



**Deckblatt einer
w i s s e n s c h a f t l i c h e n Masterarbeit**

Vor- und Familienname Talieh Attarzadeh	Matrikelnummer 01173257
Studienrichtung Musikologie	Studienkennzahl V 066 836

Thema der Arbeit:

Silent Heroines

An Exploration of *rowzeh*, a Shia Islamic Ritual by the Arab Women Minority in Southern Iran

Angefertigt in der Lehrveranstaltung: VU aus dem Schwerpunkt Ethnomusikologie:
Witnessing Sound: Ethnomusicology through Ethnography, Sommersemester 2019

Vorgelegt am: 27.07.2020

Beurteilt durch: Weiss, Sarah, Dr.phil. Privatdozentin



TALIEH ATTARZADEH
(Name in Blockbuchstaben)

01173257
(Matrikelnummer)

Erklärung

Hiermit bestätige ich, dass mir der *Leitfaden für schriftliche Arbeiten an der KUG* bekannt ist und ich die darin enthaltenen Bestimmungen eingehalten habe. Ich erkläre ehrenwörtlich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit selbständig und ohne fremde Hilfe verfasst habe, andere als die angegebenen Quellen nicht verwendet habe und die den benutzten Quellen wörtlich oder inhaltlich entnommenen Stellen als solche kenntlich gemacht habe.

Graz, den 27.07.2020

.....
Unterschrift der Verfasserin/des Verfassers

Acknowledgement

I would first like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor Dr. Sarah Weiss who always supported me with her valuable advice and her profound belief in my abilities. I cannot begin to express my thanks to my cousin Shirin Attarzadeh, without her unwavering support and patience the completion of my thesis would not have been possible. I would like to thank my lovely partner, Lukas Wartner, for being so supportive during my study. I would also like to extend my special thanks to my parents to whom I dedicate my master thesis.

Abstract

The following thesis investigates the musical and anthropological aspects of *rowzeh*, a Shia Islamic women's ritual that commemorates the martyrdom of the third Shia Imam. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in the southern Iranian city of Khorramshahr among the performers and audience members who participate in the ritual called *rowzeh*. Each *rowzeh* consists of eight parts that include, variously, narration, metrical and non-metrical singing, as well as body movements. In order to understand the cultural dynamics of practicing this kind of woman-led ritual in a sex-segregated society, I conducted participant observation over the course of several trips to Iran. Using observations made during my fieldwork – field notes from many events and notes from interviews – my analysis documents not only the multifariousness of sonic elements employed in a *rowzeh* and their meanings but also the social capital of *rowzeh*. My results show that in addition to offering possibilities for women in the city to expand their social lives, *rowzeh* provides women unprecedented opportunities for political participation, social mobility and economic independence.

Contents

Prologue	6
Introduction	10
1. Who is a <i>mollāyeh</i> ?	12
2. Methodology	17
3. Rights of Caliphate and the Battle of Karbala.....	19
4. <i>Rowzeh</i> in Historical and Contemporary Context	24
5. Khorramshahr City and Iranian Arabs	29
6. <i>Rowzeh</i> in Khorramshahr	38
6.1. Men's <i>rowzeh</i>	39
6.2. <i>Sineh-zani</i>	45
6.3. Women's <i>rowzeh</i>	47
7. How to Become a <i>mollāyeh</i>	53
7.1. Um Sa'eid	57
7.2. Um Shahrin.....	60
7.3. Um Sadegh	62
8. Miracle Making and the Enhancement of Religious Status	65
9. Ritual Participants: Donors, Receivers and Listeners	69
9.1. Talking with <i>mostame'in</i> about their Participation.....	73
10. <i>Rowzeh</i> , its Structure and Musical Components	80
10.1. <i>Nowzeh</i> (Mourning Song)	82
10.2. <i>Ġasid</i> (Poetic Chant)	88
10.3. <i>Ĥadiṭ</i> (Narration).....	92
10.4. <i>Na 'ā</i> (Elegy)	93
10.5. <i>Laṭmiyeh</i> (Self-Beating)	96
10.5.1. <i>Laṭmiyeh</i> 1 st Variant	101
10.5.2. <i>Laṭmiyeh</i> 2 nd Variant	102
10.5.3. <i>Laṭmiyeh</i> 3 rd Variant.....	106
10.6. <i>Howseh</i> (Soundful Song)	107
10.6.1. Non-Metrical Vocal Parts in <i>howseh</i>	109
10.6.2. Metrical Vocal Parts in <i>howseh</i>	111
10.7. <i>Do 'ā</i> (Prayers Chant)	112
Epilogue	116
Register of Illustrations	118
Bibliography.....	121

Prologue

It is September 2019. I'm checking my handbag in the taxi of Mr. Bachari. I have to make sure if I have all the travel documents for my flight to Tehran with me. Shirin laughs and says: "no worries if you forgot something. You will miss the flight, but you will stay longer". She says, "Can't you extend your trip? I am very sad that you are leaving so soon. Please write your doctoral thesis also on *rowzeh*¹ so that you can come back again"! Confirming her daughter's sentiment *Mollāyeh* Um Shahin says, "*inša-allāh*," which means 'God willing'. Mr. Bachari asks me whether I received enough information for writing my thesis. I say, "I think so! I have made a lot of interviews; I have seen, heard, and discovered lots of new things. Now I have to write everything down." "Imam Ḥossein bless you", says Mr. Bachari, who, in addition to driving the taxi, is also the neighbor of my cousin, Shirin.

Shirin is a famous organizer of religious rituals in Khorramshahr, the city where I conducted my fieldwork. Through her religious and social activities, she has a great affinity with the people from Khorramshahr whom I call *Khorramshahrīs* in the course of my thesis. Her importance in the city is also the reason why Mr. Bachari accompanied us everywhere and offered us his taxi service whenever we needed it. At the Abadan airport, Shirin, and her similarly famous mother, *Mollāyeh* Um Shahin were upset seeing Iraqi passengers all over Abadan airport, intending to fly to Mashhad to visit the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam in Shia Islam. The Abadan airport is a major transport hub between Iran and Iraq. While both Shia and Sunni forms of Islam are practiced in Iraq, the majority of Iraqis living in the southeast of the country are Shia. Many of these Iraqi Shia move through Abadan airport in southwestern Iran on their way to the important Shia shrines located in Iran.

The economic disparity between the comparatively rich Iraqis and the poor Iranians, irrespective of religious affiliation are stark. "Iraqis are first-class citizens in Abadan and Khorramshahr. They buy everything possible because it costs them nothing. As a result, we only can buy the lower quality groceries. One of them came to our *rowzeh* and said, that she bought ten kilos of lamb [presumably to take home to

¹ For ease of reading the Arabic and Persian terms, I used the transliteration table of Carl Brockelmann and Hans Wehr: https://www.naher-osten.uni-muenchen.de/studium_lehre/werkzeugkasten/dmgtransliteration.pdf, accessed June 28, 2018. The first letters of these words are written everywhere in small letters except at the beginning of sentences.

Iraq]. “We can hardly afford one kilo”, says *Mollāyeh* Um Shahin, who is one of the most important and well-known ritual leaders in her city.

Due to the political sanctions, the Iranian currency has plunged in value in recent years. Shirin says, “We cannot afford any flight or train tickets anymore to visit our relatives in other cities”. She is right. As I observed, Iranian people are struggling to survive. Regardless of whether they are illiterate or have higher degrees from the best Iranian universities, unemployment or low incomes with high living costs is a big problem in the country. Figure 1 shows the unemployment rates in Iran from 1999 to 2019. Honestly, after living for some years in wealthier Austria, it was also unpleasant for me to experience the situation when I arrived in Abadan to do my research about *rowzeh*. The influence of wealthy Iraqi culture on the southern city is palpable.

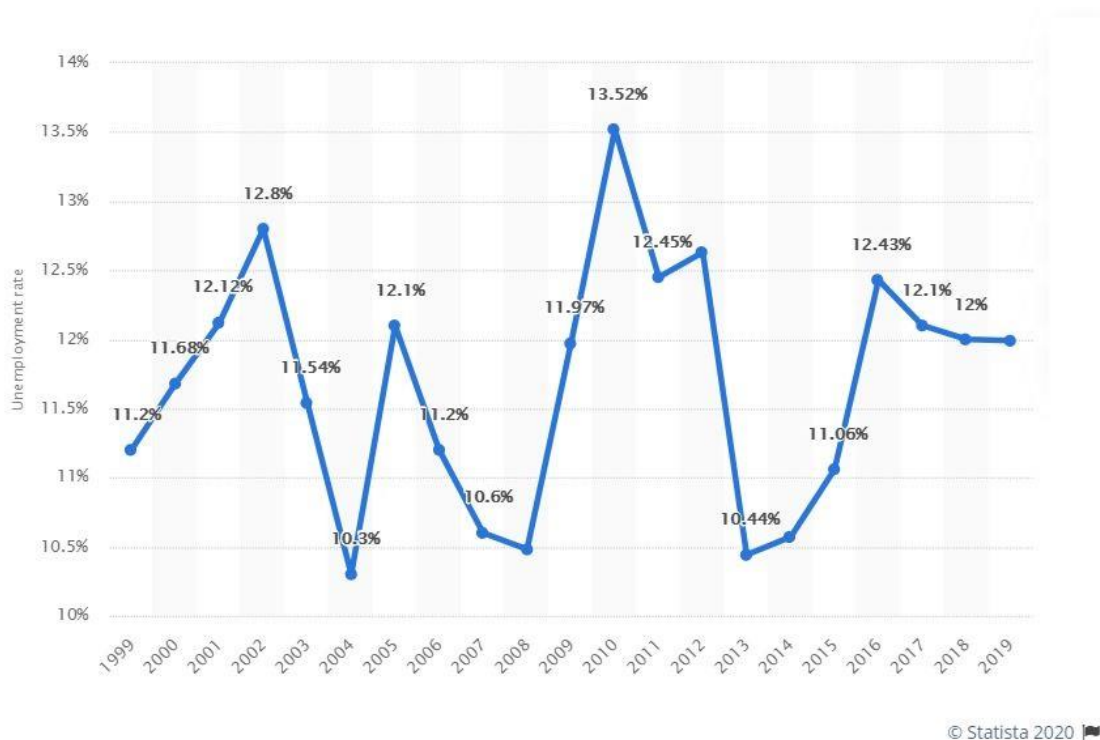


Figure 1: Unemployment rate of Iran (Plecher 2020). “This statistic shows the unemployment rate of Iran from 1999 to 2019. In 2019, Iran’s unemployment rate was estimated to amount to 11.99 percent of the total labor force”.²

After a short, one-hour flight from Tehran, I arrived at Abadan airport. Even the mood on the plane was different than in Tehran. I could hardly hear Persian spoken around me anymore. In this region of Iran, almost everyone, sometimes even non-Arabs, speak Arabic. The majority of the Iranian-Arab minority live in the Southwestern Iranian

² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/294305/iran-unemployment-rate/>, accessed April 16, 2020.

province of Khuzestan where both Abadan and Khorramshahr are located. I admit that I was surprised by the disparity in the treatment of Iraqis and Iranian people. Outside the airport, I waited fairly long to catch a taxi to continue my way towards Khorramshahr. In September and at 10 in the morning, one can experience a hot 45-degree temperature on most days. *Khorramshahr*is call this time of the year *ḥormā-pazoon*, the time when the dates get ripe.

It was clear that no taxi driver wanted to take me to the city. The drivers sorted the passengers into an order I couldn't comprehend. They spoke only in Arabic. I complained out loud, stating that I had arrived earlier than some of the others who were already stepping into taxis, and that I had already been waiting for a long time. But they just told me: "wait"! Finally, an Iranian man came over to me and tried to calm me down. He said to me, "You don't live here, do you? It will take a long time until you can get a taxi. The Iraqis ride first. They pay ten times more than we Iranians. It doesn't cost them anything." At that moment I realized what was going on. It was obvious that I appeared to be an Iranian woman who might also suffer financial pressure and therefore, might not be able to spend as much money as Iraqi tourists. Finally, when it became clear that I would never get a taxi while waiting in the line at the airport, I called Shirin to arrange a taxi for me. I waited one more hour until Mr. Bachari arrived from Khorramshahr and picked me up.

Peering out the window on the way to Shirin's house, I could see that all people wore black clothing. It was the mourning month of Muḥarram in which Imam Ḥossein, the "Lord of Martyrs" in Shia Islam was martyred in a battle. After twenty minutes, we arrived in Khorramshahr. Shirin opened the door and kissed me six times on the cheeks. She offered me a cold sweet lemonade and brought me everything she could offer. Um Shahin (her mother) was already in a *rowzeh*. "Do you want to go there together, or do you like to take a nap?" Shirin asked me. I said enthusiastically, "of course, I want to see the *rowzeh*!"

After five minutes of walking, we arrived at a mourning ceremony for Imam Ḥossein. We could smell the rose water everywhere. The ritual attendants were all Shia *Khorramshahri* women. The majority of them were over thirty years old. A young amateur *mollāyeh* was breast-feeding her baby. She had to perform the next song. *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid and her three daughters, who perform like their mother in rituals, were also there. Um Sa'eid was already singing a praise song about the martyred Imam. Other women were weeping and listening to her. Shirin and I sat near the daughters of

Um Sa'eid. When they saw us, they smiled slightly and greeted us warmly. After that, we hid our eyes behind our scarves, same as all other attendees.

After the ritual, women packed the snacks prepared by the host of the ritual in their handbags and left the ceremony, one by one. Shirin, her mother, and I stayed there and talked to *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid and her daughters who took off their veils. Despite the air conditioning in the room, it was very hot. Everyone was complaining about the expensive cost of living. Suddenly Shirin asked *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid in Arabic if she could give me some time for an interview because I am writing my thesis about *rowzeh*. Um Sa'eid was very proud and enthusiastic about the idea. She decided that we could arrange immediately for everything necessary to have some interviews with not only her, but also with her daughters. I was as excited as my interview partners. My fieldwork in Khorramshahr had, surprisingly, already started on my first afternoon...

Introduction

The land now encompassed by the borders of the nation state known as Iran has been a site of human, urban population since at least 7000 B.C.E. (Axworthy 2008). The Iranian speakers who migrated to the region before 1000 B.C.E. were of mixed origin, some nomadic and settled groups. Their descendants eventually came to be known as the Medes and the Persians. Although they lost in military campaigns mounted by the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III in 836 B.C.E, in less than 100 years after joining together the Medes and the Persians fought back successfully. By 700 B.C.E. the Medes had established their own state, unifying Iran as a nation and an empire in 625 BC. With roots reaching possibly as far back as the second millennium B.C.E., and a documented history from the 7th century, the indigenous Zoroastrianism served as the state religion of the land from 600 B.C.E to 650 C.E. The Achaemenid Empire (550-330 B.C.E.) led by Cyrus the Great was the first true global empire stretching, at its peak, from Asia Minor to the Hindu Kush and south to the Persian Gulf (Axworthy 2008; Holland 2011).

The Muslim conquest of Persia, between 633 and 654 C.E. served as a turning point that lead to the Islamization of Iran over the course of the next two centuries. After that point, the land was several times reunified and re-colonized. In 1501, the ruling Safavid dynasty reunified Iran again and claimed Shia Islam as its official religion. The descendants of that dynasty and its internal competitors continued to rule Iran as a monarchy until the Iranian revolution 1979, after which Iran became an Islamic republic (Axworthy 2008:123-185). Even if the newest form of the Iranian nation state began as recently as 1979, the long history of the place and its people cannot be denied. While all of the events I discuss in my thesis have happened long after any of these historically significant events, people inhabiting the land that is now the Islamic Republic of Iran carry a shared knowledge of and pride about those long periods of historical importance.

As they have often been in its long history, politics and religion in Iran are two inseparable elements at the moment of my research in the country. The religious and political context plays an essential role in the lives of many Iranians. As I will go into more detail later, one can see the influences of these two elements in everyday life as well as in the ritual practices of Iranians. Along with this, it is important to understand that whatever one's religion, sex segregation of the society from childhood is an

inevitable fact – a phenomenon that generates numerous gender issues in adulthood. One of the primary results of this gender segregation is that most rituals are held separately and consequently differently by men and women. Among them is the important ritual of *rowzeh*, the primary focus of my thesis.

Rowzeh is a ritual commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Ḥossein ibn ‘Ali (also transliterated as Husayn, Hussein, or Hossein), who was the third Imam in Shia Islam. Ḥossein was killed by the troops of the second Umayyad Caliph, Yazid ibn Mu‘āwiya at the desert of Karbala in C.E. 680. Shia Muslims around the world believe that Ḥossein, as the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, should have become the next Caliph. His death can be considered as the culmination of historical events in the world of Shia Islam. Nakash writes that “perhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping Shiite identity as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala, whose evocation informs the annual rituals of remembrance in the month of Muḥarram” (Nakash 2007:115).

The commemorating rituals of the martyrdom of Imam Ḥossein are also practiced passionately by Shia Muslims in Iran. Since Iran is a multi-ethnic country, we are facing a huge number of these kinds of religious practices that can differ in their settings, repertoires, languages used in them, dress codes, etc. It applies also for the ritual of *rowzeh* that is to be found all over the country, but can be performed in various ways. The ritual diversity of *rowzeh* is so variegated that the same ritual in Tehran can be held totally different from its counterpart in another Iranian city. My thesis aims to take a look at the *rowzeh* in the southwestern Iranian city of Khorramshahr, hence I call the ritual *Khorramshahri rowzeh*.

The main goal of my work is to give an idea why is this ritual so important among many women in Khorramshahr and what roles does it play in the society. Furthermore, I want to document the current way of practicing the ritual in Khorramshahr, too. For these reasons, I will provide historical, cultural, and socio-political information beyond the *rowzeh* in each section. For those who are not familiar with the Iranian-Arab minority, I will introduce this ethnic group that is a large part of involved people in the ritual. However, it does not necessarily mean that the participants of a *Khorramshahri rowzeh* consist only of this minority group. Engaging several elements from both Arabic and Persian cultures is an important reason for the participation of many non-Arab women in the ritual. I will shed light on the topics that

women speak about and are important for them.³ During reading this thesis, you will be taken into a journey to Khorramshahr. You will see a small part of the lives of *rowzeh* performers called *mollāyeh* to whom I take a special attention in this ethnography and call them silent heroines. Therefore, I start the first chapter by introducing them and state who is a *mollāyeh*?

1. Who is a *mollāyeh*?

A *rowzeh* ceremony, such as the one I attended on my first afternoon in Khorramshahr is usually guided and performed by three to five female Islamic preachers. These preachers are called by locals in Arabic ‘*mollāyeh*’ (Arabic *al-mawlā*: “lord”).⁴ The reason for choosing this Arabic term in a Persian speaking country is that the majority of the people in Khorramshahr belong to the Iranian-Arab minority who speak Arabic as their first language. The plural form of the word *mollāyeh* is *umlāli*. There are also men who serve in this same kind of ritual role. The male counterpart of *mollāyeh* is *mollā*. A *mollā* performs ceremonies for men and a *mollāyeh* does the same for women since most of the Shia rituals are practiced separately by men and women. The Persian synonym for the two words *mollā* and *mollāyeh* is *maddāh*. One should not mistake a *mollā* or *mollāyeh* for *mullās* (Persian: “*āḥund*”) who are considered as low-level clerics in Iran.⁵

Both terms *mollā* and *mollāyeh* – same as *maddah* for both men and women – are religious titles. People with these religious titles are known to be responsible only for reciting the Qur’an or religious songs in Islamic rituals. People from Iran have always associated with and sought guidance and advice from preachers of this sort. They are spiritual clerics who show the people – unofficially – the right way to live in order to enhance one’s greater religious life like a teacher. However, these people are not comparable with *mullās* and high-ranking Shia clerics like *āyatollāh* who have to spend many years learning the Islamic religion in theology schools. Whether male or female, a *mollā* or *mollāyeh* is always in demand to chant religious songs in several kinds of ceremonies. These ceremonies can be secular rituals like funerals, birthdays, weddings, and also Islamic mourning rituals such as *rowzeh*, or joyful birthday

³ I quote the most relevant original quotes in Persian in footnotes.

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/Religion>, accessed June 4, 2020.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/Religion>, accessed June 4, 2020.

celebrations of the Shia Islamic saints, like *mowludi*. *Umlāli* in Khorramshahr are regarded as highly respected women. This appreciation can be seen all over in the city, or in markets (*bāzār*), where the sellers, men and women, stand in front of the *umlāli* and put their hands on their chests as a sign of respect and appreciation. Through oral reports, almost everyone in Khorramshahr, including those in the men's community, knows which women are actually *mollāyeh*. *Umlāli* play a beneficial role for the social status of their families because religion and the rituals that are part of life-time celebrations plays a vital role in the community. For example, if a market seller sees a family member of a *mollāyeh* in *bāzār*, he may offer an extra discount. But why do people pay a special attention to the religion and sacred rituals in Iranian society?

Islam reached Iranian territories in the earliest phase of its spread, which means that today's Iran has been moulded by Islamic traditions for more than 1300 years. The golden age of Islam burgeoned on Persian territory, and Iranian rulers long supported the development of high levels of knowledge and education across wide sections of population. This has over time resulted in an enormous number of world-famous scientists. As a small example one can refer to famous scientists like Avicennā (980-1037), al- Fārābi (872-950), Nasir al- Din Tusi (1201-1244), Mir Dāmād (1561-1631), Mollā Sadrā (1571-1640), Maryam Mirzākhāni (1977-2017) and Majid Samii (1937). Although Persians were originally forced to become Muslim, over the centuries, they have come to embrace the religion as an essential element of their identity as individuals and as a group. The rules of Islam are deeply embedded in the structures of society. A discussion of Islamic morality and its realization in society is beyond the scope of this work. However, suffice it to say that the integration of moral aspects of the religion, not least the giving of regular donations to the poor, as well as political factors over many centuries helped to establish Islam a predominant presence in every part of the society, at all social levels.

In the 16th century Iranian monarchs became officially Shia. Since then, Shia Islamic traditions and rituals, as well as clergy, have played a major role in Iran. Because of the importance of the religion in society, acquiring a religious title through pilgrimages to holy cities such as Mashhad, Karbala, Mecca, and Medina is widely considered to be especially a must-do duty for many pious Iranians. After the pilgrimage, these people are called by titles such as *maṣḥadi*, *karbalāyi*, *hāgi*, etc. A pilgrimage shows the honour of travelers to a special religious value that is an important and general value for many other people. It also shows the financial prosperity of the

family who can afford such a trip. As a result of being faithful and have a good financial resource, these people become to be more recognized in the society.

The particular development of Iran throughout the last century has mainly caused today's socio-religious situation. The Islamic revolution helped re-establish religion and clerics at the center of society, after the western-oriented reign of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). "During the reign of the first Pahlavi King Reza Shah, educational and judicial reforms were effected that laid the basis of a modern state and reduced the influence of the religious classes."⁶ Today, the Islamic government of Iran uses modern forms of media for propaganda and the suppression of divergent opinions and social structures. A crucial defining factor for the identity of the Islamic republic was and is the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the trauma experienced by many Iranian during that eight-year long slaughter (See Karsh 2014, Pelletiere 1992). The wide acceptance of the Islamic government as a keeper of tradition and national identity and sovereignty help maintain religion, and those who control, at the center of society, even into the 21st century.

The act of attending Islamic festivities in Iran often represents the religious opinions of people. Another important factor that can explain the high levels of participation in religious rituals in Iran is the simple fact that all other forms of gatherings, events, and festivities fall under intense surveillance, censorship, and severe restrictions. This is especially true for women, who are in law and in practice more or less second-class citizens. Thus, attending rituals like *rowzeh* can be understood as one of the safest forms of social gatherings. They are one of the only kinds of gatherings at which it is accepted for pious Shia women to attend. In the following figure, we can see a typical setting of a *Khorramshahri rowzeh* with a group consisted of four *umlāli*.

Umlāli function as the leaders, in every sense, of these Shia rituals. This means that they plan, among other things, when the ritual should begin and when it will end, how many songs will be sung and who should sing each part. The number of *umlāli* in a gathering session usually depends on the number of guests or ritual participants that is invited. A well-visited *rowzeh* should have at least thirty ritual participants. The participants are called by ritual organizers and *umlāli* 'mostame'in' that simply means 'the listeners'. The fewer the guests, the fewer *umlāli* would be required. Based on the

⁶ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/Religion>, accessed June 4, 2020.

date, place, and the time of each ritual, one can approximately know how many people would participate.



Figure 2: Typical setting of a *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr city. The group of *umlāli* sits habitually on a corner of the room. All people sit cross-legged on the floor, except those who suffer knee diseases and cannot sit cross-legged. Under the green cloth is the representation of the cradle of Ali Asghar, the six-month-old child of Imam Hossein. (Photo taken by the author).

Ritual organizers as the hosts of *rowzeh* are responsible for inviting the *umlāli* and their payment. Before the Muḥarram, they agree together with each *mollāyeh* consensually upon the exact days and times of the performance, as well as the payment for the *mollāyeh*. The payment is mostly in cash and at the end of the first two weeks of the sacred month of Muḥarram. Some also receive their honorarium at the end of each ritual. It might be noteworthy that each *mollāyeh* gets payed individually. The amount of the honorarium depends on the popularity of each *mollāyeh* and the number of rituals that she performed for the host. It might be interesting to know that *umlāli* earn more money for joyful rituals such as *mowludi* rather than mourning rituals (Shirin Attarzadeh, personal communication, 06.10.2017).⁷

Umlāli sing in turns. It is rare for one *mollāyeh* to sing two songs in a row. As a group, they decide who sings which part, shortly before they start the ceremony. For example, one *mollāyeh* might inform her colleagues that she has to skip the last part of the *rowzeh* because today she has to leave earlier. *Umlāli* arrive usually fifteen minutes

⁷ بیشتر ملایه ها دستمزدشان را بعد از دهه می گیرند. یک سری هم همیشه بعد از هر سری خواندن اجرتشان را می خواهند. برای مولودی بر خلاف روضه مبالغ خیلی بیشتری می طلبند.

earlier than attendees before the ritual begins. Habitually the oldest *mollāyeh* in each ceremony, who is usually a more famous preacher among her colleagues, opens the ceremony. She begins with salutations and greeting words to the Prophet Mohammad and his family. Then, she welcomes the guests with short prayers and shows her gratitude for their participation. She speaks loud and clear to get the attendee's attention. Nowadays, *umlāli* use microphones in all rituals with even only five or six participants. They also turn up the volume very high so that they can achieve better and more impressive sound effects. As soon as the *mollāyeh* starts the ritual, participants must stop talking to each other.

Some *umlāli* warn the guests to keep their heads down or hide their faces behind their headscarves. Keeping the head down is a sign of modesty and high respect for the murdered Imam and the other martyrs whose souls may be present in the ceremony (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 02.10.2017).⁸ In some rituals, guests are also asked not to look in the eyes of a *mollāyeh* who is performing. As we see later, in some parts of the *rowzeh* women have to cover their eyes with their hand or behind their scarves. In order for the *rowzeh* to become more outstanding and spiritual, *umlāli* ask the guests to join in and sing along. Most songs sung at a *rowzeh* are based on the call and response form. This means that a *mollāyeh* sings a solo phrase that must be answered by her audience. Depending on each religious song, the responding phrase can be either the same phrase sung by the *mollāyeh*, or another phrase sung and introduced by her at the beginning of the song. They repeat this phrase until they are sure that their audience can sing and repeat it without any problems or difficulties. Examples regarding this musical form are discussed in later sections.

