Creating Shia Spaces in British Society

The Role of Transnational Twelver Shia Networks in North-West London

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Introduction

Academic scholarship on Shia Muslim minorities in the West has described them as 'a minority within a minority'[1] or as 'the other within the other'[2], referring to a certain sense of double-marginalization of Shia Muslim minorities in non-Muslim societal contexts. They need to undertake particular efforts to maintain both an Islamic as well as particular Shia identity in terms of both communal activities and practices and public perception and recognition, responding to the rise of Islamophobia more generally and anti-Shia sectarianism more specifically. This paper will problematize this notion of a double-marginalization of Shia minorities in the West by investigating the dynamics around transnational Shia communal spaces in north-west London and the creation of Shia spaces by networks and organizations based there.

Being 'the other within other', while meant to articulate this double-marginalization, also contains certain opportunity structures for Shia Muslim communities in the context of the post-9/11 securitization of Islam[3] and the discursive dichotomy between 'good Muslim' and 'bad Muslims' or 'radical' and 'moderate' Islam.[4] This discursive securitization of Islam and of Muslim minorities living in the West tends to target militant and violent expressions of Sunni Islam in particular. Twelver Shia Muslims can thereby seize the opportunity to present themselves in the public arena, as a consequence of being othered by militant Sunni groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, as 'moderate' Muslims

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[1] Abdulaziz A. Sachedina, 'A Minority within a Minority: the Case of the Shi'a in North America', in *Muslim Communities in North America*, ed. by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane Idleman Smith (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 3.

[2] Liyakat Takim, *Shi'ism in America* (New York: New York University Press 2009), p. 143.

[3] Jocelyne Cesari, 'The Securitisation of Islam in Europe', *CEPS Challenge Programme, Research Paper No.* 15 (2009) <http://aei.pitt.edu/10763/1/1826.pdf> [accessed 26 May 2011].

[4] See Jonathan Birt, 'Good Imam, Bad Imam: Civic Religion and National Integration in post 9/11 Britain', *The Muslim World*, 96 (2006), 687-705; Katherine Brown, 'The Promise and Perils of Women's Participation in UK Mosques: The Impact of Securitisation Agendas on Identity, Gender and Community', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 10 (2008), 487; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Michael J. Balz, 'Taming the Imams: European Governments and Islamic Preachers since 9/11', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 19 (2008), 222; Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Tylor Golson, 'Overhauling Islam: Representation, Construction and Cooption of "Moderate Islam" in Europe', *Journal of Church and State*, 49 (2007), 499; Frédéric Volpi, 'Constructing the "Ummah" in European Security: Between Exit, Voice and Loyalty', *Government and Opposition*, 42 (2007), 460-462; Richard Jackson, 'Constructing Enemies: "Islamic Terrorism" in Political and Academic Discourse', *Government and Opposition*, 42 (2007), 83-95. On this discourse and its historical roots see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2005), pp. 15-16, 22-24, 260.

that are victimized by the same 'radical' forces in contemporary Islam that are responsible for the rise of global terrorism in the last two decades.[5]

This article will use the example of transnational Twelver Shia networks located in the London borough of Brent, in the north-west of the city, that operate between Britain and the Middle East.[6] Using recent contributions on the relationship between religion and space, this article examines how the agency of theses Twelver Shia networks unfolds at different spatial scales - locally, nationally and transnationally - and also transcends the physical parameters of these spaces by creating a 'utopian' space of a Shia religious *imaginaire*.

(Diaspora) Religion and Space

Based on reconceptualization of space and place by Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre and their reception within human geography[7] and the study of religions,[8] Kim Knott, Manuel A. Vasquez and Thomas Tweed conceive a spatial methodology as analytical framework to study diasporic religious communities. Knott makes the observation that diaspora and migration are themselves spatial terms describing the dispersal or movement of people from one place to another in order to propose a spatial methodology for the study of the history and politics of diaspora and migration.[9] The particular challenge of studying diasporic communities in a globalized world of 'time-space compression'[10] or 'distanciation'[11] lies in their very multi-locality: they exist in a particular locality but are not restricted to a location because of their transnational connections. Based on postmodern theorists in human geography, Knott conceives place neither as mere local context or 'passive container'[12] which hosts particular religious communities nor as static locality demarcated by fixed boundaries of nation or community. To overcome the impression of a static and localised approach to the study of religious communities in a particular place, Knott prefers an understanding of space that is dynamic and multi-

dimensional, containing – following Lefebvre - physical, social and discursive dimensions. Knott's primary interest is in the spatial strategies religious communities adopt to enter the secular space of British society and in the spaces that religious communities create themselves in particular locations and the dynamics processes involved therein.[13]

Vasquez' and Tweed's foci lie in the global-local nexus and in the transnational connections of diasporic religious communities. Based on his study of a Marian shrine built by Catholic Cubans in Miami,[14] Tweed distinguishes between three levels in which diasporic religions operate:

- The locative: the actual shrine that Catholic Cubans built in Miami to maintain their Catholic-Cuban identity in the diasporic context of primarily Protestant America.
- The trans-locative: the shrine faces Cuba and its murals depict the history of the country, thereby symbolising the horizontal connection of the diaspora to a real and imagined homeland.
- The supra-locative: as the shrine is discursively construed as a space to connect vertically with God, it acts as a spatial representation of the soteriological and redemptive meanings the Cubans assign to their enforced exile. Nostalgic of pre-Communist Cuba, they conceive their exile as part of a wider cosmic struggle between good and evil.

Despite its benefits, Tweed's dimensions do not sufficiently pay attention to the power relations inherent to the formation of diasporic communities. Vasquez suggests an approach that introduces the notion of networks to illustrate both the locative, trans-locative and supra-locative dimensions of transnational diasporic communities and the importance and persistence of power relations in their de-territorializing and re-territorializing dynamics. Vasquez defines networks as 'social fields'[15] to which individual actors have different access and entertain a diverse range of relations. Networks can be characterized by a high degree of institutionalization with clear hierarchies and membership criteria or be highly amorphous with permeable boundaries and decentralized patterns of authority. Despite their structural differences, networks delimitate trajectories of actions and discourses and serve as spaces that provide meaning to their members through shared practices, discourses, symbols, rituals etc. Their power relations manifest in conflicting claims to authority and status within these networks and in competition with other networks. They can also serve as alternative social spheres outside of state and society challenging 'dominant secular readings of civil society and citizenship.'[16]

This article utilises Tweed's distinction between the locative, trans-locative and supra-locative levels of diasporic religions and combines it with Knott's and Vasquez' contributions to investigate the role of transnational Shia networks in the creation of Shia spaces that are located in British society and engage in the British public sphere but also inhabit 'a global public space'[17] that transcends national boundaries. A number of Shia community centres of Iraqi and Iranian provenience will be introduced and their locative, trans-locative and supra-locative dimensions discussed.

