram and/or texts related to it to reproduce the core values of Islam in the diaspora? In other words, how do Shi'i Muslim women

who live in Cardiff approach issues of orientations towards core values of their home of origin and the values of the new location?

2. How does the women's use of Muharram and/or texts related to it demonstrate flexibility in their adaptation to the specifics of their new location? In other words, how is flexibility indexed in the religious practices of these women?

Chapter Four: Ethnographic Work

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the details of the ethnographic work that has been carried out in collecting data. It provides first two overviews of historical and personal backgrounds. The historical background is related to the battle of Karbala, the battle in which Hussein was killed while the personal background is related to the researcher's background and upbringing. A description of the site of the study and the programme which has been followed in the Centre is included. In addition to this, reflections related to the use of the chosen data collection methods mentioned in the previous chapter and the researcher's access to the field are provided. The four key participants of the study are introduced in this chapter where their views, opinions, origins and reasons for choosing them are included.

4.2 *Majales* and the story of Karbala

Majales (sing. *majlis*) are religious gatherings where people commemorate the death of Hussein in the battle of Karbala through a series of rituals which are mostly practised on the months of Muharram and Safar. Within the context of *majales*, texts are used. These texts are included in different aspects of the *majales* rituals. Examples of the religious texts included in the *majales* rituals are the recitation of the Quran, the sermon, the Karbala story, the English speeches delivered by young people, the laments, the *ziyara*, and the *du'a*. The use of such texts serves a number of functions, for example using them as a means of identity construction. Having *majales* as a focus gave me the opportunity to observe, interact and interview women who may invoke and refer to these texts in their everyday life.

Majales that take place during the two months of Muharram and Safar are of special importance for Shi'i Muslims, and this goes back to the tragic events that happened within these two months. On the 10th of Muharram 61 AH/ 680 AD, Hussein the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad along with 73 people of his family and companions were killed brutally in the battle of Karbala (Ayoub 1978; Walbridge, 1997; Hegland 1998a: 243; Hegland, 2003: 415). This battle broke out because Hussein

did not approve of Yazid becoming caliph due to the latter's moral and political corruption (Aghaie, 2005). Hussein was supported by many people, especially in Iraq, since Kufa was the capital of his father, Ali bin Abi- Talib's rule when he was the Muslim caliph from 656 to 661 AD. People started to write letters to Hussein to come back to Iraq since he had moved to live in Medina. Hussein decided to go back to Iraq and took his family and companions who insisted on accompanying him in this journey to Iraq. When Hussein arrived in Iraq, he was abandoned by his former supporters as they were fearful of Yazid's oppressive rule. So Hussein was left alone with his family and companions in the desert of Iraq. Yazid tried many ways to put Hussein under pressure in order to gain his support for his rule but Hussein refused. All these events led to the outbreak of the battle of Karbala on the 10th of Muharram. The battle was unbalanced: Yazid's troops outnumbered Hussein's. Hussein, together with all his sons except one, Ali Zayn Al-Abidin, and his brothers, his nephews and his companions, along with some women and children, were killed in that battle. When the battle ended, Yazid's army took Ali Zayn Al-Abidin and Hussein's sisters, wives, children and followers as prisoners to Yazid's palace in Damascus. They also beheaded all those who were killed from Hussein's camp and took their heads with them on spears to Damascus. The prisoners' journey from Iraq to Damascus was full of sufferings and Yazid's army leaders did everything to humiliate them (Chelkowski, 1985: 19; Howarth, 2005).

For Shi'i Muslims, therefore, the two months of Muharram and Safar are associated with mourning rituals. According to Sharif (2005: 135), Shi'is are distinguished from other Islamic sects by holding "mourning rituals that serve as a platform for expressing their love for *ahl al-bait*"[8]. This love is reflected in the Shi'i Muslims' ritual calendar where it has forty-eight birth and death anniversaries for the *Ahlulbayt*, such anniversaries allow the Shi'is "the opportunity to reaffirm their allegiance through emotional acts of devotion" (Sharif, 2005: 135).

As mentioned above, these *majales* include the use of a variety of texts which serve a variety of purposes. Through the use of these texts, either by listening to them or using them, the participants find comfort because they feel close and united to the Holy

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[8] *Ahl al-bait* is a different written form of the word *Ahlulbayt*, the Prophet's household.

Family. By juxtaposing their daily life with the life of the *Ahlulbayt* they find an outlet through which they can vent out their problems and pain. Due to this juxtaposition, it is hard to separate these texts from their context. I undertook ethnographic fieldwork because it enables me to study how these texts are incorporated into the lives of Shi'i Muslim women who live in a non-Muslim community and what roles they play in these women's lives. I am interested in the ways these women take up the sacred texts and discuss them through their discourse with me, the way in which they address me and tell me narratives that have a sense of the Karbala story and the way they use these texts to make sense of their daily practices, i.e. how they represent themselves and make sense of their lives through telling stories related to Karbala and Hussein. To accomplish this, I spent the months of Muharram and Safar during the years 2014 and 2015, participating in the *majales*, observing the rituals and conducting interviews with the women involved in the rituals held in the aforementioned Islamic Centre.

4.3 My Ethnographic Work

Before going into the details of the fieldwork that I have conducted, a brief introduction about my background will be of help in contextualising my position as a researcher. Both the researcher's and the researched's identities have a potential impact on the research situation as Bourke (2014) argues. This is the case because identities are formed by our perceptions of others and how those others are perceiving us (Bourke, 2014: 1).

I was born and brought up in a Shi'i family in Baghdad, Iraq. My siblings and I were raised according to the teachings of the *Ahlulbayt*; so I was a Shi'i by birth. I decided to stay a Shi'i after growing up to be a Shi'i by choice. From where I come it is not easy for a person to change their religion or religious sect. I was named "Zayneb" after Imam Hussein's sister Zayneb; the reason for this is because my date of birth was in the month of Muharram, the month on which the battle of Karbala happened. It is usually a tradition for most Shi'is to name their daughters and sons after one of the Imams or one of the *Ahlulbayt* members. I was born in the late seventies of the 20th century; almost at the same time in which Saddam Hussein came to power. His regime was not a period of stability nor prosperity for Shi'a. Anyone who would show high affiliation or affection towards the *Ahlulbayt* was liable to arrest. During Saddam's regime most of Shi'is had

to practise their rituals in secret in fear of the regime. Having said this about my religious background, being a participant in the rituals held in the Islamic Centre under study allowed me to take on the role of a participant-observer. I belong to this "imagined" Shi'i community and this belonging has enabled me to take on the role of a participant. The observer role has been enabled by the fact that I will join with a purpose and questions in mind, which means with a certain agenda. Below I move to discuss the details of the ethnographic work that has been conducted.

4.3.1 Site of study

The site of this study is a Shi'i Islamic Centre in Cardiff. The Centre is basically a Christian church turned into an Islamic Centre. The outer shape of the church is kept as it was. According to Meer (2012), Muslims in Britain have started to make use of abandoned churches and cathedrals; by doing so they do not come into conflict with authorities as has happened in other parts of Europe, since by making use of these churches they are not changing the 'cultural landscape' of the area in which they live (Meer, 2012: 161). The interior of the Centre is modified to suit the purposes of its current users. The Centre is divided into two sections: one for men and one for women (see the map below). The men's section is somewhat bigger than the women's. The men's section contains the pulpit, which is a high chair where the preacher sits and to which steps are attached. Chairs are found on the two sides of the pulpit and at the rear of the men's section while the front side, the one near the pulpit, is left without chairs but people can make use of it by sitting on the floor, which is carpeted in beige. This side is left without chairs to give space for people to do their prayers and to perform their rituals. The women's section is shaped like the English letter 'L' but in upside position. There are chairs also in the women's section; these are on the side of the curtain that divides the men's section from the women's. There are three benches at the end of the women's section, one of them is fixed to the ground while the other two are not; from their shape they seem to be part of the original furniture of the church. The women's section is provided with a loud speaker and two flat screens that show what goes on in the men's section. This means that women can see what goes on in the men's section through these screens but men cannot see what goes on inside the women's section, which ensures the women's privacy and seclusion. The disproportionate space allocated for the men's section over the women's section shows the dominance of men

over the rituals: men are given a bigger space and more freedom than the women[9]. During the two months of Muharram and Safar, the walls of the Centre are all covered with long stripes of black fabric. There are also black banners on which are typed some of the Hadiths (sayings) of the Prophet or the Imams, as well as some sayings which commemorate Hussein and signify the importance of the congregation at such an event (see appendix 3 for samples of the banners that have been used in the Centre).
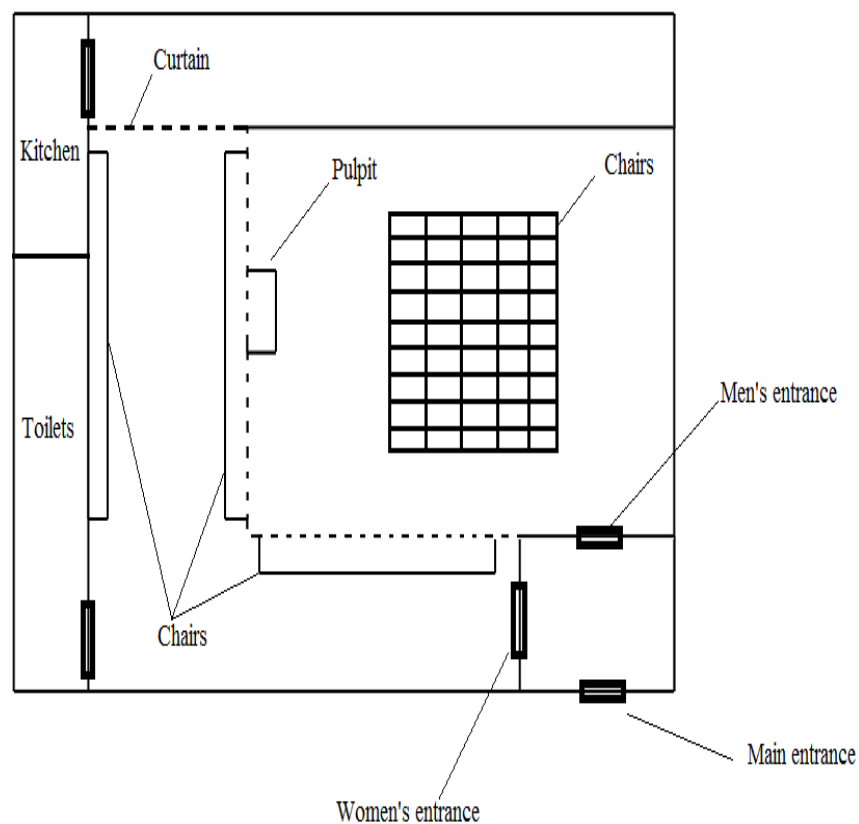
Iraqi Shi'is attend the above mentioned Centre to practise their rituals. The Centre is not restricted to Iraqis only; people from other nationalities can attend too. Based on my observations, Iraqis form the majority of attendees; those Iraqis are either PhD and MA

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[9] The dominance of the men over the rituals was also reflected in another form. Children who accompany their parents to the *majlis* usually stay with their mothers in the women's section. By being there with other children they usually made noises which were heard in the men's section. Women were always trying to control the children and minimise the noise produced by them but they could not be successful all the time. That is why women were always criticised for the noise that comes from their section. When the women's section was quiet, as happened once, women were praised for being quiet. Such criticism was not directed to men even when they made loud noises (field notes, 28.10.2014; 29.10.2014; 15.10.2015).

students who come from Iraq or immigrants who have attained British citizenship. During my fieldwork I noticed some sort of competition between the immigrant women on the one hand and on the other the female students and the wives of the male students, what we might call "sojourners" (Siu, 1952) given their temporary status as residents in Cardiff. The immigrants felt more entitled to run the *majales* and to organise things related to them because they are the ones who worked on establishing the Islamic Centre. The sojourners, on the other hand, felt entitled to take leading roles since most of the *majales* were sponsored by their donations. The wives of the students, especially in my second round of collecting data, in 2015, were trying to be the leading figures in the Centre. Walaa, one of the key participants in this study, and another woman who is also accompanying her husband who is a PhD student were the most prominent figures. This sometimes led to two separate circles of *latam* [chest-beating] being formed: one for the immigrants which was usually made up of the older women, and another, which included the sojourners and sometimes young girls from the immigrant families. On one of the nights (field notes, 20.10.2015) after the *majlis* was finished some of the women were discussing how things went in the *majlis* that night. One of them who was the wife of one of the students, who happened to be joining the immigrants' circle of *latam* that night, said that women in her circle were leaving and joining the other circle, the one which had the sojourners. Another woman replied that she had heard some of the women saying that the other circle was the 'students' circle'. On that same night there was a clash between Walaa and a young immigrant woman. Walaa tried to teach a young girl who is related to that immigrant how to do the *latam* but this young girl did not know how and she started crying. The immigrant woman was upset by this incident and took the young girl away and they both left the *majlis*. In the night that followed this incident the women formed one big circle rather than two circles of *latam*; I got the feeling that they were trying to minimize the gap that had started to form recently. Walaa on another occasion commented on this by saying that it was easy for her to direct the students when the *latam* was done but it was difficult for her to do so with the immigrants because some of them would be annoyed and get upset by her doing so. On one of the nights I have also noticed that some of the Iraqi students and the wives of the Iraqi students were wearing the Iraqi *abaya* on that particular night only because they did not do so on other nights. It seemed that there was some sort of agreement among them. They probably wanted to make themselves distinguished.

The people who join the Centre form a community of practice who share the practice of commemorating Hussein. They represent a homogeneous community who work on keeping the rituals of Muharram alive. This homogeneity is achieved despite the differences of nationalities of those who attend the Centre and despite the undeclared competition between the sojourners' circle of *latam* and the immigrants' circle. Working towards minimising the rift that might be caused by such competition is a clear manifestation of this homogeneity.

4.3.2 The Programme of the Centre

The procedure which is mostly followed in Shi'i mosques is to have a schedule that covers the first thirteen days of Muharram. The schedule commemorates the anniversary of Hussein who was killed on the 10th day (in Arabic called *Ashura*) of Muharram. The last three nights of the programme are usually dedicated to remembering what had happened to the family of Hussein: what happened to his wives, sisters, daughters and young children. On the thirteenth day of Muharram Hussein was buried; this is why the rituals usually continue up to the thirteenth of Muharram. In addition to the first thirteen days of Muharram *majales* are also held on different dates during the two months of Muharram and Safar. The table below shows the order in which the Centre commemorated the anniversary of Hussein's martyrdom in the two years in which I conducted fieldwork, i.e. 2014 and 2015. Usually some of the first ten nights of Muharram are named after people who belong to Hussein's camp and who were killed with him in Karbala.

Nights of Muharram	Names of people commemorated
Night 5	Muslim ibn Aqeel, Hussein's cousin
Night 6	Habib ibn Madhahir al- Asadi, one of the companions of Hussein
Night 7	Abbas, Hussein's half- brother
Night 8	Al-Qassim, Hussein's nephew
Night 9	Ali al-Akbar, Hussein's son
Night 10	Abdullah alrathee' (the infant), Hussein's youngest son

Below I will describe the daily programme of the schedule carried out by the Centre to commemorate Hussein and the battle of Karbala. The programme started at or around 7

pm and lasted for two or two and half hours. The general design of the programme is as follows (on some nights there were slight changes):

1. Recitation of the Quran: the ones who recited the Quran include those who are in charge of the Centre, a member of the audience (mostly a PhD student) or one of the children who accompany their parents to the Centre.

2. Speeches: these were given by young people and children after the recitation of the Quran. The majority of these speeches were in English and they centred on Hussein, his half-brother Abbas, and the battle of Karbala. There was a huge emphasis on these speeches as evident in the following episode. One night, one of the people, who are in charge of the Centre, announced that some people asked for these speeches to be cut out of the programme so that it would finish on time, i.e. within the specified two hours. He continued by saying that this will not happen because these speeches were more important than the sermon itself. He emphasized that these would encourage young people and children to be more attached to their beliefs and rituals (field notes, 28.10.2014).

3. The sermon (also referred to as the 'lecture' or 'khutba', in Arabic). The sermon was delivered by Saudi Sheiks (clergymen) during the first thirteen days of Muharram during both phases of data collection. The sermon was delivered in Arabic and started with a brief lament for Hussein which was different each night. Then the Sheik moved to the main idea of the sermon, which was linked to Hussein and to the battle of Karbala. Within this part, the Sheik who was there during the first phase of data collection in 2014 occasionally addressed young people and children who do not speak Arabic because they were born and brought up in the UK; he did so by giving short speeches in English. The sermon was concluded by another lament which usually brought the audience to tears. In order to bring the audience to tears the Sheik changes the tone of his voice[10]. This strategy is not only followed by this Sheik in particular; it is usually followed by most preachers and people who deliver those sermons. From my observations, it was clear that the audience (since the majority of them were Iraqis)

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[10] On the 25th of October 2014 which was the first day of the Muharram and Safar programme during the first round of collecting data, a friend of mine commented on the preacher's voice by saying that it was not that effective but people cried anyway because they were sad. On the 14th of October 2015, during the second round of collecting data, another friend also made a similar comment about the preacher of that year by saying that at some points his voice was very effective and tender but at others it was just noise.

were much moved when the Sheik used Iraqi dialect in his laments. This same idea was expressed by Deeb (2005), who in her study of *majales* and *masirat* (processions) in modern Lebanon made a distinction between 'traditional' Ashura and what she calls an 'authenticated' Ashura: she states that reciters tend to use the Iraqi dialect in their laments because the Iraqi dialect is as one of her informants says "the dialect of compassion and longing" (Deeb, 2005:254). The Sheik ended his sermon with a *dua'a*. This *dua'a* includes asking God to heal sick people, to protect Muslims everywhere, especially Shi'a, and to bless and protect expatriates who live far away from their homelands. During my fieldwork, each *dua'a* that ended *majales* involved a prayer to protect and keep safe Imam Mahdi. Imam Mahdi is the twelfth Imam; according to Twelvers[11] he is the awaited one, the one who will appear at the end of time to settle conflicts and to spread peace and justice. At other *majales* the preachers changed; on each new *majlis* there was a different preacher sometimes it was a *Sheik* and on other times it was a *Sayyed[12]*.

4. Laments: laments were recited by different people; some of them were Iraqis, others were from the Arab gulf countries, like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Children were encouraged to take roles in these laments. On many nights, children recited laments either alone or with grown-ups. Chest-beating (or *latam*) is always associated with laments. Chest-beating is usually done by beating one's chest with the right hand. People vary in this; some beat their chests with both hands, some choose to beat their faces, and some choose to beat their heads instead. Chest-beating was usually carried out by forming circles. Men formed their own circles and women formed theirs too. Children were encouraged to form their own circles. More than once I noticed women helping young girls to form circles of chest-beating; on different nights one woman would volunteer to participate with those girls in their circles instead of participating with other women just to encourage these young girls. I noticed the same thing

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[11] Twelvers (in Arabic *Ithna Ashariyyah*) are the ones who form the majority of Shi'a in the world. They believe in twelve imams that followed Prophet Muhammad; the first of these imams is his cousin and son in law Ali and the last one is Muhammad al-Mahdi (Gilliat- Ray, 2010: 62). Al- Mahdi is believed to be in occultation (in Arabic *ghayba*); when this occultation ends al-Mahdi is believed to be "the one who is awaited (*al-muntaẓr*) to bring about the state of faith" (al- Mufid, 1981: 524-525).

[12] The difference between a *Sheik* and *Sayyed* within Shi'i religious settings is that the *Sayyed* is related to the Prophet Muhammad, i.e. he is a lineal descendant of the Prophet, while the *Sheik* is not related to the Prophet, i.e. he is a layman.

happening in the men's section (through the screens): a man used to teach and encourage young boys to form circles and to do chest-beating in a correct way, i.e. in time with the others to achieve a rhythmical pattern.

The majority of the laments that were recited in those *majales* were very well- known laments, i.e. those which were usually shown on the Shi'i TV channels. Once the participants recognise the opening of the lament they start to repeat it with the lamenter. If the lament is a new one, i.e. one that the participants has not heard before, the lamenter starts to read the opening of it so that the participants become familiar with it. At this point, i.e. the beginning of the lament, all the participants stop chest-beating regardless of whether the lament is well- known or new. They do so in order to be familiar with the lament itself and to keep in mind its opening, which will be repeated within certain intervals. They also do so in order to organize rhythmical chest-beating. If chest-beating goes wrong, as happened sometimes, the lamenter asks the participants to stop and listen carefully in order to catch up the rhythm. Laments and chest-beating are ended by *Warith Ziyara*. This is a kind of *dua'a* which is specific to Hussein[13]. The word *ziyara* in Arabic is used to refer to an actual pilgrimage to the shrines of the imams or to the text that is recited either in their shrines or from a distance. Takim (2005: 194) indicates the importance of the recitation of the *ziyara* from a distance by saying: "this enables the Shi'is to attain the reward for reciting the *ziyara* and facilitates the emotional encounter with the imam from a great distance."

5. Food: food is served at different intervals. When people arrive at the Centre, they are offered tea, biscuits, sweets, sandwiches and other delicacies. After the end of each *majlis* dinner is served, together with soft drinks, sweets, etc. Food at the beginning of the *majlis* is provided by the people who attend the rituals while dinner is provided by the Centre. People choose to provide food for others for different reasons: some do so because they had made a vow; others out of love for Hussein, while others choose to do so because they seek the blessings of the Imam. Rejecting to taste or to eat the food offered in such rituals is considered something inappropriate, as documented in the following anecdote from my fieldwork (field notes, 06.11.2014). On the thirteenth day of Muharram a friend of mine was talking to me, when a woman came and offered her food but she refused to take it because she was having a bad time with her studies. The

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[13] For each Shi'i Imam there is a specified *ziyara;* although there is one which can be read to all imams, it is called Al-ziyarat al-Jamia (*al-Jamia* means the 'comprehensive') (see Ayoub 1978: 192).

woman who offered the food felt annoyed and said that she must not reject the food of the Imam. I encouraged her to take the food, and she did.

Different men and women choose to serve others. They serve people food, water, and they volunteer to do the cleaning jobs. People carry out this service in order to gain blessings of the Imam or to ask the Imam for a wish, especially a difficult one, to be fulfilled. Even children are encouraged to serve others: for example, there was one girl who kept offering tissues during those thirteen days to women when they started crying, and another who offered prayer beads (field notes, 25-27.10.2014; 01.11.2014; 14.10.2015; 18.10.2015).

6. Drawing Competition: this competition is directed to teenagers and children. They are asked to make drawings that reflect their own perceptions of the battle of Karbala. During the first ten days I noticed that the children were really occupied with this competition (field notes, 02- 03 .11.2014).

7. Blood donation: This practice usually takes place in the Centre on the ninth day of Muharram. People are expected to make a blood donation as a kind of simulation to the sacrifice of Hussein. Around the world there are also people who donate blood on the 10th day of Muharram as a reaction against the custom of *tatbeer*, hitting one's head with sharp knives. *Tatbeer* is a very controversial ritual; and it "is practiced by only a small portion of the Shi'i community" (Takim, 2005: 197), which is why people came up with the idea of blood donation as a substitute.

There are two other activities which were suggested and planned by the Iraqi students in Cardiff. The first of these activities was a procession in Cardiff city centre on 12th December 2014. For this procession, we all gathered in a place that was agreed upon; women who participated in the procession were handed flowers to which introductory cards about Hussein were attached along with CDs, containing documentary films about Hussein and the battle of Karbala. The men who participated in the procession were handed juice bottles to which the same introductory cards were attached. Then, we moved towards the city centre; the police accompanied our procession. The procession started at 1:00 pm and ended at 2:30 pm. People's reactions towards this procession varied, some were indifferent while others showed interest. Some people started to ask what the purpose of our procession was and what we were commemorating. The second activity was a procession, from the same place where we gathered for the procession in

the city centre, to the Islamic Centre. This procession happened on the 13th of December 2014, the 20th day of Safar in the Islamic calendar. The 20th of Safar is the day of the *Arbaeen*; the *Arbaeen* in Arabic means the 40th. This day is of special importance to Shi'is just like the 10th day of Muharram; it is important because it is the 40th day after the martyrdom of Hussein. People go on processions from different parts of the world towards Karbala in Iraq where the shrine of Hussein is. Shi'a Imams have always encouraged people to visit the shrine of Hussein, especially on the 40th day (20th of Safar). Since we live far away from the shrine of Hussein we tried to imitate those who go on foot towards Karbala on this day. At the beginning of the procession only Iraqi students were there, then Iraqi immigrants joined. The weather was very cold. The procession was not licensed by the police so we were told to take full responsibility of any accidents that might happen. Everything went well; some young girls started to chant some well-known laments. Women brought their young children with them. Some of them talked about the processions in Iraq and one of them who is from Karbala talked about how she used to go on a procession herself when she was in Iraq. Our procession took nearly 45 minutes we reached the Centre at 12:10 pm. When we entered the Centre men prayed as a group while women prayed individually. After the prayers there was a short speech by one of the men; he talked about the day of the *Arbaeen* and about Sayyida Zayneb, Hussein's sister, and her role in the whole epic of Karbala. *Ziyarat*, specifically *Arbaeen ziyara* and another *ziyara*, were recited after that. Lunch was then served; it was home-made food, as each woman had brought a certain dish. We left the Centre after someone made an announcement to remind us that there would be a *majlis* at the Centre that night.

The programme of the Centre reflects the sense of community that is being created. Almost all those who come to the Centre (regardless of age) are engaged in the activities and undertake particular roles. There is a special emphasis on children, as evident in a range of activities that primarily concern them, like the English speeches given by or directed to children, as well as the drawing competition. Sharing the same rituals and having meals together also strengthens the common bonds that are created within such a context.

Finally, women play a key role in the *majales*. They build the community by keeping strong relationships with other women, by bringing their children with them to the rituals and by teaching them. For example they guide children on how to practise chest-

beating or teaching them how to serve others like the two young girls who used to distribute tissues and prayer beads to women.

Within the rituals there are norms of appropriate participation. These norms are based on what I have observed and learned through my ethnography and insider knowledge. For anyone who wants to participate in the Muharram and Safar rituals it is more appropriate to wear black; wearing black is a sign of sadness. Pedersen (2014: 86) indicates that pious Shi'is "may observe mourning by wearing black clothes, avoiding expensive purchases, not celebrating joyous events (such as weddings or birthdays) and not attending social gatherings other than the religious commemorations". When I participated and observed the rituals in the Centre, women including myself wore black; even men and children were dressed in black. It is really important for me to dress in black as a participant and as an observer. The importance of the researcher's personal appearance is highlighted by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) who state that "sometimes it may be necessary for the researcher to dress in a way that is very similar to the people to be studied" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 83). Being a Shi'i participant I joined the rituals wearing black, if I was just an observer it would be more appropriate for me to be dressed in black too. If someone does not wear black it is more appropriate to wear dark colours like grey, brown or blue otherwise they will be liable to criticism. For example, one of the women I interviewed criticised severely one of the women who participated on the 10th of Muharram rituals and was wearing a coloured scarf. Wearing make-up, chewing gum, joking or showing happiness are all inappropriate behaviours within these rituals because of the sadness of the occasion itself. It is exactly as if someone is attending a funeral: it would be totally out of context, for instance, if someone started to tell jokes or laugh.

4.4 Reflections on ethnographic methods

This section presents my reflections on the ethnographic methods that have been adopted in the current study and my access to the field. As indicated elsewhere, three methods were followed: audio recordings of the rituals, participant observation and interviews.

4.4.1 Recording the Rituals

Sometimes the field dictates its rules over the ethnographer. In the current study the nature of Islamic religious gatherings where gender segregation is evident has its effect on the way the fieldwork is done. Men are seated in a separate place from women, this suggests that being a female will not allow me to go to the men's section. Not being able to access the men's section due to gender restrictions may have been a drawback to the research but it enabled me to access the women's section freely, an opportunity which is not affordable to men especially in communities that do not allow the mixing of sexes freely (see Hammersley and Atkinson, (1995: 93) for a discussion of this issue). This is the reason I had to seek help from other people and from men in particular. After getting the School's approval in regard to the ethical issues related to the study (see appendix 4), I contacted the representative of the Iraqi students in Cardiff in order to help me get the approval of the Centre to do my fieldwork there. I contacted him because I was not sure where to start first and who to contact in particular. When I talked to him about my intended study he said that he could contact the people in charge of the Centre since he knew almost all of them. The people who are in charge of the Centre expressed their approval after I explained the scope and aim of my study. Having that settled, I went to the Centre on the first day of the announced programme. I had an agreement with the representative of the Iraqi students that he is the one who is going to get the recorder into the men's section. I arrived there and looked outside the Centre but he was not there, I tried to call him but there was no signal. I kept waiting outside the men's section hoping that I would get hold of him but I did not see him. I had to come up with a plan B, my friend who was waiting outside with me suggested trying to ask children who were getting in and out of the men's section about him. I followed her advice and asked the children about that person but they said they did not know him. Finally, I found a four and half year-old boy whom my friend recognized as the son of one of her colleagues at school. We asked him and he confirmed this, my friend and I asked him to go and call his father. He went in the men's section after a desperate attempt to convince him to do so. His father came and I explained to him everything, he said that he was going to call one of the people who are in charge of the Centre in order to do the things I asked for. He came out with another man, a Saudi, and I introduced myself to him and asked him to take the recorder in and before turning it on he had to tell people that the rituals were going to be recorded for the purpose of

study, he did so and no one objected about this. So I managed to make recordings of the rituals but I kept facing the same problem every night, i.e., how to get the recorder in and out of the men's section. I tried sometimes to ask men I started to recognize as usual goers of the Centre while we were waiting for the bus to take the recorder and to hand it to the same person who made the recording on the first night. Getting the recorder out was also a problem, one night it was raining heavily and people were leaving the Centre quickly in order not to get wet. I waited for the person to whom I handed the recorder before the start of the rituals but I did not see him. I waited outside with a friend of mine but he did not show up. I was obliged to leave since it was raining heavily. We went to the bus station and there I found that person; he said he had left the recorder in the Centre but he could not go back because his wife and two daughters were with him so I decided to leave the recorder in the Centre that night.