Regarding the information from this section, it is now apparent what principal tasks a *mollāyeh* takes on in this religious scene. *Umlāli* are the vocal performers of this ritual who get paid for their performance. They guide the whole ceremony and its succession and give the participants instructions on how to behave and what they expect from them during the ceremony. Throughout my thesis, I write more about the lives of these women. I will report how and why they became *mollāyeh*. Most of the data I gathered is based on several interviews I conducted with *umlāli*. Because of this reason, in the next chapter I explain the methodology I used to gather data to compose this ethnography.

برخی از ملایه ها حتی با مستمعین دعوا می کنند و اخطار می دهند که سر خود را پایین نگه دارند یا صورت خود را پنهان کنند. آنها⁸ بر این باورند که به نشانه ی حیا و احترام به امام حسین نباید به چشمان ملایه نگاه کرد چرا که این یک مراسم سوگواری هست و نه یک سرگرمی!

2. Methodology

I have conducted fieldwork over the course of several years between summer 2015 and autumn 2019 in the center of the southwestern Iranian city of Khorramshahr. I decided to choose this city for several reasons. First, there is a lack of ethnomusicological as well as anthropological studies about this Iranian region. Second, Khorramshahr is particularly interesting, because the majority of its inhabitants are Iranian Arabs and literature written about this minority is sparse. Third, I come from the province of Khuzestan and have a strong desire to contribute to the documentation and understanding of the culture of Khuzestan. My mother is from Abadan. My father was born and grew up in Khorramshahr. Each spring, my family and I spent our new year's holidays, known as Nowruz, in this city. As I was a child, I was always happy if we could stay during the holidays at my grandmother's house in Khorramshahr.

My grandmother was a pious, and at the same time a recognized woman in Khorramshahr. Every year, she organized several Islamic female rituals at her home, among them *rowzeh*, and *mowludi*. When she was younger, she took care of the best-known and now oldest *mollāyeh* of the city *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid. This connection is one reason why I had the opportunity to make interviews with many of the famous *umlāli* of the town, among them with *Mollāyeh* Um Saeid. The fourth reason for composing this work was my fascination with the ritual itself. Due to my research about Shia women's rituals in Iran, I found the *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr to be especially intriguing because of its multicultural dimensions and the kinds of covert freedoms it affords to the women who participate in them. Additionally, the absence of government-based political issues in this ritual, rather than in many other Islamic men's or women's rituals in the country, was one more reason to explore this topic.

My fieldwork included participant observation in nearly all aspects of the ritual, not only during the events but also before and after. For instance, I helped the ritual organizers to prepare a *rowzeh* by doing tasks, such as buying groceries, preparing food, and making several varieties of tea to welcome the ritual participants or *mostame'in*. After each *rowzeh*, I washed the dishes, and helped the hosts to clean the *hosseiniyeh*, the place where a *rowzeh* takes place. A *hosseiniyeh* is usually a living room of the private houses of those people who arrange religious rituals. Taking on all these responsibilities helped me to understand how and why the people work so elaborately to arrange a ritual.

By being a ‘daughter’ to so many of the ritual participants and *umlāli* I was able to build close relationships with them. This seemingly simple ritual consists of a variety of finely intersecting socio-cultural layers that impact not only the development and attendance of each event but also its success and the status of the women involved, both performers and attendees and especially the *umlāli*. I conducted many interviews with ritual organizers, participants, and *umlāli*. As part of my participation and in order to achieve an enhanced understanding of the task of a *mollāyeh*, I spent time learning to perform religious songs in Arabic and Persian. Famous *umlāli* of the city, among them *Mollāyeh* Um-Shahin and *Mollāyeh* Um-Sadegh asked me to perform some songs in their own performances invitations that I accepted with honor. These experiences singing at *rowzeh* revealed to me the difficulties of doing the job of a *mollāyeh* in a way that I could never have experienced in any other way. I realized how difficult it is to make your audience cry and as Pirzadeh suggests to transform their state of mind. He states that the narrator, much like a preacher, would use moving language to bring his audience to tears and to transform their state of mind (Hajji Pirzadeh 1963:336-337). Moreover, I found it very challenging because to act as a *mollāyeh* in a *rowzeh* you have to control your emotions yourself during the performance of powerfully emotional mourning songs. This can be regarded as a major responsibility of *umlāli* who are supposed to make their audience cry.

I will address the musical aspects of *rowzeh* in the last part of my thesis. Since the culture in Khorramshahr, as is true in many other parts of the world, is dynamic, I will document the current structure of the *rowzeh* ritual, how the people practice it in the twenty-first century in Khorramshahr. This part of my thesis consists of numerous musical analyses, examples, and transcriptions. For the musical analysis and transcriptions, I utilize the software Praat (version 6.0.22) and the music notation software Sibelius. In order to clarify the historical background to the development of the *rowzeh*, in the next section of my thesis I take you on a time journey from the contemporary Iran to the year 632 A.D. It is the year of the Prophet Mohammad’s death. This date is a crucial time for key events that will happen in the future.

3. Rights of Caliphate and the Battle of Karbala

Iranians are followers of Abrahamic religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, as well as other religions like Zoroastrianism, Mandaism, etc. Among Muslims, 90-95% are Twelver Imamites Shias and 5-10% are Sunnis.⁹ Twelver Imamites Shia Islam is since the sixteenth century, the official religion of Iran: “the Persian majority’s conversion to Shiism in Iran took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (Nakash 2007:115). This conversion to Shia Islam can be seen as a political ideology and demarcation from the neighboring countries at that time, where Sunni Islam was the religion of the Caliphs and thus the state religion of the Ottoman Empire (Akhavi 1983:203-206).

Shahrugh Akhavi states that, “after 1501, Imamite Shiasm became the religion of a centralized Iranian state under the Safavid shahs (1501-1722)” (Akhavi 1983:204). “Safavides declared Shiism the official religion of Iran and extended their zone of influence to contemporary Afghanistan under the reign of Shah ‘Abbas (1587–1629)” (Monsutti 2007:175). The question now might arise is, what is exactly the Shia Islam? Akhavi defines the main beliefs of this particular Islamic faith as follows:

“(1) Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, should be succeeded by his descendants, the imams; (2) salvation is vouchsafed to those who believe in the restoration of God’s justice, to be accomplished by the last Imam when he reappears on earth; (3) every historical period requires a “proof” of God, incarnate in the line of these descendants” (Akhavi 1983:203).

Among the Shia Muslims, followers of the so-called Twelver Imamites Shia believe that the prophet’s rightful heirs were his twelve male descendants or Imams. However, “Only the first in this line, ‘Ali, actually ruled and then only briefly (A.D. 651-56). The other [Imam]s were persecuted as a matter of official policy by the rulers of the Islamic community” (Akhavi 1983:203). “The social mythos of Shiism suggests that blame for the death of their imams must be placed at the door of the Sunni caliphs who ruled the Islamic world at that time, even though there is historical evidence that some imams did not die a violent death” (Akhavi 1983:203). The second question is, what exactly does the Caliphate mean and who was a Caliph? Aghaie writes:

⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>, accessed October 1, 2019.

“The caliphate is the system of government that developed out of this crisis [selecting a successor after the death of the Prophet Mohammad]. According to this system, the empire was ruled by a Caliph, who commanded both temporal and religious authority but did not possess any of the supernatural or metaphysical qualities of the Prophet, such as infallibility, supernatural knowledge and ability, or the ability to receive revelation” (Aghaie 2005:1).

“Upon the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the main challenge facing the young Muslim community was who should succeed the prophet and in what capacity. It was also unclear who had the right to select a successor” (Aghaie 2005:1). “While some Muslims supported the ruling Caliphs, others believed that the Prophet’s son in law and cousin, Ali Ebn-e Abi Taleb [Imam 'Ali], should have succeeded the Prophet upon his death” (Aghaie 2005:1). Ali’s Caliphate was ended by his sudden death due to the attack and assassination by 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam al-Murādi, while Ali was praying in the Great Mosque of Kufa. The believers of the later Shia Islam claimed that the successors to the Caliphate should be 'Ali’s descendants, beginning with his two sons, Ḥasan (d. 669) and Ḥossein (d. 680) (Aghaie 2005:1).

Aghaie writes more about the rights of Caliphate from the point of view of Shia Muslims, stating that “these Muslims believed that the Prophet named 'Ali as his successor on more than one occasion before his death” (Aghaie 2005:1). “After the assassination of 'Ali, they elected his son from Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed’s eldest son, Ḥassan, to [be] the Caliph. After six months of rule, he renounced [...] the throne” (Greenfield 1904:70). Subsequently, the youngest son of 'Ali and Fatima Zahra, Ḥossein, claimed the right to be the next caliph (Kasi 1918: 217). His claims to the caliphate were not recognized by the former Umayyad Caliph, Yazid ibn Mu‘āwiya and his supporters and caused Ḥossein to lead a rebellion against the ‘impious’ tyranny of the Sunnis (Akhavi 1983:208). These conflicts and disagreements of Ḥossein with Yazid ibn Mu‘āwiya, as well as the resistance struggle led to the catastrophe of Karbala in 680. Christiane Gruber explains that the battle of Karbala was a politico-religious mission that was engaged in order to stipulate who has the right to reign (Gruber 2012:71). On the tenth day of the Arabic lunar month of Muḥarram in 680 (known as '*āšurā*¹⁰'), Imam Ḥossein and his army of 72 soldiers who were his followers were attacked and killed by the troops of Caliph Yazid ibn Mu‘āwiya at the desert of Karbala. Karbala is nowadays a pilgrimage city in central Iraq. It is a heavily visited city, especially by Shia Muslims from Iran throughout the year. But during the mourning

¹⁰ The root of the Arabic word '*āšurā*' is '*āšar*' which means the number ten. Since Imam Ḥossein was killed on this day, the tenth day of Muḥarram or '*āšurā*' is the culmination of the religious rituals of this month.

months of Muḥarram and Ṣafar, the city is especially busy as it is visited by a huge number of (mostly) Shia pilgrims. In Khorramshahr, during the sacred month of Muḥarram, one can observe numerous travel buses arriving from cities around Iran. Religious Shia people travel in large groups to Khorramshahr. Groups of pilgrims visit especially the city center where the Khorramshahr Central Mosque is located (figure 3). They walk from there to the shrine of Imam Ḥossein in Karbala (figure 4 and 5). For many pious people it is a life-long dream to be present at Karbala on '*ʿāsurā* day.



Figure 3: Khorramshahr Central Mosque. (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 4: Imam Ḥossein Shrine (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).



Figure 5: *Beynol ḥarameyn* (between the shrines) is a street that connects the shrines of Imam Ḥossein and his cousin. This street, which consists of souvenir shops from both sides, is a traveler attraction in Karbala (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).

Since this tragedy of the death of Imam Ḥossein at Karbala, Shia Muslims around the world consider Ḥossein ibn 'Ali as the rightful and correct successor of the Caliphate. His defeat and death cemented very early in its history the division between what are now the two branches of Islam, the Shia and the Sunni Islam. Today, Shia Muslims still commemorate the murder of Ḥossein whom they consider to be the rightful caliph and from whom leadership for Islam should flow:

“The battle pitted Imam Ḥossein, the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson, against the military forces of the Umayyad Sunni ruler Yazid I (r. 680–683 CE). Ḥossein’s followers were slaughtered, while Ḥossein himself was brutally killed, his decapitated head mounted on a spear before its relocation to Ashkelon and then Cairo” (Gruber 2016:250).

Besides Ḥossein’s martyrdom, many of his supporters were killed, too. Women, children and other survivors were dragged as slaves to the former capital city of the Umayyad Caliphate, Damascus. Impressive stories from the battle of Karbala have been carried down orally through the history. Oral tradition says that women had to carry the separated heads of their male relatives on the way to Damascus. Chelkowski writes:

“The women and their small children underwent tremendous physical and psychological pain as they were forced to accompany the severed heads of their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons on the way to Yazid in Damascus via Kufa. [...] These women became part and parcel of the Karbala lore, myth, and rituals, and were elevated to the status of superheroes for their heroic endurance” (Chelkowski 2005:123).

Of course, women of Khorramshahr commemorate the sufferings of the other victims in the Karbala battle, too. Therefore, each of the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram

is dedicated to a particular occasion or a person. For example, people mourn on one day specifically for Ali al-Asghar, the six-month-old baby boy of Imam Ḥossein who was killed by an arrow. On another day, they commemorate the martyrdom of Abbas ibn Ali, known as Abolfazl al- 'Abbās, the younger brother of Imam Ḥossein. It should be noted that in all these ceremonies Imam Ḥossein is the central character to whom the whole ceremony is dedicated.

One of the most moving narratives from the battle is the story of Roghayeh, the three-year old daughter of Imam Ḥossein. *Khorramshahri* women sing several elegies in her memorial. They speak about the story of Roghayeh, who could not believe the death of her father. By order of the Caliph, his soldiers showed the three-year-old child the severed head of her father, which was covered with his blood. Experiencing the religious songs dedicated to Roghayeh and at the same time watching people's reaction to these songs during a *rowzeh*, is one of the most- shaking moments that I have ever experienced in my life.

The martyrdom of Imam Ḥossein and the stories from the battle of Karbala can be considered as the most tragic occurrence in the history of Shia Islam. Chelkowski writes: “much as the crucifixion of Christ is to Christians, the martyrdom of Hussein is to the world's Shia Muslims: the seminal event in their faith” (Chelkowski 1980:30). It still plays a significant role in the spiritual lives of many pious Shia Muslims in the contemporary Iran. Indeed, the Islamic government of the country has emphasized the role of the tragic battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Ḥossein from the very beginning of its tenure.

Perhaps because of the importance of the events at the Battle of Karbala, martyrdom plays a significant role in Iranian society, especially in the post-revolutionary Iran, a time in which government and religion have become more intricately imbricated than ever before. The national emblem in the Iranian flag is a symbol of martyrdom. The emblem is a stylized representation of the word Allah in the shape of a red tulip, the symbol of bravery and martyrdom.¹¹ Manochehr Dorraj explains in his paper *Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture*, the importance of martyrdom in detail. Referring to both historical references and Persian poetry and literature, he discusses

¹¹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/320.html>, accessed July 14, 2019.

how the concept of martyrdom has come to be so highly valued among Iranians since the pre-Islamic Iran until today.

Dorraj argues that the powerful motif of martyrdom has been efficiently utilized for political purposes throughout Iranian history (Dorraj 1997:489-522). After the Islamic revolution of 1979 and later during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), until today, Iranian government constructs itself and its legitimacy based on the occurrence of Karbala. It propagates the concept of martyrdom in the school or in the media like the Iranian national Broadcasting, especially to encourage the younger generation to fight against the country's enemies and to defend Iran, like Ḥossein defended Islam. It has been accepted in society that being a martyr is a sign of honor and among the martyrs, the character of Ḥossein should be adopted as a role model for the younger generation. The metaphor of Karbala has even crossed religious divisions and the martyrdom of Hossein has become a rallying cry for oppressed Muslims in different places around the world.

“A pan-Islamic sentiment gained ground after the Iranian revolution: the Karbala paradigm was constantly reinterpreted and linked to Palestine, Kashmir and Bosnia. Religious symbolism was used to justify political action under the slogan *Kul yom Ashura, kul ardh Karbala* (Every day is Ashura, the whole earth is Karbala)” (Abou Zahab 2007:108).

One of the consequences of the Battle of Karbala, has been the development of numerous Shia rituals and ceremonies relating to the event at Karbala and articulating important differences from the history and ritual cultures of Sunni Islam. These rituals are celebrated with notably great efforts in Iran, as a theocratic Shia Islamic state.

“Over a period of twelve centuries, five major rituals developed around the battle of Karbala: the memorial services, the representation of the battle in the form of a play, the flagellation, the public mourning processions, and the visiting of Husayn's tomb particularly on the day of 'Ashura' and the fortieth day after the battle” (Nakash 2007:115).

The *rowzeh* ritual is one of those based on themes from Karbala. I turn now to an investigation of the origins and practice of the *rowzeh*.

4. *Rowzeh* in Historical and Contemporary Context

During the first ten days of Muḥarram in Shia Iran, streets are decorated with numerous symbols of the battle of Karbala. The ninth and the tenth day of Muḥarram (*tāsu'ā* and *'āšurā* days) are official national holidays in the whole country. The symbols on the streets or public places such as airports, museums, libraries, etc. could be the

hands of Al-Abbas ibn Ali, the half-brother of Imam Ḥossein, a bowl of water, flags, helmet, pigeon, etc. The following illustration shows some of these symbols.

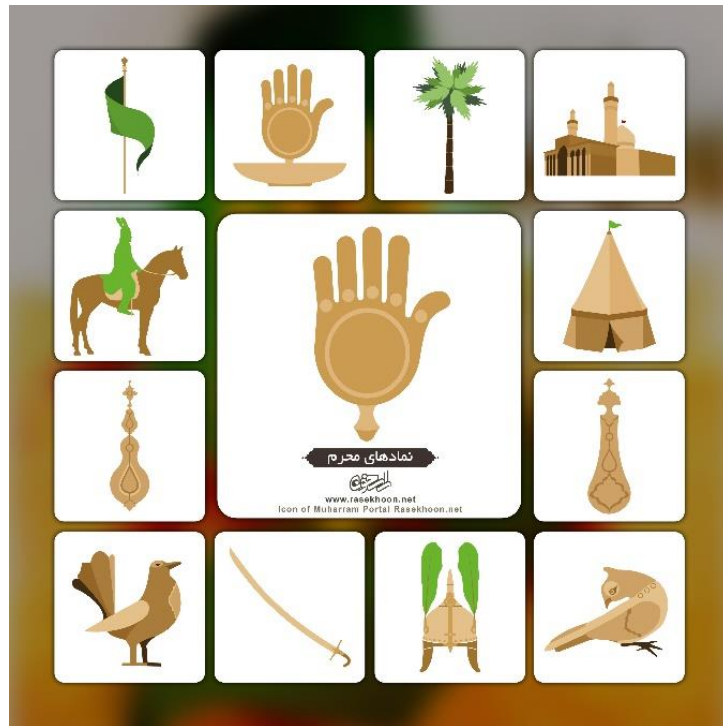


Figure 6: Several symbols from the Karbala battle.¹² These symbols can also be found in various *rowzeh* rituals. These can either be distributed as objects in the room, or in posters or cloths.

Many people either arrange or perform several rituals. One would not encounter these kinds of celebrations in the countries with a majority of Sunni Muslims. Naef and Sabahi discuss the importance of these rituals among Shia Muslims: “Rituals, especially those marking the death of Imam Husayn during the month of Muḥarram, are for most Shiite groups a fundamental element of identity construction and self-affirmation” (Naef and Sabahi 2007:7). Gruber affirms that “during ‘Ashura ceremonies, Shia communities across the globe, from Iran to India and onward to Trinidad in the Caribbean, commemorate the persecution and violent death of Imam Husayn and members of the Prophet’s family” (Gruber 2016:250).

Since the Buyid dynasty (934–1055), Iranians put a lot of afford into the practice of mourning rituals (Binesh 2003:178). Centuries later, during the Safavid era, Kings of Safavid started to establish and promote Islamic art and architecture, at a high level. Some of the rituals from that time are known nowadays as Islamic performing arts such as *ta'ziyeh-hāni*. *Ta'ziyeh-hāni* resembles a theatre that is about a story from the Battle

¹² <https://rasekhoon.net/photogallery/show/1112152/عاشورایی-های-نماد/>, accessed March 9, 2020.

of Karbala. In Iran, *ta'ziyeh-hāni* or shortened *ta'ziyeh* is also an intangible cultural heritage.¹³ Islamic paintings and the architectural masterpieces in the former capital city Esfahan, as well as the ritualized Islamic performing arts are just some examples of those art forms, developed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Especially, during the reign of the Shah Abbas Safavi, the royal reign promoted the practice of the memorial rituals including *rowzeh* (Binesh 2003:178). These rituals were so important at that time, that a large number of the names of *rowzeh* 'artists' are preserved in written sources (Binesh 2003:178). Other rituals that developed through this period are *šabih-hāni* and *nowheh-hāni* (Binesh 2003:179). Farrokh Gaffary writes: "The Safavid dynasty encouraged all these rites and, in addition, patronized elaborate religious processions, *dastes*" (Gaffary 1984:367).

Same as the *rowzeh*, the above-mentioned rituals contain vocal parts and are performed in Muḥarram. It might be helpful to review briefly the *ta'ziyeh*. *Ta'ziyeh* is the most famous performance in devotion to the Karbala disaster in Iran. At the same time, it is among the mourning rites of Muḥarram a commonly discussed and well-documented performance. *Ta'ziyeh* is the passion play of the Shia Muslims performed in the country that recounts the tragedy of martyrdom of Imam Ḥossein, writes Chelkowski (Chelkowski 2005:15). Following Calmard about the development of this genre Gaffary writes, "*ta'zie* progressed and flourished under the patronage of the Qajar Shahs [from 1794 to 1925¹⁴], particularly Nāser al-din Shāh (1848-96) and was equally well received and actively supported by the general public" (Gaffary 1984:368). *Ta'ziyeh* was inscribed in 2010 on the representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity.¹⁵

The theatrical aspects of *ta'ziyeh* such as dramatization, stage set, and costumes characterize this art form and distinguish it from *rowzeh*. One interesting aspect of a *ta'ziyeh* performance is that women, men and children can all be present at the same time as the audience. Whether men and women can play together as actors on the same stage differs from one region to another region. For example, *ta'ziyeh* in Khorramshahr is practiced in the same way as the *rowzeh*, that is, separately by men and women. In women's *ta'ziyeh*, the male roles are also taken over and interpreted by women. The

¹³ <https://www.mcth.ir/english>, accessed June 14, 2020.

¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Qajar-dynasty>, accessed March 30, 2020.

¹⁵ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ritual-dramatic-art-of-taziye-00377>, accessed June 4, 2020.

notable commonality between these genres is the utilization of the vocal practice and musical modes to perform the lyrics (Binesh 2003:179).

“Each character or role has its musical structure. For example, the person who plays the role of Abbas ibn Ali, the half-brother of Ḥossein, has to sing in *čahārgāh* while Abdullah ibn Hasan, the nephew of Ḥossein, has to sing in *rāk*” (Binesh: 179-180). Some scholars even assume that these religious genres played a significant role in survival of Persian classical music. Gaffary quoted after Khaleghi, “thank to *rowzeh khāni* and especially *ta'ziyeh*, Persian classical music survived under religious cover” (Gaffary 1984:369). I do not find the statement unjustified. It is a common knowledge that there have been many restrictions on the musical practices since the reign of the Safavids. Nevertheless, this interesting hypothesis must still be furthered researched by engaging historical research methods.



Figure 7: Performance of a *ta'ziyeh*. © 2002 by Iranian Dramatic Art Center.¹⁶

Turning back to the *rowzeh*, there are similar kinds of this ritual in other regions of the world under different names, for instance the Syrian *gaṣid* or the Iraqi *gīrā'a*. Both rituals are closely connected with the narration of the events of Karbala (Nakash 2007:116). The question now might arise is, what is exactly a *rowzeh* and where are its origins to be found in Iran? Iranian *rowzeh* is a religious gathering that is dedicated to

¹⁶ <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ritual-dramatic-art-of-taziye-00377>, accessed June 4, 2020.

the soul of the martyred Imam Ḥossein. It consists of at least one preacher and a group of mourners. Depending on each region, one can name the preacher under different terms such as *maddah*, *rowzeh-hān*, *nowḥeh-hān*, or *mollā*. The variety of the *rowzeh* rituals is so great that addressing each of them would fall outside the scope of this thesis. For this reason, I investigate only the *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr.

The word *rowzeh* stems from the name of a poem book, called *rowzat- al-ṣohadā*. This literary masterpiece in Persian language was composed in 1502 by Mollā-Ḥossein Vāez-Kāšefi in Herat, in today's Afghanistan (Ruffle 2009:406). The title of the book *rowzat- al-ṣohadā* means literally 'the Garden of the martyrs' (Chelkowski 2005:137). The single word of '*rowzeh*' means 'garden'. *Rowzat- al-ṣohadā* is written in ten chapters. Four chapters of the book are about Imam Ḥossein, and they are all dedicated to him (Zolfaghari 2011:1-34). It includes many stories about the suffering moments of the sacred personages who were involved in the battle.

Massoudieh writes that over the years, the stories from *rowzat al-adohadā* were sung in a kind of cantillation (Massoudieh 2003:12). Gaffary confirms Massoudieh's statement, "Orators recited extracts of this book, drawing from the believers' cries and lamentation on the calamities of the Prophet's family. These meetings are called *rowzeh khāni* (recitation of threnody)" (Gaffary 1984:366-367). These meetings in Khorramshahr are called *mağles-e rowzeh*. *Mağles* simply means a place for meeting. Before examining the *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr, in the next section, I provide some information about the world of the Iranian Arab minority. This minority group is the one by whom the ritual is most significantly influenced. In addition, most of the arrangers, participants, and interpreters of this ritual, at least in Khorramshahr are Iranian Arabs.

5. Khorramshahr City and Iranian Arabs

Iran is a multi-ethnic country. Iranian population consists of 61% Persians, 16% Azeris, 10% Kurds, 6% Lurs, 2% Balochis, 2% Arabs, 2% Turkmen and Turkic tribes and other descents.¹⁷ People from several parts of Iran speak different languages. Besides Persian or Farsi, the official language of Iran, people can speak Azeri Turkic, Kurdish, Gilaki, Mazandarani, Luri, Balochi and Arabic, depending on each region. The majority of the Iranian-Arab minority live in the province of Khuzestan. Towfiq states:

“[The Arab tribes in Iran] are scattered over a zone stretching from the Arvand-rūd (Šaṭṭ al-‘Arab), and Persian Gulf in the south to Šūš in the north and lying roughly to the west of the Baḳṭiārī territory. They live in dispersed groups on Mīnū (formerly Kežr) island near Ābādān and Korramšahr (the old Moḥammara). These tribes gradually immigrated into Iran during and after the early years of the Qajar period” (Towfiq, 1987:707-724).

The following illustration shows the spread of the Iranian Arabs on the map. One should consider that the following map is from 1986. Since that time, there have been some changes in the territory of the Iranian provinces. For example, the eastern Iranian province of Khorasan is now divided into three separate provinces of North Khorasan Province, Razavi Khorasan Province, and South Khorasan Province. However, the distribution of the Arab minority in the country is almost unchanged. Matras and Shabibi write about the history of the Arab settlement in Khuzestan:

“Arab settlement in this area is believed to go back to the beginning of the Christian era. In the centuries following the advent of Islam, the Arabic language enjoyed the status of the literary language of religion, scholarship and administration, as well as being the primary language of everyday communication in the province. This changed with the coming to power of Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1926 and the introduction of an intensive campaign favoring Persian as the only official state language. The policy included the settlement of a Persian-speaking population in the province” (Matras & Shabibi 2007:137).

¹⁷ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>, accessed October 1, 2019.