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[13] Knott, *Location of Religion*, p. 3; see also Kim Knott, 'From Locality and Location and Back Again: A Spatial Journey in the Study of Religion', *Religion* 39 (2009), pp. 154-169.

[14] Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[15] Vasquez, *More than Belief*, p. 299.

[16] Vasquez, *More than Belief*, p. 302.

[17] John R. Bowen, 'Beyond Migration: Islam as a Transnational Public Space', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 30 (2004), p. 880.

The Locative: Twelver Shia Networks in Brent

The local context in which the Shia communities and networks are based is the London borough of Brent, in the north-west of the city. Brent, including the areas of Willesden Green, Kilburn, Cricklewood, Wembley, Neasdon, Kingsbury and Brondesbury, is one of the most multicultural areas in London with a long history of immigration, initially of Jews and Irish in the late 19th century; Kilburn has been referred to as 'County Kilburn', an extraterritorial county of Ireland in the spatial *imaginaire* of the Irish diaspora in London.[18] Due to the later arrival of Afro-Caribbean, South Asian and Eastern European immigrants the majority of the population in Brent come from ethnic minority groups (64%, according to the 2011 Census).[19] Brent together with Ealing and Kingston-upon-Thames is also the main area in London where Iraqis have settled since the 1970s and have continued to do so as a result of their oppression under the regime of Saddam Hussein and also following the most recent sectarian violence post-2003.[20]

As a consequence of Iraqi settlement in the borough, Brent has become not just the European but one of the global hubs of transnational Shia Islam in the last 30 years. There at least 20 Shia community centres located in Brent representing different national backgrounds but also different religious and political factions within contemporary Shia Islam. These community centres, referred to in Arabic and Persian as *husayniyya* or *imambarga* in the South Asian context, are not mosques but congregational halls used for Shia commemoration ceremonies, in particular those associated with 'Ashura', the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram when Shiis worldwide remember and mourn the death of Prophet Muhammad's grandson and third Imam Husayn on the plains of Karbala, in southern Iraq, in 680CE. The particular uniqueness of Brent as a diasporic space is its concentration of a variety of Shia networks and communities. While Iraqi centres constitute the majority of networks present in Brent, other centres and initiatives are run by Iranians, Afghans, Gulf Arabs and South Asians. Given the history of migration and diverse environment of Brent, the strong presence of Shia institutions, centres and networks blends into the normality of the wider multicultural and multi-religious urban landscape of Brent. One does not notice the prominence of Shia religious institutions in Brent in particular as they are not necessarily visible as Shia institutions but as Islamic centres located next to Sunni mosques, Buddhist and Hindu temples or synagogues. Within the spatial *imaginaire* of Shiis living in London, however, Brent is known as the 'Shia mile of London', or as a pun on Brent's designation as 'People's Republic of Brent' due to its history of leftist politics in the 1970s and 80s, as the 'Islamic Republic of Brent'.

One of the oldest and most prominent organisations is the Al-Khoie Foundation which was established in 1989. It runs the Al-Sadiq and Al-Zahra schools which are independent boy and girl schools. In addition, it also hosts an academic outreach centre, the Centre for Academic Shi'a Studies which invites academics to its seminar series and is involved in publication activities of an academic nature. However, it is most notably known for its various outreach activities to the wider public having become in the eyes of the British public and government officials the quasi-official representation of Twelver

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[18] M. C. Barrès-Baker, 'A Brief History of the London Borough of Brent', *Brent Museum and Archives Occasional Publications*, 5 (2007), p. 14.

[19] London Borough of Brent, *The 2011 Census: A Profile of Brent* (London: London Borough of Brent, 2013), p. 19.

[20] It is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the number of Iraqis living in London as a whole or in the different boroughs where they are concentrated. Estimates suggest a total of around 250,000 Iraqis living in the whole of the UK. See Monica Davey, 'Iraqis from Far Home Sign up to Vote', *The New York Times*, 19 January 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/19/world/africa/iraqis-far-from-home-sign-up-to-vote.html> [accessed 29 September 2017].

Shia communities in Britain. The Al-Khoei Foundation is usually approached by the British government and its various departments for advise on issues affecting Shia Muslims in Britain and is also one of the founding member and only Shia organisation of the Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB), an organisation founded after the London 7/7 bombings in 2005 in order to provide advice to mosque communities on how to meet professional standards in providing religious, pastoral and educational services to their congregations.[21] On a local level, the Al-Khoei Foundation is involved in various interfaith initiatives such as the London Interfaith Centre, the Three Faiths Forum, the Faiths Forum London or the Brent Interfaith Network and other civic society actors such as the North London branch of Citizens UK.[22]

In representing Shia Islam in the British public arena, the Al-Khoei Foundation has been extremely successful and conceives itself as an organisation that seeks to achieve 'community cohesion'[23] and to represent Shia Muslims as an integrated part of British society. It thereby is also willing to push the boundaries of inter-communal relations locally. In October 2016, under the umbrella of the Faiths Forum London, the Al-Khoei Foundation hosted the Jewish sukkot festival in partnership with the neighbouring Brondesbury Park United Synagogue, with volunteers from both communities building a wooden booth on the premises of the Al-Khoei Foundation. The event was presented in the media as 'an historic first in the UK'[24], an 'unprecedented partnership between a British mosque and synagogue'[25], as 'a London mosque has played host for a local synagogue's succah'[26]. This highly symbolic gesture to articulate the commitment of the Al-Khoei Foundation to break down barriers between Jews and Muslims in the UK was partially inspired by the rise of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes following the Brexit referendum in June 2016. It was also meant to further buttress the moderate credentials of the Al-Khoei Foundation in a multicultural context in which 'faith is projected as "bridging" capital – a common denominator of the universal signifiers of respect for difference and spirituality.'[27] Activities as these also buttress the reputation and perception of the Al-Khoie Foundation as a 'moderate' voice within British Islam.