As indicated above, I was not the one who was in control over the recordings and that is the reason they were varied. On the first day in the field in 2014, only the sermon was recorded but on other days the whole rituals were recorded. I told the one(s) who took the recorder from me each night to record as much as they can from the rituals. Sometimes they forgot to turn the recorder on from the very beginning of the rituals especially when it came to the rituals that took place before the sermon. When asking people to record as much as they can from the rituals I had the idea in mind that everything counts and will have an importance which I may not be aware of at the time of collecting the data.

4.4.2 Observing and participating in the rituals

I started my fieldwork by trying to observe everything and tried to write down everything that happened around me - even things which might look unrelated or unimportant. Trying to observe everything proved to be difficult to achieve but being a Shi'i Muslim myself allowed me to enter the field with some 'insider' insights which helped in narrowing down what is observed. I heard about this Centre in 2013 and I participated in the rituals which took place in it. In 2014 I also joined in, not only as a participant but also as an observer. Since I was actively participating in the rituals, I was not always able to write down everything I observed and, as a result, I wrote things down when I went home.

Having some insider insights has its own challenges. For example, being familiar with the way rituals are done, and the kind of sermons delivered in these occasions is one of challenges. I had this constant fear that I might miss a significant point due to my familiarity with it. Pedersen (2014) states that one of the objections raised against researchers studying their own societies was that the researcher "would take things for granted and not be able to go through the cultural learning process that is one of the prime goals of the fieldwork" (Pedersen, 2014: 28). Being emotionally involved is another challenge; while doing my participant observation I got emotionally involved more than once. It was really hard and difficult to distance myself emotionally from the rituals practised. This is expressed nicely by Bowern (2008: 4) who indicates that: "Fieldworkers don't leave behind their own identities and culture when they go to the field. This is why there is much more to linguistic fieldwork than just turning up to record someone!" I also got emotional while conducting interviews. I tried hard to take a distance from the things discussed but I could not, especially when my informants got very emotional, to refer to one example of these:

> Asma got emotional at a certain point and started crying because of the things she was saying, I told her that we could stop the recording if she wished but she refused (actually I wished if she said 'yes' because I got emotional too and wanted to cry!)

<div align="right">(Field notes, 11.12.2014)</div>

4.4.3 Interviewing Participants

In chapter three, the reasons behind adopting interviews as a research method in data collection have been presented. This section presents the relationship of the researcher with interviewees in both focus groups and one-to-one interviews and the challenges she has encountered while conducting them.

4.4.3.1 The researcher-researched relationship in the interviews: Focus groups

The major problem I faced with focus groups was how to bring people together in one place. I tried to do this after the end of each *majlis* during the first thirteen days of Muharram but that did not work, I tried to go earlier to the Centre in order to do my

focus groups but that did not work either because there were loud speakers which played laments and that would lead into unclear recordings.

With the two focus groups which were conducted on the same day a women's *majlis* was held, I had to make use of the interval that followed the night prayers; during this interval I conducted my first focus group. This was interrupted by a woman who announced on the microphone that the rituals were going to be resumed. I had to stop the discussion at that moment because the voice from the microphone was really loud. I agreed with my participants that we would continue after the rituals were finished; they all agreed on that. We resumed our discussion after the rituals were finished; dinner was served at that time, there was a lot of interruption but we all managed to stay focused on the things being discussed. It lasted for 17 minutes and 4 seconds. The second focus group was conducted after the first one; women started to leave the Centre and it started to get quieter. The women in my second focus group agreed to be delayed a little because they were the ones who were in charge of the Centre that night. It lasted for 39 minutes and 15 seconds.

4.4.3.2 The researcher-researched relationship in the interviews: One-to-One Interviews

As indicated in section (3.2), being a Shi'i Muslim offered me some 'insider' insights. This is supposed to make things easier but it did not work that way. In the case of interviews, in particular, familiarity with the rituals and the ideas behind them resulted in me jumping in, sometimes, to finish others' sentences, defend an idea or express my own. This is illustrated in the extract below from an interview held on the 11th of December 2014:

1.	Inter.	which character affects you most =
2.	Mithal	= Zayneb =
3.	Inter.	= why
4.	Mithal	firstly because she is a woman
5.		and I'm a woman too =
6.	Inter.	= ok (.)

7.	Mithal	and the most important thing is
8.		she is a //sister//
9.	Inter.	//uhmm//
10.	Mithal	the status of a brother I highly appreciate
11.		so I feel that
12.		when she talks
13.		as if she expresses our feelings and-
14.	Inter.	why you chose this aspect of her character and not another aspect (.)
15.		she was also a mother who lost two of her sons (.)
16.	Mithal	no a brother is //dearest// [than a son]
17.	Inter.	//uhmm//

My familiarity with the character Mithal is talking about allowed and motivated me to jump in, lines 14 & 15, to express my own opinion and to suggest another way of answering the question. Having this shared knowledge between the two of us prompted me to intervene and disrupt what Mithal was saying.

Blommaert and Dong (2010:27) shed light on another side of the familiarity problem; they argue that being familiar with a place does not always work to the advantage of the researcher, because others may not tolerate the researcher's crossing the usual boundaries or norms in the same way that they would from an outsider. An example taken from an interview held on the 20th of November 2014 shows this:

1.	Inter.	ok in this case do you consider your attendance to the Husseini majales *some sort of returning the favour to Imam Hussein*
2.	Walaa	*returning the favour* ↑ (.) no
3.	Inter.	so it's not returning the favour ↑
4.	Walaa	no (.) no (.) it's not returning the favour
5.		how I can return the favour to Imam Hussein (crying)
6.	Inter.	(chuckling) I told you to consider me
7.		as if I'm not-
8.		that's why

9.		I'm raising such questions in order to get-
10.		I mean for example
11.		what will be the motivation for people
12.		now we are in the twenty first century
13.	Walaa	yes
14.	Inter.	hundreds of years separate us from the battle of Karbala
15.		what makes people till this day attend the Husseini majales

Walaa got upset, lines 2, 4 & 5, with my question and she started crying because of it; if the interviewer was a total outsider the situation could have been different. Walaa did not tolerate my framing of the question in this way. She got upset and this is shown by the rising intonation she uses in line 2 when she repeats what I have said. To show her objection towards my question, she gives a negative answer to my question followed by a rhetorical question (line 5) accompanied by crying.

Of the eleven participants who participated in this study (see appendix 1), four were chosen for an in-depth investigation of their roles in the *majales* and their opinions about them. All four women have lived in Karbala city in southern Iraq and they were living in Cardiff at the time the data was collected. Their stay in Cardiff is temporary and it is bound to the duration of their (spouses') studies, i.e. they are (academic) sojourners. My participant observation and ethnographic work has led me to choose four women and their interviews for detailed investigation in this thesis. These women were chosen because they have prominent roles in the *majales*. The prominent roles that were adopted by these participants varied from encouraging others to attend the rituals and participating in them to taking active, leading roles in the *majales* such as forming chest- beating circles and directing others on the way they do the chest- beating. They have also expressed different opinions in comparison to what have been said by the other participants. Below I will provide a brief profile of each of the four key participants in turn as background to my analysis of the interviews in the following chapters.

i.   Amira

Amira is an Iraqi PhD student of Computer Science at Cardiff University. Amira is from Karbala, the place where Hussein is buried. She is married with three children: a boy and two girls. At the time of the interview Amira has been in Cardiff for two years, one year was spent on her language course while the second was her first academic year. I chose to interview Amira in particular for two reasons, first because she used to be one of the regular attendees at the Centre, and second because her young son had an active role in the Islamic Centre; he recited poems and laments on many nights when I did my fieldwork there. Two interviews were conducted with her on the 15th of December 2014 and on the 22nd of December 2015. Amira showed willingness to participate in the rituals after being asked by one of initial contacts who was a good friend of hers. For the first interview with Amira to take place I had to wait a while. We had agreed many times upon meeting up but there was always an obstacle in our way. When we finally met on the 15th of December 2014, Amira apologized many times for not being able to attend all the previous appointments that we had agreed upon. I felt familiar with Amira when I first interviewed her in 2014 and more familiar and relaxed in the second interview with her in 2015. I got the impression that she felt the same.

Being from Karbala gives Amira first-hand experience of *majales* and the Karbala story. She states this in her interview on the 15th of December 2014:

> here only during Muharram people remember Imam Hussein but in Karbala you live him daily with the visitation of his shrine his calamities are always repeated mawakib are there[14]

Within the same interview she mentions the following:

> now you can see that the majority of the ones who attend are students they are the ones who motivated these majales and the majority of them are from Karbala the immigrants yes they live here but they don't feel like the ones who lived in Karbala

From Amira's point of view even if people in the UK practised these rituals they would not be like the ones who live or come from Karbala. For her, to be from Karbala is the gauge that measures a person's eligibility regarding these things. Amira also refers to the fact that PhD students who come from Iraq form the majority in attending the

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[14] Narrative extracts are presented in this way, and not within tables as with other extracts, because I am citing them for their content only, i.e. I am not following a line by line analysis.

rituals. What is important for Amira is the exact place from which those students come and as she states above most of them come from Karbala.

Holding *majales* is important for Amira; through *majales* she finds hope and motivation to survive difficult times. After she lost her mother, and both her brother and her son fell ill, she remembered the calamities of Hussein and his household that are retold in these *majales*. This remembrance made her endure such hardship.

> I think that I learn a lot [from this calamity] it's not just crying and latam [chest-beating] (.) I learn how I can endure living and calamities that befall upon me sometimes

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

To hold and to attend *majales* gives Amira patience since she listens to the Karbala story which is difficult to imagine; this will enable her to endure any difficult situation she goes through. It makes her appreciate what she has because whatever she is exposed to would not be as intense as for example, what Zayneb, Hussein's sister, faced.

> I thank God because it's nothing in comparison with what Lady Zayneb went through

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

She also learns from *majales*; she learns how to deal with her husband and children and how to behave when confronted with a difficult situation.

> the preaching lectures they give don't involve narrations only they (.) teach people how if they face a certain problem how to face it sometimes I face a problem and deal with it in a certain way but when I listen to preachers I would say why I didn't face it in this way sometimes I missed the solution or I just didn't know it honestly (.) but sometimes I say if God forbid if I had such a problem I have to deal with it in this correct way since they [preachers] are more experienced than us (.) they know the Imams and their stories but for us you know our lives are divided between studying taking care of children and other responsibilities

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Amira states that she needs *majales* in her life to help her raise her children in accordance with the teachings of *Ahlulbayt*. Attending *majales* along with other community members helps her to transmit her cultural norms to her children.

there are certain things that I can't give to them [to her children] I have no time to teach them that's why they learn these things through the majlis they learn from other children who also attend (.) sometimes they learn lessons from their friends from the sermon sometimes they have their own discussions about certain things

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

So for Amira the *majales* represent multi-educational resources: she can learn things from them either from the stories within or from the preachers themselves. Her children can also learn from the *majales*, as both the rituals and the religious texts work on socializing the children.

ii.   **Asma**

Asma is a Medical Engineering PhD student who is married with one child: a girl. Asma is originally from Baghdad, Iraq but after getting married she moved to Karbala where her husband lived. I chose to interview Asma because she was suggested to me by other participants. They told me that she was the one who encouraged them to participate in the *majales*. Asma showed enthusiasm for being interviewed; I remember when I first asked her to be interviewed she felt excited to participate when I told her that my topic was related to Hussein and she said it is a pleasure for her to do something for the sake of the Imam[15]. She showed this enthusiasm again when I interviewed her for the first time on the 11th of December 2014; she printed out some articles that are related to the Husseini rituals, their importance and the reasons for holding them. She was the only one of my participants who did so. Asma was also the only one who insisted on hearing the interview questions before starting the recording, and so I read to her the questions that I was going to ask. In my second interview with her on the 17th of December 2015, when I read to her the questions I was about to ask, she said one of

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[15] Asma's enthusiasm for being part of this research is derived from her love and attachment to Hussein. This love has different manifestations. For example, Asma expressed in her first interview on the 11th of December that she purposefully does not tidy up her daughter's hair in a neat way during the months of Muharram and Safar. She also adds that even if she had bought her new hair ornaments, she would not use them in these two months because using them might indicate happiness. The same idea was expressed on the 15th of December 2014 when she was helping me to recruit a participant. When Asma saw this participant she just greeted her without shaking hands with her or kissing her which is contrary to what is usually followed among Arab Muslim women. Asma commented on her doing this by saying that she has stopped kissing and shaking hands with women during the two months of Muharram and Safar because if she would greet and kiss a woman it would suggest that she is showing happiness. And even smiling to the person she was greeting would not be compatible with the sadness of these two months.

them was emotionally difficult for her to answer but she said she would answer it anyway. In my second round of collecting data, in spite of the difficult time she was having due to certain complications with her studies, she helped me to recruit participants. She created a group on 'WhatsApp' to which she added some women and asked them to cooperate with me. Asma was really active and attended *majales* almost every night when I did my fieldwork in the Islamic Centre in 2014; in 2015 she did not attend many *majales* because of some complications with her studies.

As mentioned above, Asma is not originally from Karbala, she is from Baghdad but moving to Karbala was a milestone in her life. She has changed as she indicated in her first interview:

> me getting married in Karbala was a quantum leap
>
> (Interview, 11th of December 2014)

After this move she became unwilling to leave Karbala:

> I always say if they give me a mansion in Baghdad and for free I won't leave [Karbala]
>
> (Interview, 11th of December 2014)

This shows the degree to which Asma is attached to Karbala to the extent that even if she was given a luxurious place to live in away from Karbala she would not go, i.e. that the things she can get from being in Karbala are more valuable than wealth.

Asma uses Karbala as a reference point or a gauge, just like Amira, but in a slightly different way. Being a student in the UK entails that she has had to leave Karbala which might have a negative implication for her, but she employs this distance in a positive way. She takes this distance to reflect upon her situation in Karbala, how she behaved towards Hussein and whether her relationship with him was a strong or weak one. She is a changed person in a way; moving places helped here to evaluate what she used to do.

> when I was in Karbala I used to attend more majales (.) but I felt when I came here [to the UK] that I wasn't doing well [when it comes to attending majales] in Karbala
>
> (Interview, 11th of December 2014)

Moving away from Karbala helped Asma to reflect upon her attendance to the *majales*; she became aware of the need to enhance this bond with Hussein by attending them. Cardiff helped her in this, although her study difficulties during the second round of collecting data prevented her from attending the *majales*. *Majales* are available in Cardiff and attending them would help in minimizing the yearning she felt towards Hussein and his shrine:

> for me when I went away from Karbala I discovered that I had been living in heaven and I wasn't aware of this but when I came here (.) I had a wide and comprehensive appreciation for Imam Hussein's cause and most importantly that I should keep on attending the Husseini majales (.) uh here thank God the Husseini majales are good they are held whenever there's a death or birth anniversary of one of Ahlulbayt but I told you my attachment to Imam Hussein and his cause increased when I came to Cardiff because I am away [from Karbala] I yearn to Imam Hussein and yearn to the visitation of his shrine (.) I hope inshallah [God willing] Allah will help us to do something to Imam Hussein when we go back to Karbala

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

Asma learns from the *majales*; she sees them as opportunities to increase her knowledge, as sources of information and exchanging ideas with others:

> we have to increase the number of people who attend Hussein's majales because when the number increases awareness will increase people will start to ask why Imam Hussein was killed in this way (.) what he wanted why they killed him this way wouldn't it be enough for them to just kill him why they cut off his head (.) questions will be raised […] when the number of people increases questions will increase you might ask a question somebody else might ask a question you might raise an issue I haven't considered before (.)

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

Asma takes her daughter with her to attend the *majales*; she is doing this in order for her daughter to learn as well. Asma's daughter can learn from the *majales* just like any other child but there is an added element for her: Asma's daughter is a lineal descendant of Hussein. This is the case because Asma's husband is a '*sayyed*' which means he is a lineal descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. When asked by the interviewer whether

she takes her daughter with her to the *majales* so she can be raised as a Shi'i or because she has a blood relationship with Hussein, Asma answers by adding a third reason:

> for me for both reasons of course (.) and for a third reason to learn truth (.) to learn not to be unfair to others to grow up correctly to hate injustice and to love justice (.) uh I always try to bring her up in this way (.)

> (Interview, 11th of December 2014)

By bringing her daughter with her to the *majales*, Asma wants her to learn and one of the things Asma insists on for her daughter to learn is 'sharing':

> when I bring her crayons or **colouring book** I always tell her to **share** with her friends because Ahlulbayt won't approve [selfishness] [I tell her] that your grandmother is Al-Zahraa your grandfather is Hussein so it's really nice when someone has such role models and if I don't give her an example she won't understand

> (Interview, 11th of December 2014)

Indeed, during my second round of data collection, I had the opportunity to observe Asma encouraging and demonstrating sharing to her daughter, as evident in the following extract from my field notes:

> They [Asma's daughter and two other girls] all started working on a colouring book which belongs to Asma's daughter. After colouring a page or two the two girls left and then came back again. One of them couldn't colour the side she wanted so Asma tore the book into two halves and gave her one; Asma's daughter and the other girl kept working on the other half[16].

> (Field notes, 16th of October 2015)

Sharing things with other children from Asma's point of view suggests learning how to abandon selfishness and to love for others what one wishes for themselves.

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[16] Something similar to this happened with another child when an old woman brought her granddaughter with her to the *majlis* and some children gathered around her; the grandmother encouraged her granddaughter to share the crisps she had with those children. One of the children refused but the old woman encouraged her to take some saying that she wanted her granddaughter to learn how to share things with others. I think this granddaughter was the only child they have in the family so coming to the *majlis* would help her to be familiar to have children around (field notes 14th of November 2015).

iii. Walaa

Walaa used to be a pharmacist in Iraq before coming to the UK accompanying her husband who is studying for a PhD degree at Cardiff University. Walaa has four girls and she is from Karbala. Walaa was first recommended to me by others, but as I was carrying out my fieldwork, and especially the participant observation, I noticed that Walaa had an active and leading role in the *majales*.

For Walaa, to be from Karbala has its own consequences as she states in her interview on the 20th of November 2014:

> sometimes I thank God for being a Muslim an Arab a Shi'i who lives in Karbala (.) but I feel that I'll be judged for these four points [in the hereafter] (.) because I live next to an Infallible Imam (.) ok then I did what [about this] (.) did I act in the way he [the Infallible Imam] would approve of this is first (.) did I act according to the responsibility I have (.) did I achieve something (.)

Whereas Asma and Amira relate to Karbala as a place they feel proud to belong to, for Walaa to be from Karbala entails that she will have an extra responsibility in comparison with other Shi'is who are not from there; this extra duty comes from the fact that she lives in the Imam's neighbourhood and this suggests that she is surrounded by him and by his presence. The extra duty can be compared with the Husseini lineage that Asma's daughter has with Hussein which is mentioned above. Asma's daughter is related to Hussein through blood while Walaa is related to him through her living in his neighbourhood.

In Iraq, Walaa used to be a working mother which suggests that she did not have enough time to give her daughters the teachings she aspires for them to learn. For Walaa, *majales* were and still are a good source of teaching that she is making use of. Walaa brings up the metaphor of planting when she talks about bringing up her daughters:

> I want them to be raised in a Husseini way to be raised on the love of Hussein to be raised on the Husseini concepts (.) and in which way they love Ahlulbayt (.) because this is like planting this planting I can't do it alone I need support

> (Interview, 20th of November 2014)

Walaa thinks that starting teaching her daughters early will make things firm and strong for them when it comes to beliefs; in that way it will not be easy for them to abandon these beliefs when they grow up:

> this is planting just like when you plant something when it grows it'll be strong (.) you start with a bud and then you water it that will transform into a tree (.) it's not the same when you plant a big tree this big tree may respond or may die (.) but the bud if you plant it yourself and take care of it you water it it will be strong planting starts from the beginning early start grow smart (.) it means when you start from the beginning when they'll grow up you wouldn't worry about them (.) because there is something firm (.) and it won't be moved easily

> (Interview, 20th of November 2014)

For Walaa the *majlis* teaches her daughters the following:

> firstly (.) it teaches them their true religion secondly (.) it reinforces their religious sector (.) thirdly it raises them according to the Islamic teachings fourthly it will keep them in constant check with themselves

> (Interview, 20th of November 2014)

Walaa considers it a duty to transmit knowledge about Hussein, as well as associated rituals and *majales* to the next generations. In one of the *majales*, Walaa was teaching young girls in the *majlis* how to recite *du'a Al-Faraj*[17], when another woman encouraged this aspect of teaching Walaa replied: "We have to teach them such things because we are not going to stay in this life for long and Allah [God] will ask us about them in the hereafter" (field notes, 27th of October 2014).

Being a teacher for Walaa is not only about teaching others it is also about her and how she gets a sense of identity by being the teacher. Walaa took a leading role in the *majales* especially in my second round of collecting data in 2015. She used to organize the circles of *latam* [chest-beating], and advise young girls on their practice and behaviour during the ritual:

> Walaa as usual was the leading figure, she was bending to the ground and then she lifted up her body while she was beating her

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[17] It is a prayer that is recited which asks God to hasten the appearance of the twelfth Shi'i Imam, the 'awaited' one.

chest. Children imitated her; I noticed that some of them were happy and smiling while others looked proud (I envied them because I don't have the courage to do latam in the way they did it). […] Walaa pointed to one of the girls who was wearing a beige coat over her black abaya to take it off. I'm not sure whether she did this because the coat was coloured or because it will restrict the girl's movements. Walaa also tidied up on one of the girls' shirt, it was black printed with small white flowers that showed a big and unusual part of her chest; Walaa used a pin to fix it.

(Field notes, 18th of October 2015)

From this short profile we can see that for Walaa teaching involves two central elements: making sure that others maintain traditions, and as a means of maintaining her own identity as a Shi'i Muslim woman, a mother and a teacher.

iv. Hanaa

Hanaa is a Computer Engineering PhD student who comes from Karbala. Hanaa is married with two children: a boy and a girl. Hanaa did not attend many *majales* during the two rounds of collecting data in 2014 and 2015; when she was asked about the reasons behind this she stated that she had many commitments like her study and taking care of her children. She also mentioned that her husband was one of the participants in preparing and cooking food for the people who attend the Centre on many nights. Being part of this process entailed that he would go to the Centre in the afternoon and stay there until the evening and in that case Hanaa could not go to the Centre alone at night. Two interviews were conducted with her on the 15th of December 2014 and the 17th of December 2015.

Hanaa, like Amira, Asma and Walaa, considers the city of Karbala as a reference point for her when it comes to the Husseini cause, holding *majales* and practising the rituals that are related to Hussein. Muharram and Safar in Karbala, for her, are different from those in any other place because she considers Karbala as the 'centre' of these rituals.

Muharram and Safar for us there [in Karbala] are not something ordinary

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

in Karbala, we are the centre as people say

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

> if you want me to compare them [majales held in the UK] with the ones held in Karbala I mean men's majales there then there's no comparison maybe because in Karbala there is the power of (.) the reciter the preacher but here it all depends on what is possible[18]

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

When Hanaa was asked about the reasons behind her participation in the rituals, *majales* in particular, the few ones she attended in Cardiff and the countless ones she attended in Karbala, she said that when she was a child she used to attend because she was imitating her parents without knowing why she has to attend and practise the rituals. The situation changed when she grew up because she started to understand why she attends:

> later on we understood why it [attending majales] is something that must be continued because it involves the memory of Abi Abdullah [one of the titles of Hussein] his sacrifice and his principles because these majales are not only (.) I have an opinion about them they are not for someone to go cry and lament Hussein one needs to know who Hussein is first

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa uses 'true' participation as an exclusion strategy when she criticizes others who, from her point of view, are not sincere in what they are doing in relation to Hussein and the rituals. She makes this distinction between them and people, like her, who understand the real meaning behind the *majales.* Hanaa criticizes women who attend those *majales* without knowing the real aim behind them; in other words women who did not reflect on the rituals like she did:

> there are others let me tell you (.) who would come just to have tea (.) eat cookies and then talk a lot cry a little start latam [chest-beating] and then leave

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa does not attend the *majales* just for the sake of attending them and this is probably why she criticizes people who only attend to socialize with others or to show

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[18] See section 4.3.2 above regarding the preacher's voice and his ability to make the audience cry.

off. Hanaa also criticizes people who do *majales* or attend them but they are not pious or they are inconsiderate of other people especially their relatives:

> I saw such people in Karbala so I'm an eye witness (.) a lot of people who don't care about their relatives don't pray don't pay alms but they spend millions (.) uh I mean to make a majlis for the Imam and to give food in the name of the Imam (.) ok millions but at the same time (.) they don't care about relatives for example again I'm telling you that I'm an eye witness on this

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa has talked about how the rituals were used by some as a means of propaganda, i.e. they were advertising themselves as good Shi'i Muslims by holding the rituals:

> now in which way you can tell that X is a pious person (.) actually I don't want to say that all people like this but there are some who try to show that they are Husseinis and symbols of piety so I'm really really sad that there's such kind of people (.) I always say that I have encountered such people in my job (.) in my life and some of them are closely related to me honestly (.) ok (.) they don't care about their relatives (.) but they go and make a Husseini mawkib so you answer me do such people know Hussein (Inter.: of course no) there's exploitation a lot of exploitation for Imam Hussein that's what I call (.) so I cut it short for you and said that Imam Hussein is used for propaganda

> (Hanaa, interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa wants her son and daughter to be raised knowing Hussein and his cause; she is trying to replicate her experience when she was a child:

> there must be a role model so why I'd bring him [her son] an English role model or something else here [in the UK] they call it **role model** for example if you ask people here about their role models some would say Bill Gates or someone else some take Gandhi ok (.) we have Imam Hussein

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

> when we have such a person (.) a person who's good (.) uh a person let's say who knows God well (.) then let's make him a role model and the one who follows him will be like him for sure and this is what I wish for my son and daughter

Hanaa is trying to maintain her children's identity as Shi'is in the diaspora. She wants them to take Hussein as their role model; Hussein, for Hanaa, is a good example, a pious person who deserves to be followed.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the ethnographic fieldwork that has been done in collecting the data for this study. A historical background of the battle of Karbala along with a personal background of the researcher have been provided. Such backgrounds have presented information which is significant in understanding the Muharram rituals and the researcher's positioning within such a context as the one under study. The historical background presented at the beginning of this chapter is of help in contextualising the stories told by the participants that are related to the Karbala story. Stories which will be analysed in the next chapters and which help the participants to make sense of their daily practices. The researcher's personal background assists in contextualising her position as a researcher within this Shi'i Muslim community. The researcher enjoys a semi-insider position within this community due to her upbringing as a Shi'i Muslim. This aspect has facilitated her entrance into this community but it has some challenges. Being familiar with the rituals which might entail missing significant aspects due to this familiarity was a major concern. This concern was reflected in the process of observation and what to include or exclude. Emotional involvement was also a great challenge in both observing the rituals and conducting interviews.

Doing ethnographic fieldwork has helped in configuring distinguished features of the community under study. The community represents a community of practice where the participants share a number of practices to achieve a common goal, i.e. commemorating Hussein. The Centre at which the participants gather and meet to practise their rituals represent a scared liminal space. A space that allows men to be segregated from women, to be surrounded by banners that remind them of home and to hear, use and practise Arabic, their native language. It is well known that the British society does not have this idea of segregation between men and women but it is found in Iraq especially in religious gatherings. By doing so the participants were doing two things: they were keeping alive their home traditions and they were creating a 'sacred space' for them in the diaspora.

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Participating and observing the rituals has revealed that men are given more space and freedom then women. It has also been noted that there was a competition among women's groups over the running of the *majales*. Multiple languages and dialects were in use in the Centre. Multiple codes enable speakers to address different audiences in this diasporic context and they are associated with different values, histories, etc. For example Arabic language, the language in which the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and which has gained it a sacred status due to its association with the Quran, was used as the default language particularly in the sermon. The English language was also used but to a lesser extent in comparison with Arabic. The English language was used to address young generations those who were born in the diaspora and those young children who accompany their parents who study in the UK because those use English more than Arabic in their daily communications[19]. One way which was followed in the sermons in 2014 to incorporate young people into the rituals was the preacher's delivering two speeches. The first speech was a short English speech which was mainly directed towards those children who do not speak Arabic. The second speech, which is the main speech, is the sermon which was delivered in a mixture of standard and colloquial Arabic.

The application of ethnographic methods has witnessed some challenges like the difficulty of accessing certain aspects of the field due to gender restrictions, the conflict in the researcher's positioning between being an insider or outsider and the difficulty in recruiting participants and finding a suitable time and place for interviewing them.

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[19] On one of the nights I noticed a group of young girls who were sitting next to me, they were talking in English most of the time with some switching to Arabic (field notes, 08.11.2015).

Chapter Five: Doing *Majales*

5.1 Introduction

The first level of Bamberg's (1997a) model focuses explicitly on the events within the narratives themselves and tries to answer the following question: "How are the characters positioned in relation to one another within the reported events?" (Bamberg, 1997a: 337). According to Bamberg (2009: 139; 2011: 15) this level is concerned with analysing "the *way* the referential world is constructed, with characters (self and others) emerging in time and space as protagonists and antagonists". Similarly, Heinrichsmeier (2012: 386) argues that under this level "the focus is on the relationships of the characters *within* the story, the way they are positioned vis-à-vis other characters and the linguistic means used to achieve this." In other words, at this level an attempt is made to explore how characters are construed within story events related to *majales*: are they agents, targets, protagonists or antagonists? Adding a Labovian analysis to this we can explore the story world in the narratives told by the participants about participation in the *majales* and also the narratives about Hussein and Karbala that they draw into this discussion. Analysing the narratives in this way will help us to understand the identity work done by these women as diasporic people.