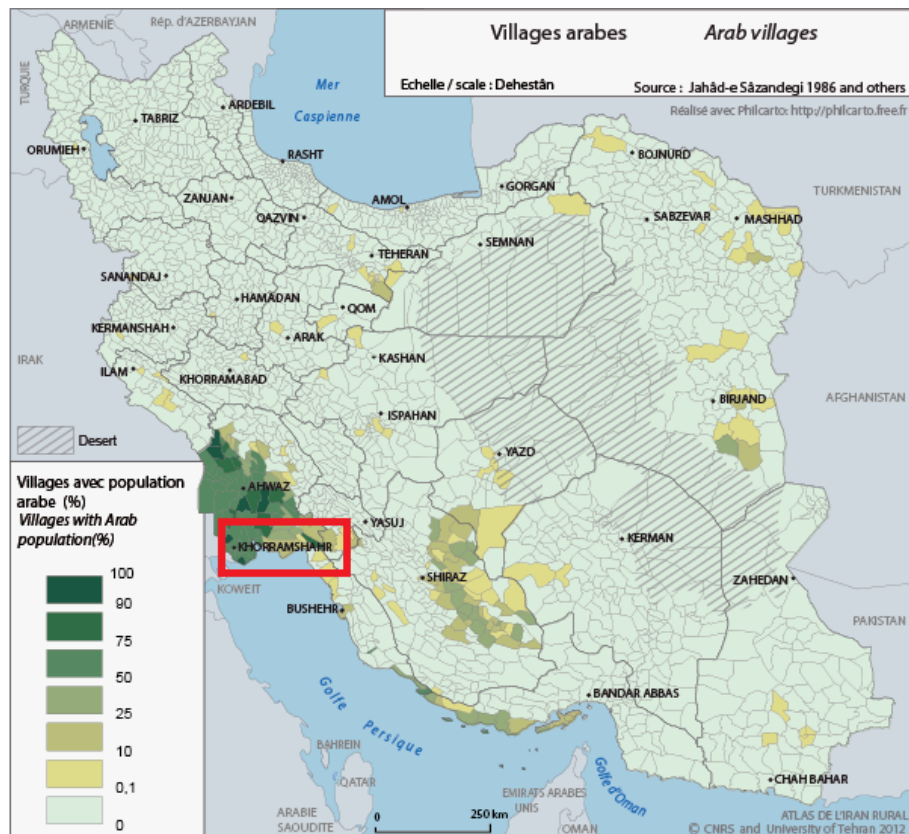


Figure 8: Arab villages in Iran.¹⁸ One can see the geographic location of the city of Khorramshahr as a city with a majority of the Arabic-speaking people with red mark.

I conducted my fieldworks in Khorramshahr (formerly Moḥammerah).¹⁹ Khorramshahr is a port city in Khuzestan. The city is about seventeen kilometers away from Abadan, the center of the Iranian oil industry. Khorramshahr is located on the Iraqi border. It is at the confluence of the two rivers, Arvandrud and Karun. Figure 9 demonstrates the geographical location of the city on the map (retrieved from Google Maps).

¹⁸ <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/record.php?q=AR-040535&f=local&t=document&l=fr>, accessed October 23, 2019.

¹⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Khorramshahr>, accessed April 18, 2019.



Figure 9: Geographical location of Khorramshahr shows the location of this border city on the map of Iran.

Many of the inhabitants of Khorramshahr work in the agricultural sector or in the shipping and oil and petrol industry. Otherwise, they might be civil servants, fishermen, or artisans (Zolfaghari 2010:16-21). Since the discovery of oil deposits at the beginning of the 20th century, the demographic, economic, and socio-cultural situation in the region has changed profoundly (Nikzat 2018:9). Babak Nikzat adds that “Arab towns are facing a high and steady influx of people from the surrounding highlands and other parts of Iran working in oil and gas fields and industrial plants” (Nikzat 2018:9).

The intermingling of Arab and Persian cultures influenced the culture and language in Khorramshahr over the years. Nowadays, many people in the city can speak both Persian and *Khuzestani*-Arabic, which has many grammatical borrowings from Persian (Matras and Shabibi 2007:137-151).

“Most Khuzistani Arabic speakers are bilingual. Arabic is strictly used as a language of the extended family and of occasional communications with Arabic speakers in streets or shops. Persian, the contact language, however, is used everywhere” (Shabibi 2010).²⁰

Figure 10 shows the multilingual Iranian villages. Among these villages, Khorramshahr is also the hometown for many bilingual people.

²⁰ <http://languagecontact.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/McrLC/casestudies/MS.html>, accessed October 15, 2020.

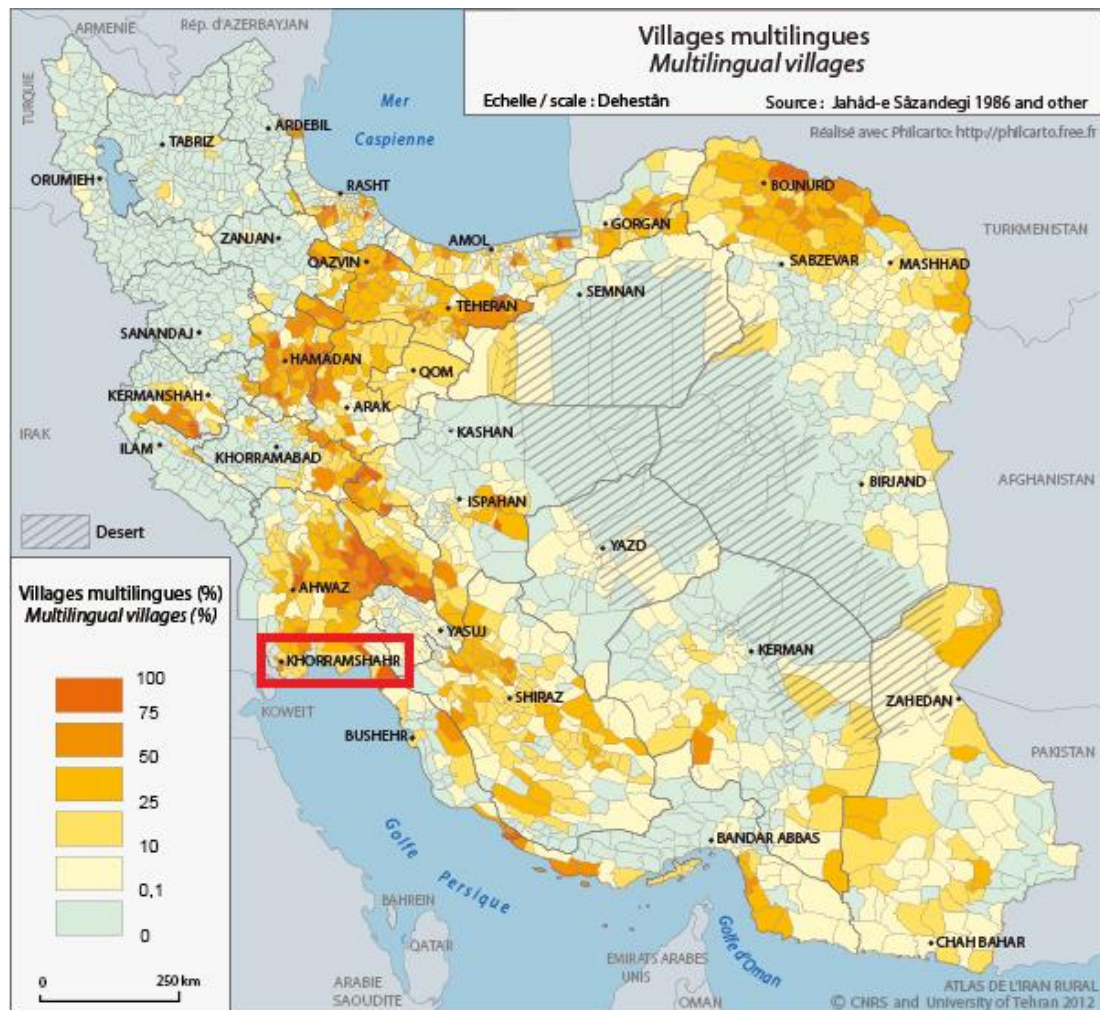


Figure 10: Multilingual villages in Iran.²¹ Khorramshahr is again marked with red.

It is noteworthy to mention that “Arabic is the language of the family and community in the Arabic-speaking neighborhoods, though even as an informal language it is now in decline, and Persian is the preferred language of the younger generation born since the 1970s” (Matras & Shabibi 2007:137). This statement can be confirmed by the reports from the local people from Khorramshahr, as well as my own observations. Many young Iranian Arabs can speak and understand Arabic, nonetheless they avoid using the Arabic language in public. Many Iranian Arabs try to hide their Arab roots. I was one of them! Many of young Iranian Arabs marry within their own community, however, they do not reveal the identity of their loved ones to others as Arabs, though they themselves are from the same minority group. Some people change even their Arabic family names to ancient Persian names such as Avesta, Parsi, or Parsamanesh. They do this in an

²¹ <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/record.php?q=AR-040506&f=local&t=document&l=fr>, accessed October 23, 2019.

effort to have a better social place in the world of ‘*ağam*’ people who identify themselves as “pure Persians.” The word ‘*ağam*’ is an Arabic term that refers to someone whose mother tongue is not Arabic. No matter what ethnic group the people come from, most of the Iranians in and outside the country identify themselves as Persians:

“Although over 50 per cent of Iranians identify as Persian, several other ethnic groups make up a significant proportion of the population. Even those who identify as Persian are likely to have other ethnic roots and connections. Indeed, for centuries, various ethnic groups and communities have intermingled and intermarried, giving Iran a complex socio-cultural composition”.²²

Most of these people perceive the ‘Arab culture’ as a great enemy of the ‘Persian culture’. Iranian Arabs had always to struggle with accusations of those who identify themselves as the “pure Persians”. Growing up as an Iranian Arab woman in Khuzestan, I witnessed numerous ways of struggling with this theme, the famous debate of Arabs and ‘*ağams*’. I remember the Persian street names in Jarrahi, the village where I grew up, that were replaced with graffiti to Arabic names. For instance, Persian Gulf boulevards (*bulvār-e ḥaliğ-e fārs*) was replaced with *al-ḥaliğ al-‘arabiya* which means the Arabian Gulf. During the last decade, one can see many social movements that claim, Iranian Arab people are also Persians and they have nothing to do with the ‘Arab culture’. According to the Minorities at Risk Project from 2001:

“the main factor that differentiates Iranian Arabs from Iran’s Persian speaking majority is their racial distinction, and that they speak one of several dialects of Arabic. Most of the Arabs living in Khuzestan are Shia Muslims, and most of those living along the coast of the Persian Gulf are Sunni Muslims, with more Shi’a than Sunni overall. Both the urban and rural Arabs of Khuzestan are intermingled with the Persians, Turks and Lurs who also live in the province and often intermarry with them. Despite this, Iranian Arabs are regarded by themselves and by Iran’s other ethnic groups as separate and distinct from non-Arabs. The government of Iraq, both before and after Iran’s 1979 revolution, has accused Iran of discrimination against its Arab population. Despite this, the Arab population of Khuzestan sided with Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. [...] As Khuzestan is the most oil-rich province of Iran, Arabs desire greater control over and benefits from these resources. Finally, Arabs desire the end of language and religious discrimination”.²³

Arab women with whom I worked said about these kinds of cultural conflicts that there is no difference between the Arabs and the Persians. They believed that all people are equal and in this religious context the servants of Imam Hossein. Persian women (except for a few cases) shared the same opinion, too. Talking about cultural conflicts opened a new door for me. Another approach that I haven’t thought about until then, that

²² <https://fanack.com/iran/population/iranian-arabs/>, accessed September 24, 2018.

²³ <http://www.mar.umd.edu/assessment.asp?groupId=63009>, accessed March 13, 2020.

binds these women strongly together. *Khorramshahri* women, no matter Arabs or Persians, have one thing in common. The war...

During the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) Khorramshahr was completely occupied by the Iraqi army:

“In September 1980 the Iraqi army carefully advanced along a broad front into Khūzestān. Iraq’s troops captured the city of Khorramshahr but failed to take the important oil-refining centre of Abadan. By December 1980 the Iraqi offensive had bogged down about 50–75 miles (80–120 km) inside Iran after meeting unexpectedly strong Iranian resistance. The Iranians first pushed the Iraqis back across Iran’s Kārūn River and then recaptured Khorramshahr in 1982”.²⁴

Local inhabitants were evacuated from the city. They had to move to other Iranian cities. Some of them decided to leave the country. Many people remained in their new cities or countries after the war, as the conflict lasted nearly a decade. These internal migrants may now visit their hometowns only on some special occasions. For example, they visit their family and relatives each spring during the New Year holidays. Another important yearly opportunity to revisit the city is during the month of Muḥarram in order to attend Shia rituals, among them, the *rowzeh*. Each Muḥarram, when I wanted to fly to Khuzestan to work on my research, I encountered many people at the airport who were originally from Khorramshahr but who live now in Tehran. I spoke with many of them about the reason of their travel.

Many reported that the main reason for their flight is participating in rituals. Among the passengers, I met many women who said that their sisters or mothers host *rowzeh* and need help in the preparations. For this reason, they were going to help their families with the rituals. Compared to the other flights, above 90% of the passengers on the flight to Abadan wore black cloths²⁵. In this time of the year, many *Khorramshahri* people wear black clothes both at home and in public places. With this, they show their homage to Imam Ḥossein. Many of those passengers had already taken a vacation, often for two weeks to be a part of the rituals for Imam Ḥossein.

It is noteworthy that there are *Khorramshahri* communities in Tehran that arrange and host *Khorramshahri* rituals, among them the *Khorramshahri rowzeh*, in Tehran, too. Due to the migration of the people from Khorramshahr to other cities during the war, women brought the *rowzeh* to cities like Esfahan, Shiraz, Kashan, or Tehran. However, a *Khorramshahri rowzeh* in these cities does not have the same

²⁴ “Iran-Iraq War” (2018). *Britannica Academic*, academic-1eb-1com-1000048o7026d.han.kug.ac.at/levels/collegiate/article/Iran-Iraq-War/42742, accessed April 19, 2019.

²⁵ It is a general norm that pious Muslims across the country wear black clothes during the Month of Muḥarram.

structure like the *rowzeh* practiced now in Khorramshahr. In contrast to the current practice of *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr, the ritual of internal migrants resembles the *rowzeh* from the 1980s. It is the time when they had to leave the city because of the war. The *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr has changed over the years. Some parts of that are now regarded as obsolete parts. Nevertheless, one can still see these parts in *Khorramshahri rowzehs* in other Iranian cities.

One of these obsolete parts is the tradition of head-turning during the performance of *latmiyeh*. In the last part of the thesis I will talk more in detail about the *latmiyeh*. Head-turnings resembled a spiritual unconsciousness as if the women had lost their consciousness from deep grief. Previously during the mourning chants, women took off their veils and turned their heads and hairs while the others beat their chests, a tradition known as *sineh-zani*²⁶. I haven't observed any head-turnings personally since 2015, a tradition that I always saw in my childhood. Another example is avoiding the performance of certain sections of the *rowzeh*, for example, the third part, *gaşid*. Issues regarding a *gaşid* performance will be investigated in later sections.

During my fieldwork in Khorramshahr, I heard women speaking about *rowzeh* in other cities where they are now living. They compare the rituals with each other and conclude always their chats with the sentence: "no place is better than home". It is also a sentence that I heard from almost each passenger of the flight to Abadan. One man stated that "experiencing the Muḥarram in Khorramshahr has another meaning and feeling for us. That's the reason why are you revisiting your hometown, too", said one of the male passengers of the flight to Abadan to me (personal communication, 04.09.2019).²⁷

The participation of *Khorramshahri Arab* and *'ağam* women in *rowzehs* creates a sense of belonging and influences their regional identity. Sosis describes the rituals, as a patterned behavior that is a form of communication within the members of the same community or different communities (Sosis 2004:168). Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi, citing Keating explains that "regional identity has been recognized as a key element in the making of regions as social/political spaces, but it is difficult to elucidate what this identity consists of and how it affects collective action/politics" (Paasi 2003:477). He adds:

²⁶ In the following parts of my thesis I will write more about this tradition.

²⁷ محرم در خرمشهر حال و هوای دیگری دارد. این حال و هوا و حسی که در مراسم در خرمشهر هست را هیچ جای دیگری نمی توانی پیدا کنی. حتما هم به همین دلیل الان به این مقصد پرواز داری؟

“Regional identity is [...] an interpretation of the process through which a region becomes institutionalized, a process consisting of the production of territorial boundaries, symbolism and institutions. This process concomitantly gives rise to, and is conditioned by, the discourses/practices/rituals that draw on boundaries, symbols and institutional practices” (Paasi 2003:478).

Another important point that Paasi speaks about is to distinguish between the two matters of the *identity of a region* and the *regional identity* which he calls as regional consciousness of the people living in or outside of their region (Paasi 2003:478). He writes:

“[...] former points to those features of nature, culture and people that are *used* in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others. These classifications are always acts of power performed in order to delimit, name and symbolize space and groups of people. Regional consciousness points to the multiscalar identification of people with those institutional practices, discourses and symbolisms that are expressive of the ‘structures of expectations’ that become institutionalized as parts of the process that we call a ‘region’” (Paasi 2003:478).

In my conversations with *Khorramshahri* women who now live in other cities, they said that they participate gladly in this particular ritual. Many of them, whether Arab or non-Arab complain of missing home when they are living away from their former home city. This applies, in particular, to Arab women who can no longer participate in everyday life in their mother tongue and also to *Khorramshahri* men. For this reason, participating in *Khorramshahri* rituals both in Khorramshahr and in other Iranian cities can contribute to the sense of still belonging to their old city and the regional identity of these people. Regarding the ability of music to create a sense of identity, Ruud suggests that “music creates powerful emotional experiences, associations and memories which form the raw material for the narrative construction of identity” (Ruud 2017:589). The same thing is also applicable for the religious songs in *rowzeh*.

Nowadays, Khorramshahr is recognized as a holy city in Iran. In addition to its proximity to Karbala and its role as a staging ground for pilgrimages to that site, many soldiers (especially young ones) were killed by the Iraqi Army during the war in this city. Khorramshahr is even unofficially called as *hūninšahr*. This literary means ‘a city built of the blood of martyrs’. There are countless women who lost their male or even female family members who were martyred during the war. Many of the ritual participants and *umlāli* who I met have had the experience of losing a loved one to the war. In *rowzeh* rituals, each *mollāyeh* ensures that she takes time to commemorate the

loss of *Khorramshahr* martyrs. Figure 11 shows the importance of this border city for the whole country during the war.



Figure 11: 'Welcome to Khorramshahr, Population: 36 Millions'. This number shows the total population of Iran by the Islamic Revolution.²⁸ Compare it with the current population of the Islamic Republic of Iran about which is stated to be 82,651,386 (as of Wednesday, April 17, 2019, based on the latest United Nations estimates).²⁹

Having conversations about the war, as well as memorializing the sad memories of the things that people endured during that time are vitally important topics that people talk about in many different contexts. Women who participate in *rowzeh* speak passionately about their feelings as they had to leave the city or about the moment when they returned and were confronted with their ruined hometown. Those who now live in other cities talk about losing their beloved hometown what they call as innocent Khorramshahr. It would not be so easy for them to return on a permanent basis to their former city. Their children were born in other cities and have different worldviews than their parents.

In participating in *rowzeh* rituals, women encounter many other women who have experienced the same thing as them. Verbalizing the sufferings they endured during the war helps women to have a better inner feeling after attending the ritual. They talk more about their past to those who have compassion and compare everything to their today's situation. In fact, this is an essential point that can be regarded as part of

²⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-47192445>, accessed April 18, 2019.

²⁹ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/>, accessed April 18, 2019.

the power of rituals to change the state of emotions. People create or enhance a sense of identity by attending the ritual. According to Hassanzadeh, “rituals create collective memories and reinforce a sense of belonging as a significant aspect of identity” (Hassanzadeh & Karimi 2018:80). That identity formation and confirmation are important elements of successful rituals can be seen among the participants in *rowzeh*. In the next section I will talk more about the construction and order of *rowzeh* and discuss the details of the ritual as well as report on some of the social processes and politics that go on behind the *rowzeh*

6. *Rowzeh* in Khorramshahr

As an Islamic ritual with a rich repertoire of Islamic songs, *rowzeh* has existed in Khuzestan for centuries and is held more magnificently and lavishly every year, states Khademi, one of the members of Khuzestan Provincial Assembly (Khademi 2017:3). In comparison to other *rowzeh* rituals in Iran where political elements have intruded into the ritual contexts, a *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr consists only of artistic parts and historical narratives. We can find no traces of any kinds of political or religious speeches by the ritual leaders. Political, religious and social discussions in the context of a lecture and subsequent question and answer sessions are integral parts of many *rowzeh* rituals in Iran especially in Tehran. In Tehran, there is always a female preacher called as *hānom mağlesi* who holds a speech and instructs her followers. In these kinds of rituals, the speech plays the primarily role. Religious chants play here a secondarily role.

The content of a *Khorramshahri rowzeh* is composed either of narration concerning the tragedy of Karbala or of mystical poems in Arabic and Persian languages. The poems refer to the role of Imam Ḥossein as a political and religious leader, father, brother, and a son during the battle. These poems are from several Arabic poem books, written by Shia Muslim male poets from Khuzestan or Iraq (*Mollāyeh Um Mustafa*, 10.04.2018).³⁰ The poets from Khuzestan are mainly Arabic-speaking poets and belong to the minority group of the Iranian-Arabs. They have written these books specifically for the *rowzeh* rituals, both for men and women. The poem books are called in Arabic *gaṣid* (not to be confused with the third part of the ritual.).

بیشتر شعرها یا از شعرای خوزستانی هستند و یا از عراق، بصره.³⁰

Ġasid poem books are published exclusively in Ghom. Ghom is an Iranian city where the main Islamic school of theology or *howzeh-ye 'elmiyeh-ye Ġom* is located. In addition to this repertoire, a huge number of the poems sung in *rowzeh* are also written by *umlāli* from the region. In the next sections and by introducing several parts of *rowzeh*, I will translate some parts of the poems to give you an impression of the content of these religious songs.

6.1. Men's *rowzeh*

The mourning rituals of Muḥarram, among them the *rowzeh*, are practiced separately by both men and women. Though the focus of this thesis is on women's rituals, it might be worthy to speak briefly about a men-only *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr. This introduction can be helpful to better understand the social structures. While women's rituals throughout the whole country can only take place at home, men's rituals can take place at home, in the mosques or on the streets. The major features of the men's rites in Khorramshahr are public processions, flagellations with chains, chest-beating custom (Persian: *sineh-zani*), and playing musical instruments such as *senġ* (cymbal) and *dammām* (two-sided cylinder membranophone) to accompany the groups of flagellants.

During the public processions, women watch and follow the groups of male performers on the streets (figure 12 and figure 13). They do not do the self-flagellation, but they perform the chest-beating tradition (*sineh-zani*) and accompany the men. It is common knowledge that women are not allowed to participate in men's rituals in mosques. However, many of them are familiar with men's rituals. In some mosques, there is an opportunity to take a look inside the mosque where men are mourning and breast-beating for Imam Hossein. Women see the rituals either from the upper terrace of the mosque, where they look down, or when the front door of the mosque is open so that one can look inside. Moreover, as a child, girls are allowed to enter the *Khorramshahri* mosques with their fathers. I can still remember that my father brought me to the Khorramshahr Central mosque every year during the first ten days of Muḥarram until I was nine.



Figure 12: Women watch the group of male performers on the street, while they perform the chest-beating tradition (*sineh-zani*). (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 13: A group of male performers, known as *buṣṣhri-hāye* Khorramshahr, plays drums and cymbals on Fakhr-e Razi Street in Khorramshahr. (Photo taken by the author).

During the mourning days in Khorramshahr, there are banners and flags on the doorsteps of houses where men's *rowzeh* take place. Pious people who own big houses and can afford the financial burden of the rituals often host both women's and men's

rituals, in two separate rooms. In contrast to women's rituals that can be performed at any time of the day, men's rituals are generally in the evening around 21.00. This is in consideration of the fact that they have to work throughout the day. The exception for this schedule is on the Muḥarram 9th and 10th. These two days, known as *tāsu'ā*³¹ and '*āšurā-e Hosseini*, are official state holidays. On these days, men can participate in any of the Muḥarram rituals throughout those days, among them also the *rowzeh*. Based on the information from local people, men's *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr consists of two general components. A vocal part that contains the religious vocal genre *nowḥeh* (mourning songs), and the performance and discussion of an anecdote from the tragedy of Karbala. In a later chapter I look at *nowḥeh* in detail.

One can hear the chants sung by men while passing the streets. They use microphones and amplifiers. Habitually, they leave the doors open. This can be perceived as an attempt to attract and invite more men to the ritual. It also enables the participation of women, in that they can stay outside the door and still listen to the events going on inside. However, I have seldom seen any women waiting and listening on the street. During these days all people are so busy that they always have to hurry to do something else. For men, the *rowzeh* cannot be considered one the most important highest rituals. Furthermore, it does not function as a main meeting point at which to socialize with others. The main venue for men's rituals and gatherings all happen in the mosques. Because of this lesser importance, the food and drinks provided at men's *rowzeh* is not as ample or as luxurious as it is in women's rituals. Women serve various drinks and several varieties of tea. The popular drinks are lemonade, hot milk, black tea, saffron tea, cinnamon tea, and loomi tea.

³¹ The Arabic word *tāsu'ā* refers to the number nine and here it means the ninth day



Figure 14: Opening of a *rowzeh*. A ritual organizer is welcoming her guests with tea. Guests are called in Arabic *mostame'in* (listeners). (Photo taken by the author).

Women put significant effort into preparing whole meals and delicious snacks. They serve food at the beginning or the end of the ritual. In contrast to women's customs, men serve only black tea or lemonade in their rituals. The drinks are almost always made by invisible women at the back of the house. The following photos give you an impression of the variety and plethora of the food served at a women's *rowzeh*.



Figure 15: *leffeh*, rolled flatbread filled up with cheese, cucumber and fresh herbs like basil, mint and chives. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).



Figure 16: Different types of sweets that will be divided into smaller portions in plastic bags. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).



Figure 17: Women sit for hours and prepare these snacks. They usually divide the snacks in plastic bags. Usually 2 to 4 women are involved in this activity. The atmosphere during the division is usually a happy atmosphere. Women like to laugh and talk about everyday life and the latest news about their family or friends. The social issues naturally depend on the current situation in the country. During my last field research trip, talking about the nuclear sanctions and increased prices was the topic that was most talked about. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).



Figure 18: Portions of fruit and small snacks for the end of a *rowzeh* ceremony. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).



Figure 19: There is also a possibility for the guests to take their snacks with them. Many of them want to take these foods for their family members who could not attend the ritual for some reasons, for example for their husbands or their sick parents or children (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).



Figure 20: Brewed saffron is the base for Safran tea, the most expensive and popular sort of tea served at *rowzeh* rituals. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).

One common custom in both male and female rituals is the tradition of chest-beating. This custom is called in Persian *sineh-zani*. In the following section, I provide a brief discussion about this custom, as well as to related self-flagellation found in the men's ritual. Referring to the men's tradition can be useful for a better understanding of the *sineh-zani* in the women's *rowzeh*.

6.2. *Sineh-zani*

Sineh-zani and flagellation with chains are two common customs in Khorramshahr that are both a form of expressing grief and generating pain. Concerning the historical aspect about the roots of self-flagellation in the Muḥarram's rituals, Kazmi writes:

“Hussain was beheaded and his body mutilated and the few among his followers who survived were humiliatingly made to march on foot to the palace of Yazid in Damascus, where they were imprisoned: many of them died. It is said that bystanders along the route, realising what had happened, began to beat themselves and weep. This event is regarded as the beginnings of the self-flagellation rituals that we see today among Shia Muslims” (Kazmi 2008).³²

In his article, Moratilla investigates the concept of flagellation in a Philippine context. Citing Mintzs and concerning the public flagellation in Catholic ceremonies in the Philippines, the author writes: “flogging had been a form of punishment even in precolonial times. The colonizers, however, gave it new meaning by associating it with purifying the body and purging it (as well as the soul) of sin” (Moratilla 2018:151). In fact, in Iran, many religious people associate the both mourning customs of *sineh-zani* and chain flagellation with purifying the body and soul, as well. They believe that having pain in their own body and experiencing a sense of suffering similar to that which Ḥossein endured can reward them (*tawāb*) for their future life, especially for the Last Judgment (*ruz-e ġiyāmat*).