The various outreach activities of the Al-Khoei Foundation illustrate its progressive and outward-looking character. The foundation also runs a religious congregation and community centre that holds religious events central to the Shia calendar. These events, held in the main hall of the community centre in Arabic, primarily attract middle-aged middle- and upper-class Iraqis. These quite traditional religious gatherings show that the Al-Khoei Foundation also caters to a significant extent for the religious and spiritual needs of a specific segment of the Iraqi Shia diaspora in London, upwardly mobile Iraqi Shiis. In this respect, the Al-Khoie Foundation is a good example of the multivocality of diasporic religions being quite diasporic in terms of its religious activities directed towards a particular segment of their own community while appearing as a progressive and outward-looking voice in its

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[21] See its website, <http://www.minab.org.uk/> [accessed 28 September 2017].

[22] Al-Khoie Foundation, *Al-Sadiq and Al-Zahra Schools: Experience of Community Cohesion* (London: Al-Khoie Foundation, n.d.), p. 8.

[23] Al-Khoie Foundation, *Al-Sadiq and Al-Zahra Schools*.

[24] Justin Cohen, 'London Mosque Hosts Jewish Community for Succot', *Jewish News Online*, 24 October 2016. <http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/london-mosque-hosts-jewish-community-for-succot/> [accessed 28 September 2016].

[25] 'Constructing Cohesion: Sukkah built at Mosque as Communities Come Together', *Asian Express Newspaper*, 24 October 2016. <https://www.asianexpress.co.uk/2016/10/constructing-cohesion-sukkah-built-at-mosque-as-communities-come-together/> [accessed 28 September 2017].

[26] Cohen, 'London Mosque Hosts Jewish Community'.

[27] Seán McLoughlin and John Zavos, 'Writing Religion in British Asian Diasporas', in *Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas*, ed. by Seán McLoughlin, William Gould, Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Emma Tomalin (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 175.

public representation. These two sides of the foundation are also visible in the spatial separation between the offices of the foundation on one side of its compound and the actual congregation hall located on the other side in a former synagogue.

Another community centre attracting a similar socio-economic group of the Iraqi Shia diaspora in London is Dar Al-Islam which is also the official representation of the Da'wa Party (*hizb al-da'wa*) in Britain, the most important Shia Islamist party in Iraq which has been in government since 2005.[28] Having Iraqi Shia Islamists as its main constituency, Dar Al-Islam primarily attracts middle- and upper-class educated professionals. The particular connection between social status and the Dar al-Islam is evident in its interior decors. The main hall of the community centre is decorated with twelve granite blocks with the names of the twelve Imams inscribed on them in gold in English and Arabic. Unlike the Al-Khoie Foundation, Dar Al-Islam's religious, political, educational and cultural activities primarily possess a diasporic character; engagement with the wider British public in the form of interfaith dialogue or local civic activism are not visible, as Dar Al-Islam has served as a local centre for politically active Iraqi Shiis forced into exile during the regime of Saddam Hussein.

Other Iraqi Shia centres in Brent similarly focus on catering for the spiritual and religious needs of their diasporic communities in an attempt to re-create the homeland abroad. The community centre Rasool Al-Adham thereby represents a different social segment and religious faction of the Iraqi Shia diaspora. When examining the demographics of the Rasool Al-Adham congregation social class and regional identity markers are clearly visible separating this congregation from other Iraqi Shia centres. Rasool Al-Adham primarily attracts a lower middle-class and working-class congregation. This is also visible in the space that the congregation used until 2016 – Rasool Al-Adham was based in an old warehouse without the sophisticated and representative decors of other centres. Regional identity markers are equally important. Members of this congregation primarily come from Karbala, the Iraqi shrine city in which the third Shia Imam Husayn is buried. Being the followers of a prominent clerical family that originally hailed from Karbala, Muhammad Al-Shirazi (1928-2001) and his younger brother Sadiq Al-Shirazi (b. 1942), attendees of Rasool Al-Adham are also referred to as Shiraziyyin.[29]

The aforementioned community centres cater for the different social and regional segments of the Iraqi Shia diaspora in London providing religious services that initially aimed at re-creating religious life of Iraqi Shiis in a diasporic context. Some of these centres have also begun to cater for the needs of the so-called second and third generation of Iraqi Shiis whose main language is English and for whom the ritual activities conducted in Arabic and aimed at recreating the Shia religious life of Iraq are not appealing. The Al-Khoie Foundation runs activities in English and also a group of young Iraqi-British Shiis associated with Rasool Al-Adham have organised religious activities in English since 2015 under the umbrella of the Al-Akbar Foundation. Other more established centres with a stronger diasporic identity have not provided such services.

The diversity of Shia community centres requires new entrees into the Shia religious field of Brent to carve out a particular niche. New religious activists cannot rely on a particular religious constituency held together by political or clerical allegiances or regional backgrounds as the more established Iraqi Shia centres. Established in 2012, the Imam Al-Jawad Centre or Alsalam Foundation targets young British Shia in particular by offering programmes in English. The name of the centre after the ninth Imam Muhammad Al-Jawad (ca. 811-835) reflects the target audience of the centre: Muhammad Al-

[28] Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi, 2003), pp. 73-142; Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 82-88.

[29] Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, pp. 88-99; Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, pp. 216-224.

Jawad became Imam as an infant upon his father's death at the age of seven or nine and also died very young, at the age of 25, having been poisoned by his wife, according to the Shia tradition. The age span of Imam Muhammad Al-Jawad's term as Imam mirrors the target group of this centre. The centre also provides a more informal and interactive setting of religious instruction; rather than just listening to a religious lecture as in more traditional congregational Shia gatherings, members of the congregation can ask questions on issues that pertain their interests and reflect issues relevant to their lives as young Shia Muslims living in Britain.

The Imam Al-Jawad Centre has also been engaged in academic outreach activities with its Centre for Shi'a Islamic Studies (established in 2007) that has run a seminar series with lectures by prominent academics in the field of Shia Islamic Studies and has intermittently published a magazine and also a number of research publications. As such, the Imam Al-Jawad Centre has not only reached out to young British Shiis whose language needs were not sufficiently catered for by other centres at the time of its foundation but also to the academic world with the aim to link traditional religious scholarship in Shia Islam with academic research at Western universities.