To answer Bamberg's (1997a) question which is included under the first level of analysis, the following questions will be addressed for each narrative: 1. what the story is about? 2. Who are the characters? 3. What are the relations that exist among them? and 4. In what way are these characters presented by the narrator of the story? Addressing these questions will be giving us insights into how these women 'do' the *majales*, what participation means to them and how they use narratives about *majales*, the battle of Karbala and Hussein to maintain their Islamic identity in the diaspora. One of the central findings of this chapter has been the way these women intertwined Husseini narratives and personal narratives to make sense of their individual practices against a wider sociocultural backdrop.

5.2 Muharram and Safar *majales* as told by four Shi'i women

Narratives of the four key participants regarding holding and doing *majales* are presented and analysed in this section. The extracts analysed are included in the interviews of the four key participants introduced in chapter 4: Amira, Asma, Walaa, and Hanaa. All the narrative extracts included in this chapter have the idea of transformation and learning but in varying degrees. This is why they have been given different headings except for the second extract (5.2.2) which has been labelled as 'a narrative of transformation' because it addresses transformation more explicitly than the other extracts.

5.2.1 Narratives of suffering, epiphany and empathy

This section contains the analysis of two narratives that belong to Amira (15th December 2014). The first narrative is about suffering and epiphany while the second is related to empathy. Two narrative extracts have been chosen from Amira's interview for their significance in shedding light upon the way these women do *majales*, learn lessons from them and use them as sites of learning and education.

5.2.1.1 Narratives of Suffering and Epiphany

In the following narrative Amira talks about her experience of doing the *majales* as a response to the question about whether or not she considers not attending any more *majales* since these *majales* keep on telling the Karbala story that has not changed. Amira's answer to this question is 'no' for two reasons: one is related to the preacher's style which has great effect on the audience who listen to the Karbala story and the second reason is related to the events in the Karbala story and their importance for the audience. They can learn lessons and they can find ways to cope with the difficult situations they go through by listening to such a story.

The narrative below shows a certain incident through which Amira learns how to cope with a difficult situation that she had encountered. Amira's personal narrative about

how she felt when her brother fell ill embeds a narrative describing how Zayneb, Hussein's sister's, lost her brother in Karbala but kept strong. Amira's situation is a mitigated one in comparison with that of Zayneb.

1.	Amira	we go through different situations
2.		for example concerning- the other day I went through a bad situation
3.		because I felt worried about my brother
4.		so whenever I hear the story [the battle of Karbala story]
5.		I say
6.		may Allah help her [Zayneb, Imam Hussein's sister]
7.		how she endured all this pain
8.		and how she managed (.)
9.		while for me he [her brother] just got ill
10.		and stayed in bed
11.		and I couldn't help it
12.	Inter.	yeah
13.	Amira	after this [incident] as if it's the first time
14.		in which I hear the story of Lady Zayneb
15.		there're certain incidents
16.		you wouldn't feel the calamity of Lady Zayneb
17.		unless you go through similar situations
18.	Inter.	right
19.	Amira	you'd really feel her sufferings
20.	Inter.	uhmm
21.	Amira	whenever I hear her story
22.		I feel her pain
23.		and how she may Allah help her endured all these calamities
24.		while for me I couldn't endure
25.		that my brother stayed in bed
26.		how about her and her brother's head was cut off (.)
27.		in comparison with her mine is nothing

Amira's narrative consists of two narratives: a matrix narrative, in which she is the central protagonist, and an embedded one. The matrix narrative involves a story of (everyday) suffering and ways of dealing with it while the embedded narrative talks about facing a difficult situation but within a religious story. In terms of Labov's (1972a) framework, we can break the matrix narrative down as follows:

1.	we go through different situations	Line 1	Abstract
2.	for example the other day I went through a bad situation	2	Orientation

3.	I felt worried about my brother	3	Complication
	he just got ill	9	
	and stayed in bed	10	
	I couldn't help it	11	
4.	after this [incident] as if it's the first time	13	Resolution
	in which I hear the story of Lady Zayneb	14	
5.	whenever I hear her story	21	Evaluation/ Coda
	I feel her pain	22	
	and how she endured all these calamities	23	

In this narrative Amira narrates a story about herself, she is the main character in the story. Minimal information is provided about her brother except that he was ill and had to stay in bed. Usually 'just' getting ill is something normal but not for Amira, she describes this as a 'bad situation'. Talking about her brother, Amira could have either introduced him first as her brother and then mentioned his name or referred to him in relation to his children if he is married and has any. Amira chooses to refer to him as 'my brother'. Al-Khatib and Salem (2011) highlight this kind of reference to people in relation to their children in Jordan which can be said to be true also in other Arab countries:

> The prefix abu means usually 'the father of', a man is given the prefix abu to identify him as the father of X. After a person gets married and has a child, s/he is called by the name of the eldest son «Abu X» (father of X), or «Um Y» (mother of Y)

> (Al-Khatib and Salem, 2011: 92)

Amira seems to be taking away from her brother any other personal features except the blood relationship that links him to her. If we take this noun phrase 'my brother' from a lexical point of view then it might be probably used to highlight the strength of this brother-sister relationship between them, to link him to her alone or to show how much she loves him. This is similar to the way she links Hussein to Zayneb in the embedded narrative below. And if we take it from a narrative point of view and how characters are positioned within this story then the use of it suggests that Amira is the main character

and her brother is taking a secondary role to her. This way of presenting her brother and Zayneb's brother helps in positioning both Zayneb and herself as main characters in the narratives told.

In the narrative Amira construes herself as a weak person, a person who would not endure the calamities of life even if these were easy ones, someone who cannot endure such things when they touch upon one of her close family members, and her situation is contrasted with that of Zayneb, who is introduced through an embedded narrative. Family relationships, in terms of the sister-brother relationship, are found in both the matrix narrative and the embedded narrative (see chapter 7 for a discussion of the family relationships that are referred to in the narratives).

Amira constructs the embedded narrative in the way shown in the table below:

1.	whenever I hear the story [the battle of Karbala story] I say God help her	4 5 6	Evaluation/ Coda
2.	she endured all this pain she managed she endured all these calamities	7 8 23	Resolution
3.	her brother's head was cut off	26	Complication

In this embedded narrative we are looking at the story through two lenses: Amira's lens, since she is the narrator and she is the one who chooses what to include in the story; and the lens of Zayneb, as the main character whose brother was killed brutally but who endured this situation and managed to go through it. Amira does not follow the usual structure in narrating this story, she is telling it in reverse order which creates a sense of familiarity with it (this non-linearity in narrating events is similar to the way shared stories were narrated by young people in Georgakopoulou's (2003) study where those young people chose to accentuate certain plot events or evaluations based on their agendas). As shown in the table above, the coda and resolution appear before the complicating action. The naming strategy employed for the male character 'Hussein' is

similar to the one found in the matrix narrative: she does not use Hussein's name, instead she refers to him as 'her brother'. Zayneb, the main character, the heroine is construed as a strong and resilient person. She endured calamities and this is evident in the repetition of the resolution and the verb 'endured', juxtaposed with the tragic and cruel act of beheading reported as the sole complicating action in this narrative.

By interweaving personal and religious stories, this extract shows how *majales* texts (i.e. Zayneb's story) are used as exemplars for the participants and become interwoven into their own personal lives. In doing this, Amira is drawing parallelism between the everyday world and the religious world that is advocated in the *majales*. Amira is comparing her situation with that of Zayneb since they are both females who have gone through bad situations. Amira compares herself to Zayneb and this helps her to learn resilience though she does not do what Zayneb did. Amira might have respected Zayneb before for purely religious reasons; she is a Shi'i so she might have this 'semi-natural appreciation' for her. After being faced with a mitigated situation to what Zayneb faced, Amira, the character, changed her perspective and started to appreciate Zayneb's situation more. She has gone through a 'bad' situation that gave her an experience of epiphany which enabled her to look at Zayneb's situation differently. Usually, epiphany accompanies this kind of narrative, according to Frank (1993) epiphany is at the centre of any illness narrative. As Frank (1993: 42) puts it

> Epiphanies are moments that are privileged in their possibility for
> changing your life. But insofar as changing your life is an
> historically defined project, so the general possibility of epiphanies
> is also socially constructed. To experience an epiphany requires a
> cultural milieu in which such experiences are at least possibilities,
> if not routine expectations.

The quote above suggests that epiphany in illness narratives is achieved through illness itself but in Amira's narrative about her brother's illness, epiphany related to illness is mediated through (reflection on) religious texts. Amira's narrative is about suffering and epiphany which discusses an illness incident although she is not the one who is directly involved in it. After this incident, Amira is presented as a changed person in terms of her appreciation of Zayneb's situation and in terms of her awareness of her own situation. Going through this helped her to look at things differently; she is a changed person because she became aware of things she was not aware of before going through

the illness incident. This narrative shows how Amira uses the *majales* and the Husseini stories told there to reflect on her own life and try to emulate what she hears. This can be linked to what she said earlier in the interview about the importance of attending *majales* although the story of Karbala which is told in them is the same.

To sum up, by comparing two incidents, one is an everyday life incident and the second is a historical, religious incident Amira, as a character is positioned as a weak person in comparison to Zayneb, Hussein's sister. Being in a weaker position has taught Amira to reflect upon her attitude towards her brother's illness and eventually to be patient. This epiphany has occurred to Amira through an illness incident which made her think of Zayneb's story. Thus, participating, listening and remembering the Karbala story has brought out change in the participants' lives, a change that came from reflecting and learning.

5.2.1.2 Narratives of Empathy

The following extract is also from Amira's interview (15th of December 2014). Amira discusses the reasons that have motivated her to choose Um Wahab, a non-Muslim woman who participated in the Karbala battle as the one she feels close to from those who were present in that battle, i.e. the reasons that led her to empathise with her more than the other women.

1.	Inter.	ok from the women characters in Al-Taff [another name for the battle of Karbala] whom do you feel close to you
2.	Amira	um Wahab [Wahab's mother]
3.	Inter.	um Wahab↑
4.	Amira	uhmm (laughing)
5.	Inter.	you're the first one
6.		who says so
7.	Amira	(laughing)
8.	Inter.	ok
9.	Amira	(laughing) I don't know
10.		but her conduct affects me (.)
11.		I feel
12.		that she gave a lot
13.		and sometimes it's difficult difficult
14.		maybe she represented-
15.		yeah it's right
16.		that I read about her

17.		but when I saw the TV series Al-Mukhtar
18.		when they represented her character
19.		I was really influenced by her
20.		because it's so difficult especially for a mother
21.		now I look at my son
22.		my child if he grew up
23.		and it was his first day of marriage
24.		and she told him to go and fight
25.	Inter.	uhmm
26.	Amira	what a sacrifice she made
27.		she sacrificed
28.		the dearest thing she had her son
29.		who was young and on his first day of marriage
30.		what a great mother she was
31.	Inter.	uhmm (.)
32.	Amira	I feel
33.		that she was a great woman
34.	Inter.	right (.)
35.	Amira	it was a very difficult situation
36.		few women can do
37.		what she did (.)
38.		she saw his wife in front of her
39.		he was very young newly married
40.		which means
41.		he was at the peak of his life
42.		but she asked him to sacrifice himself for the sake of Imam Hussein (.)
43.		another thing is that
44.		they were from another religion
45.	Inter.	yeah (.)
46.	Amira	those two things they were from another religion
47.		but she had strong faith in Imam Hussein to the extent that
48.		she sacrificed her son for his sake
49.	Inter.	right (chuckles)
50.	Amira	these two things I feel them (chuckles)
51.	Inter.	yes (.) but actually I'm surprised
52.		because this is the first time
53.		I think about her in this way
54.		yes she is great woman
55.		but never thought about her in this way
56.	Amira	because she was from another religion
57.	Inter.	right
58.	Amira	to be from another religion it's difficult
59.		now Muslims can't do
60.		what she did
61.	Inter.	right
62.	Amira	right isn't it to be from another religion and to have strong faith in religion in Islam and in Imam Hussein to the extent that

63.		sacrificed her son
64.		in addition to this when they cut off her son's head
65.		she threw it back to them saying that
66.		what I sacrificed for the sake of God
67.		can't take it back
68.		what a mother she was
69.		she saw her son's head
70.		and she didn't want it back
71.	Inter.	yeah
72.	Amira	now we get hold of anything of our deceased right
73.	Inter.	right
74.	Amira	clothes or anything saying that these belong to them
75.		how she managed
76.		that she was offered her son's head
77.		and she said
78.		what I offer to God can't take it back
79.	Inter.	that's really true
80.	Amira	(chuckles)

Again, Amira combines two narratives together, a matrix and an embedded one. The matrix narrative is a personal one while the embedded is a religious one. In terms of Labov's (1972a) framework, we can break Amira's personal narrative down as follows:

1.	I don't know	9	Orientation
	but her conduct affects me	10	
2.	I feel	11	Complication
	that she gave a lot	12	
	and sometimes it's difficult difficult	13	
	maybe she represented-	14	
	yeah it's right	15	
	that I read about her	16	
	but when I saw the TV series Al-Mukhtar	17	
	when they represented her character	18	
	I was really influenced by her	19	
	because it's so difficult especially for a mother	20	
	now I look at my son	21	
	my child if he grew up	22	
	and it was his first day of marriage	23	
	another thing is that	43	

3.	they were from another religion	44	
3.	I feel	32	Resolution/
	that she was a great woman	33	Evaluation
4.	few women can do	36	Coda
	what she did (.)	37	
	now Muslims can't do	59	
	what she did	60	

In terms of the embedded, religious narrative we can break it down as follows:

1.	it was a very difficult situation	35	Abstract
2.	she saw his wife in front of her	38	Complication
	but she asked him to sacrifice himself for the sake of Imam Hussein	42	
	she sacrificed her son for his sake	48	
	[she] sacrificed her son	63	
3.	when they cut off her son's head	64	Resolution
	she threw it back to them saying that	65	
	what I sacrificed for the sake of God	66	
	can't take it back	67	

Um Wahab, a non-Muslim woman, sacrificed her only son for the sake of Hussein, a son who was young and newly married at the time of the Karbala battle. Amira indicates that she empathises with her, she has read about her but she liked her more when her character was represented in a TV series. Amira's admiration for this woman is attributed to many factors: she was not a Muslim, she had one son and she sacrificed him, in addition to this when the people in Yazid's camp killed him and threw his head to Hussein's camp she refused to take it and threw it back to show that she is true and sincere in her sacrifice.

Um Wahab is the protagonist, who is positioned by Amira as an agent; she is an active person since a lot of actions are attributed to her. Um Wahab, because she believed in Hussein's cause urged her son to go and fight with him. This suggests she was willing to feed her son to death, to sacrifice him as long as this will be for the sake of keeping

what is right from her point of view. Um Wahab's son is positioned as a patient, a recipient. No actions are attributed to him but since he was killed this implies that he followed his mother's orders and sacrificed himself for the sake of Hussein. This entails that he was an obedient son on a one hand and on the other it suggests that he was also true and sincere in his love to Hussein otherwise he would not sacrifice himself if he did not share the same love that his mother has. Another character that is involved in the embedded narrative is the wife of Um Wahab's son; he is married but nothing is given to us as listeners about his wife, what her reaction was towards Um Wahab's urging, whether she approved this as well or not is left unknown here. The people in the enemy camp are also mentioned they are the antagonists who are unnamed but referred to by the use of the pronoun 'they'.

Through the extract above Amira emphasises the fact that Um Wahab was a non-Muslim. This is central to Amira because of this she admires Um Wahab and considers what she did not many Muslims are capable of doing. Amira herself shows reluctance to sacrifice her son if she was in Um Wahab's position. In narrating, Amira relies on comparisons (in the same way she compared between her situation and Zayneb's situation in the previous extract): Um Wahab was a non-Muslim woman who sacrificed her dearest son for the sake of Hussein, Amira has a son as well but she is unwilling to sacrifice him. Amira also compares what Um Wahab did with (some) Muslims do nowadays. What Um Wahab did, for Amira, not any woman is capable of doing (lines 36-37) and not all Muslims will accept easily the fact they lose their dear ones. Amira empathises with Um Wahab and she makes this explicit at several points in her narrative. Amira considers Um Wahab's sacrifice a great one 'what a sacrifice she made' (line 26), this for her makes her 'a great mother' (line 30) and 'a great woman' (line 33).

In sum, family-relationships in particular the mother-son relationship are highlighted in the extract above: Um Wahab- her son, Amira – her son, other Muslim women/ people and their dear ones. Amira shows her empathy towards Um Wahab and how she sacrificed her only son. Amira is reflecting upon Um Wahab's actions because she herself has one son, she is imagining herself in her position and she states that she will be unwilling to do what Um Wahab did. But what Um Wahab did is exemplary from Amira's point of view and that is why she chose Um Wahab in particular rather than any other woman who was present in the battle of Karbala.

Amira is unconventional in her choice of Um Wahab as the woman she feels close to instead of Zayneb as other women in this study do. Amira is unconventional as well in the means that led her to admire Um Wahab more, she did not restrict herself to what preachers say, she took the initiative and did some readings and she also took in what she watched on TV. Being unconventional suggests that Amira is not a person who discriminates against others for their religious beliefs (see chapter 7, 7.3.3), she admires people who are true and sincere in the things they do even if they belong to other sects/ religions. One of the things that led Amira to admire Um Wahab is the fact that she sacrificed her only and newlywed son. Although Amira seems reluctant to sacrifice her son for the sake of something that she believes in, this did not prevent her from appreciating this sacrifice when done by others.

5.2.2 Narratives of Transformation

In the following extract (11th of December 2014), Asma describes how she learns from the *majales* and in particular how she transformed from being a selfish person into an altruistic person when she moved from Baghdad to Karbala. Prior to the interviewer's question which has brought out Asma's narrative below, Asma was talking about the importance of the participation of people regardless of their sectarian or religious backgrounds in the Husseini rituals.

1.	Inter.	do you try to apply the things
2.		you listen to
3.		for example have you attended a majlis one day
4.		and the preacher said something
5.		and you decided to follow
6.		what he said
7.	Asma	uhmm uhmm (.) one which is altruism altruism is something really important
8.		I (.) especially before I move to Karbala
9.		didn't have this love for altruism (.)
10.		I used to love having every good thing to myself (.)
11.		I was selfish (.)
12.		when I realized the cause of Imam Hussein and his household peace be upon them but not necessarily Imam Hussein's cause (.)
13.		*but it's the one*
14.		*that's really distinguished because* uh (.)
15.		*because* uh *it is a case*

16.		*that provoked conscience* so altruism
17.		for example we have Lady Al-Zahraa peace be upon her who
18.		as I mentioned
19.		is the mother of Hassan and Hussein peace be upon them
20.		when a poor man came and knocked on her door
21.		she didn't have anything to give
22.		but she gave him her wedding dress
23.		uhm this isn't easy to give the dress of her wedding
24.		or when a poor person knocked on their door
25.		and they were fasting for three days (.)
26.		I mean who stands hunger for three days
27.		they gave their food to the poor
28.		this is also not an easy thing
29.		this is a high level of altruism
30.		not many people can make it up to that state
31.		it won't come easily
32.	Inter.	yeah yes
33.	Asma	it's not
34.		you want to favour others over yourself
35.		and that's it
36.		you become a lover of altruism of course not (.)
37.		this is a matter of a blessing from Allah [God]
38.		as we say (.)
39.		I started to have this love for altruism
40.		for example when I want to make du'a
41.		I started to mention others and pray for them
42.		before I pray for myself
43.		wish others luck
44.		before I wish it to myself
45.		uh for example even with simple things when I make a **sandwich** for my husband
46.		I choose the best thing for him
47.		and favour him upon myself
48.		I have noticed that the one who loves altruism
49.		will be well rewarded

In this extract Asma, like Amira above, combines two narratives, personal and religious which again show how far the Husseini texts are integrated into their daily lives. The personal narrative is the matrix narrative within which a religious narrative is embedded. In the personal narrative, Asma talks about her experience with the concept of altruism:

1.	one which is altruism altruism is something really important	7	Abstract
2.	I (.) especially before I move to Karbala	8	

	didn't have this love for altruism (.)	9	Orientation
	I used to love having every good thing to myself (.)	10	
	I was selfish (.)	11	
3.	when I realized the cause of Imam Hussein and his household peace be upon them	12	Complication
4.	I started to have this love for altruism	38	Resolution
	for example when I want to make du'a	40	
	I started to mention others and pray for them	41	
	before I pray for myself	42	
	wish others luck	43	
	before I wish it to myself	44	
	uh for example even with simple things when I make a **sandwich** for my husband	45	
	I choose the best thing for him	46	
	and favour him upon myself	47	
5.	I have noticed that the one who loves altruism	48	Coda
	will be well rewarded	49	

Asma is the protagonist of this narrative, other characters are involved as well, and these are: Imam Hussein and his household, Asma's husband and unnamed others. In the orientation, she portrays herself as a selfish person in the past but through her acquaintance with Hussein's story in the narrated complicating actions that resulted in her transformation she abandoned this selfishness. In the story world, the change in character is presented to co-occur with changes in place; Asma is portrayed as selfish in Baghdad but she becomes an altruistic person in Karbala. When it comes to Asma not many actions are involved: the change that happened is more a change in her state moving from selfishness to altruism. It is a change that is related to her way of thinking, her mentality, and her way of perceiving things. The only visible action appears in the narrative's resolution where she illustrates how she practises altruism in daily activities.

In order to illustrate the concept of 'altruism' Asma provides a religious narrative:

1.	for example we have Lady Al-Zahraa peace be upon her	17	Abstract
2.	-	-	Orientation
3.	when a poor man came and knocked on her door	20	Complication
	she didn't have anything to give	21	
	or when a poor person knocked on their door	24	
	and they were fasting for three days (.)	25	
4.	but she gave him her wedding dress	22	Resolution
	they gave their food to the poor	27	
5.	-	-	Coda

This narrative is related to Hussein's mother and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima Al-Zahraa. In this embedded narrative Asma combines two well-known stories in order to bring out Al-Zahraa as the main character in the story, i.e. she is the one around her the events revolve. The first part of the narrative is about a well-known incident in the Shi'i literature. This story has two characters, Al-Zahraa, the protagonist of this story, and the poor man. The poor man is the one who triggered the series of events by coming and knocking on the door. Asma emphasises Al-Zahraa's role here by saying that the man knocked on 'her' door as if the man came to her in particular and not to anyone else. This is true in relation to the original story because it says that this poor man was sent by the Prophet himself to his daughter Fatima. In the second part of the narrative more characters along with Al-Zahraa are involved; this second part of the narrative is also related to a well-known story about Al-Zahraa's family when they were fasting to fulfil a vow that they all had made and then a poor man came and knocked on their door asking for food, they offered him their food. This fasting story was also mentioned with further details by the preacher in one of his sermons during the first thirteen days of Muharram in 2014. Asma in the two stories related to Al-Zahraa emphasises 'giving' as a particular form of altruism. This 'giving' is performed towards people Al-Zahraa and her family are not related to, in both stories the two poor men were strangers. In addition to this, this 'giving' is done while they did not have enough, i.e. in the first story Al-Zahraa gave her

wedding dress (taking into consideration the emotional aspect attached to it) and in the second they gave their food despite the fact that they were fasting.

To sum up, just like Amira's, Asma's interview and her use of narrative show how she integrates the *majales* and the Husseini cause into her daily life in order to deal with others. Asma interweaves two stories together, a personal and a religious story. Asma constructs herself as a transformed person: she was a selfish person but after being acquainted with Hussein's cause she changed her way of behaving and abandoned this selfishness. The religious story is used as a model in this process of transformation into altruism (see Wortham (2001) for similar narratives of transformation).

5.2.3 Narratives of Action and Agency
In the following extract (20th of November 2014) Walaa talks about her teachings to young girls in both Iraq and Cardiff, which is for her a way of 'doing' the *majales*.

1.	Inter.	ok some time ago I attended uh
2.		it was a women's majlis
3.	Walaa	yeah
4.	Inter.	and you were teaching the children
5.	Walaa	yes
6.	Inter.	good in which way this was done
7.		I didn't know how
8.		did you teach them
9.		or did they learn by themselves
10.		I mean
11.		did you give them directions
12.		and then they went and memorized at home
13.	Walaa	yes although some of them couldn't make it and attend
14.	Inter.	yes
15.	Walaa	at the beginning in general I like young girls (.)
16.		and in Karbala when I used to hold women's majales there
17.		I used to dedicate the last day for young girls
18.		that's why
19.		I know how to deal with //th//
20.	Inter.	//with// them
21.	Walaa	yes with this age group that I //like//
22.	Inter.	//yes//
23.	Walaa	and that's why
24.		I like dealing with them
25.		and before this when my daughters started to grow up
26.		I made a seminar at my house and invited the neighbours the relatives
27.		those who have young girls
28.		who are as old as my daughters (.)
29.		I started to teach them

30.		the things I know like Islamic law a little bit of doctrines a little bit of Quran
31.		so this thing started to be part of me
32.		I can't abandon it
33.	Inter.	ok
34.	Walaa	yes so whenever I see young girls
35.		I like gathering //them//
36.	Inter.	//teaching// them
37.	Walaa	teaching them and letting them know
38.		that I care about them

Walaa held *majales* and seminars and she was the one who invited others to bring their daughters to her to teach. In terms of Labov's (1972a) framework, Walaa's narrative displays the following structure:

1.	at the beginning in general I like young girls	15	Abstract
2.	in Karbala when I used to hold women's majales there	16	Orientation
	I used to dedicate the last day for young girls	17	
3.	and before this when my daughters started to grow up	25	Complication
	I made a seminar at my house and invited the neighbours the relatives	26	
	those who have young girls	27	
	who are as old as my daughters (.)	28	
	I started to teach them	29	
	the things I know like Islamic law a little bit of doctrines a little bit of Quran	30	
4.	so this thing started to be part of me	31	Resolution
	I can't abandon it	32	
5.	yes so whenever I see young girls	34	Coda
	I like to gather them	35	

In this narrative Walaa is the protagonist, she is the one who carries out all actions (e.g. lines 16, 17, 26 & 29) and knows a lot (e.g. lines 19 & 30). Other characters are involved in this narrative but not many details are given about them; these are neighbours, relatives, young girls and Walaa's daughters who are all left unnamed.

Spatial movement, just like with Asma's narrative, has its importance. Two places are involved in this narrative: Karbala, which is named, and Cardiff, which is left unnamed

but can be understood from the context. A parallelism exists between these two places: when she was in Karbala, Walaa used to teach young girls and when she moved to Cardiff she kept on doing the same. Thus, Walaa shows some consistent positioning by keeping the role of the teacher in both places and throughout the story. Space/ place is relevant to the particular type of narrative Walaa engages with and the positioning she takes. Being in Karbala has offered her the chance of being familiar with her surroundings and so she is able to hold *majlaes* and seminars in her house there. Also being there allowed her to know others, to have her acquaintances with whom she feels at ease and invites them over to her house. Cardiff has also offered Walaa the chance to participate in *majlaes* and to have leading roles (see chapter 4, section 4.3.3.2, Walaa's profile) but this leading role is restricted by others (see chapter 4, section 4.3.1). So, places assist Walaa in reflecting on her past: this is the way I used to do things when I was in Karbala (lines 16, 17 & 25- 30); to talk about her current situation: this is the way I do things in Cardiff (lines 31-32); and to reflect on her future: this is what I will do if I will meet young girls in the future probably no matter where (lines 34, 35, 37 & 38).

To sum up, Walaa, like Asma, makes use of the spatial movement that she has made to reflect upon her relationship with Hussein and *majales*. She used to teach young girls when she was in Karbala, moving away from Karbala did not prevent her from taking on this teaching role. As if she has laid down the basis for this teaching role in Karbala and now she is trying to take it on in any place she goes to. In spite of this agency on her part Walaa evaluates herself by minimising the things she is doing and thus presenting herself as a modest person. She does not say that she knows many things; in line 30 she is referring to herself as someone who knows little about things but this does not prevent her from taking on a teaching role and so identifies herself as a teacher. Walaa has an active role of agency. She takes a lot of actions which positions her in the above narrative as a woman who is active and in control. She used to be a teacher in Karbala and she is willing and ready to keep this role of a modest teacher in Cardiff.

5.2.4 Narratives of Learning
This section contains a narrative of learning but the one involved is not the narrator herself but her young son. The analysed extract is from Hanaa (17th of December 2015). Prior to this extract Hanaa was talking about the effect of changing places on the way and the amount she and her family participate in the rituals.