Bautista observes that, “to flagellate is to express embodied empathy according to culturally and religiously determined modes of suffering in order to communicate an empathic identification with another predicament” (Bautista 2015:104). At first glance, this kind of mourning may seem strange to the people who have never been confronted with that. However, as Kazmi states “there is also nothing strange in seeing participants who, immersed in what appears to be a spiritual ecstasy, are made to calm down, often to prevent further injury to themselves” (Kazmi 2008).³³

Many participants of *rowzeh* consider the self-beating in such rituals dedicated to the Shia saints as occasions for potential therapeutic purpose, whether in treating mental disorders or physical diseases. According to many of the people who are involved in them, taking part in Islamic mourning rituals enhances the well-being and the health of the community members, assume the people who are involved in them. I observed young women with mental diseases who were brought to *rowzeh* by their mothers in hopes of *šafā* (healing) from the ritual. Regarding the psychological aspects

³² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/28/religion.islam>, accessed February 12, 2020.

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/28/religion.islam>, accessed February 12, 2020.

and the importance of participating in rituals, one of the Persian-speaking ritual participants pointed out, that:

“Many of these women are not even allowed to cry at home. They cannot express their emotions for various reasons. In this sense, *rowzeh* is the safest way for them to reveal their feelings. They can cry with sad poems and songs. They mourn together with other women who might have also the same problem. They mourn for the death of Hossein. Some may have deceased children. They associate Hossein’s death with the loss of their children. At the end of the ritual, they feel relieved. You don’t need psychotherapy anymore! You just feel better and you have the honor to be a member of Hossein’s funeral service” (A. Moradi, a ritual participant, 07.09.2019).³⁴

This healing aspect indeed plays a great role in the participation of women in the ritual. Many women talk about the spirituality of such rituals. After that, they feel calm and much better than before, they say. Ruud articulates a similar conclusion, “music contributes to an emotional and cognitive context which is conducive to a feeling of well-being and a state of either alertness or repose, depending upon the demands of the given situation” (Ruud 2017:591). Many claim that they have to deal with a lot of problems at home. By participating in *rowzehs* you forget your problems for a while and immerse yourself in another world, the world of oblivion, said one of the participants. One should not forget that music is a means of relaxation and stress regulation (Ruud 2017:590).

There is a variety of music therapy rituals in Khorramshahr. However, they don’t have connections to any religious background. They are all secular ceremonies and therapy sessions, mostly open to the public. The most famous genres of music therapy in Khorramshahr is *zār*. Originally from the East Africa where one can still witness the practice of such music therapeutic sessions (Olsen 2002:148-155), in *zār* there is little discernible trace of any of the Abrahamic religions. Though nowadays in some ceremonies, people ask the Islamic saints to help the patient, too. Despite the existence of such rituals that are very well attended, many religious women refuse to participate in them. They associate such therapies with superstition. The reason for their assumption is that “patients [of the *zār*] believe that other invisible beings live near us. Under special conditions, they can take possession of the human body and make it obsessed. They can demonize people and make them sick” (Qarasu 2008: 115).

³⁴ شاید باورکردنی نباشد ولی خیلی از این زنان که اینجا هستند حتی اجازه ی گریه کردن در خانه را ندارند. خیلی از آنها فقط نقش یک زن خانه دار را ایفا می کنند که اجازه ی بیان احساسات خود را ندارند. در این میان روضه مکانی امن برای این افراد است. بدون اینکه کسی آنها را قضاوت کند با اشعار حزن آمیز در روضه گریه می کنند و آرام می شوند. خیلی ها فرزندان مریضی دارند و با شنیدن اسم حسین با او همذات پنداری می کنند. به همین دلیل بعد از مراسم خیلی ها احساس آزادی و سبکی می کنند. با وجود روضه دیگر کسی به روانشناس یا روانپزشک نیازی ندارد. در ضمن اینکه خدمت به امام حسین صوابی هم برای آخرتشان محسوب می شود.

That is one of the reasons why many women participate in a *rowzeh*. That is, to purify their soul through the *sineh-zani*, in a safe or acceptable place in consonance with the moral perspectives of their religion. In regional Arabic terminology *sineh-zani* is called *al-laṭam* (beating). In the women's *rowzeh* we can observe different variants of *sineh-zani*. They mainly involve the striking of the hand palms on the chest, on the thigh, and sometimes on the forehead. This kind of striking is common in the mourning rituals of Arab women in the region in general. We can see the similar kind of mourning in funerals in Khorramshahr, too. Men only strike on their chests. Addressing the routines, as well as the moral requirements for attending the *rowzeh*, the subsequent part describes in detail the women's *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr.

6.3. Women's *rowzeh*

From the first to the eleventh day of the month women from Khorramshahr visit different *rowzeh* every day. Although the period during which these rituals commemorating Imam Ḥossein may be held lasts for nearly two months, fewer and fewer women participate in the rituals after the tenth day of Muḥarram. Depending on the time, the location of the ritual, which *mollāyeh* will perform, and who organizes the ritual, the number of participants can vary widely. According to my observations, I saw some *rowzehs* with only seven participants attending and other *rowzehs* with almost hundred participants. Through observation and assessments by women interviewed, a well-attended *rowzeh* should have, on average, at least forty ritual participants.

Rowzehs take place any time during the day, from early morning to late at night during this time. The morning schedule starts commonly at 09:00. It lasts until 12:30. However, this does not mean that a *rowzeh* lasts for three hours. Depending on the number of ritual attendants who are regarded as 'guests', the duration of *rowzeh* can change. The fewer the guests, the shorter will be the ritual. A short *rowzeh*, for example, takes about 15 minutes and a longer one can take almost an hour. Commonly, women make an appointment with their acquaintances to attend a *rowzeh*. Then, they continue visiting other *rowzehs* taking place on the same day, traveling together and joining with different groups of women at each event. This is the reason why the whole morning's schedule of the *Khorramshahri* women is full, and their visits take a long time, until noon. During lunchtime, women prefer to return home. There, they prepare lunch and dinner and take care of their children. Later, they start again from about 15:00 to visit

the afternoon *rowzehs*. Attendance at the rituals on the first ten days of Muḥarram can last until 02:00 in the morning. Due to the serious and strict regulations governing women's activities outside their homes in Iran, religious events such as *rowzeh* are considered to be an optimal opportunity for women to communicate with other women and expand the reach of their social circles and their familiarity with the city, and to engage all of this long past the hour at which their daily activities would normally have them returning home.

The guests of a woman's *rowzeh* must only be women and their children. Until they are about five or six, small boys are also allowed to participate in these female-only rituals as they normally stay with their mothers. Not every *mollāyeh* agrees with the participation of children in an Islamic ritual at all. However, this applies to both female and male children. Some simply disagree with the presence of boys in *rowzeh*. While many *umlāli* believe that children need to become familiar with the religious values from early their childhood, other *umlāli* find the presence of children in such a serious context, inappropriate. I observed *umlāli* who called the small children forward so that they could even sit in the circle of *mollāyeh*. Habitually, it is only the older women who sit in the circle near to the *umlāli*. On the other hand, I also saw *umlāli* who threatened the ritual organizers, say that as long as the children were present, they wouldn't sing.

Black is the symbol of mourning in Iran and the proper clothing for a *rowzeh* is a black garment. The garment of a *mollāyeh* differs, however, from those worn by the other guests. It is made of a higher quality fabric called *tobhašmi*. Although it is forbidden for men to join the ritual, women still need to cover their hair. Some believe that the soul of the deceased Imam is present in the ritual. It is also desired that young children, even if babies, wear black or green clothing. Green symbolizes Islam. Small babies should always wear black pants so that their skin cannot be seen. Ritual participants, in Arabic called *mostame'in* (listeners), have to sit cross-legged in the *ḥosseiniyeh*.³⁵ There is little information about the history of the origin and development of the *ḥosseiniyehs* in Iran. Francis Richard writes that:

"There is no evidence of the building of *ḥosayniyas* in Persia before the Safavid period, during which their history remains poorly documented. 'Āšurā processions could start and end in any religious building or next to shrines, and therefore did not require a building specifically designed for this purpose. However, it is reported that from the early 17th century the Portuguese Augustinians were based near the Masjed-e Jāme' in Isfahan, in a district called "the Ḥosayniya quarter," which suggests the presence there already of a *ḥosayniya* of some kind by this time" (Richard 1995:26).

³⁵ Only some elderly women who cannot sit on the floor can sit on a chair.

In contemporary practice, there are usually banners, flags, and posters hung next to the door of the houses where *rowzehs* take place. Writing about her time in Tehran, Sabine Kalinock observes: “Many *rowzehs* are open-house affairs. A flag or banner announced the *rowzeh*; sometimes handbills and notices on walls gave the place, date, and the name of the religious leader” (Kalinock 2004:667). Almost all women in Khorramshahr know where and when a *rowzeh* will take place, due to their experience as well as from their acquaintances.

During the mourning rituals, the walls of *hosseiniyeh* should always be covered with black and green cloths. There are usually several pictures (on paper or cloth) placed throughout the *hosseiniyeh* and depicting various scenes from the battle of Karbala. Each picture or cloth has many decorations and often poems written around the edge. Poems are about Imam Ḥossein or other people of Karbala. In many *hosseiniyehs*, there is a symbolic icon from the battle of Karbala. This symbol is usually placed where the *umlāli* sit. Often the symbolic icon is a cradle with a doll inside – a stark reminder of – the martyrdom of Ali Asghar, the six-month-old child of Imam Ḥossein.



Figure 21: People usually use one the above symbols in a *rowzeh*. These elements represent: 1. Roghayyeh bint Ḥossein mourning for her brother Ali Asghar. Roghayyeh and Ali Asghar are the children of Imam Ḥossein. The six-month-old Ali Asghar who was killed by an arrow during the battle. The three-years-old Roghayyeh was dragged as slave to Damascus, after the battle. 2. Cradle of Ali Asghar. 3. The dead body of Imam Ḥossein. 4. Hands of Abbas ibn Ali, the half-brother of Ḥossein. 5. The helmet of Imam Ḥossein, and 6. Lanterns. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).

Before the arrival of ritual attendants, the ritual organizers check throughout the *hosseiniyeh*, ensuring that everything is clean and orderly. Carpets, in particular, have to be clean because everyone will sit on the floor. They have to make sure that there are enough turbah³⁶ (Persian: *mohr*). Organizers have to make enough drinks. Finally, the air should be fragrant with rose water. The following pictures show some photos of some *hosseiniyehs* in Khorramshahr.



Figure 22: In the above cloth you can see the name of a *hosseiniyeh* '*hosseiniyeh hazrat-e roqayyeh*'. This *hosseiniyeh* is founded in 1989. It is exactly one year after the end of the war. The owner of this *hosseiniyeh* had to leave this house during the war to the Ghom city. After her return to Khorramshahr, she realized that her house was a military barrack used by the Iraqi army and for sometimes by the Iranian soldiers. On the walls of her house there are numerous holes and damages by mortar shells. The owner of this *hosseiniyeh* was my grandmother, *haġiyeh* Fatemeh Bahrani. Today, my cousin Shirin is the owner of the *hosseiniyeh* and organizes several Islamic rituals such as *rowzeh*. (Photo taken by the author).

³⁶ Turbah is a small piece of soil that is used by Twelver Shia Muslims during daily five prayers.



Figure 23: Ritual participants are waiting for the opening of a *rowzeh* ceremony. (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 24: Written across the top cloth: “welcome to the mourning ritual of Imam Ḥossein”. On the bottom is written “God bless Ḥossein, the martyr”. (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 25: The high chair of the ritual leaders, as well as the cradle of Ali-Asghar. On the top cloth above the chair is written: Oh, *sāḥeb al-zamān*! (the Twelfth Imam), we swear you that God bless us. (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 26: Ritual attendants, also children, gather around the ritual leaders in a particular kind of *rowzeh*, a *šāme garibān rowzeh*. This *rowzeh* takes place at the evening of the 'āšurā each year. This ritual commemorates the slavery of the survivors of the battle. Lighting candles is an integral part of this ritual. (Photo taken by the author).

The official language spoken in a *rowzeh*, as well as in the majority of many other religious rituals in Khorramshahr is Arabic, due to the Arabic-speaking majority of the participants. However, depending on the participant's interest, *umlāli* perform Persian mourning songs, too. If there are many people in a ritual, *umlāli* assume that there might be many Persian-speaking guests, too. Therefore, they perform in both languages. Based on my observations, some rituals are also held only in the Persian language. In this case, the *umlāli* are mostly non-Arabs. However, the audience may consist of both Iranian-Arabs and non-Arabs. Now, it may be interesting to know how *umlāli* learn their repertoire and the vocal techniques of performing the *rowzeh*. For this reason, I describe in the following section the learning processes necessary to train a *mollāyeh*, as wells as repertoire of the *rowzeh* that must be mastered.

7. How to Become a *mollāyeh*

At the beginning of my research on *rowzeh* in 2015, I was curious to know the reasons, why these women decide to become a *mollāyeh*. I wanted to know more about the possible roles that this ritual might play in the lives of the people who practice it, especially the *umlāli* and those who organize these events. I was fascinated to see how much effort ritual hosts put into organizing a *rowzeh*. On the one hand, the ritual attendant's attitudes towards the *umlāli* almost resemble audience excitement on seeing, or maybe even meeting, a famous conductor in an after-show party of a classical music concert! On the other hand, speaking with *umlāli* about their profession and their role in the society as they view it, to witness their sometimes-fearful reactions was very surprising to me.

The first reaction of almost all *umlāli* with whom I made an interview was an excited childish smile and saying: “couldn’t you find a better, more important topic for your thesis?!”. Another common, self-diminishment that I frequently heard from them was that “we only do this for Imam Ḥossein’s sake and nothing else”. To be honest, I was very disappointed to hear that response the first few times I heard it. I thought to myself, why should I invest my time in those people who seem to not value their own profession? But I was curious. Why are they afraid and so extremely cautious to talk about their profession? As is clear from my time in the field, *umlāli* are the heroines in the ritual, the stars in the scene. As Nakash writes, their important role is the re-enactment of the battle of Karbala (Nakash 2007:117). Most *umlāli* even have their own fans, participants who come to rituals especially to hear the sound of that particular voice, following her telling of the story as she moves from one event to the next.

There might be several reasons why these *umlāli* are cautious. One reason could be that they want to protect the position of their husband and their own as his wife. There should not be rumors everywhere, maybe even in Austria, something that might happen if it becomes known that they are the focus of someone’s research. Another possible reason is that no one has ever asked them about their profession as *mollāyeh* or generally about the *rowzeh* in an academic context. Whatever their reasons, many *umlāli* were not ready to answer my questions, at first. Usually, I had to start talking to them about their favorite subjects before I could successfully pursue my questions about their professions. In other words, we first had to get to know each other personally.

Only afterwards and often in unofficial interviews, did they tell me about their life stories, including, how they became *mollāyeh*.

The topics they were interested in were the current social and political topics, as well as health and my religious intentions. Sanctions, the high cost of living, expensive medicines, and politics were the topics they mostly wanted to speak about. Then, they wanted to know more about my life in Austria. They wanted to know if I also have to struggle with high prices buying groceries in Austria; how I can survive in a European country, speaking in a foreign language, and being away from my tradition. They were curious to know if I wear an Islamic veil and say my prayers five times a day. It was a challenging and difficult situation for me answering some of these questions, in particular the last one.

I stopped being a faithful believing Muslim when I was eighteen. I was caught by Law Enforcement of the Islamic Republic of Iran, due to the apparently short length of my manteaux or long veil. I had a fairly bad experience. From that time onward, my mother, my sister, and I stopped wearing the veil as we received male guests at our home. Everybody in my family stopped saying prayers or fasting during the Ramadan. None of us could endure this uncalled-for violation of my privacy. Nevertheless, in order to continue my research, I had to introduce myself to many people as a religious and as a faithful Muslim who also does perform her daily prayers in Austria and always wears a headscarf. On this question I allowed myself to lie. On all of the other questions, I always spoke the truth.

Based on my observations, it is clear that most women who are either *umlāli* or ritual organizers stem from the families who have always organized rituals in the city or had famous *umlāli* or male preachers among their relatives. These women who contribute to Islamic rituals and organize them call themselves ‘servants of Imam Ḥossein’ (Persian: *ḥādem-e emām Ḥossein*). One of the most famous ritual organizers of Khorramshahr told me: “we would be glad if we have as many guests as possible. All of them are very welcome. It is a gathering for Imam Ḥossein. All people, no matter Arab or ‘aḡam are the same and cordially invited” (*mollāyeh* and ritual organizer Sa'ad Farsani, personal communication, 04.09.2019).³⁷

Most of the *umlāli* with whom I made interviews are from the elder generation. They are very well-known personalities in Khorramshahr. Interestingly, all these *umlāli*

هر چقدر تعداد بازدیدکنندگان از مراسم بیشتر باشد، برای ما بهتر است. قدم همه ی آن ها بر روی چشمان ماست. این مجلسی است.³⁷
برای امام حسین. عرب و عجم هیچ فرقی برای ما ندارند. همه خوش آمدند.

from the same generation have similar life stories. They started all to learn the repertoire of *rowzeh* when they were in their childhood. Some of them learned the songs from their parents who were also a *mollā* or *mollāyeh*. Some other have been supported and sent by their parents or other family members to study with famous *umlāli*. It is important to notice that, in addition to their professional leadership at rituals, many *umlāli* teach younger women and sometimes children who also want to learn to perform in rituals. They teach all those interested the art of recitation in various religious ceremonies such as *rowzehs*, *mowludis*, *do'ās*, *sofrehs* and Qur'an sessions.

Umlāli instruct their students in exchange for money or service (Shirin Attarzadeh, personal communication, 06.10.2017).³⁸ Students like to accompany their *mollāyeh* teachers and to have a chance to sing with them in ceremonies, serving as a group of assistants. This allows them to perform and gradually to be recognized by the women of the city and ritual arrangers. Classes usually take place in a group of six participants. The participants are called in Arabic *ṣāne'*. Each *ṣāne'* has her own goals and reasons for attending these lessons. The following statements are from an interview with *Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa on 20.07.2015: "Every *ṣāne'* wants to sing as powerfully and clearly as the *mollāyeh* [Author's note: in this case their teacher]. When I was a *ṣāne'*, many colleagues wanted to develop the same roughness in their vocal timbre as that employed by their *mollāyeh*. This exceptionally rough voice timbre is highly desired by the audience".³⁹

Amnon Shiloah writes about the voice quality in Arab culture stating that "Arab authors considered the voice a reflection of the human soul's mysteries and feelings. For the mystics it symbolizes divine life and puts man in vibrating resonance with the celestial and universal" (Shiloah 1995:15). Classes usually take place in the house of the *mollāyeh*. During teaching, no men are allowed to be present in the room. This also applies if men are near the classroom because they may hear the female voice. According to Islamic law, or Sharia, it is inappropriate for men to hear the voices of women who are not in their families. A woman's voice is regarded as a female beauty feature. The following famous verses of the Qur'an have been interpreted by Muslim

ملایه ها در کلاس هایشان همه ی آوازهای مذهبی را یاد می دهند. مولودی و یا روضه، هیچ فرقی ندارند. در قبال آموزش هم یا پول دریافت می کنند و یا از شاگردشان می خواهند که در کارهای خانه به آنها کمک کنند. خیلی از آنها یا مسن هستند و یا از اضافه وزن رنج می برند. مشکلات زانو و مفاصل دارند و به همین دلیل از انجام کارهای خانه عاجز هستند. برای همین درخواست می کنند که صانع ها ظرف هایشان را بشویند و یا خانه را مرتب و تمیز کنند.

هر صانعی دوست دارد که صدایی مشابه صدای ملایه را داشته باشد. این صدای بم و خشدار را نیز مستمعین بسیار می پسندند.³⁹

scholars over time as a fundamental law stating that a woman's voice as a symbol of feminine beauty must always be hidden and covered from strangers:

وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَى جُيُوبِهِنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا لِبُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَائِهِنَّ أَوْ آبَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ أَبْنَاءِ بُعُولَتِهِنَّ أَوْ إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنِي إِخْوَانِهِنَّ أَوْ بَنَاتِ أَخَوَاتِهِنَّ أَوْ نِسَائِهِنَّ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُنَّ أَوِ التَّابِعِينَ غَيْرِ أُولِي الْإِرْبَةِ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ أَوِ الطِّفْلِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَى عَوْرَاتِ النِّسَاءِ وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ وَتُوبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا أَيُّهَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Figure 27: “And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands’ fathers, their sons, their husbands’ sons, their brothers, their brothers’ sons, their sisters’ sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed” (Qur’an, surah al-nour: Verse 31).⁴⁰

For these reasons, the practice sessions as well as any kind of female rituals must always take place in private rooms.

“The phenomenon of women singing for other women on various occasions was undoubtedly a way of circumventing restrictions engendered by religious and social bias that limited their public musical activities. [...] The songs are sung in public on occasions of a folk nature and at semiprivate gatherings of women, by either a group or one individual with a good voice” (Shiloah 1995:158).

The learning process is principally based on the imitation method. A student uses no musical notes or other symbols in a class. Nevertheless, various *umlāli* who I encountered during my fieldwork found the idea of using the western notation to be a helpful method for memorizing the songs and further establishing the religious tradition so that it can be passed more easily to the next generation. The religious melodies of *rowzeh* are generally not called as ‘songs’ by local people for religious reasons. In Islamic moral code, it is inappropriate to regard religious songs as music. These songs are simply called either *rowzeh* or *nowheh*. *Nowheh* is an ambiguous term that can be either a mourning song or the name of the first section of a *rowzeh* ritual.

⁴⁰ <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=24&verse=31>, accessed August 8, 2019.

Due to modern technology, such as cell phones and the Internet, each *ṣāne*’ can now engage in extra practice at home. Many *umlāli* record their voices during the singing of religious songs and send their recordings to their *ṣāne*’ in order that they practice with fewer mistakes at home. Many religious people buy *nowḥeh* CDs recorded by famous male preachers. Among them, the Iraqi preacher Mulla Bassim Al-Karbalaei, as well as the famous preachers from the Khorramshahr Hassan and Hossein Fakhri are very popular. Younger *umlāli* learn and prepare these songs for their repertoire, too. For this reason, they send the original recordings of these songs to their *ṣāne*’s. *Khorramshahri umlāli* and *ṣāne*’s learn different things from the male singers, such as new melodies, lyrics, vocal techniques, and ornaments. Therewith they expand the repertoire of *rowzeh*. To bring you closer to life as *mollāyeh*, I’ll report here some stories about three famous *umlāli* of the city.

7.1. Um Sa'eid

Sa'ad and Majedeh assist together their mother *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid. Married Arab women of Khorramshahr who have children are always named with ‘Um’ (mother of) and the name of the first son or the oldest child, if they don’t have sons. This type of name designation is also used for the non-Arab women of the region, too. However, instead of using the Arabic word ‘Um’, people use the Persian designation of the mother *Māmān*. *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid is now the oldest and the most famous *mollāyeh* of Khorramshahr. Sa'ad, Um Sa'eid’s daughter explains explicitly everything about the talent of her mother in the art of recitation.

Before we could begin the interview, Sa'ad asks me whether I wear a headscarf in Austria and defend the Islamic values in a non-Islamic country.⁴¹ After being satisfied with my ‘positive’ answer, she agreed to continue on with an interview. Sa'ad says: “When my mother was a child, elder women put a scarf on her head. Then, they asked her to sing religious songs, to sing *rowzeh*. Since that time, she has studied and worked to become a *mollāyeh*”⁴². She had a very beautiful voice (Arabic: *ṣawt*), especially when she was young. Shiloah writes about the aesthetics of the *ṣawt*:

⁴¹ All citations of *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid and her daughter Sa'ad in this section are from a personal communication with them from 04.09.2019.

⁴² وقتی که مادرم بچه بود، روی سرش روسری گذاشتند و به او گفتند که بخوان! از آن موقع او یک ملایه شد. او بسیار تمرین و مطالعه کرد تا به اینجا رسید.

“Another important aspect was the growing awareness of the potential expressiveness of the human voice and its multiple nuances. The term *sawt* may designate sound, voice or occasionally, song. In the living traditions of the Persian Gulf, *sawt* indicates a musical genre. [...] Now, however, the knowledge of voice became a major concern for both sacred and secular music” (Shiloah 1995:15).

Sa'ad doesn't consider herself as a *mollāyeh*. She complains that she doesn't have a beautiful *şawt*: “Me and my sisters grew up attending rituals with our mother and so we learnt the songs. I, myself, am not a *mollāyeh*. I don't have the right *şawt* for that. But my mother and my sister are professionals”⁴³. After this, the *mollāyeh* herself began to speak with me. At first, she was uncomfortable speaking in Persian. She said she cannot speak the language well because her family speaks just Arabic and they use rarely Farsi. *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid says: “I was a little child. My mother was a well-known *mollāyeh* in the city. Everyone wanted to learn from her. She always had groups of pupils. I can remember that she was teaching a group of girls of my age. I was not a good child. During the lessons, I always wanted to play with other children. She stopped teaching me”⁴⁴.

Practicing Islamic traditions is a serious task. At her young age, *Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid was not ready to fulfill this task. She continued: “later, I saw how other girls were improving. I was sad and jealous. I asked my mother, why she stopped teaching me. She answered, you just want to play like boys. You are not obligated to learn it if you don't want to. All these girls want to be competent *umlāli* in the future. Your presence only distracts others from class”⁴⁵. Suddenly, the young Nouriyeh was very motivated to continue. She had the passion to overtake all other children in the class. She started again to learn by her mother and kept practicing. She says, “I sang for so many years and now I am the best *mollāyeh*”.

I heard similar stories from other *umlāli* from the same generation of Um Sa'eid. Usually, these *umlāli* perform together. If they find out that a younger *mollāyeh* who has less experience is also invited to perform in the same ritual, it is possible that they decline their own invitation. The solitary exception in which these older women will tolerate a young *mollāyeh* is if she is or if she was once their own student. This reveals

من و خواهرم همه چیز را از مادرمان یاد گرفتیم. من ولی ملایه نیستم. صوت یک ملایه ی خوب را ندارم. خواهر و مادرم ملایه ⁴³ هستند و من فقط تا جایی که بتوانم به آنها کمک می کنم.

مادر من ملایه ی محبوبی بود. همه می خواستند که از او یاد بگیرند. خیلی هم شاگرد داشت. من هم در بچگی از او یاد گرفتم. ولی ⁴⁴ متأسفانه در بچگی خیلی بازیگوش و سر به هوا بودم. سر کلاس آرام و قرار نداشتم. با همه صحبت می کردم. همه از دست من کلافه شده بودند.

بعد که دیدم همه ی هم کلاسی ها پیشرفت می کنند حسادت کردم. با خودم گفتم که باید روزی بهترین باشم و از همه بهتر بخوانم. ⁴⁵ مادرم اصراری نداشت که من هم ملایه شوم. او انتخاب را به من واگذار کرد. به شرطی که دیگر در حین آموزش او اذیت نکنم.

that *umlāli* have a special network of their colleagues with whom they would like to perform. Among all the *umlāli* whom I met, all wanted to perform with Um Sa'eid. They said, she is the best *mollāyeh*. She has a very beautiful voice. As I asked them, what do they exactly mean by having a good voice, they said that she pronounces each word clearly, she knows the right interpretation and her voice has a strong and impressive character.