The majority of Shia centres in Brent have an Iraqi background. Although the majority of the Iranian diaspora in Britain tends to be secular or even explicitly anti-Islamic,[30] having arrived after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Iranian networks equally play an important role in the 'Shia mile of London'. The first Iranian Shia community centre established in London is, however, located outside of Brent. The Islamic Universal Association of London (*majma'-i islami-yi jahani*), also known the Holland Park mosque, was opened in 1974 in the affluent area of Holland Park in the Royal Borough of Chelsea and Kensington to provide religious and educational services for Iranian Shiis living in this upscale part of west London. The Holland Park mosque was founded by a son of Mohammad Reza Golpaygani (1899-1993), a senior Iranian clerical figure at the time of the Islamic Revolution.[31] Given its central London location, the Holland Park mosque caters for Shiis of a variety of backgrounds: Persian- and Arabic-speaking but also other nationalities and therefore runs its programmes in Persian, Arabic and English. As one of the few mosques in the area, its Friday midday prayers and sermons are also attended by Sunni Muslims; this is markedly different to the Shia centres discussed above which only cater for Shia Muslims.

The Holland Park mosque is an 'independent' organisation without official links to the Iranian government, though it is not opposed to the Islamic Republic either. The Islamic Centre of England, located in Maida Vale not far from the main Iraqi Shia centres in Brent, is the official representation of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ali Khamenei, with its clerical leader being his representative in the country. The Islamic Centre of England is one of the largest Shia centres in London providing a number of educational, religious, pastoral and charitable services, publishing various magazines and running conferences and interfaith and intra-faith meetings. Financial resources provided by the office of the Iranian Supreme Leader makes this centre one of the financially most robust in the UK. As the actual number of practising Iranian Shii Muslims would not warrant such a centre, the Islamic Centre of England, as the name suggests as well, has a much wider appeal catering for Shia Muslims of a variety of backgrounds and projecting itself as the main reference point for the Shia if not the wider Muslim population in the country. Religious activities are provided in Persian and also in Arabic and Urdu on religious occasions. Lectures and activities in English are held at the nearby Iranian school which is run by the Iranian embassy for the Iranian expatriate community. A particular focus of the centre's activities is Shia-Catholic dialogue, initiated through personal contacts of the

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[30] Reza Gholami, *Secularism and Identity: Non-Islamiosity in the Iranian Diaspora* (London and New York: Routledge: 2015).

[31] On the history see <http://www.arafeh.co.uk/about-us/> [accessed 28 September 2017].

resident imam leading to a number high-profile interfaith meetings and publications in London and Qom in Iran.[32] Furthermore, the Islamic Centre of England is the only Shia centre providing sustained and systematic support services for converts to Shia Islam, running training courses and other activities for them. A particular focus is thereby support for converts to Shia Islam of an African background who often feel most marginalized in the Shia religious field of London which is dominated by community centres catering for particular ethnic groups and serving their linguistic needs.

Apart from Iranian centres with official links to clerical authorities or the government in Iran, there are also private initiatives of Iranian Shia Muslims who organise religious activities and gatherings on certain occasions outside of official centres. One of such an initiative is run by Iranian Shiis living in the Brent and surrounding areas who have organised religious events and gatherings with lectures and ritual practices performed in Persian since 2012. Not having a centre of their own, this groups uses different venues for its activities. The group usually invites a prominent speaker from Iran to deliver a lecture – in 2015 and 2016 Sheikh Manaqebi, from a prominent clerical family. While attendees of gatherings organised by this group are not opposed to the Islamic Republic, it is quite clear they intend to create a 'non-political' space for Iranian Shiis outside of the major government-sponsored Islamic Centre of England – among other reasons also to attract members of the Iranian diaspora who are not entirely irreligious or are interested in re-discovering their Shia identity but would only do so outside of an organisational context sponsored by the Iranian government.

The sample of Iranian and Iraqi centres presented above engage and position themselves in various ways in their local context. In terms of public engagement at both local and national level, the Al-Khoei Foundation is rather exceptional in the surveyed sample as being the most successful in representing Shia communities to the wider public, the media and the government and being involved in various local and national interfaith and civic engagement platforms. In this sense, the Al-Khoie Foundation has acquired a certain monopoly over the representation of Shia Islam in the British public sphere. The other more established Iraqi centres tend to cater similarly for particular segments of the Iraqi Shia diaspora located in Brent of different political orientations, socio-economic status or regional backgrounds. Nevertheless, the established centres had to realise the necessity to broaden the scope of their activities by offering English language programmes to address the specific needs of the so-called second generation whose primary language is English. Many centres – often after some internal opposition within the 'old guard' – have branched out and provided programmes in English. The Islamic Centre of England has been quite unique in its deliberate effort to cater for a very broad spectrum of the local Shia community offering services in four different languages and providing support and training and programmes for communal inclusion of converts, in particular of an African background. Hence, locative agency of the Twelver Shia community centres surveyed differs and ranges from a purely diasporic recreation of the homeland, to programmes tailored for a wider range of members of the local communities outside specific ethnic groups and inclusive of young British Shiis to engagement with the wider public, government officials and academic researchers.

The Trans-locative: the Transnational Reach of Clerical Authorities and 'Long-Distance Nationalism'

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[32] See personal profile of Ali Shomali <http://www.ic-el.com/en/DrShomali_biography.asp> [accessed 28 September 2017].

Trans-locative agency unfolds in two variants: the transnational and global reach of senior clerical authorities based in Iraq and Iran[33] and 'long-distance nationalism'[34]. Unlike Sunni Islam, Shia Islam possesses fairly formalised structures of religious authority including a hierarchy based on scholarly seniority and experience. On top of the clerical hierarchy stands the ultimate 'sources of emulation' (*maraji'*, sing. *marja' al-taqlid*), the most senior Shia clerics, referred to as grand ayatollah (*ayat allah al-'uzma*), most of whom are based in the shrine cities of Najaf in southern Iraq and Qom in Iran. Lay Shiis have to choose one recognised senior cleric as their source of emulation, follow his religious and legal interpretations and are expected to pay special religious tithes (*khums*) to them.[35] The most prominent senior clerics run offices (*bayt* in Arabic, *daftar* in Persian) which include a network of representatives (*wukala'*) that communicate the views and legal injunctions of senior clerics to their followers in different parts of the world and are also entitled to collect the religious tithes on their behalves. Personal representatives usually possess an agreement with the senior clerics allowing them to retain a certain percentage of these tithes for their own religious activities and personal upkeep. Brent hosts a number of offices representing different Shia clerics. The most influential senior Shia cleric, Najaf-based Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani (b. 1930) has two offices in Brent that are run by two of his sons in law, the Imam Ali Foundation by London-based Murtadha Kashmiri and the Al Al-Bayt Foundation by Jawad Shahrestani who heads Sistani's office in Qom, Iran. The Islamic Centre of England acts of the official representation of the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, in the UK. Other senior clerical offices run offices representing them in the area as well. The Najaf-based senior cleric Muhammad Al-Fayyad (b. 1930) has an office in the Al-Khoei Foundation.