1.	Hanaa	let me give you an example about my son
2.		my son (.) last year (.) didn't attend many [majales]
3.		and didn't understand much
4.	Inter.	how old is he
5.	Hanaa	now he finished six (.)
6.		this year no his understanding is more for the situation uh his understanding (.)
7.		uh but he is **confuse**(d) in a great way
8.		because uh uh you know
9.		the Husseiniya is uh
10.		it was a church
11.	Inter.	yeah
12.	Hanaa	and they turned it into a Husseiniya
13.	Inter.	yeah
14.	Hanaa	so my son considers all the churches here Husseiniyat [plural of Husseiniyia]
15.	Inter.	uhmm (chuckles)
16.	Hanaa	so he's really confused in terms of this
17.	Inter.	yeah
18.	Hanaa	but he calls them all places of Allah Akbar[20] [God is great] places of worship
19.	Inter.	yeah
20.	Hanaa	so there are some things
21.		last year for example he didn't know
22.		what it means to do the latam [chest-beating] for Hussein to attend to sit down to listen and so on
23.		but this year no he's better
24.	Inter.	aha
25.	Hanaa	let's say there is an **update** for the situation
26.		because when my son first came here he was only three years or three and a half
27.		which means he couldn't figure things out
28.	Inter.	uhmm
29.	Hanaa	but this year I see
30.		that he is better

The extract shows two aspects: the learning process that is done through *majales* and the effect of changing places on Hanaa and her family, her son in particular. It is given as an example of how they cannot stay away from the rituals in spite of the new environment. The extract encapsulates Hanaa's orientation to the *majales*; she considers them as a training ground or a source from which role models can be derived. In terms of Labov's framework, the narrative is analysed as follows:

1.	let me give you an example about my son	1	Abstract
2.	my son (.) last year (.) didn't attend many	2	Orientation

	[majales]		
	and didn't understand much	3	
3.	he is **confuse**(d) in a great way	7	
	because uh uh you know	8	
	the Husseiniya is uh	9	
	it was a church	10	
	and they turned it into a Husseiniya	12	
	so my son considers all the churches here Husseiniyat [plural of Husseiniya]	14	Complication
	so he's really confused in terms of this	16	
	but he calls them all places of Allah Akbar [God is great] places of worship	18	
	last year for example he didn't know	21	
	what it means to do the latam [chest-beating] for Hussein to attend to sit down to listen and so on	22	
4.	but this year no he's better	23	Resolution/ Evaluation
5.	let's say there is an **update** for the situation	25	Coda/ Evaluation

Hanna's son, who is unnamed, is the main character. She mentions others when she talks about the transformation of the church into a mosque; she uses the pronoun 'they' which does not specify to whom it exactly refers to but it can be understood that it refers to people who worked on this transformation. Two time periods are involved, the year of the interview (2015) which is referred to in the narrative as 'this year' and the year that preceded it, which is referred to in the narrative as 'last year'. Places are also mentioned: the Islamic Centre where the rituals took place which is referred to as the '*Husseiniya*' and other churches that Hanaa's son passes by. Hanaa talks about her son who at the time of the interview was six years old. She is making a comparison between his situation in the year of the interview and the previous year. Hanaa's son is presented as a changed person between the two years mentioned above. In 2014 he could not recognize why they went to the Islamic Centre but in 2015 he is able to do so which suggests that he went through a learning process during this period of time. In this

narrative, Hanaa evaluates her son's position, which is a positive evaluation as opposed to a series of negative evaluations preceding, to be better than it was used to be and this is obvious from the way she puts it in line (23). Hanaa's son has gone through a learning process which enabled him to figure out the practices that are done in a *Husseiniya* like chest-beating and listening to the preacher. But this knowledge is still incomplete because he considers all churches he passes by to serve the same function, i.e. to do the job of a *Husseiniya*, he also struggles with giving places the right name so he uses the opening phrase of the call for prayers 'Allah Akbar' to refer to the *Husseiniya*. This use of 'Allah Akbar' shows that he is being attentive to the rituals that are practised around him when he goes to the *Husseiniya*, he hears the call for prayers and sees people performing their prayers there and this part was kept in his memory. So, as Hanaa states in the narrative, he is in a state of confusion but this confusion is lifting up gradually as she states in line 25 by stating that there is an 'update' to his situation. Hanaa use of the English word 'update' could be linked to her academic major as a computer engineer. Hanaa, in a way, is portraying her son in terms of software that is updated each year. The switch to English probably acts as an additional marker to emphasise the positive evaluation and transformation. Also by saying so Hanaa is hinting to the way in which she wants her son to be.

In sum, Hanaa did not attend many *majales* when she moved to Cardiff due to life commitments (see chapter 4, section 4.4.3.2, Hanaa's profile) but she wants her son to attend them, she wants him to be raised in the same way she was raised and through this she presents herself as a dedicated mother who wishes her children good things. She tells a narrative in which she shows how her son struggles with the differentiation between mosques and churches but learning eventually. Spatial movement is also noted in this narrative. It is not a movement between countries or cities but rather a movement among local spaces, i.e. the *Husseiniya* that was originally a church and the other churches around Hanaa's son. Despite the confusion caused by the outer shapes of worshipping places, Hanaa considers her son in a better position because he is able to figure out that when he goes to a *majlis* he needs to sit down and listen to what is said which entails learning and change is his ability of comprehending the rituals. Being in the diaspora is the cause behind Hana's son confusion because in Iraq and in Muslim countries in general mosques have their own distinguished architecture which usually cannot be missed. To live in a foreign country in which there is some overlap between

Muslim and Christian worshipping places causes confusion for young children, a confusion which can be lifted up through learning. And this narrative has depicted this process of learning which is related to *majales* and diaspora.

5. 3 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on how women talk about 'doing *majales*' and analyses their narratives about *majales* in terms of holding, participating, and learning from them and their use as a means in the construction of identity in diaspora. I investigated this in terms of the first level of Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model, which analyses the ways in which characters within narratives are construed, combined with a Labovian approach which shows the way narratives are structured. This first level revolves around "the orchestration of characters with regard to one another at the level of what is being talked about" (Bamberg, 1997b: 221). The analysis has focused on events, people, and places as they are discursively construed in the story world. The way stories are told shows the use of embedded narratives, the interviewed women weave in these narratives their personal stories with religious stories. This embedding shows how texts for Muharram become integrated into daily lives and identity formation. This embedding is also an index of the parallelism that exists between their personal daily lives and the events of the Karbala story. When narrating, these women bring in two aspects and juxtapose them, i.e. the sacred and the earthly. This juxtaposition helps them to make comparisons, make conclusions and reach solutions for their everyday life problems. The sacred, for them, is not a historical story that is repeated; lessons are derived from the sacred stories and these lessons have practical applications in their daily lives. Applications that enable them to learn and eventually change. Parallelism as a technique is also used with regard to places where again the participants draw parallelism between Karbala and Cardiff as two places that allow them to reflect on their daily lives, religious practices and their attendance in the *majales*.

Different types of stories have been produced by the participants like stories of transformation and learning. Transformation stories were related to changes in personality due to changing places and stories related to the change that occurred within *majales*' focus and purpose (cf. Hegland, 1983; Deeb, 2005 and Pandya, 2010). From

stories related to learning from the *majales* and building comparisons with everyday life events and the Karbala story events, the participants have learned patience, endurance of hardships and resilience. In other words, learning stories entail the idea of having a role model in life which has proved to be prevalent in the narratives of these Shi'i Muslim women. Other types of stories have also been produced like stories related to empathy, reflections upon life and practices, socialising children from young age to the religious practices of their parents (cf. Takim, 2000; Pandya, 2010 and Perdersen, 2014) and stories of suffering, alienation and non-belonging.

Moving places plays a central role in the narratives of these four women. Since they all come from Karbala they could not resist comparing the way *majales* were done there with the way they are done in Cardiff. All these four women tried to carry on the practices they used to do in Karbala to the diaspora; this is presented as a way of maintaining the rituals, which is part of who they are (cf. Schubel, 1996; Takim, 2000 and Pedersen, 2014). To move from Karbala to Cardiff leads Asma to evaluate her situation in terms of attending *majales* and her relationship with Hussein. Walaa uses this change of place to reflect not only on her past, as Asma does, but also to reflect on her present and future. Walaa used to teach young girls in Karbala, moving to Cardiff did not prevent her from pursuing this again and she shows willingness to keep on doing so in the future. Hanaa is aware of the effects of this move on her children especially because they are very young and are so unlikely to remember how things were done in Karbala. For her it is important that her son knows Hussein even if he gets confused about things that are related to him now.

The analysis adopted in this chapter has helped in bringing out the way women 'do' *majales* and the significance of this to the women involved. This analysis adds to the information gathered in the field, i.e. to ethnography. As stated in chapter three, ethnography provides the wider context for the study while linguistics provides detailed analysis which brings out the details of interaction that might be missed out within the wider context. Through the first positioning level of Bamberg's (1997a) model, we have gained access to the characters, places and events that are associated with talk about *majales* (or doing *majales*) in my interviews. This level helps in showing how these four women construe characters like themselves and their loved ones in the narratives told. The themes that have revealed under this level of analysis point to the fact that narrating these stories is not a mere act of telling but a way of interacting in terms of

these themes (level 2) and of making sense of their lives and activities in the diaspora through the promulgation of certain underlying master narratives (level 3). One important aspect that will be picked up in the next chapter is the exploitation of the shared knowledge that both the interviewer and the interviewee possess. This shared knowledge has been used in the narratives above but since it serves an interpersonal meaning the discussion of it will be included in the next chapter. The themes derived from this first level will also be used in the analysis included in chapter 7 where the third level of Bamberg's model is employed. The third level is concerned with how narrators position/ define themselves as particular kind of people. The themes brought out in this chapter and the next will therefore help in identifying the master narratives these women orient to when they engage in the telling of narratives of their individual lives.

Chapter Six: Talking about *Majales*

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we analysed a number of narratives in which the tellers and others were constructed as participants in a story world. However, as Bamberg (1997a) points out, a narrative event is never simply an act of telling but also an occasion of interaction. The interaction that takes place within the interview setting is highlighted by De Fina (2009: 237) who argues that "interviews are interactional events, not artificial social encounters and that we should treat them as such". Thus this chapter addresses the question of how diasporic Muslim women position themselves in the act of telling stories about Muharram and *majales* – particularly, when they tell these stories to an interviewer who belongs to the same cultural and religious group. Bamberg's (1997a) second level of his narrative positioning model is employed in exploring this question.

This second level is different from the first level of analysis in that the first level deals with how the story world is set out and how the characters are positioned in relation to each other within story world events. For the first level, attention was paid to references to characters (e.g. naming strategies) and references to time and place in order to understand how characters are positioned in the story world. For the second level the focus is on interpersonal and interactional features such the use of pronouns, terms of address, etc. (see chapter 3, section 3.3). The focus of this chapter is not on the activities of the narrative but the affective language in the telling of the narratives and the talk around the narratives.

The following sections address how interpersonal meanings are created through the telling of narratives within the interview setting and how the co-construction of identity through the telling of these narratives about *majales* is done. The way a story is told and the way the speaker frames the telling and interacts with the hearer are identity work in that they tell us about the assumptions, subjectivities, common ground, interpersonal positioning and the salience given to key episodes and ideas. The narrative extracts which are included under the sections below have been chosen because they show diversity in terms of both how the questions were set up by the interviewer and the responses produced by the interviewees. This diversity is expected to reveal a variety of positions and choices of narratives.

6.2 Amira the advice-giver

This first extract comes from an interview with Amira (15th December 2014) which was presented in the previous chapter (see 5.2.1.1). At this point in the interaction Amira and the interviewer have been talking about whether Amira feels bored or too familiar with the Karbala story to the extent that she might consider not attending the *majales*. Through this question, the interviewer first states something about the *majales* which is derived from the cultural knowledge and expectations that she shares with the interviewee and from her observations both as a Shi'i used to attending the *majales* and as a researcher who has conducted fieldwork in an Islamic Shi'i Centre. She states that *majales* have the element of repetition, i.e. repeating the story of Karbala (lines 4, 5 & 7). Then she comes up with a hypothetical situation in which she depicts Amira as someone who might be bored with this repetition (lines 8-11). This question is a restricting question in a way because it brings in the idea of boredom and asks the interviewee to either agree or disagree with it.

1.	Inter.	ok for example when you attend a majlis
2.		and you said you are from Karbala
3.	Amira	yes
4.	Inter.	usually majales year after year tell the story of Karbala
5.		that hasn't changed
6.	Amira	yeah
7.	Inter.	and almost it's repeated in every majlis
8.		have you ever thought
9.		that you know the story
10.		and it's repeated more than once
11.		and so you don't want to attend any more majales (.)
12.	Amira	no it depends on the style
13.		actually we choose the preacher
14.		that has style
15.		yes it's right
16.		that if you try to tell any story
17.		even if it's told to a child
18.		that child might get bored with it
19.	Inter.	yeah
20.	Amira	but there are preachers
21.		who have a very nice style
22.		and whenever you listen to them
23.		you feel

24.		as if the story happens now (.)
25.		so it depends on the style
26.		secondly you can't be bored with it
27.		such a story has to be repeated
28.		because as I told you
29.		we go through different situations
30.		for example concerning- the other day I went through a bad situation
31.		because I felt worried about my brother
32.		so whenever I hear the story [the battle of Karbala story]
33.		I say
34.		may Allah help her [Zayneb, Imam Hussein's sister]
35.		how she endured all this pain
36.		and how she managed (.)
37.		while for me he [her brother] just got ill
38.		and stayed in bed
39.		and I couldn't help it
40.	Inter.	yeah
41.	Amira	after this [incident] as if it's the first time
42.		in which I hear the story of Lady Zayneb
43.		there're certain incidents
44.		you wouldn't feel the calamity of Lady Zayneb
45.		unless you go through similar situations
46.	Inter.	right
47.	Amira	you'd really feel her suffering
48.	Inter.	uhmm
49.	Amira	whenever I hear her story
50.		I feel her pain
51.		and how she may Allah help her endured all these calamities
52.		while for me I couldn't endure
53.		that my brother stayed in bed
54.		how about her and her brother's head was cut off (.)
55.		in comparison with her mine is nothing

As indicated in 5.2.1.1 in the previous chapter, the narrative included in this extract is a narrative of suffering and epiphany which shows Amira's strong emotional reaction towards the Karbala story which informs her personal story. A change occurs after going through a bad situation which allows Amira to compare her situation and empathise with Zayneb, Hussein's sister. At the time of the interview, Amira is aware of this change of perspective so she is taking a stance towards her 'old' self.

In her response to the interviewer's question, Amira shows her stance towards the idea of boredom. In line (12) Amira uses negation to show her counter-stance towards the proposition offered by the interviewer regarding the ideas of boredom and repetition that might be associated with attending *majales*. In line (13) Amira refutes the interviewer's suggestion that she might be tiring of *majales* by offering her counter-argument which is introduced by the use of the word 'actually'[21]. By using 'actually' she is making a link with the interviewer's utterance which went before and introducing her explanation for the stance she takes, i.e., why she does not agree with what the interviewer said in the preceding lines. Amira picks up the idea of boredom which is suggested by the interviewer and gives a hypothetical situation to agree initially with this idea (lines 15-18). Then she comes up with an elaboration which shows her counter-stance to this idea of boredom. Lines 15-18 can be interpreted as a mitigated dispreferred second within an adjacency pair (Coulthard, 1985; Ervin- Tripp, 1993). Ervin- Tripp (1993:253) highlights the distinctive features of dispreferred seconds as:

> delayed or displaced, and [were] marked or elaborated by mitigations preface markers like "well…", token agreements, apologies, mitigations, hedges, indirection, explanations, or excuses. Examples of dispreferred seconds are: rejecting an invitation, side stepping a question, refusing an offer, agreeing or disagreeing with another's self-criticism and accepting blame which seems to be dispreferred.

Amira is probably trying to avoid coming up immediately with her disagreement which is a dispreferred second and might be interpreted as rude. So, she mitigates this dispreferred second by coming up with a hypothetical situation about telling the same story to a child. The reason behind the worthiness of the story of Karbala being repeated is explained in the lines which contain a narrative about what happened to her when her brother got ill. Amira is telling this narrative to justify to the interviewer the reason a story like the Karbala story has to be repeated. She explains that the boredom aspect does not apply to the story of Karbala because it is not like any other story for the reasons she mentions in the extract above which are derived from her daily life experiences. This narrative helps in enhancing the stance of disagreement Amira takes concerning the accusation triggered by the interviewer to *majales* and their repetitive

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[21] This word is a translation of the Arabic word '*alsaraha*' which when translated into English would mean something equal to 'actually' or 'honestly'.

nature. As mentioned in chapter 5, section 5.2.1.1, the extract included in this section is a complex one which interweaves Amira's personal story with Zayneb's, Hussein's sister, religious story. Amira's coming up with a personal story which she then intermingles with a religious story enhances the stance of disagreement and makes it more convincing.

In lines (32-36, 51 & 54) Amira expresses both her evaluation and empathy towards Zayneb. She evaluates her situation as a difficult one and that is why she empathises with her. When she talks about Zayneb she uses the verb 'feel' to show her empathy towards her. 'Feel' is a 'private verb' which is according to Biber (1988: 242) expresses "intellectual states (e.g., believe) or nonobservable intellectual acts (e.g. discover)". In line (47) she precedes 'feel' by the intensifier 'really' to show how much she empathises with her. The use of the verb 'feel' along with the use of the intensifier might signal how changed Amira is after her brother got ill and how this made her change the way she perceives Zayneb's situation. In lines (43-45) Amira moves from the specific to the generic; in other words, she moves from the story about her brother and the embedded story about Zayneb to make a statement about something general. Although these lines still mention Zayneb and her situation, Zayneb's situation is used by Amira to stand for any difficult situation, as if she is saying that 'you would not appreciate how difficult situations look like unless you yourself go through one'. Amira in these lines steps out of the narrative world to the here and now of the interview situation.

The interviewer's question is constructed in a narrative mode where lines (1 and 2) represent the orientation of this narrative since they place the narrative in time and place. The main character in this narrative is Amira who is from Karbala. Lines (4-5 & 7-10) contain the complicating action which refers to how the story of Karbala is almost always repeated in the *majales*. Line (11) is the resolution of this narrative. The question being asked in this way might be the reason behind Amira's answer in the form of narrative.

The interactional situation is a research interview in which there is an interviewer and an interviewee who are both aware of the purpose of this interview. On the other hand they are both Shi'is who are accustomed to attending *majales* and who know the story

of Karbala. Coming up with the question of boredom, the interviewer shows that she is trying to abide by the rules of the interview setting because if she sticks to her Shi'i identity only she would not have come up with such a question. Amira also seems to be aware of the interview setting and this is shown through her reply and how she aligns first with the interviewer but then presents her counter-stance. By doing so, Amira positions herself as a knowledgeable person who is aware of the potential boredom aspect in the *majales*, boredom for children but this boredom is justifiable from her point of view.

Amira incorporates the interviewer within this interview/ interaction setting by making use of the common/ shared knowledge they both have as Shi'is who are familiar with the story of Karbala. By making use of this shared knowledge, Amira positions herself as someone who has something in common with the interviewer. She narrates the religious story in a reverse order and without giving many details. She also makes use of shared deictics like when she talks about Zayneb (line 34), she uses the pronoun 'her' rather than stating obviously her name. She also does not give many details about what happened in the battle of Karbala. In lines (35, 36 and 51) she states that Zayneb managed and endured pain but managed what and which pain are not clear; this gets clearer in a subsequent line (54): her brother was killed. Even her brother's name is not stated but since the interviewer knows Zayneb and knows the story of Karbala the interview goes on without interruptions or requests for clarification. The embedded narrative, as stated in chapter 5, is not told in a chronological order but rather in a reverse order. Amira starts with the coda, resolution and then she gives the complicating action. She also does not give any orientation which would place the story in time and place and would tell the listener about the characters involved in the narrative. Amira relies also on her listener's knowledge of the story and its characters; she might have told this story differently if the interviewer was someone who is not familiar with the story of Karbala. The effect of narrating the story in this way helps in positioning Amira as a Shi'i woman who knows the literature related to *Ahlulbayt*. It also helps her to build rapport with the interviewer. She knows that the interviewer is a Shi'i herself and is conducting this interview to ask her about the Shi'i rituals related to Muharram and Safar, so she is shaping her narrative in this way by taking her interlocutor's knowledge and interests into consideration. Amira also builds rapport

with the interviewer through the use of 'Allah' phrases in lines (34 & 51). Arabs and Muslims are known for their use of such phrases. According to Morrow:

> the Arabic language is saturated with a rich variety of expressions invoking Allah explicitly or implicitly and ... the name Allah permeates both spoken and written Arabic to the point where we can speak of the omnipresence of Allah in the Arabic language. As a result, an Arabic speaker could scarcely conceive of a conversation where the name of God would not appear.

(Morrow, 2006: 45)

In addition to showing her evaluation to Zayneb's situation and how empathetic she is towards her, the use of such phrases helps Amira to build rapport with the interviewer. Such stock cultural phrases are built around the background both Amira and the interviewer share. They both share the same religion and culture and thus a sense of community is invoked here.

The embedded narrative, in particular, appears to be an indirect invitation to the listener to take Zayneb as example as Amira does. The embedded story helps Amira to offer a lesson to the interviewer. By telling this narrative Amira indicates that she takes Zayneb as an example and in this way she is inviting the listener to take Zayneb as an example too. This relies on the shared knowledge between the two speakers as Amira invites the listener to think of Zayneb as a role model since Amira has followed her and that was fruitful to her. What is significant about this extract in terms of design is the way in which Amira makes this comparison between her situation and that of Zayneb. Amira refers to Zayneb throughout this extract and since Amira has gone through a 'difficult' situation herself that would make her story reliable, she could be taken as a first-hand experiencer and so her indirect advice can be taken up by the interviewer, i.e. Amira positions herself to the interviewer as an advice- giver.

In sum, according to Johnstone (1996:57): "Speakers create selves in narrative through choices of theme (you are the history you create) and language (you are how you talk)." In the narrative above Amira employs the shared knowledge that both she and the interviewer have to build rapport with the interviewer and to position herself as a fellow Shi'i. She achieves this through telling a story about Zayneb which suggests that she

knows the Shi'i literature to the extent that she can relate everyday experiences with similar incidents in this literature. The way she constructs the embedded narrative shows this as well since she knows the story she expects her listener who is a Shi'i too to have the same knowledge about the story she tells. That is why she does not give the minute details of this story which she tells in a reverse order relying on the listener's shared knowledge. Amira also positions herself to the interviewer as a changed person; someone who went through a bad situation and this situation triggers a resemblance in the literature she is familiar with and this helps her to change the way she perceives things. This in turn allows Amira to take on the position of advice-giver because she experienced first- hand going through a bad situation and this bad situation made her think of Zayneb's situation. This reflective process led her to change the way she perceives things and as she indicates in the extract above. Having this first-hand knowledge makes her position as advice-giver more convincing.

6.3 Asma the orthodox critic

The narrative extract included here is derived from an interview with Asma (11th of December 2014). This extract is initiated by the interviewer's question about the negative points Asma had noticed about *majales* held in Cardiff.

> Inter.: ok uh (.) through your participation in the majales held here [in Cardiff] have you felt anything negative about them that you wish to be fixed or have you noticed that the people who are in charge of these majales have missed a point or something

The interviewer and the interviewee's roles in the interview setting are complementary roles which contribute to the co-construction of the identity work being done. The interviewer's question is a leading/ restricting question because it restricts the answer to the negative points related to the *majales* held in Cardiff. The interviewer presupposes that the *majales* held in Cardiff have some negative aspects about them and presupposes that Asma will share these feelings. This presupposition is attributed to two reasons: first, since Cardiff is not a (Shi'i) Muslim city then the *majales* held in it may not be perfect; and second, that Karbala, where Asma is from, is the 'centre' in terms of the *majales* (see chapter 4). This presupposes that Asma will be able to figure out any

negative points in the *majales* due to her familiarity with them when she was living in Karbala. The interviewer seems to be taking these two points into consideration when posing the question and putting it in this way.

1.	Asma	unfortunately when women attend Hussein's majales
2.		they don't appreciate this point (.)
3.		I mean (.)
4.		this is the most thing [I have noticed]
5.	Inter.	in which way they don't appreciate it
6.	Asma	they don't appreciate that Lady Zayneb
7.		Imam Hussein peace be upon him
8.		and Ahlulbayt all died for the protection of Islam and the protection of Muslim women to keep them chaste and honoured (.) to teach them
9.		how a woman should be precious how to glorify and protect herself (.)
10.		we have in religion if
11.		Allah forbid
12.		you want to degenerate into vice
13.		there are steps
14.		the first step you can begin with is indecent clothes (.)
15.		the second step is inappropriate [forbidden] relationships (.)
16.		*the bad things we commit will be shown upon our psychological status without us noticing* (.)
17.		*these will change our entity and our spirituality without us noticing*
18.		to the extent that we eventually find ourselves the worst people
19.		those who don't care about justice
20.		this will affect your way of thinking and evaluation to justice in our present time (.) so (.)
21.		I notice that they don't appreciate the cause of Imam Hussein
22.		they don't appreciate the veil of Lady Zayneb
23.		peace be upon her
24.		the veil of Hussein's children
25.		peace be upon them (.)
26.		uhmm I don't know
27.		but I feel sad
28.		when I see such women
29.		who don't appreciate the Husseini cause
30.		Imam Hussein peace be upon him died for what
31.		he died for religion for prayers now the simplest thing
32.		let me criticize something Muslims do
33.		today for example- why Imam Hussein peace be upon him died
34.		he died for prayers
35.		what prayers mean (.)
36.		prayers mean
37.		that I allocate a time for God to talk to Him
38.		prayers are soliloquies

39.		I ask Him for forgiveness
40.		ask Him for guidance
41.		ask Him to make me a useful member in community
42.		ask Him-God to give me children
43.		who'll become good members in community (.) so (.)
44.		what I criticize about Muslim men and women is that
45.		when it's prayers time and we have a **compulsory course** for example
46.		today we have had a **compulsory course**
47.		we can ask for permission from our teacher for fifteen minutes during which
48.		I can go to pray
49.		and then come back
50.		we have to respect this time with God the time of soliloquy with God
51.		now if the head of your school the head
52.		I won't say your supervisor
53.		if he comes
54.		and calls you
55.		won't you go to him
56.		you go
57.	Inter.	yes
58.	Asma	you'd apologize from those
59.		who are around you [and go to him] (.)
60.		so we have to appreciate the principles for which
61.		Imam Hussein and his household were brutally killed

Asma acknowledges that there are negative points related to *majales* and her reply follows the restrictive nature of the interviewer's question, i.e. she talks about the negative aspects she has noticed about the *majales*. Through this extract, Asma takes up an interpersonal stance of moral evaluation which positions her as a critic of others' behaviours. She criticises two things: firstly, women who do not show appreciation towards Imam Hussein and his cause by not abiding by the rules of the Islamic teachings regarding their way of dressing. Secondly, she criticises Muslim(s) (colleagues) who do not respect prayer times.

Asma shows her stance towards women's non-compliance with religious norms of dressing when they attend *majales*. Asma uses 'most' in the superlative form in line (4) to show that women's non-compliance with the teachings of Islam regarding clothes is the thing that attracts her attention most. She feels sad (line 27) about the way they behave and this sets her up in the role of a moral evaluator of others' actions.

Asma uses pronouns to show the stance she takes towards those women who do not make it up to her expected standards. Asma uses 'I' versus 'they': I notice that they don't appreciate the cause of Imam Hussein (line 21), they don't appreciate the veil of Lady Zayneb (line 22), I feel sad (line 27) and I see such women (line 28). By using these pronouns and contrasting the actions of others with hers, Asma is taking the stance of a critic who 'notices' what others are doing, feels sad because of their actions and then criticises them. Asma uses generalisation as a design technique to show her stance towards those women. By the use of the adverb 'unfortunately' in line (1), Asma makes a point about non-compliance in general and hence taking up a stance and doing identity work. When Asma talks about those women who do not comply with the Islamic teachings, she uses the present simple tense; she is presenting their actions as a state of fact (lines 1-2, 6-9 & 21-25). She also does not specify a certain kind of women or say that 'some' women do this; instead she generalises her criticism to all the women who attend the *majales* (line 1). In this way Asma changes the nature of her criticism from an individual case to a general case and in so doing she sets up for herself an identity as a critic.

In order to make her stance convincing, Asma comes up with a hypothetical situation about the degeneration into vice which from her point of view is connected to the way women dress. According to Georgakopoulou (2001: 1893) hypothetical situations/ scenarios "enable the tellers to imply rather than explicitly state their views by letting the events speak for themselves". The role of the hypothetical situation in the narrative above is persuasion because as Georgakopoulou (2001: 1896) argues they "invite the addressee to actively adopt a perspective, different to her own, and pursue it to its logical conclusions". Lines (10-20) contain a hypothetical situation about the steps that lead to moral degeneration and one of the key steps, according to Asma, is wearing indecent clothes. In this hypothetical situation, Asma makes use of the 'Allah' phrases to show her moral stance towards the idea of degeneration into vice. In line (11) Asma says 'Allah forbid' which is a formulaic expression used by Asma to avoid bad or unpleasant situations; it is a form of prayer to God to prevent such situations from happening. Asma by using this expression is showing her stance towards the situation she is imagining, i.e. the degeneration into vice, and also assuming a shared stance with the interviewer through the use of such phrase. In this hypothetical situation the use of pronouns is significant as a stance marker. In line (10) Asma talks about religion, i.e.

Islam and since she is a Muslim she uses the inclusive pronoun 'we' which also includes the interviewer and other Muslims, thus projecting her value system onto the interviewer. When she talks about the degeneration into vice she uses the generic 'you' as if she is trying to distance herself from such people (lines 12-15). Asma goes back to the use of inclusive 'we' in lines (16, 17 & 18) probably because we as human beings all commit mistakes and no one is infallible. What distinguishes lines (16 & 17) is that Asma switches from the Iraqi colloquial dialect which is a shared dialect of the two interlocutors to Standard Arabic (SA). Asma's code-switching here might be prompted by two reasons: she either wants to show the seriousness of the situation and that is why she resorts to SA since "SA is associated with religion, mainly Islam, and with history and tradition" (Bassiouney, 2012: 110).Or she wants to distance herself from what she is saying; in other words, she does not want to be that person who changes because of the things they commit. The use of the Iraqi colloquial is more intimate since it is the non-standard form that Iraqis learn first. The use of SA which is more formal and helps Asma to be distant from the things she is talking about. So the switching between the 'we', 'they' pronouns and the different dialects assists in bringing the interlocutors together and separates them from other groups like the one referred to by Asma.