According to my interviews, younger *umlāli* who are still learning the religious songs dream about having a roughly textured vocal timber similar to that of Um Sa'eid. This sparked my curiosity and I asked Um Sa'eid about her voice color. I asked her what she thinks about the desires of the younger *umlāli* to sing like her. Um Sa'eid laughed and said: "Horrible! It sounds scary! I am doing this since many years. I didn't achieve that at just one night. I hope I did nothing wrong if they want to take me as their role model" (*Mollāyeh* Um Sa'eid, personal communication, 04.09.2019).⁴⁶

I asked Um Sa'eid about the origins of the ritual, too. I assumed that maybe she as the oldest *mollāyeh* may have interesting stories about the roots of the *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr. Her incredible story was a time travel to the time of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the first king of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1941). From that moment on women were not allowed anymore to put on headscarves. They were beaten and pelted if they had an Islamic *hiḡāb*. The same matter can be seen in contemporary Iran but in reverse. At the time of Reza Shah, under-developed Iran was striving to resemble European countries. Every devout Muslim woman with *hiḡāb* was beaten up, said Um Sa'eid, who comes from a religious *Khorramshahri* family. She said, "my family always organized Islamic rituals, among them *rowzeh*. It was difficult for her grandmothers and her mother to deal with the new, anti-religious situation, due to the new dictator monarchy."⁴⁷ Because of this, her family left the Khorramshahr.

They immigrated to Basra, in Iraq. Basra is not that far from Khorramshahr. Um Sa'eid said, "We could go back to Khorramshahr with a boat without any problems to revisit our relatives. Many *Khorramshahris* left the country, also the grandparents of your grandparents" Um Sa'eid said—speaking directly to me.⁴⁸ According to Um Sa'eid, after the arrival of *Khorramshahris* in Basra, religious Shia women started to host

پناه بر خدا! امیدوارم که در این راه همه چیز را به خوبی انجام داده باشم و خطایی نکرده باشم. این وظیفه ی سنگینی است وقتی که ⁴⁶ بخواهند دنباله رو تو باشند.

خانواده ی من همیشه خانواده ای مذهبی بوده است. آنها نمی توانستند که بی حجابی متحمل شده دیکتاتوری مثل رضا شاه را تحمل ⁴⁷ کنند.

بصره در همین نزدیکی خرمشهر است و ما می توانستیم هر وقت با بلم به خرمشهر بیاییم. خیلی خانواده ها به عراق رفتند، مثل ⁴⁸ مادر بزرگ خودت.

rowzehs. She was convinced that *rowzeh* is a ritual that originally comes from Khorramshahr and has been brought to Iraq by the new political and social regulations of the dictator's regime of Reza Shah.

I knew that Um Sa'eid was suffering from various illnesses. Because of that I shortened my interview. Habitually, my grandmother called Um Sa'eid, whom she took care of me as a small child, by saying *mollāyeh* and her first name, *Mollāyeh Nouriyeh*. I said to Um Sa'eid "thank you *Mollāyeh Nouriyeh* and hope to see you soon." Suddenly, she and her daughters started to laugh. She told me "you are stubborn like your grandmother. God bless her soul. I am Um Sa'eid and no longer Nouriyeh! If my husband hears my first name somewhere in public, he'll get angry! Your grandmother always deliberately called me *Mollāyeh Nouriyeh* so that I could get into trouble, God bless her."⁴⁹ I apologized, thanked her again by calling her *Mollāyeh Um Sa'eid* and wished her good health. After this interview, I saw her and her daughters in different rituals. She always offered me to sit next to them, which would never be the case for other women my age. It was an honor for me to have the chance to get to know *Mollāyeh Um Sa'eid* personally and to have interviews with her.

7.2. Um Shahin

Immediately after lunch and while everyone else is looking forward to the dessert, Um Shahin leaves us. She sits on a corner in the living room and opens her *ḡasid*-books. She starts practicing because the next ritual begins in less than two hours. Her daughter Shirin asks her in Persian, "*māmān čāyi?*" which means mom, do you want to have a tea? Um Shahin answers in Arabic "*lā, enṭini ešweyyeh māy ḥār,*" meaning, no, give me please some hot water. Of course, Shirin understands both languages. However, I have never heard her speaking Arabic, unless she speaks it on the phone with her relatives who live in Bahrain, with those who do not understand Persian.

I ask the *mollāyeh*, "don't you want to take a rest? It is not so healthy for your vocal cords. You have to take a little break." Shirin shouts from the kitchen: "I tell her that every time, but she doesn't listen to me"! *Mollāyeh Um Shahin*, or known to me as my auntie Hediyyeh, began to tell me about her life story.⁵⁰ My uncle was sitting there, too. He was pretending not listening to us! Um Shahin said, "My father was a rich man.

⁴⁹ تو هم به مادر بزرگت رفته ای. خدا بیامرز همیشه سر به سر من می گذاشت و جلوی همه مرا به اسم کوچکم صدا می زد. شوهر من عصبانی میشد. من ملایه ام سعید هستم!

⁵⁰ All citations of *mollāyeh Um Shahin*, my cousin Shirin, and my uncle Mehdi Attarzadeh in this section are from our informal personal communication from 12.09.2019.

He was a carpet dealer. My mother had breast cancer when I was a little child. My father didn't support us anymore. He left us and went to Tehran.” "... Where he married two younger women,” continued my uncle! Um Shahin said: “I can still remember those difficult times when my mother had to struggle with her illness till she died. Then, my uncle took care of me and my siblings. He was a generous man. Once he asked me, if I prefer to go to school, or should he send me to a *mollāyeh* and learn the Qur'an?”

I recall that my Auntie Hediye is afraid of speaking Persian. She always communicates in Arabic. However, there are many people in Khorramshahr who don't understand Arabic. I can hear how auntie Hediye puts her Persian vocabulary in the frame of the Arabic grammar of the region, like a puzzle. She said: “I was afraid of going to the school, because I couldn't speak Persian. Until today I cannot speak Persian very well. So, I decided to learn the Qur'an by a *Mollāyeh*”. She sipped hot water and continued: “I was very shy to perform in front of other people. I always attended *rowzeh* and other *umlāli* who were my close friends forced me to perform. First, I started with easier songs. We didn't have microphones. I was too shy to sing louder. I was not a *mollāyeh* on that time, but I got more confident during the time, until the war”. My uncle added to his wife's sentences: “She is still very shy! I don't understand why. She does not perform in a concert like Googoosh! [Googoosh is an Iranian-American singer and actress who is one of Iran's most popular and enduring entertainers despite being banned from performing for some 20 years following the Iranian Revolution.⁵¹] She is the servant of Imam Ḥossein and has to be proud. We are all proud of her”.

“During the war, Khorramshahr was occupied by Iraqis. We had to leave the city. We were war refugees and had to find a new city to live somewhere. Kashan, was from that time on our new hometown. It is the city where all my children are now living, except Shirin,” said Um Shahin. She continued, “We were not the only *Khorramshahri* family who moved to Kashan. We met some other families who also moved to Kashan. During our first Muḥarram, *Khorramshahri* women thought about practicing our *rowzeh* in the new city. Attending the 'aḡam's *rowzeh* is like spending the time in a library. They are too quiet!” Other women living in the city already knew that Um Shahin had experience. They asked her to be their *mollāyeh*. Though she was shy, she started gradually to perform for the other *Khorramshahri* women. Their rituals

⁵¹ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Googoosh>, accessed May 1, 2019.

got bigger and bigger and were best-attended by *Kashani* women. Organizing this southwestern Iranian tradition in its new home played an important role in enhancing the sense of identity of the *Khorramshahri* women in their new city. Ruud writes about the same aspect in a musical context that in my opinion can also be applied to my context:

“A strong sense of identity derived from music can contribute specifically to the following four aspects of health: a sense of vitality (of being alive, of being empowered, of having internalized supporting self- objects), a sense of agency (of self- efficacy, of empowerment, of ownership of the “locus of control”), a sense of belonging (of participation, of a network, of social capital, of being recognized) and, not least, a sense of coherence and meaning (of strong emotional musical experiences, flow, transcendence)”. (Ruud 2017: 589-590)

A few years after the war, the family came back again to Khorramshahr. After this unplanned conversation about her past lives, Um Shahin continued practicing her repertoire. She still had to sing in four rituals before she could rest that day.

7.3. Um Sadegh

“If you want to hear the most impressive elegies (*na‘ā*), you should once go to a *rowzeh* by Um Sadegh,” suggest *Khorramshahri* women. I will discuss the *na‘ā* later in the music analytical section. I was curious to know how the mourning chants developed that they can now be heard in their current form. A question for which I have no answer yet and nobody could answer it, neither. I have heard similar melodies like those in a *na‘ā* particularly in lullabies from the region. How could it be possible that these two different genres sound so similar? Participants in a ritual believed that Um Sadegh could be the person who might have the answer to all such questions. “After all, the saddest songs are performed by her,” said the participants. That was the reason why I had several interviews with Um Sadegh.

Enduring massive knee pain, she cannot sit on the floor. Before starting the ceremony, I acknowledge that everyone says she is considered the best interpreter of elegies in Khorramshahr. Um Sadegh thanked me for my praise with a tender smile and big excited eyes, exuding happiness like a small child. She told me that she has been a *mollāyeh* for a long time. She knew that she could sing the saddest songs of the *rowzeh* better than any other *mollāyeh*. She said that even she sometimes has to stop and cry during her performance.

Apart from the fact that Um Sadegh was not allowed to perform for a certain period in her life, she always liked to be a *mollāyeh*, no matter whether singing in

rowzeh or in *mowludi*. Many *umlāli* whom I encountered, had a period in their life during which they were not allowed to perform in the religious rituals, at least for some years. Many of them refused to speak about the reasons for the hiatus. However, Um Sadegh revealed the secrets from this period in her life. “I got married. I was very young and beautiful. My husband didn’t want that I might leave the house to perform. Until today, he is still afraid that if on the way to a ritual somebody falls in love with me, although I am an old woman [she laughs].”

Her mobile phone rings. Her husband is on the phone. “No matter which car! I take the first car I see. Then, I go to the next *rowzeh*. I can’t wait with my knees” she screamed on the phone. Then she ended up the call and she laughed. “He said, don’t drive with a SUV. They will never bring you back again! But I do not care.” She continued speaking about how she convinced her husband to return to performing. It turns out that she had to explain to him that she had once dreamed about it. “I started again to perform. It took some years, but I could persuade him. We were both not young anymore. Our children were grown up and they no longer needed every day help. I started again when I was very old. One night I dreamed I sat alone in an empty *hosseiniyeh*, with a *gaşid*-book in front of me. Suddenly a tall woman in green cloths appears in the *hosseiniyeh*. She commanded me to mourn and sing for her son”.

At this moment, Um Sadegh started to cry. She said, “Believe me. It was her, the Fatimah.” She continued, “The *hosseiniyeh* was suddenly full of women who waited for me to sing. Before starting, I wanted to kiss her hands. I turned back, but she was not there anymore. It was Fatimah who asked me to be a *mollāyeh*”. Um Sadegh emphasized repeatedly the delightful smell of Fatimah. Then she said: “I screamed and woke up. When my husband asked me what I dreamt, I explained him everything. He said it is a great sign and a big duty for you. Do it and may Fatimah Zahra and her son bless you. Since then, I have been allowed to perform again”.

It is now clear that many Iranian women, due to their husband’s decisions, are not allowed to work. Many may only be housewives and take care of their children. Some are even not allowed to wear their favorite clothing in public places. Perhaps it can be considered as a bit of luck if they are allowed leave their houses. Many are not even permitted to do their daily shopping; thus, shopping has to be done either by their husbands or by a carrier (*hammāl*). I should note that the younger generation of *umlāli* deals with this problem in another way. Regarding Islamic law in Iran, people who want to marry someone have to sign a marriage contract. I met many young *umlāli*

who declared their interest in being a *mollāyeh* before their marriage. They had the smart idea to add an agreement in their contracts stating that the husband is not allowed to decide on their future career and occupation. Adding these special points to the marriage contract is a progressive move, one that only certain groups of Iranian women might consider. These groups consist essentially of women who strive for their independence and freedom after the marriage.

Because of the crucial role of religion in the lives of many Iranian men, the husbands of these women more or less consent to their wives' activity as *mollāyeh*, rather than doing other jobs. In my opinion, there are several reasons why these men accept this stipulation. The first reason is that being recognized as a *mollāyeh* and holding such a religious title manifests the faithfulness of the entire family. For instance, I saw some men who were criminals before the marriage. They were arrested and punished in various ways and for several reasons. Consequently, they lost their place in society. Interestingly, after getting married to a *mollāyeh*, they now enjoy special appreciation and recognition in the city. People assume that a man who marries such a religious and blessed woman is undoubtedly a pious person who made a mistake in his past life, mistake that can be forgiven.

In the majority's opinion, practicing the rituals contributes to a healthy religious society. That is why the people who strive for it are highly regarded. Secondly, husbands of *umlāli* are assured that their spouses are in a safe place. According to my observation, a safe place means a place where there are no stranger men (*nāmaḥram*) in the scene. Apart from the above socially acceptable reasons, a third reason might very well be the fact that performing as a *mollāyeh* can be considered as a good source of income. Nowadays, this is an advantage for the whole family, due to the current political situation as well as the economic crisis, high unemployment and unaffordable living costs.

Later, in our conversation Um Sadegh revealed something else that I had to think more closely about. She said: "On the next day after I dreamed, I entered the living room [her *ḥosseiniyeh*]. I felt the same smell of Fatimah as I experienced in my dream. She was there." Again, Um Sadegh started to cry and spoke about these miracles. She informed other women and friends who she knew to come and visit her house, to smell the scent of Fatimah. Her living room gradually came to be a well-visited and holy *ḥosseiniyeh*, as news about the miracles continued to spread through the community. My conversation with Um Sadegh was not the only case in which a *mollāyeh* spoke

about miracles to me. It was only one of the many numerous stories that I heard from nearly all *umlāli* and ritual organizers whom I met. Miracles, or more precisely, miracle makings play a significant role on the pathway to becoming a well-known personality in this religious scene. Because of the inevitable role of miracles within this group of women, I will take a deeper look at this topic in detail.

8. Miracle Making and the Enhancement of Religious Status

The first question that might arise is, what is a miracle? How do scientists define this phenomenon? Second, why do miracles play a prominent role in the lives of pious women of Khorramshahr? It seems that everyone has her or his definition of miracles. Among the definitions I encountered in previous studies written about miracles, the following ones appear to be most relevant to the perception of miracles in the context of the *Khorramshahri* ritual world. Nidhal Guessoum, an Algerian physicist, defines miracles as a spiritual experience that can be open for new interpretations (Guessoum 2011:174). Stefano Bigliardi, citing Maurice Bucaille, explains that supernatural phenomena are due to God's intervention, that they are unexplainable by science and remain basically unexplained within the scriptures (Bigliardi 2014:116). He writes that "miracles precisely point at the existence of other levels: namely, they 'mark an irruption of the eternal order in the temporal'" (Bigliardi 2014:121).

There are interesting traces of the importance of miracles in several religions and several historical epochs. In their article, Dan Lainer-Vos and Paolo Parigi explore the role of miracle-making in the preservation of charisma in early modern Europe (from 1588 till 1751) under the observation of the Catholic Church. They write: "miracle-making provides an outstanding opportunity to examine the dynamics of charismatic domination" (Lainer-Vos & Parigi 2014:455). The authors point out that their reason for choosing this historical period is that this epoch was marked by deep religious uncertainty and political and social unrest (Lainer-Vos & Parigi 2014:456).

Interestingly, it is possible to observe a comparable situation in the contemporary Iran. Due to the current political and economic sanctions against the country's nuclear program, people are experiencing a difficult financial situation and societal uncertainty. Underestimating the religious leaders who are also political leaders, as well as the Islamic scholars who are understood to be the representatives of God on earth, has been forbidden for more than two decades. At the end of almost every ritual, I

saw numerous ritual participants praying for a new democratic government, one that would not be dependent on religion or religious leaders who are also politicians. Although the pious *umlāli*, as religious officiants, might blame them and criticize them for this insolence, they just listened to their prayers without any reactions, neither positive nor negative. Based on personal communications with the *umlāli*, almost all of them, too, are suffering under the pressures of the economic sanctions.

With examples from Lanier-Vos and Parigi as comparison, charisma and socioreligious status play also an essential role among many of my informants. The more miracles that have occurred in or around a particular *hosseiniyeh*, the more auspicious the site and the more charisma accrues to the owners of that *hosseiniyeh*. The more a *mollāyeh* has observed and experienced miracles, the more women want to listen to her *rowzehs* and be blessed by her status as a woman blessed by Shia saints. These kinds of associations directly influence and increase the number of guests who attend religious rituals hosted in that specific *hosseiniyeh* or performed by that specific *mollāyeh*.

Numerous women I encountered during my fieldwork spoke passionately about miracles and the value of miracles. Miracles play an essential role in their social lives. The more miracles happened in a *hosseiniyeh*, the more people want to visit that place. This place will be considered as a holy place. The more visitors in a *hosseiniyeh*, the more recognition enjoyed by the family living in that house. It is not unusual anymore to expect that miracles might be made known to people involved in a *rowzeh*. Women cry and swear to the Shia saints that they have witnessed a miracle. They showed me many places and *hosseiniyehs* where they observed miracles. In the *hosseiniyeh* of Um Seyed Karim for instance, they pulled back a curtain in front of a niche in the wall. I saw some moisture marks on the wall. Those marks resembled the head of a horse. People associate this sign with the horse of Imam Ḥossein ‘Zulḡanāh’.

Um Seyed Karim personally said: “It appeared some years ago during Muḥarram. It quickly became quite famous. Women from all over the city, as well as small villages near the Khorramshahr, came every day to us to see the marks on the wall. There were long queues every day in front of our house! One day everything was suddenly interrupted as some policemen warned us. They considered this remarkable miracle as superstition. They threatened us with punishment” (*hosseiniyeh* owner Um Seyed Karim, personal communication, 04.09.2019).⁵² *Mollāyeh* Sa'ad told me another

این معجزه مربوط به چند سال پیش هست. ماه محرمی بود. دم در خانه ی ما قیامت شده بود. از همه جای شهر، حتی روستاهای اطراف همه اینجا صف کشیده بودند که معجزه را ببینند. تا اینکه بالاخره روزی پلیس آمد و ما را تهدید کرد. از آن موقع دیگر فقط پرده

story about her experience witnessing a miracle during a *rowzeh* in another *hosseiniyeh*.⁵³ She said: “During the ceremony, everyone was yelling and mourning. Suddenly, I heard a woman weeping differently rather than other women. [Sa'ad started to cry]. I was lost in my thoughts and emotions as a woman shouted from the entrance door: “She was here! Fatimah was here!!!” [Author’s note: other women listening to us confirmed her story by moving their heads]. As we ran out to the door no one was there anymore. The woman who informed everybody said that she Fatimah expressed her thanks for mourning for her son” (*Mollāyeh* Sa'ad Farsani, personal communication, 04.09.2019).⁵⁴

Mollāyeh Sa'ad referred immediately to the character of the owner of that *hosseiniyeh*. Speaking directly to me, she continued: “Your grandmother was one of the most pious women of the city. As she was still living, we saw numerous miracles in her house during *rowzeh*. She was a woman who had a pure faith, to breathe for God and for saints. If somebody lives like her, God will bless her. He will bless her with astonishing miracles” (*Mollāyeh* Sa'ad Farsani, personal communication, 04.09.2019).⁵⁵

I heard a rumor from one ritual organizer that about twenty years ago an eight-year-old blind girl suddenly got her eyesight back, after spending one night sleeping in a *hosseiniyeh*: “I didn’t see it personally. I heard it later as I came back home. The child dreamed of a little three-year-old girl who came to her, said she. She was for sure Roghayyeh, the little daughter of Imam Ḥossein. Apparently, Roghayyeh put her hands on the eyes of that child. In the morning when the girl awoke, she could see for the first time in her life. Such a thing doesn’t happen frequently, especially in the last decade. People are not like in the past anymore. They are suffering under social and economic pressure and do not believe the saints. Therefore, there are less miracles today rather than past” (personal communication, 17.03.2020).⁵⁶

Some told me that they know women who could not get pregnant. By participating in these rituals, *sineh-zani* for Imam Ḥossein, and by donation for the

ای جلوی سر اسب قرار دارد. ولی همچنان خیلی ها برای تبرک می آیند.

⁵³ It might be interesting to notice that she was speaking about my grandmother's *hosseiniyeh*!

⁵⁴ در یک روضه در حالی که همه گریه می کردند، من صدای گریه ای را شنیدم که با بقیه فرق داشت. در حالی که غرق در همین فکر و خیالات بودم، دختری جیغ کشید و گفت که حضرت فاطمه اینجا بود. او برای همه طلب آمرزش کرد، چرا که برای فرزندش سوگواری می شود. حیف که همه ی ما دیر به سمت در رسیدیم. او همینجا بود.

⁵⁵ مادر بزرگ تو زن خیلی خوبی بود. مومن بود. ایمان قوی داشت و برای اهل بیت نفس می کشید. قاعدتا خدا هم این اعتقادات امثال او را بدون جواب نمی گذارد. خانه ی او با معجزات بسیار متبرک شده بود.

⁵⁶ من به شخصه خودم شاهد این معجزه نبودم. اما شنیدم که دختر بچه ای را برای شفا به حسینیه ی ما آوردند. یک شب کامل کنار منبر خوابید و فردای آن روز بیناییش را به دست آورد. دختر نابینا خواب دیده بود که یک دختر سه ساله دستانش را روی چشم های او گذاشته است. دختر سه ساله نمی تواند کسی به جز حضرت رقیه باشد. اما چه فایده. امروزه دیگر کسی به معجزات اعتقاد ندارد. ایمان مردم سست شده و به همین دلیل کمتر معجزات اتفاق می افتند.

hosseiniyeh, they became pregnant and now, they have healthy, smart and virtuous children.⁵⁷ Alongside its role as a mourning ritual, a *rowzeh* is an important moment for the preparation of the food. Many miracles happen during the preparation of those meals. For example, it has happened more often than once that by opening a can of sieved tomatoes, the content of the can spurts out on the wall. When this happens, women can sometimes observe shapes on the wall that resemble the symbols from the battle of Karbala, such as the head of Zulġanāh, the hand of Al-Abbas ibn Ali, or the turban of Imam Ḥossein.

Countless further examples refer to the footprints of a pigeon on the floor. Pigeon is another symbol of the battle, and the Karbala city as well. Witnesses say commonly that they haven't seen the pigeon with their own eyes. They say they have only seen the footprints. People understand the marks left by the pigeon as a sign of a presence that has come from the Shrine of Imam Ḥossein located in Karbala. They consider this sign an honor, a recognition of their devotion. They assume that Ḥossein thinks about his mourners, and he rewards them by such signs.

There are numerous indications that not all miracles are believable and that not all women believe in miracles. Women make fun of the attempts of others to create miracles. According to many women with whom I discussed this topic, the most important factor in determining the authenticity of the miracle is the person who announces the miracle. Convincing miracles come primarily from three groups of people. The first group includes rituals organizers and their family members. Despite the fact that we are investigating a women's ritual, in the case of miracle-making, gender doesn't play any role. Male family members can also contribute to the recognition of the miracles. The second group consists of the *umlāli* of the city, as well as their family members. The more they witnessed miracles, the more fans, and followers they achieve. Women swear that these people are blessed by God. Members of the first two groups are the key persons in rituals. Without the organizers, the *umlāli*, and their family's support, there is no ritual.

The third group, which is a specially recognized group of people in Iranian society, is the group of *sādāt*. *Sādāt* are people who are direct descendants of the Prophet Mohammad. Member of all these groups are regarded as spiritual, and refined people. These spiritually significant people treat their fellow community members in

⁵⁷ From informal interviews with some ritual participants during my last fieldwork in September 2019.

special ways. For example, they may offer someone a meal of food that has been blessed or they may provide someone with a place to sleep at their *hosseiniyeh*. People assume that if you eat anything near by these ritually significant people, you will also be blessed by God. Many believe that their wishes will be fulfilled through donations or spending time in the sacred places such as *hosseiniyehs* where miracles occurred. This desire to interact with spiritual people and places and to prepare food for them is part of what draws people to participate in *rowzeh*.

9. Ritual Participants: Donors, Receivers and Listeners

Most of the women who participate in a *rowzeh* come from religious families, like *umlāli* and ritual organizers. Nevertheless, there are many non-religious women, especially from the younger generations, who attend the ritual primarily for social and cultural purposes. They look forward to meeting their friends, and other women in order to socialize with them. They enjoy the time listening to religious songs, drinking a cup of tea, and receive a portion of the meal, but may not feel any emotional attachment to the religious elements of the rituals. But even they understand the ways in which preparing and eating meals together in ritual contexts enhances the experience for everyone. Anthropologist Faegheh Shirazi notes that dishes prepared in religious contexts have social, economic and emotional meanings and also provide comfort and community that reaches beyond the ritual itself. Using a comparative approach, Shirazi demonstrates similarities in food rituals across communities of Iranian people practicing different faiths including Shia Muslim, orthodox Zoroastrian, Jewish and even people living diaspora (Shirazi 2005:293).

During my fieldwork, food was one of the most popular and ever-present topics about which people spoke. Ritual organizers take months to plan the meals they want to cook for and offer to their guests. They invest much effort and money to buy and prepare food. Guests regularly speak about the quality of the food in particular ritual sites. They compare the meals from different houses they visited and evaluate the service. The food itself demonstrates the financial situation of ritual organizers. The larger the portions and the more meat used in them, the more prosperous and compassionate are the families who organize religious rituals.

Community hierarchies can be observed in the planning and serving of these meals. Ritual organizers have usually a list of who should get the food first. How many portions they should receive and there are always notes about the quality and the amount of each portion. The lists show that the wealthier family members and relatives who donate food and money for the hosting of the rituals are placed at the top of the lists. They should be served first and they should take home the best parts. After that, other relatives who have not necessarily donated should be served. Since the organizers are quite busy by preparing the food and overseeing the cooking and preparation processes, hosts often use a taxi service to deliver the food to the houses of people located at the top of their lists.

Afterwards, it is the turn of *umlāli* and *hosseiniyeh* owners. Only the *umlāli* who perform for the particular event will receive offerings of the food. Depending on a *mollāyeh*'s current relationship with the ritual organizers, portions of varying sizes will be sent to them. Surprisingly, *umlāli* who may once have sung at the house of the host, but who for various reasons – including previous conflict over payment – may be excluded from the list of those who receive offerings of the meal, despite their relative status in the community. It should be remarked that the portions for *umlāli* and other ritual organizers have an equal size as those for the relatives and other supporters of the event. However, they contain less meat. Afterwards, the closer neighbors receive their food. Finally, the ritual participants are those at the bottom end of the hierarchy of who should be served and when. In addition, servings of these meals are also offered and picked up by poor people. I saw different people knocking on the door of houses hosting *rowzeh* and asking for portions of the prepared food several times a day. As people also bring meals with them when they come to attend *rowzeh*, by the beginning of the event, the houses of ritual organizers are overcrowded with different dishes and foods from other houses on these mourning days. Ultimately, a lot of food is thrown away unless the hosts manage to give the remainder away to the poor and others. The following illustration shows the hierarchical structure for dividing the food.