Apart from offices and centres representing senior clerical figures based in Iran and Iraq in London and the UK, connections to and current and past links with senior clerics also fulfils the role of emboldening the reputation and communal standing of a centre, in particular in the process of establishing a new one. For instance, the resident imam of the Al-Jawad Centre follows Sistani and emphasises its allegiance to him to buttress its religious legitimacy within the communities in London. Ensuring clerical approval is particularly important for new centres or for those targeting or involving young Shiis. Shabab Al-Sibtayn, a Shia youth organisation running religious events and gatherings at different centres in Brent, similar seeks support from local clerical figures representing religious authorities in the Middle East. In October 2016, leaders of the organisation visited Mohammad Ali Shomali, the UK representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran, and Fadhil Milani, one of the most senior clerics in the UK and representative of Sistani, based in the Al-Khoie Foundation, and posted photos of their visit on their social media outlets to illustrate the support they have from 'two of the most prominent scholars & leader of the Shia community in London.'[36] More established centres equally refer to their links to senior clerical figures to underscore their religious credentials. The Holland Park mosque, for example, emphasises its historical connection to Mohammad Reza Golpaygani whose son founded the community centre, given his scholarly standing that has outlasted his death.[37]

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[33] Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, pp. 69-82; see also Elvire Corboz, *Guardians of Shi'ism: Sacred Authority and Transnational Family Networks* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

[34] Benedict Anderson and Gail Kligman*, Long-Distance Nationalism: World Capitalism and the Rise of Identity Politics* (Berkeley: Centre for German and European Studies, University of California, 1992).

[35] Linda S. Walbridge, *The Most Learned of the Shi'a: The Institution of the* Marja' Taqlid (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 3-16.

[36] See <https://www.facebook.com/AlSibtayn/> [accessed 28 September 2017].

[37] The current homepage of the association is flanked by photographs of Golpaygani and the current resident imam on each side. See <http://www.arafeh.co.uk/> [accessed 28 September 2017].

The transnational reach of clerical figures can also change, in particular with a death of a senior cleric. The Al-Khoie Foundation is a particularly good example of this transformation. Established in 1989 to manage the two independent schools on its premises, it turned into the global headquarters of Abu Al-Qasim Al-Khoie (1899-1992), the most senior Shia cleric based in Najaf in the latter half of the 20ᵗʰ century and teacher of many prominent contemporary Shia clerics such as Sistani and Fayyad. Given the oppression of Iraqi Shiis following their uprising in southern Iraq in 1991, the assets of Al-Khoie's clerical network were moved to London to the foundation established under his name. Until his death in 1992, the Al-Khoie Foundation in London acted as the global headquarters and official representation of himself and his clerical network. With his demise, however, the foundation had to re-invent itself. While the connection of the foundation to the Al-Khoie family is secured by its statutes' stipulation that its director had to be a patrilineal male descendent of Al-Khoie – currently, the foundation is run by one of his sons -,[38] as an organisation it had re-invented itself as a transnational NGO with various branches across the globe running community centres, schools and orphanages in Paris, New York, Montreal, Mumbai, Islamabad, Bangkok, Najaf, Mashhad and Qom.[39] In addition to its prominent local and national role, internationally, it is well-connected to organizations such as the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, making regular interventions in its sessions, the Jordanian Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies, established by Hasan ibn Talal, and Ali Al-Hashimi, the judicial and religious advisor to the President of the United Arab Emirates. These two latter relations have resulted in the Al-Khoei Foundation being involved in high-profile international interfaith and Sunni-Shia intra-faith dialogue events.[40]

In addition to their past and present connections to transnational clerical networks, the Shia community centres in Brent are likewise engaged in 'long-distance nationalism' in their activities of which Dar Al-Islam is a particularly good example. As the London and UK headquarters of the Da'wa Party, it has been one of the main sites of diasporic politics of Iraqi Shii Islamists in exile and still retains an important role as conduit between the Iraqi governing party and Iraqis living in London. Many members and attendees of Dar Al-Islam have returned to Iraq and assumed important political, economic or cultural roles. Iraqis refer these exiles who have returned to their country after 2003 as 'the people of London' (*ahl london*) or more generally as 'Iraqis from abroad' *('iraqiyyin min barra)*. The prime minister of Iraq Haider Al-Abadi (b. 1952) lived many decades in Brent and was affiliated to the centre, its former resident scholar and imam returned to Iraq to establish a private university, and other members now hold positions in government departments in Iraq. From the setup of the centre it is not really visible that this congregation is affiliated to the Da'wa Party; it does not exhibit any Iraqi flags or other symbols of Iraqi national identity nor any images, slogans or logos of the party as such. One can only observe indirect signs suggesting a connection to the main Iraqi Shia Islamist party. On the office walls of the director of the congregation are photographs of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr (1935-1980) who was the founder of the party and of Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah (1935-2010) who acted as the clerical authority for many members of Da'wa Party.[41] When entering the main hall of the centre a sign containing the slogan *hayhat minna dhilla* ('we will never succumb') is exhibited. This slogan has been attributed to Imam Husayn and his followers, expressing their refusal to surrender to

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[38] Elvire Corboz, 'The Al-Khoie Foundation and the Transnational Institutionalisation of Ayatollah al-Khui'i's *marja'iyya'*, in *Shi'i Islam and Identity: Religion, Politics and Change in the Global Muslim Community*, ed. by Lloyd Ridgeon (London: IB Tauris, 2012), pp. 93-112.

[39] Al-Khoie Foundation, *Mu'assasat al-imam al-khu'i al-khayriyya* (London: Al-Khoie Foundation, n.d. [2015]), pp. 99-149.

[40] Al-Khoie Foundation, *Mu'assasat al-imam al-khu'i*, pp. 86-88.

[41] Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics*, pp. 85, 200; Jaber, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, pp. 288-289.

the ruling dynasty, and is an important rallying cry for contemporary Shia Islamist movements, articulating their resistance to oppression Shia Muslims experience today.