The same technique of generalisation is used in relation to the 'prayers' incident, the second aspect that Asma criticises. Asma gives a specific incident and then she generalises this to all Muslims. Asma criticises Muslim(s) (colleagues) who do not respect prayer times. Asma first refers to the 'prayers' incident as a 'simple thing' then she says she will 'criticize' this 'simple thing'. Although this incident happened to Asma and her Muslim colleagues she does not say that 'we do this' instead she says 'Muslims do' (line 32), i.e. she generalises and this generalisation positions her as a critic. After criticising her colleagues, Asma comes up with a hypothetical situation (lines 51-56 & 58-59) in which she makes an analogy between the relationship that exists between students and supervisors on the one hand and the relationship between worshippers and God on the other. In this hypothetical situation Asma (line 51) repeats the noun phrase 'the head'; this repetition is called 'verbal emphasis' and it is used to emphasise that she is referring to the head of the school in particular and not to anyone else. Asma by repeating the noun phrase 'the head' in line (51) and then saying in line (52) "I won't say your supervisor" draws on the shared knowledge which both she and the interviewer have. Asma is a PhD student, just like the interviewer, who is aware of

the British academic system and who knows that in doing a PhD in the UK a student's supervisor is more important than the head of their school. In this hypothetical situation (lines 51-56 & 58-59), Asma suggests that the head of a school comes first in terms of hierarchy and then the supervisor. Line (52) shifts this equation of hierarchy because she is hinting to the fact that both she and the interviewer know well that the supervisor is the one who comes first for a PhD student. What Asma suggests is: now if someone who is not as important as your supervisor comes to call you, you would go to him, then what about God who is more important. This hypothetical situation is related to the interviewer and Asma's use of it suggests that she is trying to convince the interviewer of what she is saying. By coming up with this hypothetical situation, Asma positions herself as someone who has something in common with the interviewer. The student-supervisor relationship in some way is a re-creation of certain relationships from home where somewhat strict hierarchies exist among such relations. She tries to build rapport with her by the use of a hypothetical situation which draws on the shared experiences they both have as PhD students in the UK. By the use of this hypothetical situation, Asma is also trying to convince the interviewer of the point she makes regarding the importance of respecting prayers times. What Asma suggests through this hypothetical situation is that we (as Muslims) have to respect the time of prayers since it is a time dedicated to God. By analogy she gives this hypothetical situation and how she is sure that her interviewer will go to the head of her school if he asks her to do so. The interviewer backchannels the hypothetical situation Asma gives (line 57) which can be a potential evidence for both parties working together for sustaining rapport throughout the narrative.

In sum, through this extract, Asma positions herself to the interviewer as a critic of others' behaviours: she respects Hussein, his cause, the teachings of Islam, hijab and prayers times. On the other hand she feels 'sad' when other women violate the rules of Islam with regards to the way of dressing and when her colleagues do not show respect to the times of prayers. This conflict between the stance she shows towards Hussein and the teachings of Islam and the stance she takes towards others who do not share her views positions her as a critic of others' behaviours within the narrative she tells. Asma creates this position of a critic through the use of evaluative adverbs and adjectives, through the use of pronouns to create ingroups and outgroups to connect with the interviewer and the use of hypothetical situations to abstract from the particular to the

general and thus to play the role of a moralist rather than simply someone who criticises individuals. Like Amira, Asma also positions herself as someone who has something in common with the interviewer. Amira relies on the shared knowledge that both she and the interviewer have regarding the story of Karbala, i.e. religious knowledge. Likewise, Asma relies on the shared knowledge that both she and the interviewer have regarding their experience as PhD students in the UK, i.e. academic knowledge. Asma makes use of both generalisations and hypothetical situations to index an interpersonal role; she uses them as means of persuasion to convince the interviewer of the stances she takes.

6.4 Hanaa the hybrid critic

As has been indicated in chapter three follow- up questions emerged in the interviews, and these take different forms, at times the form of a question or the form of a comment (as we see here). The interviewer finds a link between what Hanaa says prior to this extract about how she is against some rituals and with what another participant said (in one of the focus groups) about one of the practices that are done within *majales*. The interviewer's lines (1-7, 9 & 10) are not meant to be a question. They just represent an opinion expressed by another participant and triggered by Hanaa's comment on the rituals. The interviewer's comment appears to motivate Hanaa to comment on what has been reported and respond with a story about an incident that she has witnessed in Karbala. Hanaa talks about what she considers 'mistaken' (line 11) practices that some people do in the name of Hussein. Hanaa could have stopped commenting at line (17) since she has given her comment in relation to the point raised by the interviewer but she chooses to elaborate. She was an eyewitness to a certain incident and she finds this incident suitable for what she has in mind concerning the stance she takes towards the practices of some people.

1.	Inter.	you remind me of something
2.		when I interviewed one of the women
3.		she objected also
4.		her objection was on something similar
5.		she talked about Al-Qassim's wedding[22] (.)

[22]Al-Qassim's wedding is one of the rituals that are done on the 8th night of Muharram, in which people make a symbolic wedding celebration for Al-Qassim, Hussein's nephew.

6.		she said
7.		that history books don't mention such a thing in the story of Karbala
8.	Hanaa	right
9.	Inter.	she said why we would bring such a thing into our rituals and celebrate it each year or make it one of our ceremonies (.)
10.		so she distinguished between facts and the things we practise
11.	Hanaa	there are mistaken things (.)
12.		but let me tell you
13.		there are things which are less evil than others
14.	Inter.	yes
15.	Hanaa	like Al-Qassim's wedding or Al-Qassim's tray in any way you do this whether within a majlis qarayia or whatever
16.		this wouldn't involve harm (.)
17.		harm is distortion
18.		tatbeer is distortion
19.		uh (laughing) let me tell you something
20.		once I saw a man in Karbala
21.		he had done tatbeer
22.		he was standing smoking
23.		and his head was bleeding
24.		ok if a foreigner would come and see him
25.		what would he say
26.		he would say
27.		that their Imam asked them to do so
28.		this was their role model
29.		so they are aggressive people
30.		and things like these are outrageous something incomparable
31.		there are certain things you can tolerate they're ok (.)
32.		but there are other things
33.		you can't (.)
34.		I'm against tatbeer
35.		and there are other rituals which are done
36.		these are heresies
37.		like when they walk on burning coal or whatever they do
38.		all these are heresies heresies
39.	Inter.	I think these are alien
40.		for example walking on burning coal is borrowed from India
41.	Hanaa	yes, from India

Hanaa positions herself as a critic of others' behaviours by showing her stance towards some people and their practices. Like Asma, Hanaa positions herself as someone who has the right to criticise others but she differs from Asma in being less strict. This difference can be interpreted as a different type of identity work where Hanaa's identity is close to the idea of hybridisation and accommodation than Asma's. Line (11) represents the abstract to the narrative she tells. She thinks that there are some 'mistaken' practices, then she moves to name the practices that she thinks are 'less evil' (line 13) than the others. Practices like celebrating Al-Qassim's wedding, which was

mentioned by the interviewer first, are for Hanaa less evil than the other practices because in this case it does not 'involve harm' (line 16). In contrast, rituals like '*tatbeer*' are harmful to the individual and, thus, presented as 'evil' (lines 17 & 18). Hanaa tries to attract her interlocutor's attention by signalling to her that she is about to tell her some practices that are done by some people (lines 12 & 19). She signals this in line (12) and then she gives a general evaluation of how some practices are less evil than others. In line (19) she signals that she is about to tell a narrative that supports what she has in mind regarding rituals practised by some people. In both cases Hanaa attracts the interviewer's attention and suggests that what would come next is something important.

Hanaa shares a first-hand experience with a man who had practised *tatbeer* in front of her very eyes (line 20). Hanaa shows her stance towards *tatbeer* by criticising this man. Hanaa first describes his situation: he had done *tatbeer* and was standing somewhere smoking a cigarette while his head bleeding. Hanaa then comments on the event by telling a hypothetical story in which a foreigner sees that man and starts to make assumptions. The foreigner, according to Hanaa, would think that this man by doing so was following the teachings of the imam. The foreigner would also presuppose that doing this *tatbeer* reflects the aggressive nature of the people who practise it. So, Hanaa criticises the man for giving the wrong impression about Islam and for making foreigners assume that Muslims are aggressive. In this hypothetical situation, Hanaa becomes the 'animator' (Goffman, 1974, 1981) for the imagined foreigner. Hanaa expresses the thoughts that might come across this imagined foreigner's mind (lines 27-29). Like Amira and Asma, Hanaa reverts to the telling of a hypothetical situation for persuasion purposes.

In line (34) Hanaa makes her stance about *tatbeer* explicit by the use of the first-person pronoun. In this line she announces that she does not approve *tatbeer*. In line (37) Hanaa makes a distinction between herself and people who do what she calls 'heresies' (line 36). This distinction is made by the use of the pronoun 'they'; it is 'they' who 'walk on burning coal' and it is 'they' who do other things (line 37). For Hanaa the people who practise 'heresies' are the 'outgroup' because they do practices she does not approve of. On the other hand, she belongs to the 'ingroup' the ones who are true believers and moderate, moderation which can be seen here as a way of opening up to

change and hybridity. By making this distinction, Hanaa aligns herself with those who do not practise these 'heresies' and positions herself as a critic of what others, who do not belong to her group, do. Because of the way she presents the 'outgroup', Hanaa also aligns the interviewer with her. In other words, because of the bad presentation of those people that Hanaa objects on, the interviewer may not like to be associated with them. Hanaa's use of the pronouns 'I' versus 'they' can be compared to Asma's use of 'I' versus 'they' and 'we' versus' you'. Hanaa's use of pronouns reflects her construal of individual choice in combining orthodox and new while Asma's use reflects more categorical distinctions between good and bad.

This extract comes at the end of the interview, at this point the pressure of the interview situation is lifted up in a way. This is probably why Hanaa starts laughing when she indicates that she is about to tell a narrative, the way she describes the situation of the man involved in the narrative is humorous. She describes him bleeding but smoking a cigarette which is contradictory in a way. Attardo (1994: 323) argues that humour can be used by speakers to attract attention to taboos or unaccepted behaviours which fits in here with what Hanaa is conveying about the man involved in the story she narrates.

The story of the man who practised *tatbeer* is an unprompted topic. Hanaa, in spite of her position as an interviewee in this research interview, initiates topics just like that shown in the extract above. She talks about other kinds of rituals which she is not asked about and which are beyond the scope of this study. What Hanaa does aligns with what has been found by Van De Mieroop (2012) where she conducts an interview with a poor man who starts defying the typical context of interviews and begins initiating and shifting topics. Hanaa is defying the usual roles of interviewer and interviewee and how it is the interviewer who usually initiates topics. Hanaa could have stopped at line (17) without moving further with the example she gives. Both she and the interviewer know what *tatbeer* is and know the controversy related to it. But instead of this she gives the narrative related to the man who did *tatbeer*. This defiance of these roles helps Hanaa to present herself to the interviewer as an independent, strong woman, someone who takes the initiative and who is able to run a situation. The manifestation of Hanaa's independence in the extract above can be linked to her unconventional way of thinking and how she does not think that attending *majales* is necessary as long as the person has firm beliefs which were established within their early years of age.

In summary, Hanaa shows her stance towards *tatbeer* by criticising a man who practised it. Hanaa presents herself to the interviewer as a critic of others' behaviours but not in a strict way as Asma does. She laughs when she describes this man and his situation but she shows her firm position against *tatbeer* by the use of the first person pronoun (line 34). Hanaa, like Amira and Asma, makes use of a hypothetical situation which is used for persuasion purposes. Hanaa initiates topics, a practice that may be considered unusual given her role as an interviewee. In research interviews the one who initiates topics is usually the interviewer not the interviewee. This initiation of topics positions her as a person who is in charge and who is willing to take the lead. By criticising *tatbeer*, Hanaa is critiquing extreme Islamic practices whereas Asma is critiquing their dilution – so Hanaa is making the case for hybridity and why she rejects certain traditional practices while Asma is advocating orthodoxy – and these two are very different aspects of identity shift/maintenance in the diaspora. Thus, (hyper)orthodoxy, which Asma shows, and hybridity, which Hanaa shows, are potential identity reactions to life in the diaspora.

6.5 Walaa the explainer

The interviewer's question which elicited the answer included in the extract below is whether Walaa empathises more with men or with women characters in the story of Karbala. Walaa's reply to this question goes in two directions, first she states that she feels touched and sad for Hussein because of his tragic death, a death which is not a historical incident but a major event in Islam, from her point of view. Second she states that she feels more empathy towards Zayneb because she feels sad for all the sufferings she had to endure. In spite of all the sufferings, Zayneb proved to be strong and different and in the extract below Walaa explains the reasons that have led her to look at Zayneb differently.

1.	Walaa	Zayneb peace be upon her was (.) the speaker after Hussein (.)
2.		she is the one
3.		who conveyed the story of the calamity of Hussein (.)
4.		no Zayneb is different (.)
5.		Zayneb is uh is is is a mobile religious entity (.)
6.		she's the one who kept
7.		what Imam Hussein had done
8.		why he rose up
9.		why he sacrificed his soul and children (.) for the sake of what

10.		when Zayneb said [oh God if this pleases you then] *take*
11.		*until you are satisfied*
12.		*this isn't an ordinary saying (.)*
13.		no one of us [women] can give away everything they have (.)
14.		she sacrificed the most precious things she had
15.		and asked God to take whatever else He wants (.)
16.		no one of us [women] can say so (.)
17.		no way we can achieve such a state no way (.)
18.		and then she said *do accept this from us*
19.		after all the things she had given
20.		and she feared that Allah might not be pleased with her
21.		after she gave seventeen members of her family (.)
22.		ok and she was unsure
23.		whether Allah was pleased with her or not (.)
24.		*accept this sacrifice from us* (.)
25.		after all the sacrifices she had given (.)
26.		she still had fear
27.		that God might not be pleased with her
28.		and she had given everything
29.		nothing was left with her (.)
30.		nothing was left with her to offer to religion and to support her religion (.) and to support sect (.) and to support her Imam
31.		nothing was left (.)
32.		but still she felt (.) in front of God (.)
33.		she felt
34.		that maybe God was not pleased with her
35.		no one can reach this state impossible
36.	Inter.	right
37.	Walaa	so when it comes to empathy with Zayneb (.) sure [I empathise with] Zayneb and the procession[23]
38.		for example if a child of yours gets ill
39.		you stay awake all night (.)
40.		me for instance if a child has fever at my home
41.		even if it's my nephew
42.		I can't sleep (.)
43.		can't sleep (.)
44.		just got a fever not lost
45.		and I don't know
46.		where he has gone in the darkness[24] (.)

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[23] She refers to the procession of the captive women and children who were taken from Karbala to Yazid, the Caliph at that time, whose headquarters was in Damascus in Syria.

[24] Here Walaa refers to Zayneb's situation on the night of the eleventh of Muharram.

47.		and above that there was the responsibility of protecting all the children[25] (.)
48.		how was her condition that night in that darkness (.)
49.		I don't think
50.		anyone else can bear that responsibility
51.		anyone else in her position won't be able to manage (crying)
52.	Inter.	right
53.		but because she is Zayneb
54.		she managed

Walaa explains why 'Zayneb is different' (line 4). Lines 4 and 5 represent the abstract to the narrative she tells about Zayneb. Walaa states the reasons that have led her to empathise with Zayneb and perceive her situation differently. Zayneb has performed a lot of actions according to Walaa's narrative. She took the responsibility after Hussein's death and showed the reasons behind his revolution. In spite of this great role she has taken, Zayneb was feeling she has not done enough to religion and probably God would not be satisfied with what she has given. Zayneb's actions make Walaa appreciate her and considers what she has done to be different. This difference leads Walaa to empathise with her and the narrative above explains how Zayneb is different.

Walaa relies on two strategies in her explanation; one is the reliance on quotes as an intertextual device and the second is repetition. Lines 10, 11, 18 and 24 contain quotes which are attributed to Zayneb. These quotes are usually mentioned in the *majales* by the preachers. By using these quotes Walaa shows two things: not only do they serve to explain why she empathises with Zayneb but, in doing so, they further manifest her familiarity with the Shi'i literature to the extent that she can use these quotes at any time. Walaa (lines 10 & 11) does not give the full quote rather she gives part of it; this suggests that she, like Amira, relies on the religious shared knowledge that she and the interviewer both have as Shi'is. Such quotes are almost always repeated and emphasised in *majales*, Walaa by using them is building rapport with the interviewer and positions herself as a fellow Shi'i. The use of these religious quotes also enhances Walaa's positioning as a knowledgeable woman, i.e. someone who is acquainted with the Shi'i literature and who can refer to it when needed.

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[25] The children of the martyrs of the battle of Karbala

The second strategy Walaa uses is the use of repetitions; the extract above is full of repetitions:

13.   no one of us [women] can give away everything they have (.)

16.   no one of us [women] can say so

17.   no way we can achieve such a state no way

18.   and then she said *do accept this from us*

20.   and she feared that Allah might not be pleased with her

23.   whether Allah was pleased with her or not (.)

24.   *accept this sacrifice from us*

27.   that God might not be pleased with her

29.   nothing was left with her

30.   nothing was left with her to offer to religion and to support religion to support this sect (.) and to support her Imam

31.   nothing was left

34.   that maybe God was not pleased with her

35.   no one can reach this state impossible

Walaa relies on repetitions and as shown above; she uses these repetitions to highlight her evaluations towards Zayneb and her situation in the battle of Karbala. These evaluations show the reasons behind Walaa's empathy with Zayneb, i.e., they contribute in answering the "so what?" question which might be put by the listener/ interviewer concerning the reasons behind telling this narrative. The use of repetitions also helps in reinforcing things. Repeating the same ideas over and over again leads to reinforcing and enhancing them for the listener (Tannen, 2007). In this way Walaa shows that the most salient points of the story for her are: Zayneb's great sacrifice, her fear that God may not accept her sacrifice and the inability of women to act like Zayneb if they were in her position.

Walaa relates to the interviewer by invoking shared knowledge as a woman. In lines 13 and 16 Walaa refers to this gender shared- ness. The interview was conducted in Arabic and in Arabic pronouns are gendered unlike English and this is the reason the word 'women' is added in the English translation. Invoking this shared knowledge is an attempt by which Walaa is trying to relate to the interviewer and get her involved in the

discourse. Walaa is exploiting this gender shared-ness to achieve her goal and seems to be simulating the emotional aspect in her interviewer in order to convince her of the reasons why she empathises with Zayneb.

The use of hypothetical situations is also employed by Walaa like the other participants as a means of affiliation with the researcher and getting her involved in the discussion. In lines 38 & 39 Walaa gives a hypothetical situation about the interviewer in which she seems to be sure that the interviewer would keep awake if a child of hers was ill. Walaa through this hypothetical situation is relating to the interviewer by invoking gendered roles like the role of mothers who would be keen on the wellbeing of their children. In addition to the affiliation work the reference to this gendered role helps in positioning Walaa to the interviewer as a caring and tender mother who would be worried not only about her own children but also about other children as she indicates in the lines that follow this hypothetical situation (lines 40-43).

Summing up, in this extract Walaa explains the reasons why she empathises with Zayneb and through this explanation she takes on several positions. Walaa by the use of religious quotes which are attributed to Zayneb positions herself first as a knowledgeable woman, a woman who is familiar with the Shi'i literature and second as a fellow Shi'i to the interviewer who shares with her the same religious sect, i.e. she is building rapport with the interviewer. Having this knowledge, she expects others to also have this knowledge and this is probably why she gives part of the quote in lines 10 &11. Walaa relies on repetitions to express her reasons for empathizing with Zayneb. She also relates to the interviewer by invoking gender shared-ness and affiliates with her as a woman.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter investigates how the interviewees and the interviewer use talk of the *majales*, the Karbala story and Hussein to position themselves to each other with respect to *majales* and Hussein practices within the interview situation. The linguistic features highlighted in 3.3 that have been analysed to help in answering the question included under this chapter: how do diasporic Muslim women position themselves

during the act of telling stories about Muharram – particularly, when they tell these stories to an interviewer who belongs to the same cultural and religious group? The story telling setting is explored and the role of the listener (the interviewer in this case) in the co-construction of narratives is taken into account along with other forms of identity work done. The same four key participants introduced in the previous chapter are also included in this chapter.

In order to do identity work while talking about Muharram in an interview context with an interviewer who is another diasporic Shi'i woman the interviewees who are also diasporic Muslim women relate to her and get her involved in the narratives by invoking shared knowledge. The interviewees appear to invoke shared knowledge primarily through omission of details related to the story of Karbala or religious quotes (see Amira and Walaa), through cultural references to shared experiences as students in the UK (see Asma), and through gendered references to activities/relations related to daily life and experience of (Muslim) women (in the diaspora) (see Walaa). This shared knowledge is also invoked by the interviewer. First by her presence, being a Shi'i leads the interviewees to relate to her in the way they do and she also invokes this through her questions, for example when she expects that the *majales* in Cardiff have negative aspects and an element of being repetitive. The interviewees also make use of hypothetical situations where each hypothetical situation is inserted at a point where more persuasion work is needed. The participants are coming up with these hypothetical situations to make the positions they take more reliable.

The questions set up by the interviewer, although not all of them take the structural forms of questions, help in shaping the interviewees replies. For example the questions asked to both Amira and Asma are restrictive questions. The interviewer asks Amira to either agree or disagree with the proposition she comes up with or to discuss one aspect, like the question Asma is asked about the negative points she has noticed about the *majales* held in Cardiff. Even the question asked to Walaa is of a restrictive nature because it has one aspect 'empathy' and whether this is directed towards men or women. The design of the question might have an effect upon the reply it elicits from the interviewees like with Amira who comes up with a narrative which might have been prompted by the interviewer's question which is in the narrative mode. The same can be true to Hanaa who was told a comment, not a question, which elicits another comment.

In the next chapter an attempt will be made to investigate how these participants position themselves as particular kind of people not only within the interview situation and as co-constructed with the interviewer (as has been analysed in this chapter), but also with respect to life beyond the immediate setting and the higher level or master narratives that inform their practices as acts of identity. The next chapter will therefore demonstrate the links between what is talked about locally and the ideological/ moral world to which these women relate. The next chapter will move away from the content of these narratives (level 1) and the way they are told interpersonally (level 2) towards a more global and macro level (level 3). Some features and hints have already been made in this chapter, and these will be picked up and explored in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Seven: Being through *Majales*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is aimed at exploring how women use texts and shared experiences of the *majales* as means of construing who they are in relation to key master narratives and hence make sense of their position as Muslims in the Cardiff diaspora: in other words how these women reach an answer to the implied question 'who am I?" References to analyses made in the previous two chapters will pave the way for reaching the master narratives that these interviewees relate to. References to the same four key participants and their stories included in the last two chapters will also be included in this chapter. The first two levels of positioning (see chapters 5 and 6) "feed into the larger project at work within the global situatedness within which selves are already positioned: with more or less implicit and indirect referencing and orientation to social positions and discourses above and beyond the here-and-now" (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008:380). This chapter draws on the third level of Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model to address the question: "How do narrators position themselves to themselves?"(Bamberg, 1997a: 337). In other words, how they construct themselves as particular kinds of people (Bamberg and Georgakopoulou, 2008: 391) and how this construction extends beyond the level of the story-telling situation.

7.2 Master Narratives

In this section the term master narrative is defined along with showing its importance in relation to the analyses made in this chapter. Bamberg (2005: 287) defines a master narrative as a term that "typically refers to pre-existent socio-cultural forms of interpretation". For Halverson, Goodall and Corman (2011: 7) a master narrative "is a narrative that is deeply embedded in a culture, provides a pattern for cultural life and social structure, and creates a framework for communication about what people are expected to do in certain situations." Halverson *et al.* (2011) use the term 'master narrative' to refer to the ideological frameworks that are found within the context of the Muslim world and the way in which particular Islamic extremists make use of these

master narratives to define their actions and the positions they take[26]. Halverson *et al.*'s view of master narratives is similar to Bamberg's in a number of ways. Bamberg (2005) defines a master narrative as a 'form of interpretation', while Halverson *et al.* (2011) define it as a 'framework for communication'. The two definitions are similar in that they allow people to recognize patterns and orient to them. Both definitions also emphasise the idea that the master narrative is deeply embedded within a culture/ community, used and circulated by the community members. McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2017: 191) emphasise the taken-for-granted aspect of the master narratives by arguing that one of the aspects that gives power to master narratives "is their invisibility as they become taken-for-granted as 'Truth'." This goes in line with what Andrews (2004: 1) views as one of the main functions of master narratives: "they offer people a way of identifying what is assumed to be a normative experience", and in this way they work as "a blueprint for all stories; they become the vehicle through which we comprehend not only the stories of others, but crucially of ourselves as well". Drawing from all the above, master narratives can be regarded as a template that people accentuate, give shape to and colour with their stories. They are the canvas upon which people embroider their stories and they afford people the opportunity to map a diversity of experience onto a general blueprint. Master narratives are not deterministic ideologies (Kiesling, 2006: 266) as narrators can agree, disagree or display neutrality towards them (Bamberg, 2004c: 336).

Reaching the master narratives that lie behind the local level of interaction is not easy and De Fina (2013) proposes resorting to ethnography. By doing ethnography one can understand better the master narratives/ ideologies/ Discourses that are evoked by the local narratives. However, Deppermann (2013a: 84) warns that resorting to ethnography should not be interpreted as "a call for resorting to cultural discourses "known" to be relevant by the researcher"; instead ethnography has to support the ones that are relevant to the participants. I will combine the ethnographic work I have done, e.g. information gained through focus groups, participant observation and the recordings of the rituals with the interviews which is where the participants may invoke particular master narratives as relevant to their talk about *majales*/identity work rather than

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[26] References to Halverson *et al.*'s work do not suggest that my participants are extremists; references to this work will only be made to points that relate to my data.

"resorting" to what I, as the researcher, consider as "known" cultural discourses. For example, in relation to the current study references to Hussein, his family and companions have been repeatedly made in the different data sets. Such references are justified by taking into consideration the fact that the research is mainly concerned with the discourse that talks about the rituals of *majales* which commemorate Hussein. By examining such references, where they occur and for what purposes one can reach the idea that Hussein is taken up as a role model and so are his family and companions. Taking a role model in life is a master narrative that the participants orient to when they engage in talking and narrating stories related to Hussein, *majales* and rituals, and this will be further explored in the following sections.

In this chapter the term master narrative is employed in the analysis of how the women of this study use talk about the *majales* as a way of defining themselves as particular kind of people who adhere to certain sets of shared expectations and practices even as they live in the diaspora. In order to address the previous question, the study aims to explore what master narratives these women orient to; how they position themselves in relation to potential ideological frameworks that are circulated within the Muslim Arab world (specifically Iraq) and beyond, including the diasporic world they belong to in Cardiff. These orientations may take different forms to those of other (non-diasporic) communities as the women adapt to the environments in which they are embedded.

Going through the interviews data set, a number of themes has been identified which can be related to certain ideological frameworks/ master narratives that are prevalent in the participants' communities. Other data sets have been also consulted to examine them for any cross-references to these master narratives. Extracts from the data are used to show the master narratives these women orient to. A number of master narratives have been referred to in the data such as the idea of having a role model in life, sacrifice and patience and moderation; below a discussion of each master narrative is included.

7.3 The idea of a role model as a 'super' master narrative

The idea of having a role model in life is traced repeatedly in the narratives told by the participants (see chapter 5 & 6). This idea of the role model is used by the participants as a 'node' term or a 'super' master narrative from which the other master narratives that are discussed in this chapter are deduced. It works in this way because

the master narratives discussed below have this element of the role model within them though they incorporate this idea in different ways. The idea of the role model is referred to by my participants but mostly it is mentioned implicitly rather than explicitly, i.e. it can be deduced from the narratives. This idea of the role model is also traced in the field notes that were made during my fieldwork (see chapter 4).

Role models are defined by Lockwood (2006: 36) as "individuals who provide an example of the kind of success that one may achieve, and often also provide a template of the behaviors that are needed to achieve such success." In a similar vein, Marx and Roman (2002: 1183) argue that "role models can have a profoundly positive impact on a person's life."

The chosen characters as role models by the participants echo to a certain extent those that were highlighted by some of the scholars who investigated the battle of Karbala in various contexts. The high status that those religious figures enjoy is one of the reasons they are taken up as role models by those Shi'i women. Deeb (2009) states that both Hussein and Zayneb are the ones most referred to as role models in Shi'i communities. According to Deeb, although Hussein and Zayneb coexist as role models, the way people relate to them is gendered. Within the context of the Islamic Resistance of Hezbollah in Lebanon which she investigates, for example, men are asked to 'embody' Hussein, i.e. to go and fight and be martyrs, while women are asked to 'emulate' Zayneb, i.e. to take her as a model and follow her example. This suggests that men can be equated with Hussein because they sacrifice themselves in the same way Hussein did while, "women may be like Zaynab, but they are never Zaynab" (Deeb, 2009: 250). Shirazi (2005) also argues that Zayneb and her mother Fatima Al-Zahraa have a high status for Shi'i Muslims:

> The social and political history of Shi'i Islam focuses on two main female characters for their excellence in piety, endurance, and virtue as exemplary women: Fatemeh al-Zahra and Zaynab, respectively the daughter and the granddaughter of the Prophet of Islam, Mohammad.