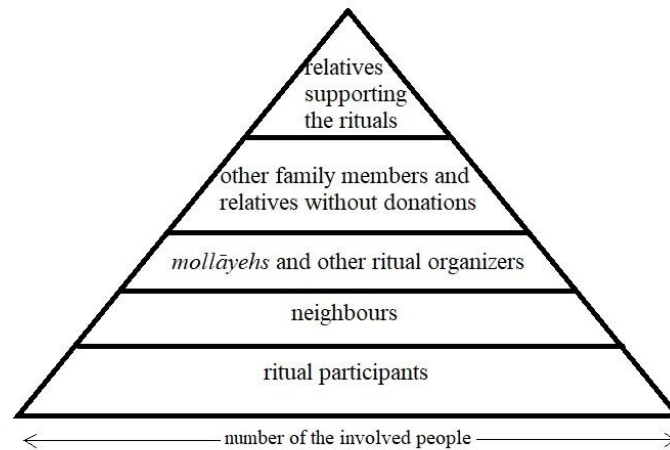


Figure 28: Hierarchy of the involved persons in a *rowzeh* who receive the food.

The social meanings that are conveyed by the preparation and distribution of meals are myriad. Preparing a meal is a women-only ritual in which the participants spend a lot of time communicating with each other. This interaction between the participants has social, emotional and perhaps even psychological impact on each person. Customarily, neighbors, relatives, and close friends cook together. Meanwhile, they chat about their daily life and their unfulfilled wishes. It is a custom that each person stirs the meal and whisper her wishes with the hope that they become true. At the same moment, other women pray for her. It is a common custom to look up at the sky and say the phrase ‘*inša-allāh*’ which means if God wills. Following pictures show some impressions of this familiar scene of communal cooking.



Figure 29: Preparing *šolleh-zard*, a sweet saffron rice pudding. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).

As we already saw, this food ritual is simultaneously an offering to ensure the success of the ritual and a sign of the socio-economic situation of the families who prepare the food. Not only the women themselves but also their male family members benefit from this aspect of the ritual. Men report to their wives about the other men they met in and around the ritual. They comment on how the other men judged the quality of the food. The better the opinions and the judgments from the other men, the more satisfied are the men in the family. Shirazi writes:

“Muslims all over the world perform the pious act of feeding the poor. From a cultural and religious standpoint, hospitality and feeding strangers, entertaining invited guests with food and drinks, and accepting food when it is offered are obligations not only in Iran but the Middle East

in general. [...] The concept of giving and receiving food is an indication of the person's status and honor. This status is also informed by other factors such as the type and amount of food and drinks or the service provided" (Shirazi 2005: 294-295).

I noted previously that the last group in the food-distribution hierarchy that benefits from the offering of the meal consists of the audience. This group is also the largest and at the bottom of the hierarchy. But yet, no ritual can take place without the participants. While the participants describe themselves as guests, organizers and *umlāli* refer to the guests as listeners (*mostame'in*) or simply women (Arabic *neswān*). Listeners in the world of Arabic performing arts are recognized as being to be one of the important components of the performance. Among those performances, one can refer to musical and socioreligious practices, among them the *rowzeh*. Racy writes about the position of listeners in a musical context: "Listeners often play a direct role as they become part of the overall improvisatory process" (Racy 2000:306). We can witness the same position of listeners in the context of *rowzeh*. The mood of the participants – how they praise the *umlāli* and how they react to the ritual in general – constructs the whole atmosphere of the ritual. In another words, there is no such a thing as *rowzeh* without its listeners.

9.1. Talking with *mostame'in* about their Participation

Ritual participants of *rowzeh* are both Arabic speaking and Persian speaking women (*'aḡams*) as well as their children. According to my observations, the average age of most of the participants is around 40 years old. Many *umlāli* are concerned that this tradition will die out in the near future because comparatively few younger women participate in that rather than past. The majority of the ritual participants come from the Arab minority. Speaking about the two groups of Arabs and *'aḡams* in a *rowzeh* is an inevitable topic about which people always speak. I discussed this topic in several interviews with people from both groups, participants and *umlāli*, in order to have a better understanding of the importance of this cultural and linguistic distinction.

I started my interviews on this topic with two famous Iranian-Arab *umlāli*, namely the daughters of Um Sa'eid, *Mollāyeh* Majedeh Farsani and *Mollāyeh* Sa'ad Farsani. I asked them if they found any differences between these two groups of attendees, specifically relating to their involvement and participation in the ritual. They both had the same opinion: "there is no distinction between Arabs and *'aḡams*. We are all servants of Imam Ḥossein and have to commemorate his martyrdom in as magnificent a way possible" (*Mollāyeh* Sa'ad and *Mollāyeh* Majedeh Farsani, personal

communication, 04.09.2019).⁵⁸ Majedeh continued: “we would be very happy to have both groups of participants in our *hosseiniyeh*. Despite the dominance of Arabic songs and customs, *ağams* should not consider the *rowzeh* as a ritual only for the Arabs. We are all the same, but the ritual is since centuries like this”.⁵⁹

Confirming her sister then said, Sa'ad: “we perform Persian songs for our Persian guests, too. We want them to participate, and to sing along with us. However, they don't participate as passionately as Arab women. Most of them don't repeat the phrases.”⁶⁰ In further discussion, it became clear that Sa'ad assumes that this difference in responding to the songs has a historical reason. She noted that: “in Persian speaking regions of Khuzestan, people didn't have such a person like a *mollāyeh*. During the mourning months, women invited a (male) *mollā* who only told anecdotes about Imam Hossein. He didn't chant any songs. Even if he did that, women were not permitted to sing with a strange man. Therefore, the Persian practice of *rowzeh* doesn't require [has not evolved to include] women's participation. They are just supposed to listen to the songs.”⁶¹

I cannot confirm the facts stated in the above quotation from Sa'ad with certainty, because I have not examined religious practices in the Persian-speaking areas of Khuzestan. Besides, there are few sources about the *rowzeh* in those regions. However, I find the Sa'ad's assumption intriguing and suggestive. This opinion might be a good research question for those who are interested in the field of southwestern Iranian rituals. Both *umlāli* concluded their comments on this topic, by suggesting that the Persian audience, in contrast to the Arab audience, prefers to listen rather than to join in the vocal parts.

In another conversation with Mrs. Ghasemi who is an *ağam mollāyeh*, she spoke about the importance of reciting Persian songs at the *rowzeh*: “Nowadays, everyone can speak and understand Persian. But not every person understands Arabic. Many Persian women claim that they don't understand the content of Arabic songs. However, they cry by

⁵⁸ برای ما عرب یا عجم تفاوتی ندارند. همه ی ما خادم امام حسین هستیم و باید برای برگزاری هر چه با شکوه تر مراسم او همه با هم تلاش کنیم.

⁵⁹ باعث خوشحالی ما هست که فارسی زبان ها هم به روضه ی ما عرب ها بیایند. درست است که خیلی از روضه ها به زبان عربی هستند، اما این دلیل نمی شود که ما مشکلی با حضور عجم ها داشته باشیم. ما همه یکی هستیم. روضه هم اگر عربی هست، آیینی هست که سال ها به همین شیوه اجرا می شده.

⁶⁰ ما روضه ی فارسی هم می خوانیم که مهمان های فارس زبانمان هم بتوانند هم خوانی کنند. ولی متأسفانه اغلب آنها بسیار ساکت هستند و همانند زنان عرب سوگواری نمی کنند.

⁶¹ در مناطق فارسی نشین خوزستان شخصی مثل ملایه نبوده است. در زمان سوگواری خانم ها ملا دعوت می کردند و فقط به او گوش می کردند. ملا هم که فقط برای آنها نطق می کرد. اگر هم نوحه ای می خواند که خانم ها نمی توانستند با او هم خوانی کنند. به همین دلیل این عادت تا الان به جا مانده و فارس زبان ها بیشتر ترجیح می دهند که مستمع باشند تا اینکه بخوانند.

listening to them, because Arabic *nowhehs* have sad and touching character [in their voices]. In addition to the Persian *rowzeh*, I learned Arabic *rowzeh* to be able to sing in both languages and for both audiences” (*Mollāyeh* Mrs. Ghasemi, personal communication, 04.09.2019).⁶²

As already stated, most of the *rowzeh* participants are Iranian Arabs. However, this does not mean that Persian people do not participate in rituals during the mourning months. Many Persian speaking religious women participate in a gathering, called *ġalaseh*. This gathering regularly takes place in a Quranic school in another part of the city. Usually, only strict Muslim women participate in these sessions. *Ġalaseh* is a gathering where various issues such as political, religious and personal problems can be discussed. It can be held at any time of year. *Ġalaseh* is one of the most serious women’s gatherings because of the type of discussion as well as the discussed topics in it. Normally, one would not encounter a *mollāyeh* at a *ġalaseh*.

In a *ġalaseh*, an Islamic female preacher called *maddāh* sits behind her desk. These preachers serve mostly the political and religious ideologies of the Iranian government. They hold ideological political speeches, whereas the *umlāli* refuse to integrate political discussions in a religious ceremony such as *rowzeh*. They say people should attend religious gatherings only for religious and praying purposes and not the politics. Participants ask their questions to the *maddāh*. She answers the questions based on several her knowledge of various religious sources such as the Quran, *aḥādīṭ*, or the opinions of a Shia Islamic cleric, *āyatollāh*. Participants make notes. Some of them try to challenge the *maddāh* by asking her complicated questions. After the discussion, they pray and recite either verses from the Quran or verses from other religious scriptures and then chant several prayers (*do’ā*). Women who have their menstruation at the time are not allowed to say their prayers during the session. Usually, at the end of each *ġalaseh*, participants consume food and drink tea, the same as in a *rowzeh*.

Around 90% of the participants of a *ġalaseh* in Khorramshahr are Persians. As I asked Arabic women about the reason why they don’t go to *ġalasehs*, they gave me several answers. Among those reasons was that that they are not interested in political speeches, the religious songs in these gatherings are not as magnificent as the Arabic songs in *rowzehs*, and finally they find these rituals are supported by the political system of the

این روز ها همه دیگر فارسی متوجه می شوند. فارس زبان ها اغلب اعتراض می کنند که مضمون نوحه ها را متوجه نمی شوند.⁶² ولی با این حال پا به پای عرب زبان ها با نوحه ها اشک می ریزند چرا که نوحه های عربی بسیار غم انگیز هستند. به همین دلیل من هم به عنوان یک فارس زبان شروع به یادگیری روضه ی عربی کردم، برای اینکه بتوانم به هر دو زبان و برای هر دو گروه زبانی بخوانم.

Iranian government something that contradicts the non-political nature of *rowzeh*. Indeed, *ġalasehs* are supported by the government. One can see it obviously in the setting and after a short conversation with the *maddāh*. In contrast to a *rowzeh*, we can see new expensive sound equipment, air conditioning, chairs and tables for participants. For these reasons and the emphasizing that politics and religion are two different things, *rowzeh* participants avoid participating in a *ġalaseh*.

There are various reasons why many women participate in *rowzeh*. Due to the majority's opinion, religion is the most important reason for attending the ritual. They say, they do it only for Imam Ḥossein. Many believe that attending the *rowzeh* fulfills their religious duties. However, this is not the only reason why they participate in the ritual. Many women admit that *rowzeh* is an opportunity for them to meet the other women and to communicate with them. Indeed, Islamic rituals are considered as meeting places where women can connect through a common effort or in this case through the preparation for, and listening to or presenting the performance.

“the women meet [...] not only because of the social support and freedom of expression these settings provide in the absence of men, but also because of the immense enjoyment they derive from a sense of self-esteem, competency and moral and social worth conferred by attendance at the gatherings and by becoming more pious” (Torab 1996:236).

One of the attendees said: “imagine that many women are not allowed to leave their house alone, even for small purposes, such as buying food or visiting their friends. During the mourning months, however, their husbands don't dare to prohibit them. If they forbid them, they are in danger themselves”. What danger for the husbands is this participant talking about? Because a *rowzeh* is a religious practice, being a part of it is a sign of piety. For many women, participation in *rowzeh* is a religious duty which should be accomplished. If their husbands ban them from the participation, the women can claim officially that their husbands don't allow them to fulfill their religious task. This is a dangerous complaint to make in the Shia Iran. Every year, many *Khorramshahri* women look happily forward to the commemoration rituals associated with saddest happenings in Shia history. During this particular time, they can enjoy a certain freedom and can move around the city without being worried.

Rowzeh can be regarded as an opportunity or a meeting point for the social gathering of many women from Khorramshahr. Participants of *rowzeh* pay special attention to social and gender topics and like to talk about them during their gatherings. Many of these women whom I met, usually have no chance to exchange their ideas with

other people – except with their female relatives. There can be different subject areas to discuss during the rituals, such as politics, economics, health, and gender issues. Torab writes that in the context of the Islamic Republic, it is worth reflecting on the importance of female religious practices. She argues:

“Despite living in a male dominant country where women don’t have usually the chance to talk about their opinions and exchange their thoughts with others, these social practices provide women unprecedented opportunities for political participation, social mobility and economic independence without losing face. Women can redefine the gendered boundaries and gaining self-accomplishment in defining their social reality” (Torab 2011:163-164).

Besides the above reasons, artistic and cultural aspects of *rowzeh* as an old tradition in Khorramshahr is another significant reason for the participation of many women in that. For many of them it is even the main reason to join these gatherings. Women like to talk about the artistic skills of *umlāli*. Amongst their favorite topics, the vocal timbre of the *umlāli*, correct pronunciation of the words, and correct interpretation of the melodies are important criteria by to judge the artistic skills of the singers. Most of the women are fans of the *umlāli*, who have a ‘dark’, ‘rough’ or ‘male vocal timbre’. These terms stem from aesthetics comments made by the local participants. According to these characteristics, they judge the vocal characteristics of the *umlāli*.

Women often compare the rituals in Khorramshahr with *Khorramshahri* rituals in other Iranian cities. For example, they comment on how rituals took place earlier, compared to how they are performed today, and which *hosseiniyeh* currently offers a better service. One of the ritual participants who lives in Isfahan and left Khorramshahr during the war said: “*Rowzeh* is a unique ritual. You cannot find the same ritual in Iran, except in some cities where people from Khuzestan live. Those are principally the people who left Khorramshahr during the war. They organize the same ritual and it’s even more old-fashioned than the way it is performed now in Khorramshahr. They practice the same things exactly, as they did before they left the city. But here in Khorramshahr, everything is changing rapidly” (personal communication, 07.09.2019).⁶³

A Persian-speaking participant said enthusiastically about the reason for her participation in *rowzeh*: “I just enjoy being here. I don’t understand the language. But I love the *laṭmiyeh*. The kind of self-flagellation by Arab women is simply different from

روضه ای که در خرمشهر هست در هیچ کجای این کشور قابل پیدا شدن نیست. شما در ایران هیچ مراسم مشابهی پیدا نمی کنید،⁶³ مگر در برخی از شهرهایی که مردم خوزستانی ها در آنجا زندگی می کنند. این افراد در واقع جنگ زدگان و افرادی هستند که در طول جنگ خرمشهر را ترک کردند. آنها هم دقیقاً همین مراسم را برگزار می کنند. و حتی اصیل تر. آنها روضه را به همان شکل انجام می دهند، که در گذشته در خرمشهر انجام می شد. در خرمشهر خیلی از قسمت های مراسم به سرعت در حال تغییر هستند.

anywhere else in Iran. I appreciate it very much. The chants are quick and rhythmic. If you do not understand the language and are not familiar with the content of the songs, you do not think at all that it is a mourning chant! Most of the time, I am the only Persian who is always in the circle of Arab women practicing the breast-beating tradition. I honestly love it to be a part of it” (personal communication, 07.09.2019).⁶⁴

In fact, participating a *rowzeh* has benefits for its participants that promote their mental health, social life and the quality of life. The last two decades have witnessed a huge growth in studying the importance of Iranian Islamic women’s rituals (Torab 1996; Kalinock 2003, 2004; Aghaei 2005; Shirazi 2005). Notably, in the fields of cultural anthropology and religious studies, there are numerous works written about this issue. Marion Holmes Katz suggests that, “the reason for this interest might be the recent recognition that most of these rituals and wide sets of devotional practices are to be found in private places [Author’s note: that one has to know someone in order to find out about them, they are not controlled by anyone except those who are involved]” (Katz 2008:467).

Douglas A. Marshall writes that “the practice of ritual produces two primary outcomes, *belief* and *belonging*” (Marshall 2002:360). He states that “‘belief’ is a way to express certainty, credulity, and confidence” and that ‘belonging’ that “it is a shorthand for a larger idea, in this case, one composed of attraction, identification, and cohesion. Just as belief is a step beyond knowledge, belonging is a step beyond membership” (Marshall 2002:360). In an essay from 2004, Richard Sosis examines the ways rituals promote group cohesion. He writes that, “Religious rituals are a form of communication where people engage in a same behavior” (Sosis 2004:168). Citing Irons, Sosis continues suggesting that “religious activities signal commitment to other members of the group. By engaging in the ritual, the member effectively says, I identify with the group and I believe in what the group stands for” (Sosis 2004:168). Based on an empirical qualitative study, Sosis argues that religious communes rather secular communes impose constraints on the behavior of their members that tend to be long-lived (Sosis 2004:169). The following graph demonstrates the results of this comparison that Sosis used in his paper. He states:

من عربی بلد نیستم. ولی عاشق این فضا هستم. از همه بیشتر لطمیه های زنان عرب را دوست دارم. مدل سینه زنی عرب ها با هر جای دیگر ایران متفاوت است. علاوه بر این نوحه هایی که می خوانند بسیار سریع و ریتمیک هستند. در آواز های زنان عرب نوعی تحرک وجود دارد. به صورتی که اگر زبان عربی را ندانید و با محتوای آهنگ ها آشنا نیستید، به هیچ وجه فکر نمی کنید که این یک مراسم عزاداری برای امام حسین است! بیشتر اوقات، من تنها فارسی زبانی هستم که همیشه در دایره زنان عرب مشغول به سینه زنی هستم. بقیه فارس زبان ها معمولاً این کار را نمی کنند. من واقعاً دوست دارم که بخشی از این فرهنگ و مراسم قدیمی باشم.

“As the number of costly requirements imposed by a religious commune rises its longevity increases. [author’s note: by costly requirements are efforts meant that members have to put into these activities, for example saying prayers, consumption of a particular sort of food or donating a certain part of their income.] In this view, religious ritual promotes group cohesion; in turn a cooperative group provides members with the benefits of group living, such as safety and cumulative wealth” (Sosis 2004:169).

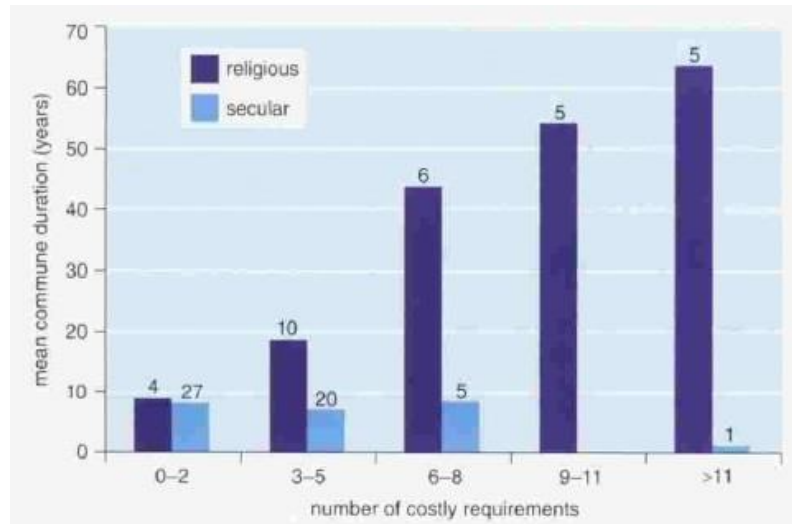


Figure 30: quantitative results from the study by Sosis show the differences between participating in religious and secular communes.

It is possible to see the parameters of the ritual practice of *rowzeh* here. The evidence reported in the study by Sosis suggests that participation in rituals has some advantages for the participants. Although they usually have to renounce something, in the end, they also receive something that further satisfies them in a broader sense. For example, in *rowzehs*, many women donate money ostensibly for religious purposes and to help ensure that the event takes place. Concerning the financial aspects, this act can be regarded as a loss. On the other hand, contributing to such an event reveals the generosity and the piousness as well as the financial wealth of the people who donate. The act of donation is a highly respected act among many pious Iranian. As a result of this act, women create (consciously or unconsciously) an advantageous position for themselves in their community. For example, observers of their donations know that religious and moral aspects are important to the donor. Knowing and valuing a donor has related effect in that, because you can attest to the high moral rectitude of the donor, the donor may well be able to speak well of you. For instance, if one needs a witness at some point in the future, one could rely on the donor in a form of the exchange of mutual respect.

In the final section of my thesis, I introduce and explore in detail the musical elements of *rowzeh*. It is the movement through this predictable series of musical events that actually shapes the flow of the ritual. Throughout my analyses of music and text, I intersperse commentary about the actions of the various participants in an effort to show how the sounding of, and listening to, these musical sections creates the shape and structure of the whole event through which the ritual foods, hierarchies, miracles, and individual narratives described above gather their social and cultural significance.

10. *Rowzeh*, its Structure and Musical Components

Traditionally, *mollāyeh* sat on a high chair, called *menbar*. Nowadays, many of them prefer to sit cross-legged on the floor of *hosseiniyeh*, next to the *menbar*. During the performance, if the *umlāli* stand up, all other guests are also supposed to rise and then sit again following the leaders. Some parts of the ritual like *laṭmiyeh* and *howseh* should be performed standing up. Each *rowzeh* basically consists of eight parts. These parts include metrical and non-metrical singing, narrations and some sections also employ group body movements as well. The eight parts of *rowzeh* are here listed in the usual order of performance:

1. *do'ā* (prayers chant)
2. *nowḥeh* (mourning song)
3. *ḡaṣid* (poetic chant)
4. *ḥadiṯ* or *ravāyat* (narration)
5. *na'ā* (elegy)
6. *laṭmiyeh* (self-beating)
7. *howseh* (soundful song)
8. *do'ā* (prayers chant)

Each *rowzeh* begins and ends with the saying prayers or *do'ā*. However, women do not consider the starting prayers as an obligatory part of the ritual. For many of them, it is merely an introduction to get the event going, a part of the event that they can skip. If you visit a *rowzeh* in Khorramshahr, you might see that many women arrive at the end of this part or before the second part, or *nowḥeh*, starts. The woman who performs the *first do'a* does not necessarily have to be experienced *mollāyeh*. Indeed, I haven't seen

any professional *mollāyeh* doing this part during my fieldwork. Only in some cases where there were just a few participants, do *umlāli* perform the *do'ā*. Otherwise, anyone who has taken a vow, or who has interest, or even someone who simply has a good voice (Arabic: *ṣawt*) is allowed to recite the *do'ā*.

Although to an outsider, that which is performed at a *rowzeh* might be heard as a variety of melodies and musical elements, the religious songs of *rowzeh* are not considered to be music by the participants nor those in the larger society. In the world of Islam, considering Islamic rituals as musical practices is forbidden. Poul Rovsing Olsen states: “There is no such thing as singing in Islam, at least not singing intimately related to the outward manifestations of Islam [...] A Muslim would not consider *Adhān* or *Qur'ān* recitation to be forms of singing” (Olsen 2002:141). Neither the local people in the Khorramshahr community nor the women with whom I discussed this topic consider the chants of *rowzeh* as music. Of course, they are aware of the existence of musical elements in the ritual and in that which is sounded. Nevertheless, to separate these religious songs from the art or entertainment music, they use a specific terminology for describing the ‘musical’, or better said the vocal components of the ritual.

Musical modes in a religious context are called by the experts from the region by the word *laḥn* (the plural form is *alḥān*). The word ‘*laḥn*’ is an Arabic word that means, literally, ‘melody’. Nobody knows how many *alḥān* exist and how many of them are used in *rowzeh*. Moreover, in comparison with Arabic musical modes (*maḡāmat*) or Persian classical music (*radif*) there are no specific names or labels for each *laḥn* as used in *rowzeh* which makes the communication with the experts about these artistic aspects complicated. People describe the aesthetic properties of the *alḥān* used in the *rowzeh* with adjectives, such as beautiful, sad, sadder and pathetic.

Given the lack of description and theorizing about the musical details, one might ask, how do the young *ṣāne*’ learn the *alḥān*. The answer is simple, all learning is based on an imitation technique. They learn the *alḥān* by heart and don’t think about giving a name to that specific *laḥn*. Instead of using names, one sings only a phrase and the others know which mode is meant. If I compare this way of practicing and learning the musical modes with learning to perform western classical music, it is possible to imagine an absolute beginner singer who learns a wide repertory of songs only by imitation without learning anything about minor or major scales or any aspects of music theory. This kind of learning certainly take places in some learning contexts for western music as well.

I can define the *lahn* as a series of tones or specific intervals that move around a tonal center, with melodies that usually begin and end on that tone. These intervals can be half-tone and whole-tone steps, as well as the microtones that occur in Persian art music or in the regional music of Khorramshahr. There is no fixed rule as to how many tones should be in a series to have a *lahn*. Later, I will discuss a *lahn* that consists only of two notes. What I find fascinating about all of this is that many of these *alhān* come either from Persian classical music or from regional music. Nevertheless, following the *umlali* I avoid giving these modes special names (either from the repertoire of Persian classical music or the regional music) because there is no such thing in this religious practice. However, an exception applies to the reciters who learn the chants in Qur'an schools. I report on this type of learning in the last part of this section looking at the performances of *do'ā*.

In the following sections I provide a description of each part of *rowzeh* using both cultural and music-analytical approaches. I transcribe the melodic examples onto a five-line system that we know from the European classical music. The reason for this decision is primarily because of the ease it provides in reading the melodic lines, a musical language familiar not only to most of my readers but also to the women with whom I conducted my fieldwork.

10.1. *Nowḥeh* (Mourning Song)

Each *rowzeh* starts officially with a *nowḥeh*, a metrical mourning song. It means, while singing a *nowḥeh*, one can clap along with the melody at regular time intervals. In reality, in this section women engage in breast-beating or *sineh-zani* at regular intervals. Hans Hickmann writes about the etymology of the word '*nowḥeh*': "Finally, there are the mourning sermons (Arabic: *nauḥ* and *niwāḥ*) in funerals, which are primarily associated with women who sing them, especially for the wailer (Arabic: *nawāiḥ*, sg *nāiḥa*)" (Hickmann 1970: 45). *Nowḥeh* is always performed in a sedentary position. The melody part proceeds in a call and response form. First, a melodic phrase is sung several times by a *mollāyeh*. She repeats this phrase until all participants can easily sing it, too. This repeated phrase is often the melody that serves as the chorus.

To clarify the structural flow of this section of a *rowzeh*, I analyze a *nowḥeh* called *ḥāharam* (Persian for 'my sister'). Figure 31 shows the chorus in this *nowḥeh*. You can read the translation of the poem under the transcription. This *nowḥeh*

resembles a tragic conversation between Imam Ḥossein and his sister Zeynab. Each *mollāyeh*, depending on her voice register, chooses the tones herself. It means that my transcriptions can be transposed and sung beginning on any pitch by different preachers. It is the sung contour which plays a determining role in the identity of this melody rather than any specific pitch.

The handling of intervals is extremely important. Any mistake made by a *mollāyeh* during the performance can immediately cause the audience to be irritated. Most of the women who participate in *rowzeh* have been familiar with the songs since their childhood. According to my observations, if a *mollāyeh* makes a mistake during her performance, the audience responds to the phrases with uncertainty. Once the proper intervals change, the audience experiences an unexpected melody and they may not know how to respond. In this case, some repeat the ‘new melodies’ and some try to sing the song with the usual intervals, or in the usual way in which they always sing. The result of this attempt ends up normally with a proliferation of disharmonious tones. However, I have only seen such a situation once in a *rowzeh* from October 2017 in a famous *ḥosseiniyeh* in the city center of Khorramshahr.⁶⁵ In that context a *mollāyeh* sang all the phrases with the wrong melody; the audience was confused but another *mollāyeh* took the microphone and sang the *nowḥeh* with its proper interval.