While the affiliation with the Da'wa Party is not very apparent and the Dar Al-Islam serves as a conventional congregational hall, differences to other centres can be observed. It is noticeable that during major Shia events and their celebration or commemoration in the centre, that actual commemorative gathering with a sermon and devotional practices is not that well attended. The majority of male attendees roam around in the lobby or move from the main hall to the lobby to engage in conversations and socializing. For many attendees, the role of Dar Al-Islam as the London base for Iraq's governing party makes it an important site for political, business-related or cultural networking. On certain occasions, the affiliation of Dar al-Islam to the Da'wa Party becomes more apparent. When Sheikh Mohammad Mehdi Al-Asefi (1937/38-2015), former spokesperson of the party and representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran in Iraq, passed away on 4 June 2015, a memorial gathering was held in the community centre. Standing posters with the logo of the Da'wa Party were erected while a speaker gave an outline of his biography and political achievements for the party and for 'the Islamic movement (*al-haraka al-islamiyya*)' more generally.

The transnational networking of diasporic communities can entail and articulate various modes of 'religious resistance to globalized modernity.'[42] As an Islamist party (albeit of Shia provenance), the Da'wa Party shares similar ideological roots with Sunni Islamist movements and retains the pan-Islamic appeal of political Islam to a certain extent. This also becomes manifest in the more political activities held at Dar Al-Islam. In June 2015, the centre hosted a conference organized by the Islamic Unity Forum *(muntada al-wahda al-islamiyya)*, a London-based organization bringing Shia and Sunni Islamist activists together. A recurring theme of the conference was the need for unified Muslim resistance against Western imperialism and its 'politics of division (*siyasat al-taqsim*)', evident historically in the division of the Middle East following the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the creation of Israel and the current Saudi-led war against Yemen. In an effort to overcome sectarian fault lines so prominent in the Middle East post-Arab Spring, speakers of Sunni and Shia backgrounds repudiated the rise of sectarianism on either side and promoted Islamic unity to counter Western geopolitical hegemony. Zionism, in particular, was blamed as 'the reason for the divisions among Muslims (*sabab ikhtilaf bayna al-muslimin*) and among the Shia in particular (*wa-bayna al-shi'a khassatan*)'.

Dar Al-Islam exhibits a strong sense of 'long-distance nationalism' among the Brent Shia congregations and oscillates in its activities between the promotion of sectarian discourses and politics within an Iraqi context and a sense of pan-Islamic anti-imperialist resistance to Western hegemony. Other congregations engage in other less political forms of 'long-distance nationalism', promoting an Iraqi Shia diasporic consciousness with more religio-cultural overtones. Regional identity markers and the desire to re-create the homeland in the diaspora are evident in the activities of the Al-Husseini Association (*al-majlis al-husayni*), referred to as 'Balaghiyyeh', which is run by the Balaghi family from southern Iraq. In the past, the family rented a tent (*khayma husayniyya*) to hold gatherings, but since 2014 it has used an old warehouse as the location for its activities. The Balaghiyyeh is a good example of the spatial extension[43] religious diasporas undertake. In its religious gatherings, the Balaghiyyeh connects Brent with southern Iraq by recreating the rituals, discourses and overall atmosphere of a commemorative gathering in the homeland; speakers are invited from either Iraq or other countries in the Gulf and there is a strong emphasis on the role Shia rituals play in maintaining the emotional

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[42] McLoughlin and Zavos, 'Writing Religion', p. 170.
[43] Knott, 'From Locality to Location', p. 156.

and imagined link with the homeland. The Balaghiyyeh attracts first generation émigrés from Iraq but also a significant young audience consisting of recent arrivals that have fled Iraq after 2003.

The Supra-locative: the Discursive Creation of a Shia Religious *imaginaire*

For Tweed, the supra-locative is understood as a reference to discursive and ideational conceptions of 'home' as a space that transcends both the locative and the trans-locative. In this context, home entails both 'a realm of concrete locality and everyday experience' and 'a more ideational, symbolic or discursive realm.'[44] Vertovec defines diaspora as 'an imagined connection'[45] with the place of origin or a wider community which can be real but is also imagined in the sense that it purports strong emotive connotations and is based on collective memory.[46] The Shia historical experience of marginalization and of being a minority within Islam has created distinctive collective mnemonic dynamics in the supra-locative religious *imaginaire* of Shiis. To investigate how supra-locative agency unfolds among Twelver Shia networks based in Brent, the discourses of lectures given during 'Ashura' in the examined community centres will be discussed.

The first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram, known as 'Ashura', constitute the peak of the Shia religious calendar. During these days, Shiis across the world remember the martyrdom of Imam Husayn on the plains of Karbala, in southern Iraq, in 680CE when he and his family and entourage were killed by the forces of the Umayyad caliph Yazid. 'Ashura' memorial gatherings (*majlis al-'aza*) are usually held in the evening and include a fairly fixed format with some cultural variations among different ethnic groups. Five major rituals constitute the set of events during 'Ashura' memorial gatherings: a memorial lecture re-narrates the events on each of the ten days culminating in the re-narration of the killing of Imam Husayn (*maqtal*) on the tenth day of 'Ashura. The lecture is followed by rhythmic self-beating of the congregation (*latmiyya*) to articulate grief while devotional poetry is recited in praise of Imam Husayn, his entourage and other members of the family of the Prophet (*ahl al-bayt*). Certain groups engage in self-flagellation (*tatbir*) on the tenth day of 'Ashura' to commemorate the actual killing of Imam Husayn. Passion plays, whether in the form of the more elaborate and professionalized Iranian *ta'ziyeh* performances or the more rudimentary and amateurish *tashabih* of Iraqi and other Gulf Arab Shiis, re-enact scenes of the battlefield in Karbala and its aftermath. Finally, mourning processions on the day of 'Ashura' and visiting the tomb of Imam Husayn in Karbala, preferably 40 days after his death (*arba'in*), conclude the mourning period in the Shia religious calendar.[47]

The concentration of different Shia centres in Brent leads to a vast array of activities in the 20 or so permanent community centres with certain groups hiring venues for the occasion, and many memorial gatherings are held in private homes as well. Memorial gatherings in the different centres are often scheduled at slightly different times allowing local Shiis to attend events at two to three centres in one evening. While the numerical and organisational strength of the Shia presence is usually

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[44] Femke Stock, 'Home and Memory', in *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, ed. by Kim Knott and Seán McLoughlin (London: Zed Books, 2010), p. 26.

[45] Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 136.