> (Shirazi, 2005: 115)

With regards to the idea of the role model there is a recurrent pattern which appeared in a number of narrative extracts. These are Amira's narrative about her sick brother and the embedded narrative about Zayneb, Hussein's sister (see 5.2.1.1), Amira's narrative

about her attitude towards Um Wahab, the non-Muslim woman, and the embedded narrative about the actions Um Wahab took in the battle of Karbala (see 5.2.1.2) and Asma's narrative about her change into an altruistic person and the embedded narrative about Al-Zahraa, Hussein's mother (see 5.2.2). This pattern can be shown through the following table:

	The matrix narrative [personal narrative]	The embedded narrative [religious narrative]
Amira's story about her sick brother	-Amira as the main character	-Zayneb as the main character
Amira's story about her attitude towards Um Wahab	-Amira as the main character	-Um Wahab as the main character
Asma's story about her change	-Asma as the main character	-Al-Zahraa as the main character

In those three stories the narrators are following the same pattern. In the matrix narratives, which are personal ones, the narrators are the main characters in the stories. In the embedded narratives, which are religious ones, the main character is a religious female figure to whom women orient: Zayneb, Um Wahab and Al-Zahraa. There is also a parallelism between the main character in each matrix narrative and the main character in the embedded one. Amira, the main character in the matrix narrative, compares her situation to that of Zayneb. Amira's brother got ill and she could not deal with it. Zayneb's brother, Hussein, was killed but Zayneb showed patience and endurance. Amira takes Zayneb as a role model from which she learns patience. In Amira's second story she compares her situation to Um Wahab because both of them have sons. Um Wahab sacrificed her only son for the sake of Hussein. Amira shows admiration for Um Wahab and the actions she took but she is unable to do what Um Wahab did. Asma compares herself to Al-Zahraa, Hussein's mother. Al-Zahraa was an altruistic person who worked on making others happy even if it was at the expense of her wellbeing. Asma was selfish but being acquainted with Hussein and his household she started to change into an altruistic person. She therefore takes Al-Zahraa as a role model that she follows in this process of change into altruism.

Other participants also referred to the idea of the role model in their narratives: for example, Hanaa talks about the importance of having a role model in her son's life:

> let me tell you something now when I tell my son to wear black to wear something written on it oh Abi Abdullah [Hussein] he'll grow up and ask why right he'll ask why I'm doing this someone will tell him that this person had sacrificed himself for prayers (.) fasting (.) religion (.) so that there would be no oppressed (.) for the sake of goodness (.) so in this way when he's raised up with something he loves connected to certain concepts when he'll grow up this will give him something that will show him the right path (.) and this is the aim let me say the aim of each mother each sister and each wife that her son I'm talking about myself I wish that my son will choose this path (.) there must be a role model

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa wishes and encourages her son to take Hussein, the Shi'i Imam, as a role model. This can be related to her idea about socializing children from early age to the rituals and practices of the Shi'i community even if they do not live in one at the time of the interview (see chapter 4, Hanaa's profile, and 5.2.4).

In sum, there is a tendency among the participants to orient towards a role model in their lives. As stated above, the idea of the role model is mostly referred to implicitly rather than explicitly. The analysis of narratives included in chapter five has shown the emergence of certain patterns when the participants evoke the role model master narrative and how they make parallel comparisons with the religious figures towards which they orient. There is some variation among the participants in the ways they relate to the role model master narrative and this variation allows this master narrative to be adopted in different contexts like personal change and dealing with other people.

There is also a saying in the *majales* that I had attended in both Iraq and Cardiff, when a woman is mentioned: the reciter of the laments will encourage other women to identify with this female figure by saying (in Arabic: حق النساء على النساء) which means it is a female's duty towards her fellow females to be identified with them. If a young person was mentioned, especially if that was a male figure, the reciter of the laments will urge

young people to identify with him by saying (in Arabic: حق الشباب على الشباب) which means it is young male's duty towards his fellow young males to be identified with them. So, from a personal perspective as a Shi'i Muslim who was born and raised in Iraq, girls are almost always linked to female figures and boys are linked to male figures.

The master narratives which have been recurrently traced in the data are discussed below; they are included under the 'role model' master narrative because they all have this element of the role model. While the emulation of role models from the sacred texts can be seen as a master narrative of good behaviour in general, we see within this super-category various more specific behaviours and attitudes that can also be considered master narratives owing to their recurrence across the data sets. The examples included under the following sections show how the master narratives which are derived from sacred texts inform daily life practices in the diaspora.

7.3.1 Sacrifice, patience and endurance of hardships

The first specific interpretation of having a role model brings out the ideas of sacrifice, patience and endurance of hardships. This resonates with ideas in the literature as when Shirazi (2005: 115) highlights the sacrifice aspect that is associated with the battle of Karbala by arguing that:

> Martyrdom is viewed by Shi'is as a duty and as a means to achieve salvation. Moharram, Ashura, and Karbala collectively are associated with the concept of martyrdom and the Master of the Martyrs, Hosayn, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad. Martyrdom is not only the physical sacrifice of one's life, but it is also seen as the mental and psychological anguish of the pious who lose a family member to martyrdom. Women are usually the victims of this psychological form of martyrdom.

Shirazi's quote foregrounds two main points: sacrifice and how it can take different forms and women's feelings in relation to the sacrifices that are made. Halverson *et al.* (2011: 92) also highlight the sacrifice aspect in the Karbala story:

> Husayn had not simply been martyred; from the Shi'ite perspective Husayn had made a voluntary act of self-sacrifice, fully aware of his coming fate as the divinely guided Imam, with all the cosmic significance and eschatological underpinnings that this role entailed. […] "Self-martyrdom", in this paradigm, is not an act of suicide (which is prohibited), but a voluntary act in the "cause of God" in this case a defensive struggle against the enemies of Islam.

Halverson *et al.* (2011) discuss the idea of sacrifice in relation to how it is used by Islamist extremists, more specifically by Iranians in their war with Iraq and by Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah took the sacrifice aspect from the battle of Karbala and applied it to their war against Israel; the Iranians did something similar where they started sacrificing themselves in the form of the "People's Army," or *Basiji* in their war with Iraq. My participants believe in this sacrifice aspect which emerges from the sacred texts related to the battle of Karbala but they do not employ it in an extreme way as the zealous Iranian Shi'is or Hezbollah did.

My participants highlight the significance of sacrifice in different contexts. For example, in the extract in which Amira tells the narrative of Um Wahab, the non-Muslim woman who sacrificed her son for the sake of Hussein, she shows respect and admiration towards this woman because of the sacrifice she had made:

> I don't know but her conduct affects me (.) I feel that she gave a lot and sometimes it's difficult difficult maybe she represented-yeah it's right that I read about her but when I saw the TV series Al-Mukhtar when they represented her character I was really influenced by her because it's so difficult especially for a mother now I look at my son my child if he grew up and it was his first day of marriage and she told him to go and fight (Inter.: uhmm) what a sacrifice she made she sacrificed the dearest thing she had her son who was young and on his first day of marriage what a great mother she was

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Amira's main reason for choosing Um Wahab as the one she feels close to most is the sacrifice this woman made. Amira makes it clear interpersonally throughout the narrative that she both respects and empathises with Um Wahab. The language she uses is both emotive and evaluative; to give some examples: "her attitude affects me; I feel

that she gave a lot; I was really influenced by her; what a sacrifice she made, and she sacrificed the dearest thing" (see 5.2.1.2 for the full extract).

Um Wahab's son fought in the battle of Karbala and was killed and Hussein's camp did not win the battle. While this could suggest that Um Wahab's son's participation was not effective from a practical point of view, this did not prevent Um Wahab and her son from making that sacrifice and it did not prevent Amira from showing admiration towards this sacrifice. As stated above, however, Amira herself seems reluctant to do what Um Wahab did. Amira loves Hussein and she wants her children to be raised in a Husseini way. She is keen on bringing her children along to the Islamic Centre when she attends the *majales,* but as a Shi'i woman who is familiar with the battle of Karbala and the idea of sacrifice that is related to it, she is not ready to go to the extremes and does what Um Wahab did, i.e. she is unwilling to sacrifice her son to Hussein in spite of her great love and respect for him. In other words, the idea of the role model is taken up but interpreted in less extreme and more practical ways.

Asma similarly invokes the sacrifice master narrative when she tells the narrative of Al-Zahraa, the Prophet's daughter, who gave her wedding dress and the family's food to the poor, an act Asma labels as 'altruistic'. Altruism can be regarded as a kind of sacrifice because an altruistic person favours others over her/ himself and by doing so they deprive themselves of possessions for the sake of others like the kind of 'giving' illustrated in the story analysed in 5.2.2. Like Amira, Asma also uses emotive and evaluative language when she talks about Al-Zahraa, as examples: "uhmm this isn't easy to give the dress of her wedding; I mean who stands hunger for three days, and this is a high level of altruism not many people can reach that state". Al-Zahraa and her family made sacrifices for the sake of others; for example, they made sacrifices by enduring the pain of hunger in order for the poor man to be fed. Asma discursively locates herself with respect to this master narrative when she narrates how she started favouring her husband over herself when she talked about making sandwiches for him (see chapter 5, section 5.2.2 for Asma's practices which reflect the role model master narrative). Asma relies on comparisons to make her meaning clear. She compares her change in behaviour towards her husband and others to Al-Zahraa's behaviour with the poor men in the two narratives related to her. This suggests that sacrifice, for Asma, has taken up a different dimension and has been applied in a different context.

Both Amira and Asma believe in the sacrifice aspect but each in their own way. Amira accepts and admires the sacrifice aspect in the narrative she tells about Um Wahab but she is unwilling to sacrifice her son in the same way Um Wahab did. Amira is also different from the extremists who were mentioned in Halverson *et al.*'s (2011) in that she does not seem to encourage killing people. Sacrifice for Asma takes a different form where sacrifice does not necessarily have to be as extreme as sacrificing oneself, sacrifice can be done by other means and one of these is to be altruistic.

To conclude the discussion of sacrifice from the view point of my participants, sacrifice is modelled to sacrifice in the battle of Karbala, but sacrifice in the battle of Karbala and everyday sacrifice are both modelled to the master narrative of sacrifice. The battle of Karbala story is just one instantiation of the master narrative, similar to the more mundane instantiations the participants of this study offer while the wider and most abstract level is the master narrative.

The narratives above point to a shared master narrative in which females' sacrifice for sustaining their beliefs and faith is seen as something worthy to be emulated by other women but by following different means. The participants orient towards role models when they talk about sacrifice and these role models are derived from the Karbala story and the religious texts that are related to it. The battle of Karbala encourages others to fight for what they think is right and to go as far as sacrificing themselves for the sake of it as Hussein did. The battle of Karbala also encourages others to make sacrifices even if they think that their sacrifices will not be very effective. Hussein and his companions were a small group in terms of number in comparison with their enemy. While the material victory was for Yazid and his followers, Hussein's blood is regarded victorious over Yazid's sword. The participants acknowledge this idea of sacrifice but they do not go to the extremes, i.e. they do not encourage the killing of oneself. This might be attributed to the political situation Iraq has witnessed over many decades. Living in Iraq all my life except for the last four/ five years I still remember those women who lost their sons in the Iraq-Iran war which lasted for eight years. Some of them died while they were still hoping to hear any news from their sons who went to war and went missing or were taken as prisoners-of-war. The bombings which happened in Iraq after the American invasion in 2003 were also devastating, people were and are still killed by dozens and this has a great impact on Iraqi people in general and women in particular (see Al-Ali, 2005; 2008; 2011). Sacrifice for my participants has shifted from sacrificing

oneself into other forms of sacrifice like being altruistic. They acknowledge that it is good to sacrifice oneself as Hussein or Um Wahab's son did but they had enough of such kind of sacrifices, i.e. they are not ready to sacrifice themselves or the ones they love. Being in Cardiff has also helped in reframing the sacrifice idea and changing it from the extremes, i.e. sacrificing oneself, into more mild forms of sacrifice.

7.3.2 Places as sources of rituals

This section also involves the role model master narrative but the role model here is a place rather than a person. So it investigates how the participants orient to Iraq and to Karbala as sources of the Husseini rituals. As discussed in chapter 4, Karbala, for the participants, works as a model city in relation to the holding of the *majales*. 'Place-identity' according to Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983: 61) "is developed by thinking and talking about places through a process of distancing which allows for reflection and appreciation of places". Comparisons between the ways in which the rituals are held in Iraq, mostly in Karbala, and in Cardiff are made (see chapters 4 &5). When compared to other British cities, Cardiff is considered a good place to be in because there are *majales* held there. Karbala, the burial place of Hussein and the city from which the four key participants of the thesis come from, occupies a central position for them. For them to be from Karbala allows them to identify themselves as 'experts' in the matter of holding *majales* and acknowledged as such by other Iraqis (see chapters 3 & 4).

Being from Karbala allows Amira to present herself as a knowledgeable person about the ways *majales* are done (see chapter 4, Amira's profile). Also as discussed in chapter 4, being a student in the UK entails that Asma has left Karbala, which will have a negative implication for her because for her Karbala is heaven:

> for me when I went away from Karbala I discovered that I had been living in heaven and I wasn't aware of this

> (Interview, 11th of December 2014)

However, Asma employs this distance in a positive way. She takes this distance to reflect upon her religious practices in Karbala. Although Karbala is not Asma's original hometown, her attachment to it is strong. Asma takes it as the model city to which other

cities are compared. For Asma, Karbala is centralized to the extent that it works as a compass that directs her life in a number of ways. Firstly, her move from Baghdad to Karbala is significant in her life; she started to see things differently, her relationship with Hussein and his *majales* was enhanced. Secondly, her move from Karbala to the UK made her reflective; she started to assess this relationship she has with Hussein and how to work on strengthening it. Thirdly, her move from Cambridge to Cardiff, which will be further discussed below, was also significant in her life. In Cambridge she missed attending *majales* because there were not any there; the situation changed when she came to Cardiff because she found *majales* happening. Cardiff worked as a temporary replacement to Karbala.

Walaa also refers to this aspect of holding the *majales* in the two cities, i.e. Karbala and Cardiff and how the situation was different in Karbala where she used to attend more *majales* than when she moved to Cardiff:

> there in the Karbalai community there are many qarayat (Inter.: ok) so it's not like here in Cardiff because in Cardiff the only outlet we have is the centre and I try to make it to all the majales that are held in it (Inter.: ok) but there in Karbala no sometimes I attend three (.) or four majales (.) especially during the first ten days of Muharram or Al-Arbaeen because I say that these are few days and it's a pity to miss them (.)

(Interview, 20th of November 2014)

For Walaa, Karbala works as the model city. Cardiff might be a good city in terms of holding the *majales* when compared to other British cities but it is not as good as Karbala. Walaa feels restricted by the number of the *majales* held in Cardiff. Holding *majales* in Cardiff in itself is something good for her but Cardiff cannot be compared to Karbala. In Karbala *majales* are available during the Muharram and Safar months and she is free to attend as many as she likes. This freedom is not affordable to her in Cardiff because it all depends on the *majales* held by the Centre, which is the 'only outlet'.

Being from Karbala is also an essential part of Hanaa's identity; in the interview which was held on the 15th of December 2014 she introduces herself as being from there: "in the same way I used to attend these majales, by the way I'm from Karbala (.) so as I used to attend these in Karbala" (see chapter 4 Hanaa's profile). She also differentiates between people who come from Karbala and others. After introducing herself as someone who comes from Karbala, Hanaa says: "of course you know that Muharram and Safar for us there are not something ordinary". For Hanaa to be from Karbala gives her an 'insider' view about the rituals and the way they are done: "and I'm telling you this as an insider from Karbala, some malaly [women lamenters] started to get educated, and read, when they held a majlis they would give a lecture, a sermon even if it is just a story[27] and then there would be crying and latam [chest-beating]". For these diasporic women, orienting to Karbala helps them to do identity work since being from there has become part of how they are.

This aspect of place-attachment is tackled from another perspective by some of the participants. Living in a Western country, a non- Muslim country may cause a threat for children. It is conceived this way because the different life style in such a country may have an influence on children and they may lose connection with their country of origin and the religious rituals practised there. Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries face many challenges and Schubel (1996), who studied Shi'i Muslims within the context of a specific North American community, highlights some of these challenges. These are: "the impact of secularism, the temptations of materialism, and the often uncaring individualism of a capitalist economy" (Schubel, 1996: 201). In addition to these challenges, another challenge can be added and that is the accusations diasporic (Shi'i) Muslim women sometimes get from people living in Muslim countries. For example, one night after a *majlis* was finished women picked up a point that was mentioned by the preacher. The preacher said that Ali, Hussein's father was married to a woman from Basrah[28]. The women who belonged to that city discussed this point and how they felt proud because that woman belonged to their city. One of them mentioned something as a follow up. She said that she heard on Facebook a preacher talking badly

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[27] Hanaa indicates that women's sermons/lectures could also be in a narrative mode ('even if it is just a story'); so talking about/ and in *majales* in a narrative mode shows the prevalence of narratives in the data.

[28] Basrah is a city in southern Iraq.

about Shi'i women who live in Western countries and how they do not obey the rules of Islam. She then said that there were many people who replied to his accusation by posting photos which showed the opposite to what he said. Another woman commented that when she came to the UK she started to be more conscious of the way she is dressed unlike when she was in Iraq (field notes, 14.11.2015). The event with the preacher accusing Shi'i women in the diaspora echoes to some extent what the father of one of the participants in Baynham's (2003) study expressed. In Baynham's study a Moroccan participant wanted to migrate to Europe and his father objected to this migration. Given that the father thought in terms of "a religious world in which space is organized into Muslim space and the space of the unbelievers or Kaffar", his objection was based on the idea that his son was about to leave the 'Muslim space' and go to the 'space of unbelievers'. By this move this son would be associated with the unbelievers and lose his identity as a Muslim (Baynham, 2003: 354-55). My participants seem to be aware of this risk of leaving the Muslim country and living in a non-Muslim one and the accusations that others might level against them. What the women said about being more reserved in relation to the way they are dressed is an indicator of this awareness. They are aware that they will not be living in a country where Islam is prevalent but where other norms and rules apply. This new setting will have its own consequences which might affect them and will definitely affect their children. The discussion above points to identity work which involves a sense of hybridity, i.e. the participants keep on orienting to Karbala but at the same time they are adopting/adapting in the new setting. Being in a diasporic space has its consequences and influence upon those women's rituals, they seem to be aware of this and thus they are trying to make a balance between their home's rituals and the rituals practised in diaspora. Being extra conscious of the way they are dressed, as one of the participants indicates above, shows the attachment to the home origins. An attachment which probably would not have been activated without being in a diasporic place.

Hanna is also aware of the effects of living in the diaspora upon children. Like the father of the Moroccan participant in Baynham's study above, Hanaa conceives spaces religiously where the UK is a non-Muslim space/ country and Iraq as a Muslim space/ country:

here it all depends on what is possible, but holding majales here in itself is something **ok** (.) because we are in a foreign (.) country (.) a non-Muslim country (.) a country that doesn't even admit Christianity (.) so when we live in such a place for sure we'll be affected by it so I think the majales held in the centre remind (.) us [of origins and beliefs] we as grownups <u>and for children these majales work on compensating the thing they lost since they are not in Iraq</u> so they are **ok** but to say that they are the same as the ones held in Iraq of course not

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa feels worried about the effects such a country may have upon her children and that is probably why she frames this movement in terms of loss (see the underlined lines above). It is a spiritual/ religious loss more than a material one. Hanaa also does not give the *majales* held in Cardiff high evaluation, for her they are just 'OK'. In spite of her opinion about the differences between the two spaces, she thinks that holding *majales* is important for children because they work on bridging the gap that was caused by leaving Iraq and living in the UK, i.e. leaving the religious space and moving into a non-religious one. Hanaa's pride in being from Karbala is evident in the extract above. She seems to be sure that the *majales* held in Cardiff cannot be compared to the ones held in Karbala. This can be related to the way she introduces herself at the beginning of her interview as someone who comes from Karbala. So here Karbala as a birthplace is used to maintain an identity that is above that of being in Cardiff and the 'dangers' facing others, such as children for example.

Staying within the realms of space and in an attempt to create a place identity in the liminal world of the sojourners, some of the participants feel lucky to be in Cardiff, where *majales* are available unlike other British cities. Asma, reports that she suffered a lot when she was studying for her language course in Cambridge and that she felt lucky to move to Cardiff.

uh I never saw any Iraqis any Shi'is any Husseiniyia there's only one mosque in Cambridge (.) even women who wore hijab let's say I've seen ten or maybe less as a **maximum** (.) so they were very **tough** with Muslims (Inter.: uhmm ok (.) **ok** (.) and now do you feel any difference between Cambridge and Cardiff) (.) uhmm **big difference** (Inter.: (chuckles)) between Cambridge and Cardiff

there's no comparison (.) when we came here we felt as if we were
on another planet[29] and not in Britain

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

While Asma reflects on her life in the UK, what seems important is not the place itself but the availability of Muslims and *majales* in particular and the belongingness to a wider Muslim community that has the opportunity to observe certain rituals, get together in specific places, dress in a particular way, i.e. a community of practice. Both Cardiff and Cambridge are foreign cities to her but she feels more attached to Cardiff because she can practise her rituals and feel connected to Hussein and his memory. Cardiff is not Karbala but it is better than Cambridge because *majales* are held in it. That is why Asma is ready to abandon Cambridge with all its academic prestige for the sake of living in a city that reminds her of home:

> so I told you it's a big difference between Cambridge and Cardiff
> I don't wish at all to go back to Cambridge for any reason (Inter.:
> (chuckles)) even if Cambridge University offered me a PhD
> position I wouldn't accept it

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

Asma looks at the UK through the lens of her Shi'i identity. Asma has come to the UK as a PhD student; what might be expected from her through her talk about her experience in the UK is to do identity work that may be related to her status as a student. Instead, Asma emphasises her identity as an Iraqi Shi'i Muslim over her identity as an international PhD student. In Cambridge she missed the Shi'i's community of practice. Asma makes one reference to her identity as a student when she states that she does not want to go back to Cambridge for any reason even if she was offered a place there to study towards a PhD. It is well know that Cambridge University is one of the leading universities in the world that many people aspire to be admitted to. By rejecting this hypothetical offer, Asma shows that she is the one in control over the situation by emphasising that she does not feel attached to Cambridge

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[29] The phrase 'on another planet' is usually used in a negative sense in English meaning that for example someone is indifferent to what goes around them. In Arabic it is also used in a negative sense and it is mainly used to indicate that someone is not sharing with the speaker the same rules of behaving. Asma's use of this phrase is not pejorative here; it is used to show the difference she has noticed between the two cities and the degree of difference that Cardiff shows when compared to Cambridge.

but rather she is more attached to Cardiff. This attachment is not related to academic rankings but to the availability of *majales*, Iraqis and Shi'is. Cardiff may not be a perfect city but for the participants it is because it offers them the chance to be who they want to be more than other places. Asma construes Cardiff as better than Cambridge in order to compensate for not being in Karbala, unlike Hanna who construes being from Karbala as an idea that keeps her safe in the diaspora. So we have a master narrative under which Muslim identity is connected to a place: Hanaa claims to carry this with her while Asma shows that she would reject Cambridge in order to be in 'better' Cardiff – thus, both are doing active work to compensate for the perceived problem of "not being in the right place".

In sum, for the participants, Karbala works as a model place against which other places are compared. For the participants, Karbala serves two purposes; the first one is its use as a gauge to measure how someone is eligible when it comes to the holding of the *majales*. Being from Karbala gives them first-hand knowledge and allows them to identify themselves as 'experts' in the matter of holding *majales*. The other role is a compass: participants, like Asma, start to reflect upon their lives, their relationship with Hussein and the rituals by being away from Karbala. Some of the participants define themselves in relation to Karbala, and being from there gives them special status. This goes in line with what Benwell and Stokoe (2006:214) indicate that space is "central to the production and maintenance of ingroups and outgroups in everyday life".

Karbala as a place has also stopped being a mere city in southern Iraq. For the participants, Karbala has become boundless in terms of place and time. They feel proud to belong to Karbala and to be from there. They take this as a way of defining themselves. They carry Karbala with them wherever they go. They carry with them their experiences of the *majales*, of the *latam* [chest-beating] and of everything that is related to Hussein. The only thing that they cannot carry with them in the diaspora is the shrine of Hussein; to overcome this and in order to find a compensation they build centres which work as 'mini-Karbalas'. By doing this they work on reproducing the social context of the *majales* of Iraq in Cardiff. The Centre, in a way, works as a mini-Karbala for them through which they can commemorate the memory of their beloved Imam and feel close to him. It is true that the outer shape of the Centre belongs to its British surroundings but the interior belongs to Karbala where Arabic is mainly spoken,

where men are segregated from women and where walls are covered with black fabric and banners that remind them of the person and the battle they are commemorating. Cardiff has offered these participants the chance to be who they want to be unlike other places. It allows them to practise the rituals that make them distinct from others and offers them self-recognition as Shi'is.

The participants seem to be aware of the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim spaces and so they try to create their own space in this liminal world of sojourners. Some of them have found ways to cope with this tension between places and Cardiff has helped them by being a 'safe' space. Cardiff, the foreign city, has worked, although temporarily, as a replacement to Karbala. They feel attached and lucky to be in it because *majales* are available unlike in other British cities. Others still seem to struggle with this tension between spaces and have expressed fear that their children might be detached from the Husseini rituals and they may feel alienated from them.

7.3.3 Moderation is a virtue

Shi'is who live in the diaspora have a special status since they represent what Sachedina, (1994) and Scharbrodt (2011) call a 'double minority'. They have this status because they represent a minority within the Muslim world and they are part of a minority within the countries they settle in in the diaspora. This status puts Shi'is under pressure to keep and maintain their Shi'i identity because as Scharbrodt (2011: 528) argues "Shiis living as a minority in Europe or North America need to ascertain and maintain not only an Islamic but also a specific Shii identity". They need to do so in order to make themselves distinct from other Muslim sects who might be labelled as extremists.

The four key participants have referred to the ideas of tolerance and Shi'is as moderate people who do not discriminate against others. These two ideas are not only restricted to dealing with people from other religions; Shi'is from different nationalities come to the Centre as audience, preachers and lamenters. From my observations during my fieldwork people from Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain were there[30].

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[30] People from other nationalities also attended; in one of the *majales* I noticed a woman whose nationality I was not able to figure out as she did not look like an Arab. She did not speak Arabic and she did not look very familiar with the rituals like the other participants. When she wanted to participate in

The Iraqis outnumbered other nationalities and this was reflected in the Board that runs the Centre, who were all Iraqis apart from one Saudi. The two main preachers who delivered sermons during my fieldwork were from Saudi Arabia; other preachers who delivered sermons on single nights on different occasions were from Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The lamenters also varied, with some from Iraq and some from Saudi Arabia.

Moderation has also been explicitly mentioned in the *majales*; John, a black Christian man, who accompanied Hussein was mentioned in the English speeches that were delivered by young boys in the Islamic Centre (field notes, 30.10.2014 and 14.10.2015). Mentioning the specific episode on the 14th of October 2015, i.e. the first day of the series of the *majales*, is significant because the speech holds a prominent position and gives the impression that people in this congregation are moderate, and ready to accept others regardless of their ethnic or religious backgrounds.

The same episode, with Hussein being accompanied by John (a black Christian man), was also mentioned by Asma when she narrates an incident that happened to one of her Shi'i friends:

> I guess God had arranged this cause [Hussein's] in this way so that no one of us would have an excuse (.) because it contained all sects and nationalities John who was (.) not a follower of Imam Hussein [but then he became one] and who was black now for example I know someone who's a Sunni (.) and in his office there's a Shi'i girl (.) one day someone who was black came and asked her for help (.) she helped him willingly the Sunni person told her why you helped him he's black she replied that we don't have such a thing […] I told her why you didn't tell him that one of those who were killed with Imam Hussein was black (.) […] so we don't have this extremism we don't have- the world should know that we as Muslims and as Shi'a we don't have extremism (.) we don't have malice towards other nationalities (.)

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

According to Schubel (1996: 201) a "[m]ajlis functions as a kind of Islamic revival meeting, calling people back to an ethical standard exhibited by Husain and his companions in the battle of Karbala". For Asma as well, the battle of Karbala and its

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the circle of *latam* [chest-beating] she looked at other women first and then she started imitating them (field notes, 02.11.2014). A black woman also attended the rituals and she could not understand the meaning of the laments but she was practising *latam*; one night a woman who was standing next to her translated some of the laments for her (field notes, 19.10.2015 and 24.10.2015).

inclusion of people from different backgrounds represents an ethical standard designed/arranged by the ultimate power (God). By taking Hussein as a role model, Asma orients to moderation as a master narrative/an ethical framework to follow in everyday life. One of his companions was a Christian black man; this encourages her to follow Hussein's model because if he is the Imam and he does not discriminate then she is entitled to follow his footsteps since she is one of his followers.

Asma says "so we don't have this extremism we don't have-", in terms of the narrative she has told about her friend this line represents the coda of her narrative from level 1 analytical perspective. Asma moves in this line from the narrative world to the here and now of the interview situation from level 2 analytical perspective. But Asma breaks her sentence and moves into saying: "the world should know that we as Muslims and as Shi'a we don't have extremism (.) we don't have malice towards other nationalities", by doing so she seems to be addressing others and not only the interviewer, she seems to be aware that others like supervisors, examiners and readers will have access to what she says or at least that the implications of what she is saying are global and so a master narrative of moderation is referred to. In a way Asma clearly answers the question 'who am I' – I am a Muslim – I am a Shi'i and I am not an extremist.

Moderation channelled through Imam Hussein and the Karbala story, is also invoked in the following anecdotes that encapsulate life in the diaspora and interaction with different ethnicities either at work or school:

> now when I go into my office I greet everyone we don't have that this one I hate because of nationality or colour sometimes my daughter she talks as a child of course she says mum I'm not talking to X because her colour isn't like mine (.) I told her no mum be careful we don't have such a thing you have to love all people and all girls and talk to them all I gave her an example because we have role models that we are proud of them so uhmm I think that Imam Hussein's cause should be known by the world (.) and hopefully it will

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

In the extract above, Asma talks about how she treats others who work with her in the same office in her school at Cardiff University. First she applies things to herself and the way she treats people that she deals with and then she tries to teach her daughter not to discriminate against others at school by showing her this through role models. As

mentioned in Chapter 4 Asma's daughter is a lineal descendent of Hussein, so for Asma's daughter Hussein can be taken up as a role model for two reasons: firstly, he is the moderate Shi'i Imam that is highly respected by her mother; and secondly, through this familial relationship.