Figure 31: Melodic phrase of the chorus in the *nowḥeh* ‘ḥāharam’.

Translation of the poem:

ḥāharam dar marge man afḡān makon šīvan mazan!
Oh, my sister! Do not cry and do not regret my death!

ey barādar piše ḥāhar harfi az mordan mazan!
Oh, brother! Do not say a word about death to your sister!

⁶⁵ In order to avoid embarrassment, I will only note the date on which this event took place.

Throughout the whole *nowḥeh* the melody of the chorus remains constant. Nevertheless, in some places a few ornaments appear, inserted by members of the audience. However, in my thesis, I don't notate the ornaments since my goal is to give an overview of the musical structure of the whole ritual in the current era. The next example shows all notes that are used in this *nowḥeh* which *umlāli* referred to as *laḥn*. The tonal center of this *nowḥeh* on which the phrases have to end up is circled with red.



Figure 32: The entire *nowḥeh*, *ḥāharam*, is mainly based on these notes. Each melody line ends up on the circled note.

In this *nowḥeh*, all other verses have the same melody as the chorus. The following figure shows the whole structure of the selected *nowḥeh*:

ḥāharam dar marge man afgān makon šivan mazan (2X) ey barādar piše ḥāhar harfi az mordan mazan	Chorus
ḥāharam ān kohne pirāhan ke midāni biār (2X) Yusofā digar dam az ān pirhane piram mazan	Verse
ḥāharam dar marge man afgān makon šivan mazan (2X) ey barādar piše ḥāhar harfi az mordan mazan	Chorus
ḥāharam in āharin bārist meydān miravam (2X) az peyam birun mayā harfi to bā došman mazan	Verse
ḥāharam dar marge man afgān makon šivan mazan (2X) ey barādar piše ḥāhar harfi az mordan mazan	Chorus

Figure 33: Schematic representation of the *nowḥeh*. In many vocal practices from Khorramshahr poems play a crucial role in determining the musical structure.

Translation of the verses:

hāharam ān kohne pirāhan ke midāni biār!
Oh, my sister! Bring me that old robe you already know (as burial shroud)!

Yusofā digar dam az ān pirhane pīram mazan!
Oh yusof! Don't talk about that tattered robe anymore!

hāharam in āharin bārist meydān miravam!
Oh, my sister! It's the last time I go to the battlefield!

az peyam birun mayā harfī to bā došman mazan!
Don't come out to look for me and don't speak a word to the enemies!

One of the characteristics of *nowḥeh* is *sineh-zani*. This custom appears in several parts of the *rowzeh* ritual and in various ways. In a *nowḥeh*, for example, one has to hit the chest or thigh with one or two hands. It is also common to hit the chest with one hand and the thigh with the other hand at the same time. Depending on the group that has gathered and their beating preferences, one beats the chest either with the first beat or with each beat in a bar. As soon as the *mollāyeh* starts to sing and performs the *sineh-zani* the audience knows how should they perform the *sineh-zani*. The generated sounds of breast-beating accompany the *nowḥeh*. They also change the atmosphere of the entire ritual. In order to amplify the sounds, *umlāli* additionally beat their poem booklets with their hands. Up to three *umlāli* can do this at the same time to produce a louder sound quality (figure 34). The booklet, colloquially called *ḡaṣid*, is a collection of poems about Imam Ḥossein. The poems are taken by each *mollāyeh* from various sources. Everything collected in their books is hand-written and no two booklets are the same, although they may share some notated texts and notes.



Figure 34: Two *umlāli* hit their poem booklets in a *nowḥeh* to amplify the sounds of *sineh-zani* whereas a *mollāyeh* sings the *nowḥeh*. (Photo taken by the author).

Regarding the sound intensity of the last parts of *rowzeh* such as *laṭmiyeh* or *howseh*, *nowḥeh* has a gentler character and atmosphere. The next example shows again the same melodic phrase of our *nowḥeh*. One can now observe the places where women perform the *sineh-zani*, signed with *.

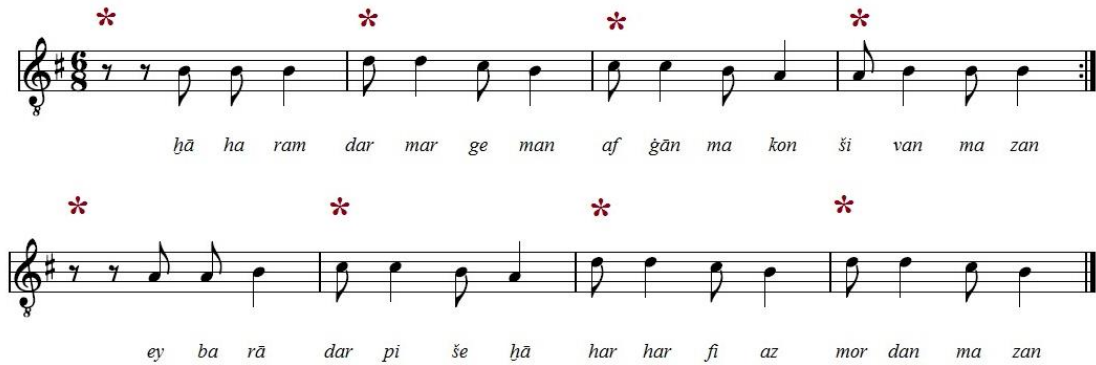


Figure 35: Notation of the chorus's melody on five-line system with the beating points at the beginning of each bar.

In the repertoires of both men's rituals and women's *rowzehs* in Khorramshahr, many of poems performed are about the sister of Imam Ḥossein, Zeynab. Following Ali Qa'emi, an Iranian scholar and the writer of the book *naḡše zanān dar 'āšurā* (1981), Chelkowski recounts details about the beloved sister of the Imam:

“Zaynab, the daughter of Ali, shared her father's skills in orations and sermons. She learned bravery and eloquence from her father and her brothers Hasan and Hosayn. She learned the maidenly lessons of chastity, purity and modesty from her mother, who was the daughter of the Prophet. Throughout the Karbala siege, all the women and children listened to Zaynab's commands and followed her counsel” (Chelkowski 2005:122).

He continues writing about the impressive role of Zeynab during the battle:

“Among the extraordinary group of women at Karbala, Zaynab plays the role of a matriarch. As a daughter of Fatemeh and Imam Ali, a granddaughter of the Prophet Mohammad, and the full sister of Hosayn, she is entitled to that role. It is not only her bloodline, but also her incredible personality, that makes her a leading female protagonist in the Moharram cycle. She is an inexhaustible reserve of physical and psychological strength and energy. Her devotion to her brother Hosayn knows no boundaries” (Chelkowski 2005:120).

In Shia-Islamic culture, especially in today's Iran, the personality of Zeynab still plays a major role in the lives of many pious women. Zeynab is considered to be the symbol of female self-sacrifice, virginity, and virtue. In almost every ritual and when *umlāli* mention the name of Zeynab, they wish the women whose brothers have died

peace and patience. *Rowzeh* participants have an exceptional sympathy for Zeynab and this affinity for the sad heroine reaches out beyond *rowzeh*. Many people name their daughters Zeynab. I know personally women whose real names are ancient Persian names. But in order to show affinity with the sister of Imam Ḥossein they changed their names to Zeynab.

It is interesting to note that many of these decisions to change names happened after the Islamic revolution and during the Gulf war. During the eight-year Gulf War, the newly constructed Islamic government of Iran decided to influence the women, and they chose to utilize religion as their primary tool. The rulers of the country tried to encourage the Iranian women to fight against the enemy. In this case, the propaganda of holy Shia martyrs such as Zeynab as a role model for Iranian women was a smart strategy of the Islamic Republic. During the war, government chose Zeynab's birthday as the nurse's day. This decision was made so that women volunteer as nurses to help the injured soldiers (Chelkowski 2005:130-131). The imbrication of religion and governance is nearly complete in Iran.

Concerning religious and traditional values, the government still wants women to be like Zeynab and follow her path. That path includes imitating various aspects of Zeynab's life, including her pious lifestyle, courage, bravery, and self-sacrifice. In this context, Islamic arts such as *rowzeh* serve, consciously or unconsciously, the political ideology of the Iranian government. Though all *umlāli* are against the intermingling of the corrupt Iranian politics and religion, in leading these women's rituals they can be seen to be tacitly supportive of the theocratic Shia regime, as religion and politics in Iran are two inseparable things. From another perspective, that the *umlāli* are leading women in these accepted religious rituals also confers a certain amount of freedom on both the *umlāli* and those who attend. For instance, ritual organizers do not need any papers or special permits from the state to hold religious rituals because being involved with religion is one of the primary goals of the government. Likewise, women who attend these events are often allowed to travel there without an accompanying male person from their households. And they are allowed to attend these events outside their own houses. Perhaps there are always at least two sides to every situation?

Returning to my description of the ways in which sound organizes the structure of *rowzeh*, during the *nowheh* women sing one or two songs. They may perform one *nowheh* in Arabic and one in Persian. If they perform two songs, the two *nowheh* are always chanted by different *mollāyeh*. One of the most beautiful

moments that I witnessed was when I observed a professional *mollāyeh* singing a *nowḥeh* by heart. I could tell that she was a bit stressed, however. At the same time that she was singing, she was searching for another *nowḥeh* in her *ḡaṣid* for her *ṣāne*’ to sing. The *ṣāne*’, at that moment, was both crying and breast-feeding her baby and unable to find the text for her *nowḥeh*. The professional *mollāyeh*, also her teacher, undertook the task for her *ṣāne*’ and provided her a calm ambiance so that she could fulfill her both duties, that of being a mother and a *mollāyeh*.

Mollāyeh Māmān Marziyeh never wanted to tell me about her stories. She always laughed and said in Arabic that she cannot speak Persian. Later, she told me in her perfect Persian language skills about that same *ṣāne*’. “She needs money. She has to perform several rituals with a small baby. I always take her with me in each *rowzeh* where I should sing. I divide my parts with her and give her also a part my honorarium. I am old and don’t need so much money anymore. If I start to tell you my stories, I cannot stop crying. She is like my daughter. So, everything I wish for my daughters who don’t visit me anymore, I wish for her, too”⁶⁶, said Māmān Marziyeh. Indeed, *Mollāyeh* Māmān Marziyeh is a silent heroine. She is one of the strongest women that I ever seen in my life. At a later point, she told me more about her sad life. However, she didn’t want to reveal the stories about her daughter, Marziyeh. In the following section, I discuss the third part of the ritual, *Ḡaṣid*, a section that is nowadays rarely performed, but is, in the opinion of experts, one of the most beautiful parts of the ritual.

10.2. *Ḡaṣid* (Poetic Chant)

When I first conducted my fieldwork in summer 2015, *ḡaṣid* was always a fixed part of each *rowzeh*. Today, after almost five years, this section is performed only occasionally. *Ḡaṣid* is sung in standard Arabic, while other Arabic parts of *rowzeh* are principally in *Khuzestani*-Arabic, a dialect in the Arabic language spoken in Khuzestan (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 31.05.2018).⁶⁷ As with *nowḥeh*, *ḡaṣid* is based on the call and response form. It is, however, non-metrical and that which is has a melismatic character. This is the primary reason why many women find the recitation of this part difficult and it may well be the primary reason for the

این بنده خدا هم با یک طفل شیرخوار به پول احتیاج دارد. این موقع سال وقت خوبی است که در روضه ها بخواند و کسب درآمد⁶⁶ بکند. من در هر روضه ای که بخوانم، او را نیز با خود می برم و با هم می خوانیم. خود من هم قسمتی از پول را به او می دهم. خود من که دیگر پولی نیاز ندارم. او هم مانند دختران خود من است. فرزندی که سال به سال دیگر به دیدن مادرشان نمی آیند. من هم هرچیزی را که برای فرزندانم بخوام، برای صانعم می خواهم.
قصید همیشه به عربی فصیح خوانده می شود، در صورتی که مابقی بخش ها به عربی محلی هستند.⁶⁷

decline of this part of the *rowzeh*. During my most recent fieldwork in 2019, I seldom heard *gaşid* performed. One *mollāyeh* told me already in 2017, “Currently, many *mollāyeh* refuse to sing *gaşid*. However, I perform it in each *rowzeh*. Older guests are surprised when I recite the *gaşid*. They are really enthusiastic to hear this part, because it is performed rarely. Older generation have always heard *gaşid* in each *rowzeh*. In the near future, this part will be an obsolete part” (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 05.10.2017).⁶⁸

About the difficulty of performing a *gaşid* *Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa says that one should breathe in enough air to sing a whole phrase without breathing (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 31.05.2018).⁶⁹ The phrases are normally quite long and one should sing them slowly. During the recitation, *umlāli* add many ornaments to the main melody. Figure 36 shows the melodic line of a *gaşid*. Regarding the vocal technique, it is also one more reason why is this part quite difficult to sing: “Answering or singing the response to a *gaşid* is difficult for most of the guests. You have to master the breathing technique very well. You need a lot of air for that. Women try to sing. They cannot do that well and then they give up. In addition, *gaşid* is sung very slowly. People are more looking forward to hear and sing along with *laṭmiyeh* and *howseh* which are sung faster” (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 05.10.2017).⁷⁰

Another aspect that makes the singing of *gaşid* even more challenging is the musical modulation throughout the performance. A skillful *mollāyeh* may decide to change the *lahn* in the course of her *gaşid* performance and modulate into another mode. For these reasons, most of the time, the audience chooses to listen to this part instead of singing along with it.

این روزها دیگر کسی قصید را نمی خواند. من ولی همچنان در هر مراسم آن را اجرا می کنم. خیلی ها حتی تعجب می کنند،⁶⁸ مخصوصا قدیمی تر ها و مستمعین مسن، چرا که این قسمت خیلی به ندرت اجرا می شود. در آینده ای نه چندان دور بعید است که کسی دیگر قصید بخواند.

خواندن قصید خیلی نفس می برد. باید این توانایی را داشته باشی که خوب نفس گیری کنی و ابیات را یک نفس بخوانی.⁶⁹ جواب دادن قصید برای مستمعین کار مشکلی است. ملایه های حرفه ای هستند که فقط از پس این قسمت بر می آیند. علاوه بر این⁷⁰ قصید خیلی آرام و آهنگین است. بیشتر خانم ها برای لطمیه و هوسه به روضه می آیند. این دو قسمت ریتم های تند دارند و خواندن آنها برای خانم ها راحت تر است و همینطور لذت بخش تر. به همین دلیل بیشتر در این قسمت از هم خوانی اجتناب می شود و مستمعین گوش فرا می دهند.

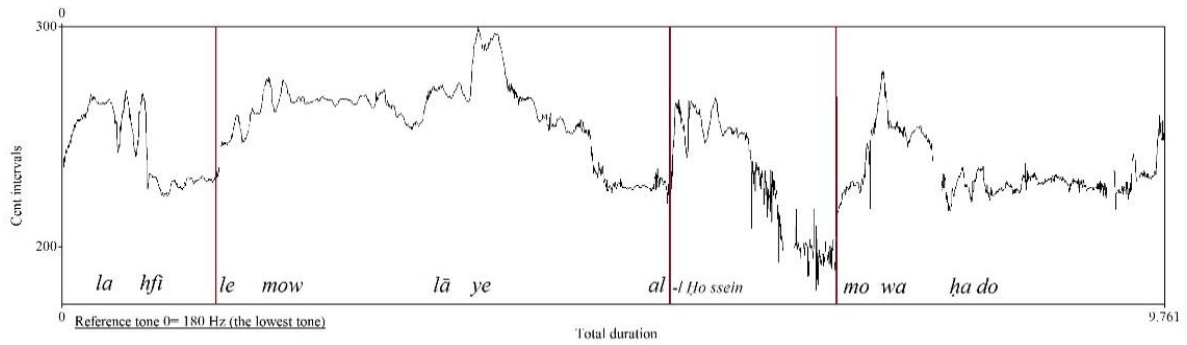


Figure 36: Representation of the melismatic structure and ornaments of a ḡaṣid.

Translation of the poem:

lahfi lemolāye al Ḥosseīn mowaḥado
 Regret for our Ḥosseīn who is leaving us alone

In this graph it is possible to recognize the melismatic character of ḡaṣid quite well. It is clear that there are many notes, some of which are ornaments, sung on each syllable. The next example shows the notes of the *laḥn* used for this ḡaṣid. The entire melody of this part is built based on these notes (figure 37).



Figure 37: The entire ḡaṣid is mainly based on these five notes. Each phrase ends up with the note circled.

In the following illustration, we see the basic melody of the main section of the ḡaṣid plotted on the staff:

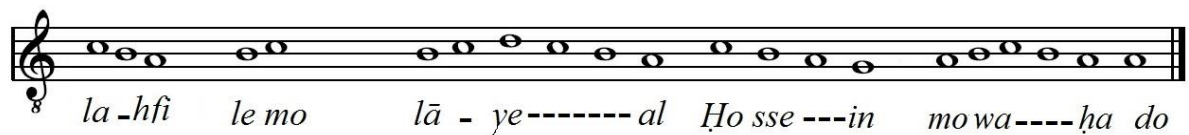


Figure 38: Transcription of the abstracted melody on the staff.

As was stated, *umlāli* can modulate into another musical mode or *laḥn*. Compared to the first part of ḡaṣid shown previously, in the second part and after the modulation, each phrase ends up with a different tone. Figure 39 shows the new mode and figure 40 shows the new melodic phrase in the modulation part of the ḡaṣid. The alteration sign in

the following transcriptions is a suggested character by Iranian musician Ali Naqi Vaziri (1886-1979). It shows the lower microtones of Persian classical music and is called *koron*.



Figure 39: The main notes of *gaṣid* after modulation. The two notes with the *koron* sign are microtones that need to be sung lower than the standard pitch indicated. The degree to which the note is lowered depends on the particular *lahn* and also the performer.



Figure 40: Transcription of the melody after the modulation on the staff.

Translation of the poem:

motaḥazzeban bedamāe mote 'afferan
It is full of blood and sand

fel gā 'e beyne ġavāme 'e va avāselu
He is surrounded by wolves [by the army of Yazid]

Despite the challenges of reciting a *gaṣid*, it is to note that it is primarily chanted only by amateur *umlāli*. Ritual participants are anxious to hear the final parts of *rowzeh* by famous *umlāli* and have little patience for *gaṣid*. These final parts, namely *laṭmiyeh* and *howseh*, are considered to be the most popular parts. Therefore, experienced *umlāli* generally avoid performing the *gaṣid*, both because it is a challenging and they usually have many rituals to lead in day and because their audiences are not interested. They prefer to keep their energy and power for *laṭmiyeh* and *howseh*. That said, experienced *umlāli* are likewise supposed to take the fourth part of *rowzeh*, the *ḥadiṭ*. *Ḥadiṭ* is the longest part of the ritual. The strenuous

nature of the *ḥadīṭ* is an additional reason why *umlāli* normally avoid performing the *ḡaṣīd* section.

10.3. *Ḥadīṭ* (Narration)

A *ḥadīṭ* or sometimes called *ravāyat* is simply an anecdote. In it the *umlāli* recount stories from the battle of Karbala. Historically, the term ‘*ḥadīṭ*’ was used in the last year of Prophet Mohammad’s life (Shiloah 1995: 31-33). Engel writes that the word ‘*ḥadīṭ*’ literary means ‘narration’ and denotes a sacred tradition of Shia and Sunni Muslims, particularly the tradition about what the prophet said or has done (Engel 1987:41). *Aḥādīṭ* (the plural form of *ḥadīṭ*) are still used today everywhere in Iran and also in the other Islamic countries as legal guidelines and rules for the everyday life of people. In this regard, Shiloah writes:

“By the last year of Muḥammad’s life it was already a pious custom, when two Muslims met, for one to ask for news (hadith) and the other to respond with a saying of the prophet or an anecdote about him. After the death of Muḥammad this custom was perpetuated, and the term hadith continued to be applied to sayings and stories even those that were no longer new. In the course of time a hadith acquired the force of law. The most authoritative collections became models and rules for living” (Shiloah 1995:32).

There is no singing or any structured body movements in *ḥadīṭ*. This part takes a long time compared to the other sections of *rowzeh* since it is a narration. *Ḥadīṭ* is a transition part between the previous vocal parts and the next part *na ‘ā*, which according to the locals is the saddest part of the ritual. Since a *ḥadīṭ* takes quite a long time and participants should stay energetic and attentive, *mollāyeh* has to recite the sentences dramatically and precisely. This part is usually performed by an experienced *mollāyeh*. She has to be an expert in rhetoric. Dynamic changes, as well as the emphasis on each word, are the crucial features of this part. Shiloah writes about this kind of recitation: “The melodic line of the cantillation proceeds gradually in ascending and descending phrases interspersed by frequent silences marking the appropriate pauses” (Shiloah 1995:38).

The language used in this part is *Khuzestani-Arabic*. It is the Arabic language spoken in the region. In a Persian *Khorramshahri rowzeh*, *ḥadīṭ* is also performed in Persian. The content of this section can be divided into two categories. First, a *mollāyeh* can tell a story from the life of Imam Ḥossein. She might point out the social aspects of his life so that the guests take these aspects into account in their lives. Second, she should describe a sad story from the battle of Karbala. This narration is

usually a story without any conclusion, as might be expected in other story-telling contexts. For instance, she describes the battle scenes, the atmosphere in the battlefield and resembles the conversations between the people at that time. The representation of the battle scenes from the perspective of personalities like Zeynab or Zahra is another possibility that can be integrated into this section. The fascinating point is that Zahra, the mother of Imam Ḥossein, didn't live anymore at that time. Fatimah Zahra died in AD 632. Nevertheless, it is believed by many religious women that her soul was present during the whole battle present to protect and encourage her children.

If the *ḥadiṭ* lasts longer than five minutes, participants may become too calm or somewhat disengaged. To make the atmosphere louder and more energetic, other *umlāli* hit on their *ḡaṣid* booklets to keep the energy level high. They do this as soon as the performing *mollāyeh* pronounces and emphasizes certain words or person's names, statements which are often slower than the rest of the narration but, at the same time louder. Hitting on the *ḡaṣid* is a signal for the participants to make a sound in order to recognize the name stated. They either cry louder or say sentences such as *yā imamā!* (oh, our Imam!), *yā Ḥosseinā!* (oh, our Ḥossein!). The intonation and dynamic changes provide crucial contributions to ensure a great performance of a *ḥadiṭ*.

10.4. *Na'ā* (Elegy)

Na'ā literally means a plaintive voice.⁷¹ Structurally in *the rowzeh*, this section announces the death message of Imam Ḥossein. Participants of *rowzeh* perceive the *na'ā* as the saddest part of the ritual. In *na'ā*, one always hears loud crying and mourning. Even if somebody doesn't understand the Arabic language, this part touches the audience emotionally. Not only does the sad atmosphere and loud crying of the audience make other people cry, but the extremely sad melodies create sad feelings in every person. I was personally deeply touched by the sounds of the *na'ā*, although my knowledge of Arabic is not sufficient to understand the poems.

I spoke with many participants about this part, inquiring about how they perceive this section of the *rowzeh*. I found out that the expression of their deepest emotions that comes from hearing the *na'ā* is not just for the tragic death of Imam Ḥossein. Many women associate their personal life and their own sad experiences or problems with the poems and the sounding of the sadness in the melodies. The *mollāyeh* uses many

⁷¹ Translation by *Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa from 31.07.2017.

dynamic changes when she recites this part. *Na'ā* is a solo part. This means it is performed by a *mollāyeh* and there is no audience response. It is a moment for contemplation of the tragedy and sorrow of Hossein's death and by extension the sorrows endured by women in their own lives. Based on her experience, a *mollāyeh* knows already which words will touch her guests dramatically. These words are, for example, children, women, loneliness, tent, night, tears, etc. Then, she emphasizes these words by using different ornaments or changing her vocal register moving most often in higher tones – a range that is associated with raised emotions and also the keening of people in mourning.

Losing a father, brother or son are important reasons why women cry in this particular part of *rowzeh*. "I have a deep wound in my soul, in the deepest of my heart. I never forget that as if it was yesterday. I will never forgive them". These are the words of *Mollāyeh Māmān Marziyeh*, whose young son died some years ago in a hospital because of the carelessness of the hospital's staff. "They thought he was dead. But he was alive when they put him in the morgue cooler, said the pathologist when it was too late. My son was frozen to death. He became a martyr," said *Mollāyeh Māmān Marziyeh*. She mourns the death of her son when she hears the name of Hossein and when she herself sings the *na'ā*.

Many women place themselves in the position of Imam Hossein or his sister, too. Hossein and Zeynab were both considered to be responsible heads for their family and relatives during the battle. I met many women whose husbands were in prison for various reasons. Many of them were never allowed to work or study due to the decisions of their fathers or husbands. They are now responsible for the maintenance of their children. They have to earn money for the children. Moreover, they have to collect money to pay for their husband's imprisonment so that they can get home from prison earlier. They are responsible for the survival of their children during this time because the man who should provide bread for his family is no longer able to maintain his commitment. These are other reasons that the emotions of women are raised during this section of the *rawzeh*.

Na'ā is a non-metrical part of the event. It has melismatic texture and recitative-like flow. Compared to the *gaṣid* that is always in standard Arabic, a *na'ā* is always performed in the local Arabic language. The following figure shows the melodic line of a *na'ā*. In this sample, you can see the use of many ornaments that a *mollāyeh* applies in her performance.

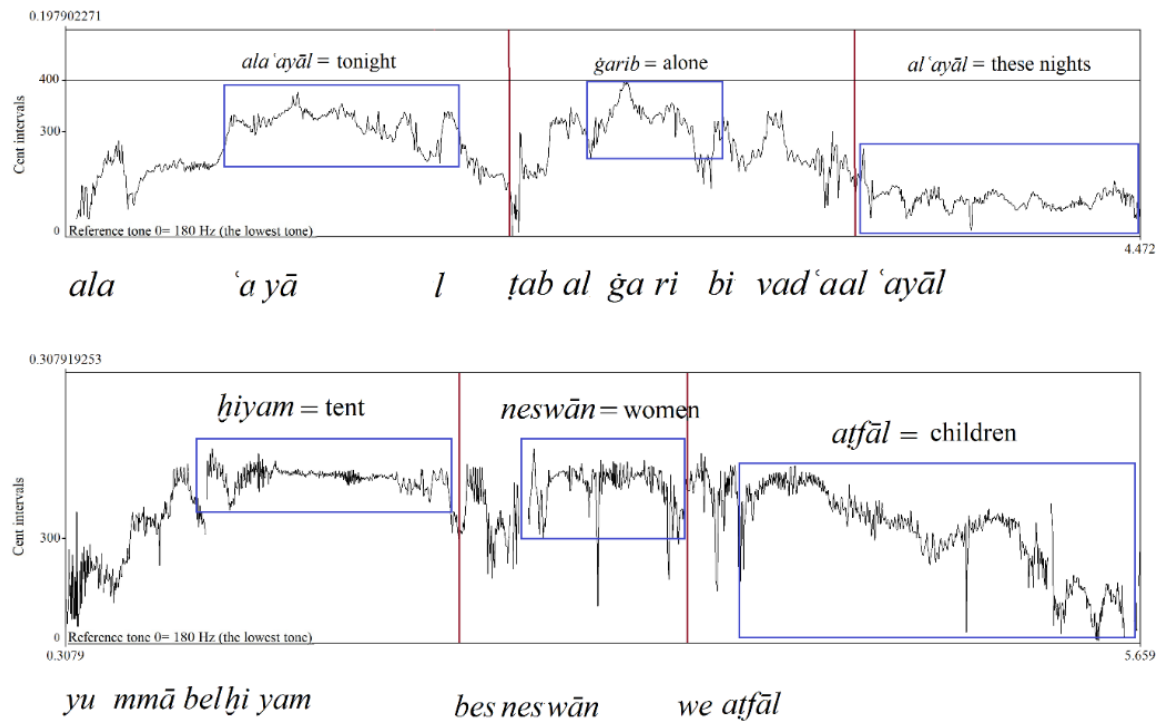


Figure 41: The melody of a *na'ā*. We can see the melismatic structure of this part, as well as the use of many ornaments.