[46] Mihran Dabag and Kristin Platt, 'Diaspora und das Kollektive Gedächtnis: Zur Konstruktion kollektiver Identitäten in der Diaspora', in *Identität in der Fremde*, ed. by Mihran Dabag and Kristin Platt (Bochum: Universitätsverlag Dr. Norbert Brockmeyer, 1993), pp. 125-31.

[47] Itzhak Nakash, 'The Muharram Rituals and the Cult of Saints among Iraqi Shiites', in *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*, ed. by Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef, Farian Sabahi, Ulrich Rudolph and Gregor Schoeler (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 115-137.

not visible in Brent, during the evenings of 'Ashura' a stream of Shiis can be observed moving from one centre to another. Private gatherings are usually held in the mornings. The 'Ashura' commemorations have historically played a central role in forging and maintaining a distinct Shia identity. For the Iraqi Shiis in the diaspora in particular these gatherings have gained further significance as most these rituals and their public performance were banned during the regime of Saddam Hussein. The diaspora provided many Iraqi Shiis with the opportunity to practice their particular religious identity freely and openly.[48]

Observing the memorial lectures provides a good opportunity to observe locative, trans-locative and supra-locative discourses in different community centres which usually invite external speakers and poetry reciters (*radud*, *mulla*) during 'Ashura' and compete among another to attract the most popular speakers and reciters. The actual memorial lecture is given by a scholar with some formal religious training. The lecture re-narrates or refers to particular events of Karbala and can deduce a general moral and spiritual message out of this which is further supported by references to the Qur'an and Shia hadith collections. Very often, the lecture applies specific Karbala events to current local, national and transnational contexts and circumstances and may have overt or implicit political connotations. This technique of applying the 'Karbala paradigm'[49] – a narrative of a righteous and innocent man, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, making a futile stand against an oppressive and illegitimate ruler and the ultimate sacrifice – is referred as *nuzul* (lit. 'descent') in Arabic and *goriz* (lit. 'projection') in Persian.[50] The centre and its political orientation, the ethnic and socio-economic demographics of its congregation and concomitant expectations and the style and ideological orientation of the speaker determine to what extent and in which way *nuzul* or *goriz* is applied.

The following examples observed during fieldwork from 2014 and 2016 give an idea of the different ways the Karbala narrative is framed by speakers at the major community centres introduced above. In 2014, the Al-Khoie Foundation invited an Iraqi speaker, based in Denmark, who, addressing a well-educated middle-/upper-class congregation, gave an eloquent and intellectualized account of the early days of the events leading up to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. The speaker discussed the notion of 'emigration' (*hijra*) in Islamic history as well as in the history of other religions. The initiation of Imam Husayn's campaign, leaving Medina to Karbala, was likened to the *hijra* of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, the exodus of Abraham from his home town, of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt to the Holy Land, or the emigration of Imam 'Ali from Medina to take up his residence in Kufa. According to the speaker, love for the homeland is encouraged and leaving it discouraged (*makruh*), when proper Islamic institutions such as mosques and seminaries exist and it is possible to practise Islam. However, emigration (*hijra*) is required when it is not possible to practise Islam anymore in a particular location and the very existence of Islam depends on emigrating to another location, as was the case with the early Muslims' emigration from Mecca to Medina and also with Imam Husayn when he had to leave Medina as he refused to pay allegiance to the illegitimate authority of the Umayyad caliph. As such, Imam Husayn fulfilled a trans-historical prophetic and soteriological paradigm with his own exodus ensuring the survival of 'authentic' Islam, its spiritual purification and the salvation of his followers. The speaker thereby moulded his presentation around different discursive layers; Imam Husayn's own actions are likened with an interreligious prophetic paradigm, while at the same time mirroring the specific migratory experiences of the congregation he

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[48] See also Yafa Shanneik, 'Remembering Karbala in the Diaspora: Religious Rituals among Iraqi Shiis in Ireland', *Religion* 45 (2015), p. 90.

[49] Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 19-26.

[50] On *goriz* see Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2014), p. 47.

was addressing who had to leave Iraq and to move abroad as they could not practice their religion in their country of origin freely at the time of Saddam Hussein.

The 'Ashura' commemorations from 2014 and 2016 were situated in the context of the post-Arab Spring sectarianization of Middle Eastern geopolitics, the rise of ISIS, the governmental crackdown of Shia dissent in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia and the European migrant and refugee crisis of the summer of 2015. Hence, many lectures responded explicitly or implicitly to these events and their repercussions on Shiis in the Middle East and Europe. Some speakers framed their interpretation of unfolding events by relating them to the events of Karbala. The extent to which they read events through a sectarian lens or politicized the Karbala narrative differed. The speaker in Dar Al-Islam of 2014, for instance, enumerated the motifs for Imam Husayn's campaign; he fulfilled the will of God by sacrificing himself and intended to make a stand against the Umayyad dynasty whose rules was marked by corruption (*fasa'id*) and terror (*irhab*). While the speaker did not make any overt references to current events and the rise of ISIS, his choice of words characterizing the Umayyads presents ISIS as their latter-day manifestation. The analogy between the Umayyad dynasty and ISIS became more apparent when he referred to the first Umayyad caliph Mu'awiya who killed his opponents and then engaged in sexual intercourse with their widows - an anecdote that resonates with the actions of ISIS fighters who enslaved the daughters and wives of Yezidis after having killed their fathers and husbands.

A much more explicit sectarian tone was adopted by the speaker at Rasool Al-Adham, the community centre of the Shiraziyyin. His series of memorial lectures was entitled 'school of terror (*madrasat al-irhab*)' of which ISIS is but one of the latest manifestations. However, for the speaker ISIS is not just a contemporary product of the perversion of the Umayyad dynasty – which also holds an ambivalent position in Sunni historiography. The 'school of terror' is a veiled reference to Sunni Islam more generally and its inherent deficiency resulting from its rejection of the infallible guidance of the family of the Prophet and the Shia Imams. As a consequence, Sunni Islam is bound to degenerate as ISIS most plainly illustrates. The rise of ISIS is used to underscore the supra-locative contestation that only Shiis as adherents to the school of the family of the Prophet follow true Islam.