Similarly, moderation is invoked in the interview with Amira. The moderation master narrative takes a slightly different form in this extract. It goes beyond tolerance as evidenced in Asma's extracts above and it becomes admiration and appreciation of people who may be from another religion, especially if they orient to key values, such as sacrifice (see section 7.3.1 which discusses sacrifice):

> it was a very difficult situation few women can do what she [Um Wahab] did (.) she saw his wife in front of her he was very young newly married which means he was at the peak of his life but she asked him to sacrifice himself for the sake of Imam Hussein (.) another thing is that <u>they were from another religion</u> (Inter.: yeah) (.) those two things <u>they were from another religion</u> but she had strong faith in Imam Hussein to the extent that she sacrificed her son for his sake

> (Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Amira appreciates Um Wahab's situation and what she went through even if she is a non-Muslim. Not only this, Amira also acknowledges that what Um Wahab did for the sake of Hussein, not many Muslims are capable of doing, including Amira herself. For Amira, the humanitarian side overcomes the sectarian one. Within the community under study, moderation has been displayed in different ways. Moderation can be traced in the multiple ethnicities welcomed to the Centre, the multiple nationalities of preachers, the themes that are discussed within the context of the *majales* and the daily-life practices that are performed by the participants.

7.3.4 Maintaining strong family relationships

Another domain in which the idea of role model is primarily invoked in the identity work of the participants is family-relationships. The participants have emphasised strong family relationships and these were either in their personal narratives or in the religious narratives that were told.

There are two levels that work parallel to each other in the *majales*: the level of the story of Karbala itself and the level of the *majlis* which people/families attend. Schubel (1991: 127) views a *majlis* as "a communal and family event. Although the women and men sit separately, they arrive and depart together. […] The battle of Karbala itself was a familial experience […]". It is conceived this way because it offers people "[m]odels for family behavior" where "[t]here are examples of the correct behavior for a son, a bridegroom, a wife, a sister and so on" (Schubel, 1991: 127-128). This suggests a constant interaction between the two levels; the story of Karbala is full of family relationships where there are sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, mothers and fathers (see chapter 5). In the *majlis* the same family relationships exist; people listen to the story of Karbala and they figure out appropriate ways of behaving and construct role models that can be emulated. Some of the relationships highlighted by the participants were mother-daughter, mother-son, father-daughter, father-son, and brother-sister relationships.

In her interview, Amira refers to this mother-daughter relationship and illustrates how participation in the *majales* guides the mourning of her own mother:

> when my mother died may Allah rest her soul (Inter.: may Allah rest her soul) whenever I listen to the story of Lady Zayneb and how she felt when her mother passed away whenever I listen to this I start crying as if my calamity is repeated with hers I feel as if this pain is new not old (Inter.: uhmm) always as long as I live

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Amira compares her situation to Zayneb's when she lost her mother, Fatima. She takes Zayneb as a role model when she feels sad for the death of her mother and tries to learn patience from her. Amira keeps on remembering her mother as she states in the underlined sections above and this not only suggests that her relationship with her mother was a strong relationship but also that Amira is taking Zayneb as her role model. Although Zayneb was very young when she lost her mother and Amira was a grownup when she lost her mother it did not prevent her from taking Zayneb as a role model. Zayneb showed patience and endured calamities and Amira looked up to Zayneb to find strength to overcome her calamity. The story of Karbala works as a constant reminder to the participants of their losses, including Hussein, his companions and, of course, their dear ones. This helps in keeping the memory of Hussein and his companions alive and keeping the family bond with the lost relatives unforgotten.

The mother-daughter relationship and the daughter's mourning are also invoked in Hanaa's interview. The story of Karbala becomes a blueprint for mourning, as Hanaa likens the sadness she feels when she listens to the story of Karbala with the feelings she has when she remembers her late mother:

> I can't listen to the calamities of Hussein his children (.) and his family (.) and not to cry I told you I can't imagine anyone (.) who truly knows Imam Hussein and remembers his calamity whether once twice or thrice yes it's the same story but through this story you remember this person and you cry let me put it in another way my mother is dead (Inter.: may Allah rest her soul) so (.) when I see her picture each time I see her picture I cry each time I remember her and how she was so it's the same the same picture although her picture is already inscribed into my mind but when I remember her remember her tenderness I cry (Inter.: may Allah rest her soul) God bless you

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Hanaa draws a parallelism between listening to Hussein's story and remembering her late mother. Hussein's story and her memories about her late mother are deeply rooted into her memory and an external stimulus such as listening to the story of Karbala or seeing her mother's picture makes her emotional. Hanaa feels sad about Hussein and, as a result, she cries when she listens to his story, a similar reaction to when she sees her mother's picture. She makes use of a personal event to make the religious event clearer. Hanaa is showing how close and intimate the Karbala story to her because she is making use of a very sensitive issue, her mother's memory, to describe how she feels when she listens to the Karbala story. It seems that the Hussein story allows Hanaa to make sense of her mother's mortality, Hussein was brutally killed and Hanaa feels sad for him but now he is dead and she cannot do anything to fix this situation. Her mother is dead and she feels sad for her but again she cannot do anything to bring her back to life, so in a way she is coming to terms with the idea of losing a dear person. Amira and Hanaa's examples point to how the story of Karbala has become a model for coping with loss of family members and it is a gendered model: mothers. The gendered role goes in line with what Holmes and Marra (2010:2) argue that "[i]n enacting parenting, for instance, or leadership, people draw on gendered discursive resources which are to some extent shaped by wider societal constraints and expectations".

Beyond mourning, the mother-daughter relationship is also referred to by Walaa in relation to her four daughters. Walaa would like her daughters to follow Zayneb and her mother Al-Zahraa as role models.

> for example when I reproach my daughters about hijab or anything else that is related to girls (.) or related to women in general their behaviour makeup dressing (.) the way they walk in the street I always draw attention to this for instance I tell them look up to Zayneb [Imam Hussein's sister] when you walk in the street imagine that as if Fatima Al-Zahraa is walking behind you (.) will she be pleased with your way of walking your hijab and your behaviour in the street in this way (.) so when I want to tie them up to Ahlulbayt I don't want to tie them up in order to just cry no I tie them up because I want their behaviours to be improved (.) their morals to be refined their religion and religious sect to be enhanced

(Interview, 20th of November 2014)

The extract above shows an example of socialising younger family members into acting/behaving according to role models and this example is different from those of Amira and Hanaa. Walaa is not talking about herself taking Zayneb or Fatima as her role models, rather she wishes and urges her daughters into taking them as their role models. Walaa could have urged her daughters to commit to the wearing of hijab more by asking them to emulate her since she herself wears hijab but she asks them to think of Zayneb and her mother Fatima. By doing so, Walaa is trying to create a bond between her daughters and the Ahlulbayt; as she states in the underlined sections above, which suggests that she is taking Ahlulbayt as her role models although she does not express this explicitly. Walaa does not encourage the development of a mere emotional bond with the Karbala story characters but rather an emotional and practical one that will continue to guide her daughters in their everyday life. Walaa works on integrating the story of Karbala into the daily practices of her daughters and through this she tries to maintain their identity as Shi'i Muslims.

In addition to the mother-daughter relationship, the role model master narrative is also exemplified through the mother-son relationship. In Um Wahab's story (see 5.2.1.2), Amira shows her admiration towards Um Wahab and how she sacrificed her only son. Amira is thinking of Um Wahab's actions because she herself has one son, she is imagining herself in her position and she states that she is unwilling to do what Um

Wahab did. But what Um Wahab did is exemplary from Amira's point of view and that is why she chose Um Wahab in particular rather than any other woman who was present in the battle of Karbala. This partial following of Um Wahab's example is significant. Amira is aware of the difference between the context of the battle of Karbala and the present time and place. Sacrificing oneself nowadays is interpreted and described as a terrorist act. Another side of this mother-son relationship is the side of Um Wahab's son. His obedience to his mother is worth admiring although Amira does not refer to this explicitly. Um Wahab son's represented the highest degree of obedience since he sacrificed himself to please his mother as obedience to parents is highly recommended in Islam.

The father-daughter relationship has been used by the participants as another manifestation of role models. For example, Asma talks about Ruqia, Hussein's youngest daughter, and how she sympathises with her because she is a child who is strongly attached to her father. Asma then moves from the Karbala story to reflect on this attachment aspect to her daughter and how she is closely connected to her father:

> Ruqia peace be upon her when she kept crying and crying asking for her father now sometimes my daughter- girls start to get attached to their fathers when they are three four or five years she misses her father a lot although I take care of her more than he does (Inter.: yes) I notice that when we go back home she starts asking mum when dad is coming mum why dad is late mum call him let him leave the university[31] so Ruqia peace be upon her who was five years old it wasn't easy for her to see her father's death and to see his head upon a spear (.) it's not easy that she cried and cried and then they brought her her father's head and she thought that they brought her food (.) she was very thirsty and hungry but she didn't think about food (.) she said aunt Zayneb I don't want food (.) so when she saw her father's head how sad she felt that she died

(Interview, 11th of December 2014)

Asma states that she takes care of her daughter more than her husband does but that does not affect her daughter's attachment to him. Asma is making similarities with Ruqia's story and drawing conclusions to justify her daughter's actions and at the same

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[31] Asma's husband is also a PhD student at Cardiff University.

time she is giving the example related to her daughter to make things more realistic and related to the present time situation. In this sense family relationships transcend time and place and Asma by interpreting family relationships in relation to the sacred texts is doing identity work as a dedicated mother which is also gendered. From a level 3 perspective, Asma is defining herself as a caring mother, someone who puts her children first, understands their needs, and sympathises with other children, i.e. Ruqia, Hussein's daughter.

Talk about *majales* also includes episodes from family life in Amira's interview, Amira makes reference to her son who was reciting laments at the Islamic Centre. Amira, unlike Asma, gives all the credit to her husband although she is the one who works more with her son on the poems and laments that he recites at the Centre:

> I noticed that during these three years he [her son] was very good in memorization he could memorize things (.) he used to imitate things from TV (Inter.: uhmm) he managed to memorize two lines of a poem for Bassim al-Karbalai [a very well-known lamenter in the Shi'i world] (Inter.: yeah) when we went on foot at that time to do the ziyara [visitation to Imam Hussein's Shrine in Karbala] on the tenth [of Muharram] on the way he kept on repeating them when he listened to the mawakib (Inter.: mashallah [praise be to Allah]) when they played poems when we returned home I told his grandmother that Ahmed [her son] was reciting a poem she was really surprised so he would sit read and memorize his father is the one who encourages him the most since you know (Inter.: yeah) he loves such things so it became just like a hobby for him that he likes to improve at home before he goes to sleep he recites a poem (laughing) he recites and his sisters repeat after him (Inter.: yes) he likes this his father chooses the poems that are suitable for him

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Asma and Amira's extracts point to another family relationship and that is the husband-wife relationship. Asma who states that she changed from a selfish person into an altruistic one (see 5.2.2) does not admit her husband's role in her and her daughter's lives and states above that she is the one who takes care of their daughter more. Amira on the other hand is doing the opposite to what Asma did. Amira is the one who 'notices' her son's talent (see the underlined lines above), she is the one who tells his grandmother about this talent but she acknowledges her husband's role more. Amira by giving all the credit to her husband is complying with the ideological framework that is

prevalent in Iraq that the wife has to be respectful to her husband and she has to put him first at least in public.

Identity work has been done by the evocation of the role model master narrative which has been presented through the sister-brother relationship, as well. Amira refers to this relationship when she talks about her brother and the way she felt when he got sick (see 5.2.1.1 & 6.2). In this way she relates her own situation to that of Zayneb at the battle of Karbala and so makes sense of it. Amira has also chosen Abbas, Hussein and Zayneb's half-brother as the one she feels close to from the male characters in the battle of Karbala. When she was asked by the interviewer about the reason that makes women across time feel related to Abbas, her answer was because he is 'a brother'. Amira in the extract below elaborates on the meaning of brother in her life:

> the relationship between Lady Zayneb and Al-Abbas peace be upon him was a brotherly relationship a girl or a woman by nature always looks up to her brother even if she grows up and gets married but still she looks up to her brother (Inter.: right) (.) it's a special relationship subhanallah [praise be to Allah] He [Allah] is the one who makes this relation a woman feels that her brother is her anchor even if her husband is there and supports her in any problem she faces she consults him so the relationship between a sister and her brother is special (.) it's special especially for women

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

Amira highlights the special quality of the sister-brother relationship and describes this relationship as God-given. She also alludes to the idea that a woman needs her brother even if she gets married and has her own life. Amira by drawing on this brother-sister relationship positions herself as a tender sister, someone who is attached to her brother and someone who keeps on strong family relationships. This kind of positioning is highly appreciated in the Iraqi society because it reflects the teachings of Islam. Islam urges Muslims to have strong family relationships and that one should not abandon their family members under any circumstances.

Hanaa shares with Amira this admiration towards Abbas and for the same reason, because he is a brother:

> since I was a child I had this deep love for him [Abbas] (Inter.: so is it just a matter of deep love or-) no Abu Al-Fadil Al-Abbas

peace be upon him had many characteristics (.) he represented loyalty to religion (.) loyalty to brotherhood (.) he represented strong family relations (.) he represented many things (.) he represented tenderness and religion at the same time (.) these things are represented [by Abbas] to me that's why (.) I have this attachment to him (.) <u>not because it is something I grew up with no this is the way I see him</u> (.) he represented the true meaning of a brother the true meaning of an uncle Zayneb peace be upon her (.) missed him a lot although he was her half-brother and this shows his status (Inter.: women are always attached to Abu Al-Fadil Al-Abbas peace be upon him) aha I'll tell you maybe they are attached to him because of his relationship with Zayneb peace be upon her that's why women feel attached to him (.) because women by nature (.) whatever status they reach (.) even if they have high degrees jobs or even money they always need support support which is support so Abu Al-Fadil Al-Abbas represented support he is a symbol of support

(Interview, 15th of December 2014)

From Hanaa's point of view, a woman always needs a brother to support her even if she occupies high positions; Hanaa attributes this to women's nature. By saying this she shares with Amira the same opinion but she refers to another aspect. Hanaa denies that she is attached to Abbas due to the way she was raised (see the underlined line above); instead she attributes this attachment to her own judgment ('this is the way I see him'). Relying on her own judgment can be linked to what Hanaa mentioned earlier (see Hanaa's profile in chapter 4) that attending *majales* is important at the early stages of life but when someone grows up they can stop attending them because they will know what is the aim behind holding them. Both Amira and Hanaa comply with the master narrative of keeping strong family relationships. However, Hanaa makes herself distinct by attributing her respect to the brother-sister relationship (cf. Abbas and Zayneb) to her own judgment, i.e. she is not moulded by nurture to take this decision.

To sum up, the idea of the role model is exemplified through family relationships. The whole idea behind the story of the battle of Karbala is based on this idea of family relationship. Hussein is the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and it is this relationship with the Prophet that gives him this special status among Shi'a. The participants have highlighted this family relationship as one of the reasons that make them attend the *majales*. The participants invoke strong family relationships repeatedly

in their interviews, with a particular focus on first-degree relationships. In cases of loss and mourning of a family member, the participants report that they overcome this by taking solace in the *Ahlulbayt*. They remember what happened to Hussein and his family and this gives them patience and strength to endure what they face. In this context, the story of Karbala transcends the story realm. It stops being a mere historical/ religious story and changes into a story that is filled up with role models and so gets integrated into the everyday lives of the participants. The participants are highly qualified and well educated women but in their interviews, they rarely talk about this aspect of their life; in contrast, family and their family gendered roles like mother, daughter, sister and wife appear repeatedly in their narratives.

The participants comply with the master narrative of having strong family relationships but some of them come up with different aspects within this master narrative. By doing so they do not appear to produce counter master narrative but their identity work entails making themselves distinct as particular kinds of people. All the participants seem to agree upon the importance of having a role model in life, they all look up to *Ahlulbayt* when they look for role models. The differences among them in taking up role models lies in the interpretation of the actions of these role models and the application in everyday life situations of the lessons derived from their actions.

7.4 Community-building

The different data sets of the current study point towards an idea of community building. Building a universal Shi'i community or *ummah* that includes both the local community and other national/ international communities of Shi'a and across different times has also been noted. The Islamic Centre as a community of practice has helped the participants in their orientation towards having a community and maintaining it.

Community-building works on two levels, a paradigmatic level and a syntagmatic level (see the figure below). By a syntagmatic level relationships I mean the religious bonds that link any practising Shi'i Muslim who participates in the rituals in our present time in any place of the world with other Shi'i Muslims whether those who share with him/ her the same place or in different places. By paradigmatic level relationships I mean the religious bonds that link any practising Shi'i Muslim who participates in the rituals with

the past Shi'i practising Muslims in different times and with the Prophet's household, i.e. *Ahlulbayt*.
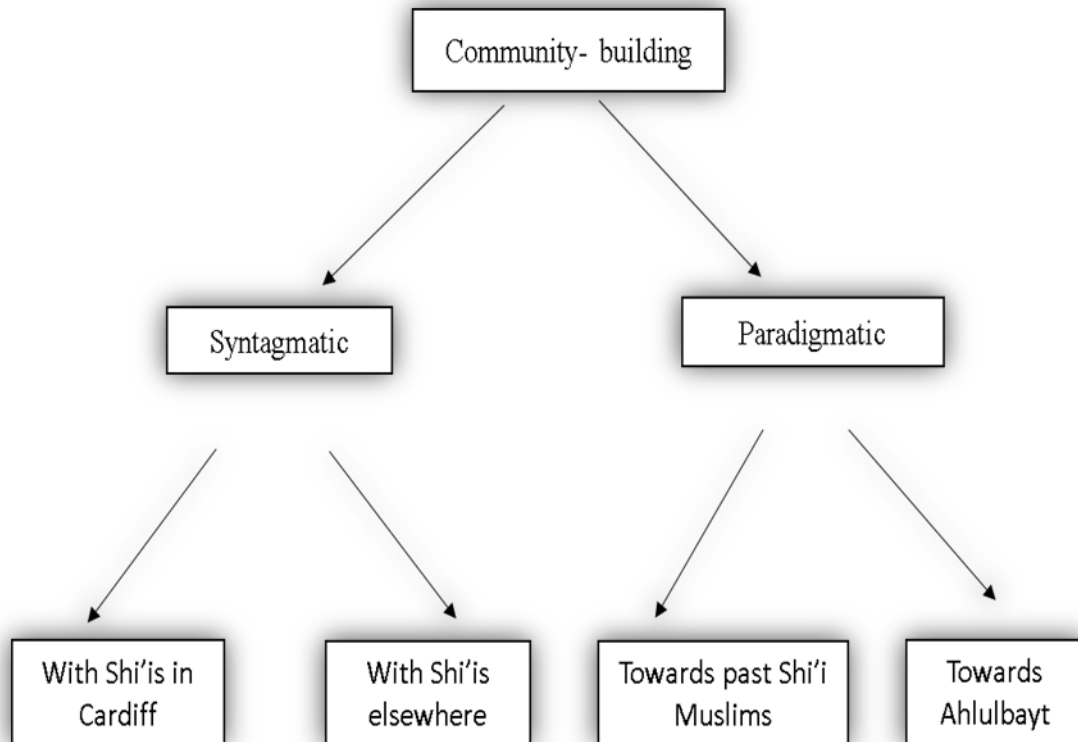
On the syntagmatic level the participants were creating ties with other Shi'i Muslims who attend the same rituals with them in the Centre and with other Shi'is who practise the rituals in different places of the world in our present time. The holding of the *majales* by itself is a unifying act. When people gather in one place and share one goal this works on strengthening their relationships. The women who were observed were taking care of each other and of each other's children. They used to socialise with each other before the programme of the Centre starts (see chapter 4) and after it finishes every night. In one of the *majales* I noticed that almost all women were asking about a certain woman who used to attend all the *majales* held in the Centre but who has recently stopped attending. I knew then that she was in hospital and that was the reason behind everyone's asking about her (field notes 26.10.2014). Women were also trying to keep strong relationships with other Shi'is especially those who are in Iraq. On more than one night donations were collected from the participants in the *majales*. These donations were for the orphans of Iraq. Donations were also collected on different

occasions for the improvement of the Centre or for holding *majales*. Participants also were either asked or they asked for prayers to be recited at the end of *majales*; the aim of these prayers was asking God to keep safe the Iraqi army and fighters who are fighting against ISIS in Iraq. As mentioned in chapter 4, Asma used to encourage other women on attending the *majales*, keeping them alive and keeping the memory of Hussein and his household alive in the diaspora. In the second round of the data collecting in 2015 when she could not attend the *majales* regularly as she did in the first round in 2014, she did not abandon urging others on attending by creating a 'WhatsApp' group to which she added some women and encouraging them to cooperate with me.

In terms of the paradigmatic level, participants were having two sorts of relationships. One was with all past Shi'i Muslims while the other was with *Ahlulbayt* and other religious figures that are related to the battle of Karbala. Below are some of the practices that show how this paradigmatic relationship is achieved.

As mentioned in chapter 4 usually some of the first ten days of Muharram are named after one of the people who belong to Hussein's camp and who were killed with him in Karbala. This act of remembering keeps people attached to their religious figures, to keep their memory alive and it also helps new generations to be acquainted with those figures. Themes related to Hussein, Abbas, Hussein's half-brother, and Zayneb, Hussein's sister and what they represent in Islam were recurrent in the narratives told by Shi'i women and in the *majales* I had attended. Other religious figures that were present at Karbala were also mentioned. Even figures that were not physically present at Karbala were mentioned like the Prophet Muhammad and Hussein's mother, Fatima, and Hussein's stepmother. Talking about those figures in the *majales* and discussing the dimensions of their acts made people, especially women, cry profoundly (field notes, different nights). This act of collective mourning crying works as a unifying bond with those figures that were mentioned but it is also a unifying bond with other people who cried for Hussein over the years since his martyrdom in 680 AD up to the present.

This act of crying works on both levels, i.e. the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic ones. Being united with Hussein, his family, companions and other people who cried for them is a paradigmatic one. On the other hand, sharing this act of crying with other people

who are either present in the Islamic Centre or who cry for Hussein elsewhere but in our present time is a syntagmatic relationship.

Some people were coming up with individual acts which reflect their attachment to Hussein and the battle of Karbala which were shown through the *majales*. For example an old woman was offering the participants water and asking them to remember Hussein's thirst on the day of Ashura, the tenth of Muharram (field notes, 28.10.2014). Hussein and his camp suffered from thirst because the enemies prevented them from water and those who were killed in the battle of Karbala died thirsty. By offering water to others in this way and asking them to remember Hussein this woman was emphasising her relationship with Hussein and at the same time encouraging others to remember him. By remembering Hussein and the way he was killed people will also remember what Hussein's enemies did. By remembering Hussein, which is usually done verbally by reciting certain phrases which show their admiration towards Hussein and their outrage towards his enemies, people take sides[32]. Another example was related to Abbas, Hussein's half-brother, where some women were offering special kind of bread which is made in his name (field notes, 20.10.2015, cf. Ghadially, 2003) on the night dedicated to him (see chapter 4 section 4.2.3).

Ida'yia (plural of *du'a*) that were recited at the end of each *majlis* have a special significant bond. At the end of each *majlis* I have attended during the time of my fieldwork *du'a al-Faraj* was recited. This is a *du'a* which is specified for Imam Mahdi by which God is asked to hasten the Mahdi's appearance. Imam Mahdi is the twelfth Shi'i Imam according to Twelver Shi'a; he is the one who is awaited to restore peace to earth. By the preacher reciting the *du'a* and the audience sharing him his prayers for the Mahdi they are building both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships. They are sharing with other Shi'is who also pray for the appearance of the Mahdi in our present time and they are also building a relationship with all past Shi'is, not only this but they are also keeping their bond with the twelfth Imam himself. *Warith ziyara* was also recited at the end of each *majlis*; through this *ziyara* people send their salutations to Hussein and they show his high position as a descendent of the Prophet.

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[32] People would usually say "Oh, Abi Abdullah [Hussein], peace be upon you, may Allah's [God] curses be upon your enemies."

When people recite *du'a al-Faraj* and *Warith ziyara* they do so while facing the direction of Mecca, the Muslims holy house of God, but with *du'a al-Faraj* they have to stand up for those who can and with *Warith ziyara* they have to sit down, preferably on the ground. By facing Mecca, those people are also sharing other Shi'is who do or did so. The act of facing Mecca works as a unifying act in that it unifies the participants of the *majales* with other Muslims since all Muslims have to be directed towards Mecca when doing their daily prayers but the recitation of the *du'a* and *ziyara* work on unifying them with other Shi'is. In this sense and in both cases they are building a virtual rather than a real community or as Anderson (1983) puts it, it is an "imagined community". Having a Shi'i community helps the participants in their identity work as Shi'i Muslims who feel united with other Shi'is and worry about them even if they have never met them. Giving donations and praying for people in Iraq are just two examples of this unity which can be linked to the way the Peshawar Shi'a in Hegland's studies felt united with the Iraqi Shi'a when they were attacked by the coalition troops in the nineties of the twentieth century.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter investigated how the women in my study define themselves, explicitly or implicitly, as particular kinds of people. Bamberg's (1997a) third level of narrative positioning model was employed in the analysis included in this chapter. This third level answers the question how the narrators define themselves to themselves. References are made to the master narratives that are deduced from the narratives as well as practices relevant to Muharram. The participants orient towards those master narratives when they talk about the *majales* and their living in the diaspora. These women show certain patterns in the way they narrate/construe specific issues, like their tendency towards having a role model in their lives and in the lives of their children. They appear to primarily orient to and empathise with the battle of Karbala's women than men. They are also in agreement on the importance of the idea of sacrifice although this is interpreted in different forms by the different participants.

Master narratives closely related to Karbala have been identified. Karbala as a story and as a place plays a significant role for the participants. Karbala as a story is filled up with

role models who are taken up as examples in the participants' daily life practices. The participants give special attention to the idea of having a role model in life and for them Hussein, his family and companions are excellent examples to be emulated. This idea of the role model works as an overarching idea, a super master narrative that encompasses other master narratives referred to in this chapter. In aspects of their lives they look up to the story of Karbala to get inspired.

The participants orient to the idea of sacrifice; the story of Karbala is hugely based on sacrifice where Hussein, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, sacrificed himself for Islam. Other characters that were present at the battle of Karbala had also made sacrifices that the participants find them worthy to be acknowledged and emulated. The master narrative of sacrifice cuts across religious and everyday life, and defines the participants as committed Shi'i Muslim women. Another master narrative that is derived from the Karbala story is moderation. The participants admire other people who belong to other countries, other religious and ethnic backgrounds. Hussein has given a good example of moderation since one of his companions was a black Christian man. A number of references have been made by the participants to extremism. Taking into consideration that identity work is always contextualised, these references might be prompted by the current socio-political circumstances (terrorism and extremism in the West). Family relationships are also depicted in the Karbala story. When the participants attend the *majlis* they do so as a family. They listen to the story of Hussein and his family and this can be reflected in the *majlis* where they attend with their children and spouses. Schubel (1991:128) states that the familial participation in the *majlis* can have a teaching aspect for the children; "[c]hildren witness the effect of this ritual not on distant strangers but rather on people whom they love and respect".

The deduced master narratives from the sets of data of the current study point to how these women orient to master narratives that assist in keeping their set of beliefs, practices and rituals from their country of origin alive in the diaspora. The orientation towards such master narratives is contributing to the reproduction of the home rituals in the host country. This could be interpreted as a means used by these women to maintain their identities as dedicated Shi'i Muslims in Cardiff. Being distant and away from Karbala might be the reason for them to draw on such master narratives. If these women

were living in Iraq and were interviewed probably the master narratives they draw on would be slightly different.

Chapter Eight: Concluding Discussion

8.1 Introduction

The central research question this thesis addresses is "how do Shi'i Muslim women use sacred texts and practices which are embedded in Muharram rituals as a means for constructing their identities in the diaspora?" The women involved in this study are Iraqi Shi'i Muslim women who came to the United Kingdom as either PhD students or as spouses to PhD students. The sacred texts involved are texts related to the rituals of Muharram and Safar which commemorate the battle of Karbala, the battle in which Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, was killed. For the women participating in this study, Cardiff city in Wales, the United Kingdom, becomes a diasporic space since they moved to a new location after leaving their homeland. The central research question is divided further into two sub-questions:

- How do the women in my study use Muharram and/or texts related to it to reproduce the core values of Islam in the diaspora? In other words, how do Shi'i Muslim women who live in Cardiff approach issues of orientations towards core values of their home of origin and the values of the new location?

- How does the women's use of Muharram and/or texts related to it demonstrate flexibility in their adaptation to the specifics of their new location? In other words, how is flexibility manifested in the religious practices of these women?

In order to reach an answer to these questions ethnographic and narrative methodologies are combined in the analysis of this thesis. The use of these two methodologies has proved to be fruitful in the analysis because each methodology has been complementary to the other. Ethnography has revealed the wider context within which the analysed narratives took place while the narrative methodology has contributed to the study of the linguistic details of these narratives and their use as markers of identity. Each of the ethnographic methods used has its own advantages, disadvantages and challenges. These methods are audio-recordings of rituals, participant-observations and interviews. The narrative methodology employed is Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model. This model which consists of three

levels has been applied to the data where each level is included under a chapter (5, 6 & 7).