A young speaker addressing young Shiis in an English-language gathering linked different discursive layers in his memorial lecture, oscillating between salient doctrinal points and political polemics. He began with an attack on Sufism and the metaphorical reading of heaven and hell in some of its expressions. For him, considering heaven and hell as mere metaphors equals the negation of the eschatological promise of reward and punishment. It would be impossible to assume that brutal dictators like Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, the Al-Saud dynasty in Saudi Arabia or the Khalifa family ruling Bahrain would not be punished in hell for their sins. In addition, heaven and hell are real physical places and the delights or suffering felt are real and concrete. The speaker compared the pain felt in hell with the pain Shia activists in Bahrain felt while being tortured in prison. He detailed how during their torture sessions a medical doctor was present to induce as much pain to the detainees as possible just stopping short of killing them. What began as a general discourse on eschatology and turned into a denunciation of Sufism, concluded in an attack on the ruling dynasties of the Gulf monarchies and their anti-Shia policies.

The Islamic Centre of England runs three different memorial gatherings on its premises each evening during 'Ashura', in Persian, Arabic and Urdu. The speaker at the Arabic gathering in 2014 switched in his lecture between Arabic and English. His English interventions addressed young Shiis in the audience urging them to integrate into European societies and to become civic actors. In Arabic, he engaged in a defence of *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the jurisprudent), the underlying ideological foundation developed by Ayatollah Khomeini and undergirding the political system of the Islamic

Republic of Iran.[51] Responding to those Shiis who deny or question the 'blessings (*barakat*)' of *wilayat al-faqih* and consider Iran, its ideological reading of Shia Islam and its policies as harming Shia communities across the world, the speaker presented Iran as the regional and global guardian of Shia communities. In the regional context of the Middle East, he suggested that Shia communities in Bahrain, the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon should form a loose political and military union under the leadership of Iran in order to ensure their survival against the onslaught of radical militant Sunni movements such as ISIS. The discursive shifting between the trans-locative and supra-locative, responding to events in the Middle East, articulated a sense of a supra-locative unity of the Shia *umma* and suggested the political formation of a 'Shii international'[52]. The speaker navigated between the local context of British society and the need to integrate therein, the transnational impact of regional events in the Middle East while also appealing to a supra-locative *imaginaire* of Shia unity which requires at present its articulation in a political formation.

Moving between different spatial and temporal contexts can also yield tensions in the discursive formation of memorial lectures. The organisers of the Balaghiyyeh follow the clerical leadership of Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, and his London representative and son-in-law Murtadha Kashmiri regularly attends and speaks at the gatherings and also uses the facilities of Balaghiyyeh for events of his own Imam Ali Foundation. In one of his talks, given during 'Ashura' in 2015, he was critical of young Iraqis leaving their country, 'the country of the Commander of the Faithful [Imam Ali] (*balad amir al-mu'minin*).' This statement was motivated by the migrant and refugee crisis Europe experienced in the summer of 2015 which also included the influx of Iraqis fleeing so-called Islamic State. At the same time, Kashmiri also acknowledged the particular challenges of raising Shiis in the diaspora, stressing the importance of learning Arabic as 'the language of our creed (*lughat 'aqidatuna*).' In 2016, in one of first nights of 'Ashura' of that season, Kashmiri emphasised the role young Shiis in the West play as representatives of Islam and as role-models for Shia Islam who should aspire to the highest moral standards and follow the laws of Islam while at the same time adhering to the laws of the country in which they reside. In these statements, the locative and trans-locative orientation of diasporic communities and subsequent tensions come to the fore: the Balaghiyyeh recreates an Iraqi Shia ritual universe in the diaspora and invites representatives of clerical authorities in Iraq to communicate its views on current affairs (such as a reprimand to young Iraqis leaving their country). At the same time, it is also used as a space to remind young Shiis living in London of the core elements of their religion and their responsibilities as a minority community in the West.

As these examples illustrate the discourses during 'Ashura' memorial lectures oscillate between the locative, trans-locative and supra-locative, reveal different levels of politicization and contain covert or overt sectarian undertones. Multiple spatial and temporal reference points are simultaneously utilised; the past, mythico-historical events of Karbala, is re-narrated and re-framed to deliver a more generic spiritual or moral lesson or to respond to current events and challenges. Spatially, the discourses address the particular responsibilities enjoined on Shia minorities in the West to represent their religion to a public sceptical of if not hostile to Islam, events in the Middle East and their global repercussions and the construction of a supra-locative Shia *umma* that is mythically anchored around the Karbala paradigm and manifest in an imagined 'Shii international'.

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[51] Khomeini developed the argument that the most learned Shia cleric is not only the ultimate source of religious guidance but ought to become the head of an Islamic state. On his concept see Norman Calder, 'Accommodation and Revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence: Khumayni and the Classical Tradition', *Middle Eastern Studies* 18 (1982), pp. 3-20.

[52] Chibli Mallat, *The Renewal of Islamic Law: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr, Najaf and the Shi'i International*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1993]).

Conclusion

Pnina Werbner develops the notion of 'complex diasporas' to articulate their 'social heterogeneity'[53], the convergence and co-existence of different, often mutually exclusive, discourses in diasporic communities, the dynamic and chaordic processes involved in their formations, and their 'dual orientation':[54] their efforts to represent their communities and to be recognised as such in the new diasporic context while at the same time maintaining transnational links and the community's diasporic identity. The examples of transnational Twelver Shia networks, located in Brent, London, and operating between Britain and the Middle East, illustrate the multi-spatial and multi-temporal formation of diasporic communtities. The religious field in the 'Shia mile of London' contains locative, trans-locative and supra-locative elements; communities engage with the local environment either by becoming an active civic actor in the local and national field or by providing religious and educational services for a young generation of English-speaking British Shiis. Their transnational connections become visible in their often crucial links to clerical authorities, based in the Middle East, which might have a purely nominal character but are still seen as essential to ensure communal religious legitimacy. Networks are also involved in 'long-distance nationalism' as active sites of diasporic politics, as spaces that re-create the 'homeland' in the diaspora or as organizations that engage with and respond to events in the Middle East. Finally, the discursive creation of and appeal to a global Shia *umma*, a supra-locative *imaginaire* of a global unity of Shiis, further illustrates how these networks transcend the local, national and transnational limitations of the spaces they inhabit. As such, Twelver Shia networks in Brent are 'both ethnic-parochial *and* cosmopolitan.'[55]

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[53] Pnina Werbner, 'Complex Diasporas', in *Diasporas: Concepts, Intersections, Identities*, ed. by Kim Knott and Seán McLoughlin (London: Zed Books, 2010), p. 74.
[54] Werbner, 'Complex Diasporas', p. 74.
[55] Werbner, 'Complex Diasporas', p. 75 [italics in the original].