8.2 Analysis Summary and discussion

This section provides a summary and discussion of the analysis included in the thesis where Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model has been applied. This model consists of three levels and each level of these asks a question; the answers to these questions are provided below by presenting first the identity work in the story world, the story telling- world, the moral and social world and then in the three worlds put together:

8.2.1 Identity work in the story world

The narratives told by the participants show a number of events that they report while they talk about doing *majales* like encountering a difficult situation or process of change and learning. It has been found that the participants use comparisons to create parallelism between events that occurred in the sacred/ religious world and the daily-lived world. The women in my study recounted the texts in such a way as to create parallels between their daily practices and the central characters from the Karbala story and the incidents that befell them. In doing this they create positions for themselves within the diasporic community that make sense of their identities as Muslim women, as when Amira uses Zayneb's story to present herself as a person who develops epiphany on the basis of going through a difficult situation. Parallelism also takes place by contrasting two places. Asma compares between Baghdad and Karbala and shows how the move from the former to the latter has affected her personality. Walaa compares between Karbala and Cardiff in terms of holding the *majales*, while Hanaa compares between Karbala and Cardiff, and between the Islamic Centre and other worship places like churches. Moving places plays a central role in the narratives of these four women. The participants try to carry on the practices they used to do in Karbala to the diaspora; this is presented as a way of maintaining the rituals, which is part of who they are.

Narratives which depict transformation are employed by the participants to show the role *majales* play in their lives. This transformation has different manifestations as discussed in chapter 5. We saw a narrative that talks about suffering and epiphany in Amira's extract in which she compares between her situation and Zayneb's situation. A narrative of explicit transformation has been told by Asma who talks about how she has changed from being a selfish person to an altruistic person when she moved from Baghdad to Karbala. Transformation is also evident in Hanaa's narrative about her son and how he started to recognise practices when he goes to a Husseiniya. Amira, Asma and Walaa's narratives have them as main characters when they tell personal narratives. But when they talk about religious stories they position religious figures as main characters. In spite of being a main character in the personal narrative she tells, Amira is positioned as a weak person in comparison to Zayneb in the religious narrative. Asma is positioned as a changed person; another person who is changed is Hanaa'a son. Walaa keeps on positioning herself as the same, i.e. as a person who takes on a teaching role in any place she goes to.

The sacred texts and practices are used by the participants as reference points in their lives. They relate the details of everyday practices to examples derived from the Karbala story. This relation to the practices and the sacred texts related to Karbala assist in identity work. The women who belong to this community do this type of identity work and present themselves as changed people, i.e. people who go through a learning process which eventually leads to their transformation. This change takes different forms like being altruistic and patient. The ways in which the participants refer to the Karbala story is similar to the idea of the portability of Karbala to diaspora which is highlighted by Schubel (1996) (see chapter 2). Schubel (1996) argues that Karbala has a portability aspect and holding the rituals in the diaspora helps the participants to re-enact Karbala in the new environment. The participants of the current study also allude to this portability aspect through both the rituals they practise and their narratives, i.e. the recurrent parallelism they draw between characters in their personal stories and characters in the Karbala story. Unlike previous research that argued about ritual portability on the basis of researchers' observations (Schubel, 1996; Takim, 2000; Pedersen, 2014), this study has filled a gap in the current literature by paying close attention to the ways in which people in the diaspora experience portability as

manifested in their actual stories about Muharram rituals and events (see the discussion regarding the importance of linguistic ethnography in chapter 3).

8.2.2 Identity work in the story-telling world

This question addresses how the interviewees and the interviewer use talk of the *majales*, the Karbala story and Hussein to position themselves in their discourse. The story telling setting is explored and the role of the listener (the interviewer in this case) in the co-construction of narratives is taken into account.

The participants show a variety of positions that they take in relation to the topics raised within the interview setting. Amira positions herself as an advice-giver, both Asma and Hanaa position themselves as critics of others' behaviours and Walaa positions herself as an explainer. Two main findings have been reached under this question. The first finding is the use of hypothetical scenarios as a means of persuasion. Hypothetical scenarios have been used by the participants. Amira refers to a hypothetical situation in which she imagines the story of Karbala being told to a child. Asma uses two hypothetical stories, in one she discusses the process of degeneration into vice while in the second she talks about an imaginary situation between the interviewer and the head of her school. Similarly, Walaa brings in a hypothetical situation about the interviewer being a caring mother. Hanaa also uses a hypothetical situation in which she imagines a foreigner who would come and see the man who has done *tatbeer*. The second finding is the reliance on the shared knowledge that both the interviewer and the interviewees possess. The reliance on shared knowledge allows the interviewees to position themselves as fellow Shi'is, PhD students and women who have something in common with the interviewer. For example, Amira draws on the shared knowledge which she and the interviewer have as Shi'i Muslims which allows her to position herself as a fellow Shi'i. Asma also invokes shared experience regarding their experiences as PhD students which allows her to build rapport with the interviewer. Walaa, like Amira and Asma, makes use of the shared knowledge she and the interviewer have. The shared knowledge that Walaa makes use of is the fact that both of them are females.

As mentioned in the literature review (chapter two), Pedersen (2014) argues that participating in the *majales* have granted those who have active roles in them an aura

and gained them respect and social recognition as good organisers, performers, etc. While talking about *majales*, my participants allude to similar roles in addition to their active, physical roles in the *majales*. Through their talk about *majales* and Muharram rituals the participants have presented/ positioned themselves in relation to their interlocutor, i.e. the interviewer by taking roles similar to the ones highlighted by Pedersen (2014), like advice-givers, teachers and critics. Thus, not only participation in the rituals throws a certain aura upon the participants but even talking about them allows them to acquire such an aura. Such roles are core to the Muslim community in diaspora and the homeland because by adopting them the participants can ensure the continuity of the rituals and socialising young generations into them, as a result, they emphasise these roles while talking to another member of their community, i.e. the researcher.

8.2.3 Identity work in the social and moral world

Bamberg's (1997a) third level of his positioning model has been described as a 'middle ground' (De Fina, 2013) because it works on linking the immediate local level of interaction to a wider global level. The links between these two levels are made by identifying patterns that occur in the data. These patterns have been identified in relation to the analysis included in chapter seven. Such patterns have been identified across the interviews and other ethnographic methods have enhanced my understanding of these patterns (cf. Creese (2010) for the complementary relationship between linguistics and ethnography). The participants seem to orient towards the same master narratives that are circulated within this particular community of practice (the Centre) and in Iraq (their home of origin). A number of master narratives have been identified which are related to Hussein, the Karbala battle and the Muharram rituals. The idea of having a role model in life has been found to be of central importance and it permeates other identified master narratives. The chosen figures as role models by the participants echo to some extent the figures who have been identified by other researchers (see chapter 7). Some differences and unconventional choices occurred in the data but these do not contradict the idea of orienting towards having a role model in life. This idea of having a role model in life has been considered a super master narrative in the analysis involved in this thesis due to its presence in other identified master narratives. It has

been identified as central in other master narratives that work within interpersonal relationships like sacrificing for the sake of others, being moderate in relation to others and having strong family relationships. It has also been evident in relation to places where the participants orient towards the idea of places as sacred and being sources of rituals.

The master narrative of places as sources of rituals and the orientation towards them like the participants' orientation towards Karbala as a source of rituals and the comparison between the rituals they held in Cardiff and those held in Karbala are somewhat similar to the portability idea which has been advocated by Schubel (1996). By comparing the rituals held in Cardiff with those held in Karbala the participants are trying to transport and recreate rituals from Karbala to Cardiff. This constant portable element, which is *majales* in this case and the orientation towards Karbala, allows for reinvention around it in new contexts. The portable element helps in the orientation towards core values that this portable element represents. This portability and orientation shows that it is not how those participants would behave wherever they are but rather it is more acting like X role model for example if s/he were here, i.e. in diaspora. So, the idea of a role model as a super master narrative is particularly important in the diaspora, as someone/a place that the participants can (re)orient to wherever they are, a stable element in the disruption and reorganisation inherent in diasporic life.

8.2.4 Identity work across the three worlds

To bring the three worlds together and to answer the central question of the thesis, through the narratives they tell, the participants orient towards the sacred texts and practices that are related to the Karbala battle, Hussein and Muharram rituals. This orientation is reflected in the three levels of Bamberg's (1997a) positioning model, i.e. the three worlds mentioned above. When they narrate stories, no matter how personal these stories are, they make references to and parallelism with stories derived from the Karbala battle and events that surround it, i.e. stories which have a sacred flavour. The parallelism and the juxtaposition with those sacred stories help the participants discover and rediscover certain aspects in themselves that they were not aware of before this juxtaposition. This in turn leads to change which is instigated by learning from these

stories. Talking about *majales* also helps to bring out certain roles that the participants take. Being teachers, advice-givers or critics are roles related to the sacred rituals. The Iraqi Shi'i women in Cardiff foreground 'teaching' because they want for the rituals and the teachings of Shi'i Islam to continue. They also criticise others because they did not follow the teachings of Islam as they would have expected or because some are spreading out a bad image of Shi'i Islam. Even the investigation of their narratives in relation to more globalised discourses revealed that the links to these higher levels of interaction are related to ideas derived from or related to the Karbala battle. The role models they follow in life are derived from the Karbala sacred texts. The way they build relationships with others and the way they interact with others are also related to discourses that are included within the Karbala sacred texts. In other words, their lives revolve around Hussein, Karbala and its texts and rituals. This discussion has shown the way in which the participants relate to the sacred texts that are related to Hussein, Muharram and Karbala.

The way/ ways in which they live and behave in the diaspora, i.e. Cardiff is also shown through the three levels of Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model. Being in a diasporic place has affected the participants' lives and identities. Moving to Cardiff has helped these women to reflect upon their rituals, practices and orientation towards Karbala as their permanent residence place. As mentioned in chapter seven they feel lucky to be in Cardiff because of the *majales* held in it but being in it has worked on reinforcing their attachment to Karbala.

Cardiff played central roles in their lives. For example, Cardiff has helped Walaa to continue with her teaching role which she used to have in Iraq. For Hanaa's son being in Cardiff caused him confusion because he was not able to figure out the difference between the Islamic Centre and churches. Asma has also been affected by being in Cardiff, being in it has enabled her to judge others' behaviours in terms of holding *majales*, *majales* that she have greatly missed when she was in Cambridge, i.e. being in Cardiff has worked as a mixed blessing for her. Cardiff, as a diasporic place for the participants, has worked on impacting their rituals and in turn affecting their identities. Having people from different ethnic groups, countries, and professions in one place, i.e. the Centre, has worked on reminding them of the different people who supported Hussein in his war against Yazid. This reminder allowed them to be more open and

tolerant with others especially towards people who do not share the same religious views as them.

In a way, moving to Cardiff has disrupted Bourdieu's 'habitus'. According to Maton (2012: 51), habitus "focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not others". Bourdieu's habitus was criticized for its implicit emphasis on the unconsciousness; in other words, what one learns of practices and behaviours become integrated within the person without being aware of their existence or the way they work (Barrett, 2015: 6). What the participants have learned and been accustomed to since childhood is the habitus that they have formed. When the habitus is disrupted 'reflexivity' or 'awareness' occurs. This is similar to the idea when "individuals becom[e] reflexively aware of, for example, their nationality, when travelling abroad, or of their working 'classness', when negotiating middle-class environments" (Bottero, 2010: 8). After changing places and moving to Cardiff, the participants started to develop this awareness and started to question why they attend *majales*, how they can reinforce their relationship to them, how they can connect their children to them and how to improve them, i.e. they have developed reflexivity.

The Islamic Centre in Cardiff, in its turn, has worked as a liminal space where the participants can meet up and practise their rituals away from the outside, foreign surroundings. Thus, it has worked as a refuge point for them which reminds them of home and origins and at the same time helped to maintain their identities as Shi'i Muslims. This suggests that religious gatherings and communities of practice can be liminal spaces in which identities are protected to some degree and maintained sometimes.

8.3 Research Reflections

In this section my reflections about the methods used in data collection and analysis are presented along with reflections about my position as a researcher.

i. Reflections related to data collection methods

This section contains reflections related to the ethnographic methods that have been adopted in collecting the data for this study. To start with the audio recordings method which was employed in recording the *majales* over the period of my fieldwork, audio recording has been adopted to capture the various texts that are used/ circulated within a *majlis* setting. As indicated in chapter 3 getting access to the men's section was not allowed to me for gender restrictions which are prevalent in Muslims' religious gatherings. This led me to ask for the help of some of the male participants to do the recordings for me. This was one of the main challenges that I have faced. But on the positive side, recording the rituals has allowed me to reflect upon the texts that are used within the *majales* settings and to check these recordings over and over again whenever needed. This advantage probably would not have been available through other means especially when taking into consideration that my request to video record the rituals has been rejected.

Moving to interviews, interviews have given me the chance to explore topics in depth with a number of the participants. Interviews have allowed me to get an emic perspective about the practised rituals and to form bonds with the participants. Interviews also enabled me to decide on narrative analysis and my whole approach because of the undeniable presence of narratives in the interviews which probably I would not be able to have without conducting interviews. The problem with interviews is that it was not easy to recruit participants without the help of my gatekeepers. Deciding on a suitable time and place was also a major challenge for both one-to-one interviews and focus groups. Another problem is getting emotional which posed a great challenge and whether this was from the side of the interviewees or the interviewer. It is hard to continue an interview when one of the parties involved is overwhelmed with emotions. From a different angle, interviews have restricted me in a way because I have relied on the information provided by the participants and this information might be biased because of the participants' personal, political or religious orientations.

Focus groups which are part of interviews enable the interviewer to see how topics are discussed within a group and how these topics are taken up by the participants. The challenge with the focus groups is when topics are not discussed as a group but rather as

a one-to-one interview where each participant will answer the question posed and then keeps silent and waits for the other participants to take up the floor or when one participants takes the floor and hold it for too long.

Some of the challenges mentioned above are related to demographic aspects, for instance, gender as with the challenge of audio recording the rituals. Gender restrictions in the Islamic Centre did not allow me to observe the *majales* in the men's section. Not being able to access the men's section led to the problem of not being able to have control over the recorder and having to ask men to get the recorder in and out of their section on behalf of me. My nationality/ place of origin have also affected the research where being non-British citizen led to treating me as an outsider to the Centre's community of practice when I got engaged with the participant observation of the rituals.

One method which I wished I had followed along the other methods mentioned above is participants' diaries. I came across this idea at a later stage of my fieldwork but if I had the chance to adopt it earlier, I think it would have given great insights about the rituals, women's opinions and reflections about them and the way they practise them. Data collected through this method would enhance the emic perspective in relation to the scope and dimension of the practised rituals and their role in the participants' lives.

ii. Reflections related to analysis methods

The main analysis model which has been adopted in this study is Bamberg's (1997a) narrative positioning model. This model has been chosen for analysis because it offers a three-dimensional perspective of narratives. In other words, this model takes into consideration the story world, the story-telling world and the relation of these two worlds to the outside world. It is also an interactional model and this goes in line with the idea of identity adopted in this thesis as being performed and constructed through discourse rather than being static or given (see chapter 2). Despite these advantages, this model has been criticised for the difficulty in drawing distinct lines between the three levels:

> For example, the distinction between second- and third-level
> positioning is particularly challenging in that part of the
> effectiveness of interactional positioning derives from narrators'

> ability to represent themselves as certain kinds of persons beyond the limits of the current interaction, and therefore their interactional identities are often related to broad social categories of belonging.

<div align="right">(De Fina, 2015, p. 360)</div>

De Fina's comment is true from my own experience and the number of hours I have spent, either with my supervisors or on my own, trying to decide whether a particular element belonged to the second or the third level. Such difficulty in distinguishing between these two levels might be possible to hide if someone is discussing all the three levels together but because I have separated them into chapters this made it particularly challenging. In addition to the criticism raised by De Fina above, the model does not specify the linguistic features that would assist analysts in the analysis of these three levels and separating them from each other. So as if this model has provided the booklet but not the toolkit, i.e. it specifies the three levels without setting out the way these can be investigated and distinguished. This can be justified by taking into consideration the performative, interactional nature of the model and the types of narratives where each narrative reflects the identity of its narrator which is fluid and dynamic.

iii. Reflections related to the researcher

In this section I reflect upon my position as a researcher and some of my personal traits which have an impact upon the research. As indicated in chapter 3, my position as a researcher is one of being a semi-insider in the community under study. Having such a position has allowed me to participate in the rituals and have access to participants. But I was not a fully immersed insider and this is where the role of my gatekeepers came. Having a semi- insider status has granted me the right to participate in the rituals but it has not given me the status of fully trusted interviewer who can interview anyone she likes without the recommendation of trusted gatekeepers.

Concerning personal traits, for someone like me who is shy and an introvert doing ethnography was not an easy job. I felt constrained by these traits in addition to the feeling of fear which was evident over certain aspects of my fieldwork, fear of going to the field and the things that might go wrong:

> I am worried all the time, the idea of any failure in the recording is haunting me! OMG!!!

<div align="center">(Field notes, 25.10.2014, first day in the field)</div>

Because I was not the one in charge of the recorder during the first phase of data collection (see 3.2.1.1), I had this fear that the one to whom I handed the recorder might forget to turn it on. This would entail having to remind him which would be very difficult taking into consideration the segregated nature of the rituals. During the second phase of data collection, I did not do any recordings of the *majales*. Not doing recordings might be reflected positively on me because in such a case I will not have to worry about the recorder and how to get it in or out of the men's section. This did not materialise because something else took place instead as indicated in the extract below from my field notes on the first day of the second phase of data collection:

> I felt nervous all day because of having to go back to the field again. I know that I don't have to worry about recordings this year since I'm not recording the rituals but I still feel nervous. I'm not confident enough about my field notes, are they enough, OK, or do I need to include other things I'm not aware of?

<div align="center">(Field notes, 14.10. 2015)</div>

To draw a distinct line between my personal faith, identity, set of beliefs and my role as an 'objective' observer was also hard. In many cases I got too emotional and got involved in the rituals. I had to remind myself during the period of my fieldwork that I was attending as a researcher and not just a participant.

The process of change that I have gone through as a researcher is also of relevance here. During my initial position as a researcher I perceived the practised rituals as universal because of the similarities that had been shown in practising them in different contexts. I thought that I knew the rituals well and these would have the same connotations for all participants no matter where they are. This allowed me to think of the community of the Islamic Centre as belonging to an 'imagined (Shi'i) community' or Islamic 'Shi'i' *ummah*'. This is applicable to certain aspects of the rituals and practices but not to others because hybrid identity work has been identified in the data. Doing fieldwork has given me insights about those rituals and what I have thought to be universal rituals have proved to have their own specifics within this diasporic community of practice.

8.4 Concluding Remarks

My thesis is about sacred texts and practices of the Muharram rituals, the way they are used as means of identity construction by Shi'i Muslim women within a diasporic community. The analysis performed in this thesis has shown that the participants of the study tend to tell parallel narratives and by telling such narratives they juxtapose two worlds, the personal and the religious. This parallelism helps the participants to discover and rediscover certain aspects in themselves that they were not aware of before this juxtaposition. Talking about *majales* also helps in bringing out certain roles that the participants take. Being teachers, advice-givers or critics are roles related to the sacred rituals.

The story of the Karbala battle is incorporated into the participants' lives; they try to take morals and follow the footsteps of the people who are involved in this story; they admit they cannot but at least they are trying. On the other hand, the events of this story help them sometimes in keeping the memory of their dear departed ones fresh. It looks as if their whole life is centred on this story, it is not just a historical story; it is a story that is entangled with almost every aspect in their lives. They construct the Karbala story as a reference point and whenever they are confronted with a calamity, a difficult situation or a problem they try to remember what Hussein, his family and companions went through. So, for them, the Karbala story is the higher level of morality, to which they always aspire.

Cardiff, as a diasporic place, has worked on impacting the participants' rituals and in turn affecting their identities. For example, having people from different ethnic groups, countries, and professions in one place, i.e. the Centre, has worked on reminding them of the different people who supported Hussein in the Karbala battle. This reminder allowed them to be more open and tolerant with others especially towards people who do not share the same religious views as them.

The *majales* held in Cardiff represent a liminal space for the participants. They have this aspect of liminality because these *majales* do not fully resemble the ones held in Iraq or in Karbala in particular. At the same time, these *majales* do not belong to Cardiff, the British city. Being liminal, *majales* work as safe refuge for the participants because they remind them of home and origins and they work as a safeguard against the secular and materialistic context in which these *majales* are held. This liminality is

reflected in the identities these women represent. Hybrid identity work is created; identities that do not belong fully to any of the two places yet they have features of both produced at the same time. The participants praise the sacrifice aspect found in the Karbala story, but they do not employ it as it appears therein. They are keen on practising the same rituals that they have used to practise in Iraq, but they are ready to modify them so that they can suit their new environment.

8.5 Directions for further study

This brief section outlines some of the points that have been touched upon in the thesis and which have a potential of being further explored:

1. the role of the Centre as a place which encompasses people from different ethnic backgrounds and a site promoting intercultural communication,

2. the undeclared competition (see chapter 4) between the immigrants and the sojourners as a good example of 'otherizing' within a community,

3. some Shi'i Muslim women, whom I have met outside the Centre and who were not participating in the rituals, when asked about the reasons which have kept them away from participation in the rituals, indicated that they find it difficult to show their emotions in public and for this reason preferred non-participation; this kind of non- participation would be worth to be further studied using the concept of 'emotional regimes' (Reddy, 2001: 124), i.e. dominant modes for acceptable emotional thought and expression as created and enforced by governments or societies; and

4. the gender of the researcher as well as the researched is also an important point for critical study; if the researcher were a male, would the findings of this study be different, would the participants relate to the researcher in the same way? And if the researched were male rather than female participants would the outcome be the same?

In onclusion, sacred texts and the practices that surround them have the potential of impacting identity in varities of ways.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviews during the two phases of data collection

Table (1): Interviews conducted during the first phase of collecting data in 2014

	Interviewee	Age[33]	Position	Marital status	Hometown	Date of Interview	Duration of interview	Place of interview
1.	Suha[34]	29	PhD Student	Single	Baghdad	01.11.2014	20 minutes and 44 seconds	The living room of the researcher
2.	Walaa	42	a pharmacist who is accompanying her husband	married with 4 daughters	Karbala	20.11.2014	45 minutes and 58 seconds	The interviewee's kitchen
3.	Maha	44	PhD Student	Single	Babil	09.12.2014	17 minutes and 59 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering
4.	Rana	44	PhD Student	Single	Karbala	09.12.2014	21 minutes and 32 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering
5.	Sama	44	PhD Student	Single	Basrah	09.12.2014	18 minutes and 17 seconds	A lab room in the School of Engineering
6.	Asma	34	PhD Student	married with 1 daughter	Originally from Baghdad but then moved to Karbala	11.12.2014	46 minutes and 39 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering ; the bottom of a stair and then an isolated corner in the same school
7.	Mithal	45	PhD Student	married, childless	Babil	11.12.2014	11 minutes and 38 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering
8.	Zahraa	38	PhD student	married with two children, 1 girl and 1 boy	Najaf	11.12.2014	8 minutes and 32 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering

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[33] Age is calculated by the time of the interview.

[34] All the names are pseudonyms.

9.	Hana	38	PhD student	married with two children, 1 girl and 1 boy	Karbala	15.12.2014	30 minutes and 24 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering
10	Amira	36	PhD student	married with three children, 1 boy and 2 girls	Karbala	15.12.2014	20 minutes and 47 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering
11	Maram	44	PhD student	single	Basrah	17.12.2014	12 minutes and 30 seconds	The quiet room in the School of Engineering
	Total			**4 hours and 25 minutes**				

Table (2): Interviews conducted during the second phase of collecting data in 2015

	Interviewee	Age	Position	Marital status	Hometown	Date of Interview	Duration of interview	Place of interview
1	Maha	45	PhD Student	Single	Babil	17.12.2015	13 minutes and 13 seconds	The interviewee's office
2	Asma	35	PhD student	married with 1 daughter	Originally from Baghdad but then moved to Karbala	17.12.2015	43 minutes and 38 seconds	The quiet room
3	Hana	39	PhD student	married with two children, 1 girl and 1 boy	Karbala	17.12.2015	40 minutes and 45 seconds	A lab room
4	Sama	45	PhD Student	Single	Basrah	17.12.2015	12 minutes and 43 seconds	A lab room
5	Amira	37	PhD student	married with three children, 1 boy and 2 girls	Karbala	22.12.2015	14 minutes and 43 seconds	A university's cafeteria
	Total			**2 hours, 5 minutes and 2 seconds**				

Appendix 2: Consent forms

Consent form (English version)

<div align="center">

Consent Form

</div>

Project title: Sacred texts and identity construction in the Cardiff Muslim community

- I understand that my participation in this project will involve answering questions related to the rituals and practices of Muharram and Safar and my participation in these.

- I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason

- I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Zayneb Al-Bundawi.

- I understand that the information provided by me will be held totally anonymously, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually. I understand that this information may be retained indefinitely.

- I understand that information provided by me for this study, including my own words, may be used in the research report, and in any future research done by the researcher but that all such information and/or quotes will be anonymised.

- I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback.

I, _____ (PRINT NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by *Zayneb Al-Bundawi,* School of English, Communication & Philosophy, Cardiff University under the supervision of *Dr Tom Bartlett* and *Dr Tereza Spilioti.*

Signed:

Date:

Consent form (Arabic version)

<div dir="rtl">

نموذج موافقة

عنوان الدراسة: النصوص الدينية ودورها في تشكيل الهوية في مجتمع مدينة كاردف المسلم

أعلم بأن مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة ستتضمن الاجابة عن أسئلة متعلقة بشعائر ومراسيم شَهري محرم وصَفَر ومشاركتي في هذه الشعائر والمراسيم

أعلم بأن مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة هي مشاركة طوعية بالكامل وبأني أستطيع الأنسحاب من الدراسة في أي وقت وبدون أعطاء اي مبرر لذلك

أعلم بأني حر في توجيه الاسئلة في اي وقت أشاء, وبأني فيما لو شعرت بعدم الارتياح خلال مشاركتي في هذا المشروع فأنا حر في الأنسحاب او في مناقشة ما يزعجني مع الباحثة زينب البنداوي

أعلم بأن المعلومات التي سأزود الباحثة بها ستوثق كمعلومات لا تكشف عن هوية صاحبها أبدا, وعليه سيكون من غير الممكن تعقب هذه المعلومات لي شخصيا.وأعلم بأن هذه المعلومات سيُحتفظ بها الى أجل غير مسمى

أعلم بأن المعلومات التي سأزود الباحثة بها ومن ضمنها كلامي الحرفي سيتم أستخدامها في هذه الدراسة وفي اي دراسة مستقبلية أخرى تقوم بها الباحثة ولكن على أن لا تكشف هكذا معلومات و أقتباسات حرفية عن هويتي الشخصية

أعلم بأني سأتسلم معلومات أضافية و(تغذية راجعة) نتائج متعلقة بالدراسة بعد الانتهاء منها

أنا .... (تكتب أسمك) أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة التي تجريها الباحثة زينب البنداوي التابعة لقسم اللغة الانكليزية جامعة كاردف وبأشراف الدكتور توم بارتلت والدكتورة تريزا سبليوتي

التوقيع:

التاريخ:

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Appendix 3: Banners used inside the Islamic Centre

Some of the banners that were hanged on the walls of the Centre during Muharram and Safar rituals

The top banner in the picture above says: '*Oh, Hussein*'

The bottom banner in the picture above shows one of the Prophet's Hadiths: '*Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things among you: the Book of God and my household*'.

The banner above says: 'Peace *be upon you, Hussein the martyr*'.

Appendix 4: Ethics Form
Proposal Form A: Fast track approval

This form is only to be used where the research being undertaken does not involve vulnerable participants or deception, but does involve information from or about living people that is not already in the public domain.

Submitted by: PG (PhD)

Date: 10-10-2014

Researcher's Name: Zayneb Elaiwi Sallumi Al-Bundawi

Principal Investigator/Supervisor if different: Dr. Tom Bartlett & Dr. Tereza Spilioti

Project Title: Sacred texts and identity construction in the Cardiff Muslim community

Proposed dates of research: October 2013-September 2016

Reasons for choosing Fast track route (please tick):

	Tick
I have completed the checklist, with no issues arising.	X
I will be gathering personal data about individuals (e.g. names, contact details, biographical or educational information, or other personal information) that needs to be held securely.	√
I will be gathering opinions, or making observations or measurements of individuals' behaviour.	√
My participants are over 18 years of age.	√
My participants are not members of a vulnerable group or temporarily in a vulnerable situation.	√
All the participants will sign a consent form.	X
All the participants will receive a debriefing document.	X
My procedures will fully comply with the information given in the consent and debriefing documents.	√
Students and research assistants: I have fully discussed this project and this application with my supervisor/the Principal Investigator	√
My research does not involve the collection of human tissue	√
Other: I cannot give a consent form and a debriefing form for all participants when I am going to record sermons and speeches in the mosque because of the large number of people who will attend these. However, the fact that the event is being recorded will be announced at the beginning and repeated at the end and if there are any objections I will not record the session. For smaller scale data collections such as interviews and focus groups, I will provide consent and debriefing forms.	

I would like to discuss aspects of this research with a member of the Ethics Committee. Please indicate the focus of this discussion:	X

Brief description of the research:

1. Aim, hypothesis

The aim of my study is to investigate how religious texts, which are embedded in religious rituals and practices, are used as resources by Muslim women to construct their identity in a non-Muslim community

2. Basic method

Ethnographic and discourse analytical research including semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observations. All of these will be recorded.

3. Type(s) of information that will be obtained, incl format.

Sermons and speeches delivered by preachers in the mosque; laments and elegies which are delivered by specialists in this kind of practices. Real-time discussion around these events and post hoc interview and focus group data about these events.

4. If you are using an existing dataset, briefly explain its origin and how ethics issues (might) apply.

N/A

Be prepared to supply, if requested, a copy of:
- the checklist
- the consent form
- the debriefing document
- examples of the materials being used (e.g. questionnaire, stimuli)