Translation of the poem:

ala 'ayāl ṭab alḡarib ivad'a al'ayāl.
Tonight, is the night of loneliness, the night of saying farewell.

yummā bel ḥiyam bes neswān we atfāl.
Oh mother! Women and children are still in tents.

To date, I have found no information about the origins of the *na'ā*. During the recitation of this part, women have to hide their faces behind their black robes or scarves. Some women hold only their hands in front of their faces to cover their eyes. The following photograph shows a *na'ā* performance from September 2019.



Figure 42: During the emotion performance of *na'ā*, women have to hide their eyes behind their head scarves or robes. (Photo taken by the author).

At the end of this section, all *umlāli* stand up. The following parts of *rowzeh* have to be sung standing up, hence the experts call these parts *rowzeh-ye istādani* which means standing *rowzeh*.

10.5. *Laṭmiyeh* (Self-Beating)

Laṭmiyeh is one of the most popular parts of the *rowzeh*. It is so popular that there may be several *laṭmiyeh* sung by several *umlāli* during one *rowzeh*. The word *laṭmiyeh* comes from the Arabic word *al-laṭam*. It means self-beating. *Laṭmiyeh* is an integral part of Arabic funerals in Khorramshahr, too. The Persian synonym of *laṭmiyeh* is actually *sineh-zani* (self-flagellation). Salim writes about this kind of mourning's tradition:

“Religious ceremonies change over time. Beating on the chest expresses one’s deepest emotions due to a sad event. A *laṭmiyeh* is usually associated with religious songs. It creates a sad atmosphere, especially in the context of *‘āsurā* rituals. *Laṭmiyeh* makes the ceremonies more exciting and livelier” (Salim 2002:21).⁷²

⁷² Translation by the author. For the original text in Arabic see <https://baqiatollah.net/article.php?id=4208>, accessed October 10, 2016.

Aside from the sad content of its poems, *laṭmiyeh* has an energetic and rhythmic sonic atmosphere. For unfamiliar listeners, it may resemble the sounds of joyful celebrations from the region such as *mowludi*, especially, because it employs the similar melodic and rhythmic musical components. That *laṭmiyeh* recalls those more joyous events, sonically, even in the context of the mournful moment in *the rowzeh*, could be the reason for the popularity of the *laṭmiyeh*. Also, it is an exciting moment. Powerful chest- and shoulder-beatings create a thumping which, in a non-instrumental performance, substitutes for the usage of percussions and empowers the rhythmical ambiance of songs, even though they are unpleasant and painful acts. Some women even take off their veils. They make their chests free of any clothes and become bare-chested to make the strikes with their hand palms more effective. You can see afterward bruises on their chests. The more painful the *laṭmiyeh*, the more one can gain a reward (*tawāb*) for the future and for the life after death, assert women who do the self-beating powerfully.

There is a lack of information about the roots of *laṭmiyeh*. Some *umlāli* assume that it originally comes from Iraq. It is not the only genre speculated to have come from Iraq. The same assumption applies to *na'ā* or *howseh* (see the following section), too. In fact, Shia Iraqi women perform also the *laṭmiyeh*. In Iraq, however, *laṭmiyeh* is sung much slower and more tranquilly than its counterpart in Khorramshahr (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 02.10.2017).⁷³ In fact, many women assume that *Khorramshahri rowzeh* is actually a tradition from Iraq. However, the older generation of *umlāli*, among them Um Sa'eid, state that the origin of the entire ritual is to be found in Khorramshahr. Based on their reports, one can be certain that this ritual in Khorramshahr has existed since the beginning of the twentieth century. Due to the lack of evidence, I cannot say if the ritual, as well as its performance practice, has been existed before this point in time.

During the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi from 1925, many *Khorramshahris* migrated to Iraq and mostly to Basra. There are several reasons why they left their city. Among them, good job opportunities that they didn't have in Khorramshahr. Moreover, as Um Sa'eid said, escaping the strict rules regarding women's wearing apparel (during that period wearing the *hiḡāb* in Iran was forbidden) was another reason for their

⁷³ در عراق هم لطمیه خوانده می شود. لطمیه ی عراقی بسیار آرام تر و غم انگیزتر است. در خرمشهر لطمیه همیشه با سرعت های خیلی بالا اجرا می شود.

migration. Locals state, as a cultural result of this migration, they brought their ritual to Iraq. This assumption can still be worked out in further research projects.

During the performance of a *laṭmiyeh*, we can observe structured movements. Older women, *umlāli* and *ḥosseiniyeh* owners move into a standing circle and perform the chest-beating ceremony (figure 43). Shiloah states: the “dancing that came to be an attendant part of the *samā*’ [I note that the same applies to *rowzeh*] was nothing more than physical movements performed collectively by initiates all standing in the same line or circle” (Shiloah 1995:141). While they strike their chests, they move clockwise in the circle. This circle is very close to the place where the group of *umlāli* sit. If there are many participants at a ritual, women form up to three circles inside one another circle. Some participants invite small children to take part in the circle, some also do not allow the children to join (figure 44 and figure 45).



Figure 43: Women mourn around the cradle of Ali-Al-Asghar. (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 44: Regardless of whether they are Arabs or not, all participants are most interested in this part of the ritual. (Photo taken by the author).



Figure 45: Even small children are taken by their mothers so that they can get familiar with this old tradition. (Photo taken by the author).

Participants ask the eldest *mollāyeh* of the ritual to sing their favorite *laṭmiyehs*. Older *umlāli* are especially popular. Therefore, participants prefer to hear their favorite *laṭmiyeh* by a famous and older *mollāyeh* and not by an amateur *mollāyeh*. Many

participants attend particular rituals because of the presence of their favorite *mollāyeh*. What makes a *mollāyeh* very popular is her behavior with respect to the audience, her behavior toward poor people, her singing technique, her clear pronunciation of the poems, as well as her professional rhetoric and demeanor, and of course her vocal timbre.

Sometimes, however, the audience's wish is not fulfilled and an amateur *mollāyeh* performs the famous *laṭmiyeh* and the more famous *mollāyeh* doesn't perform. I have witnessed several times that audience was disappointed when such a thing happened. Although, the amateur *mollāyeh* interpreted the *laṭmiyeh* impeccably, audience still desired to hear it from a well-known *mollāyeh*. One should keep in mind that the *rowzeh* audience is quite strict and punctilious. In this situation, you can imagine how the audience might complain after the ritual that they came here especially because of the famous *mollāyeh*, and then a beginner sang the beautiful *laṭmiyeh*. Either they just talk to each other about it, or they may even complain to the organizer. Some women stay longer and wait until the young preacher leave the *ḥosseiniyeh*. Then, they ask their favorite *mollāyeh* personally, why she didn't sing. Older *umlāli* have a great sense of humor. They respond to their fans with flattering answers. In the end, they invite the complainers to come to another ritual at which they will perform. After their fans are gone, *umlāli* claim, for example, "during the whole ritual, I saw how they were busy with their cellphones! They are not here because of Imam Ḥossein, but rather they want to hear my *laṭmiyeh*!".

Similar to the *nowḥeh* and *gaṣid*, *laṭmiyeh* is also based on call and response form. Generally, *laṭmiyehs* can be divided into three different variants. Depending on each ritual and the number of *umlāli*, the number of each form of *laṭmiyeh* can vary from one to three songs. In the first variant, we have short verses followed by a chorus. The melody of both parts is the same. The second variant consists of long stanzas. Every stanza is followed by a chorus. In this case, the melody used in stanzas differs from the melody of the chorus. By the third variant of *laṭmiyeh*, each verse has to be repeated by the audience. After the completion of each stanza, there is a short phrase that has the same function as a chorus. This phrase is most often the words that form the title of the *laṭmiyeh*. Here, the melody of the chorus, differs from the melody used in the verses.

To have a better understanding of these three kinds of *laṭmiyeh*, I will analyze short segments of each category. Before I go into each variant, I would like to point out

that whatever happens afterwards, almost every *rowzeh* uses a fixed beginning *laṭmiyeh* section. This fixed and short *laṭmiyeh* functions as an introduction into the whole standing segment of the ritual. This introductory *laṭmiyeh* starts with the famous phrase of ‘wā yā Ḥsin, wāmsābā’ which means ‘oh, Ḥossein, oh, your sorrows’. This short phrase is at the same time the chorus. It appears after each verse that has the same length as the chorus. The melody of both parts is the same, like in the first variant of *laṭmiyeh* that is analyzed in the subsequent part.

10.5.1. *Laṭmiyeh* 1st Variant

In the first variant of *laṭmiyeh*, there are several short verses. Each verse is followed by a chorus. The melody, as well as the length of both parts, is always the same. In the following figure we can see the poem of a *laṭmiyeh* that is sung in this form. The top verse, marked with red, is the chorus.

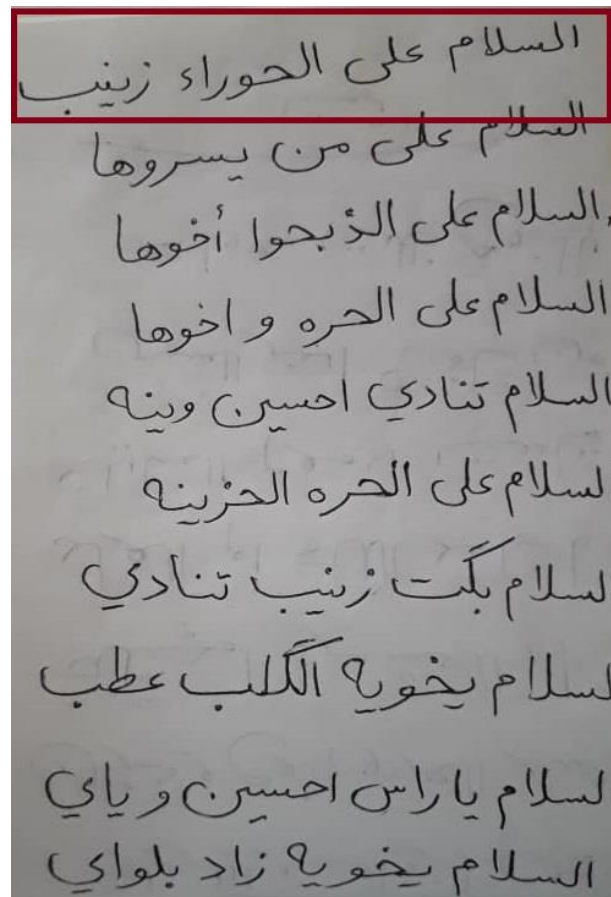


Figure 46: *laṭmiyeh* ‘al-salāmo ‘ala-alḥawrā-e Zeynab’. (Photo taken by Mollāyeh Um Shahin, from 26.01.2020).

The following figure shows the melodic line used in both chorus and other verses:

al--sa-lā-mo 'al-al-ḥaw-rā-e Zey-nab Chorus

al--sa-lā-mo 'a--la men-yas se-ru hā 1st verse

al--sa-lā-mo 'al-al-ḥaw-rā-e Zey-nab Chorus

al--sa-lā-mo 'a--la ḍab-ḥwa a-ḥu-hā 2nd verse

al--sa-lā-mo 'al-al-ḥaw-rā-e Zey-nab Chorus

Figure 47: Chorus and verses in this *laṭmiyeh* employ the same melody.

Translation of the poem:

al-salāmo 'alal ḥawrāe Zeynab,
Greetings to Zeynab!

al-salāmo 'ala men yasseruhā,
Greetings to those people who dragged her as a slave! [sarcastic]

al-salāmo 'ala ḍab ḥwa aḥuhā,
Greetings to those people who slaughtered her brother! [sarcastic]

10.5.2. *Laṭmiyeh* 2nd Variant

For the second category I analyze a famous *laṭmiyeh* by *mollā* Basim al-Karbala'ei, a famous, male reciter from Karbala, Iraq. The *laṭmiyeh* is called 'hāḍa allil' which means 'this night'. During the recent years, this *laṭmiyeh* melody became incredibly popular and is now sung very often in many rituals. In this example, all stanzas marked with yellow have the same melody. However, they might differ only in some dynamics changes or in ornaments. The chorus marked with green has a different melodic structure. Besides these two sections, there is a purple section that appears after each

stanza. This part connects the stanza to the chorus. It has the same melody as the chorus. Further, there is overall a phrase, shown with an arrow, that is a signal for the participants to be aware of the upcoming chorus and to prepare to sing along with the *mollāyeh*.

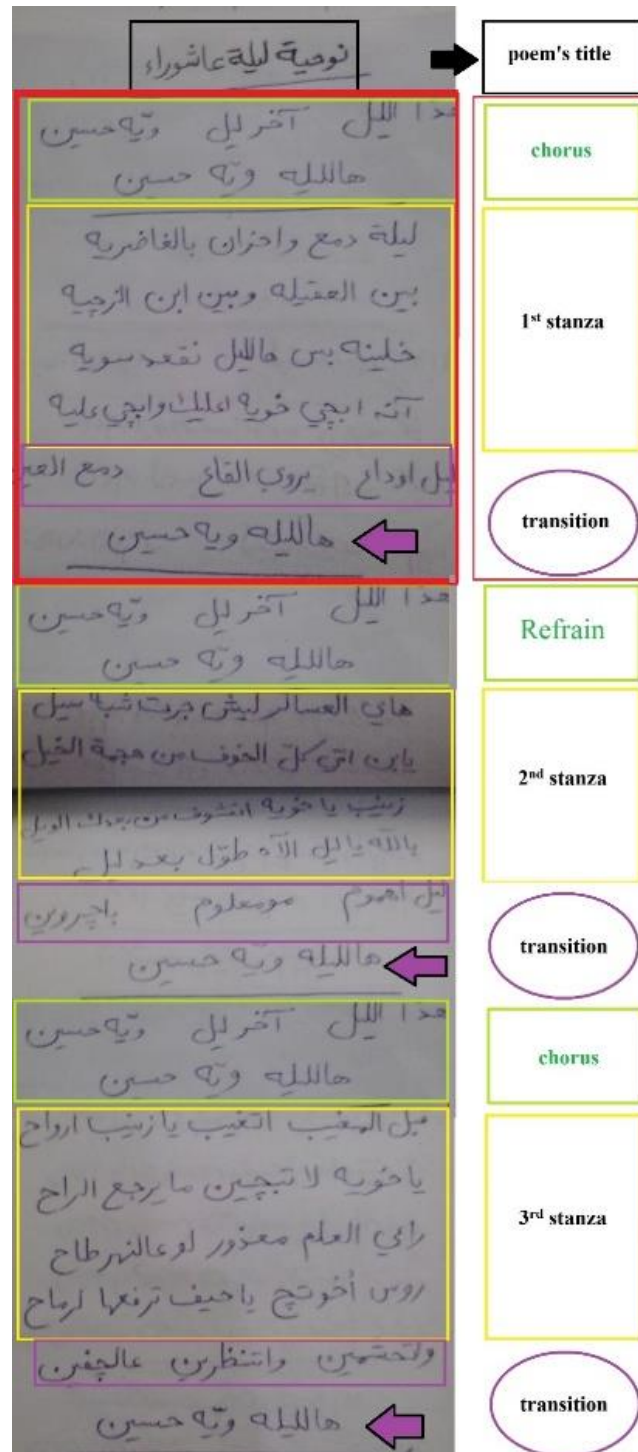


Figure 48: Poem's structure of a *latmiyeh*. The photo is taken from a *ḡasid* booklet, written by Um Shahn.

Figure 49 shows the main melody or the *lahn* of the chorus of this *laṭmiyeh*. We can follow the places marked with * as the proper places for breast-beating.



Figure 49: Chorus of the *laṭmiyeh*.

Translation of the poem:

hāḡa allil āḡer llil (2X)
This night is the last night (2X)

vā yā Ḥsin
Oh, Ḥosseini!

helliyelee vā yā Ḥsin
This night with Ḥosseini

The melody of the chorus differs from the melody of the stanzas. Next figure shows the main melody of a stanza. It also demonstrates the sections with breast-beating.



Figure 50: The main melody of the stanzas in the selected *laṭmiyeh*.

Translation of the poem:

lile dama' va aḥzān bil gāḍeriyeh
It is the night of sadness and tears in Karbala

bien alaḡile o biene bne zečiyeh
Between the Zeynab and the son of Fatimah

ḡelline bes hal lil neg' ed sewiyeh
Let's just sit together tonight

ane ebči ḡuye 'alik vebči 'alayyeh
Then, I cry for you my brother and you cry for me

The following transcription shows the melody of the transition part between the stanza and the chorus.



Figure 51: Transition between the stanza and the chorus.

Translation of the poem:

liele vdā' yerve alḡā' dam 'a al'eyn,
The night of farewell, while tears water the earth,

ḡelliyelee vā yā Ḥsin.
This night with Ḥossein.

Comparing the melody of the pre-chorus with the melody of the chorus, no differences can be recognized between the melodic structure of these two parts. The same melody of the chorus is used again in the pre-chorus part. Using the same melody works like a cue for the participants to be aware of the upcoming part, the chorus.

10.5.3. *Laṭmiyeh* 3rd Variant

In this variant, there are several stanzas that consist each of two verses. Every single verse has to be repeated by the audience. After the completion of each stanza, there is a short phrase that can be regarded as a chorus. Same as the second variant, there are two different melodies for the verses and for the chorus. Figure 52 shows the poem of a *laṭmiyeh* in this form. The verse marked with red is the chorus. I separate the stanzas with yellow lines.

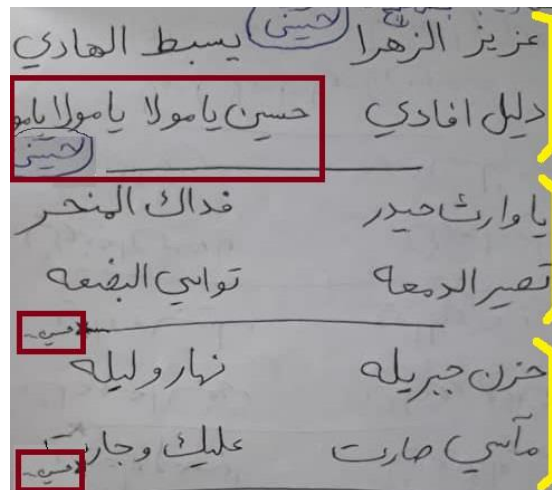


Figure 52: *laṭmiyeh* ‘‘aziz-e Zahrā Ḥossein’’, (Photo taken by Mollāyeh Um Shahin, from 26.01.2020).

In this transcription the melodic structure of both parts is shown. Just like above, I mark the stanzas with yellow, and the chorus is again marked with red.

call

'a---zī-ze Zah-rā Ho-ssein yā-sabṭ al---hā---di Ho-ssein

response

'a---zī-ze Zah-rā Ho-ssein yā-sabṭ al---hā---di Ho-ssein

call

Da---lil af---fā---di Ho--ssein yā sab--ṭ-al--hā--di Ho--ssein

response

Da---lil af---fā---di Ho--ssein yā sab--ṭ-al--hā--di Ho--ssein

chorus

Ho-ssein yā maw--lā yā maw--lā yā maw-- lā Ho-ssein

Figure 53: Melody of the stanzas and the chorus.

Translation of the poem:

'azize Zahrā Ḥossein, yā sabṭ al hādī Ḥossein!
Dearest of Zahra, Ḥossein! The leader of my heart, Ḥossein!

Dalil affādi Ḥossein, ya sabṭ al hādī Ḥossein!
The heir (of the Prophet) Ḥossein, The leader of my heart, Ḥossein!

Ḥossein yā mawlā, yā mawlā, yā mawlā Ḥossein!
Ḥossein the lord, the lord, our lord, our Ḥossein!

The high popularity of this genre may be one reason why there are different variants of the *laṭmiyeh*. *Laṭmiyehs* are listened carefully by the participants, so that after a ritual there might be several discussions about the quality and correctness of the performance of each *mollāyeh*. The extent to which the quality and precision of the intonations and the performance are judged depends on the taste of the participants. They often compare a *laṭmiyeh* with their favorite version of the same *laṭmiyeh* which they heard in a certain ceremony.

The connection between the *laṭmiyeh* and the next part is blurry. One can never count on exactly how many *laṭmiyehs* are going to be performed in a ceremony. The more guests are there, the more *laṭmiyehs* are sung. However, there is always only one *howseh* in each ritual. Both parts are considered as the emotional high point of the *rowzeh*. At a time when the *mollāyeh* starts to praise Imam Ḥossein by saying *yā imamā!* (oh, our Imam!), *yā Ḥusseinā!* (oh, our Ḥossein!), the circle of chest beaters dissolves slowly. Participants already know that the next part is going to be performed.

10.6. Howseh (Soundful Song)

Howseh is the penultimate section of *rowzeh*. It is widely considered the high point of the entire ritual. In contrast to the *laṭmiyeh* section where one hears several songs from the same genre, there is only one *howseh* performed in each ritual. The term *howseh* is derived from the Arabic word "*al-ahzowḡeh*". It means a loud and noisy song, though without instrumental accompaniment. During the performance of a *howseh*, we can hear a lot of interjections. These interjections include cries or praise words like *yā imamā!* (oh, our Imam!), *yā Ḥusseinā!* (oh, our Ḥossein!). If necessary, *umlāli* beat their *ḡaṣid* poem booklets. For these reasons, namely the acoustic conditions, I use the term 'soundful song.'

To practice a *howseh*, one should stand up, as in a *laṭmiyeh*. A *howseh* can be performed on various occasions, such as funerals, religious rituals and political protests (*Mollāyeh* Um Mustafa, personal communication, 25.07.2017).⁷⁴ However, one should use a proper poem for each occasion. In contrast to the *laṭmiyeh*, the circle of chest beaters slowly dissolves as the *howseh* begins. Body movements are performed only during the metrical parts of the *howseh*. While the participants sing the metrical phrases of the chorus, older women hit their foreheads on each beat. This kind of self-beating on the forehead is mostly symbolic and only a few people actually hit their foreheads hard. Those who hit their foreheads powerfully feel dizzy quite quickly. I saw some women who felt weak after this section. However, they may be only one percent of the mourners who practice or attend the *howseh*.

Most commonly, women move their torso forward (figure 54). They do it with each beat while they hit their foreheads. Many participants only beat their chests like a typical *sineh-zani*. In order to amplify the sounds of self-beating, *umlāli* beat the *gaṣid* book with the hand. During the non-metrical parts all women stay at their places and listen to the *mollāyeh* who performs this section. Some of them pray at the same time and weep gently. From a musical point of view, *howseh* is a combination of non-metrical vocal parts, and metrical vocal parts. I explain each property in the subsequent sections.



Figure 54: Beating the forehead is a typical characteristic of the *sineh-zani* in a *howseh* (Khademi 2017:1). The hand positions of the woman in the center of this photo suggest that she is not hitting her chests, but her forehead.

⁷⁴ در خیلی شرایط و نه فقط مراسم مذهبی می توان هوسه اجرا کرد. در خاکسپاری ها و یا تظاهرات هم می شود هوسه های مختلفی را دید.

10.6.1. Non-Metrical Vocal Parts in *howseh*

The following figure presents the typical structure of the poem in a *howseh*. The stanza is always recited non-metrically, while the chorus part is always metrical.

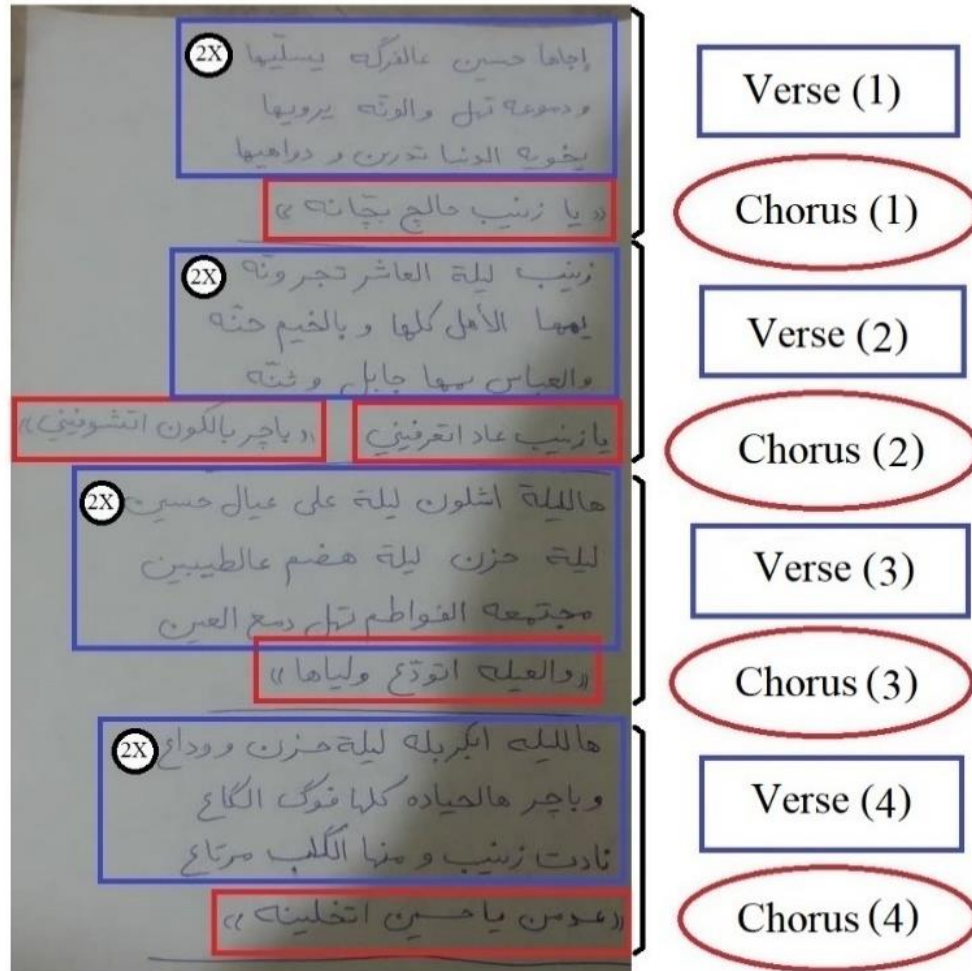


Figure 55: Structure of the poem in a *howseh*. The sections marked in blue are the non-metrical stanzas, and the parts marked in red represent the metrical choruses.

Since each *howseh* has the same poetical form, I analyze only the first segment of this *howseh*. Each segment consists of a verse. Verses should be performed twice (with repetition). Besides, there is a chorus and a cue to the subsequent segment. *Howsehs* differ in the number of stanzas, the content of poems and the melodic line from each other.

Translation of the poem:

eğā Hsien 'alfarge yosalliehe.2x
Hossein came to comfort her [Zeynab, his sister]. 2x

wa dmū 'e tehel wal wenne yerwiehe.
With crying eyes, she sighs heartbreakingly.

yā hūye aldunyā tedrin we dewāhihe.
Dearest Sister, you know the troubles in this world.

bačāni yā Zieneb hāleč
Zeynab! Your pain makes me cry.

The non-metrical parts of *howseh* are only performed by one person. In a religious context, a *mollāyeh* performs this part. She recites each verse that consists of four phrases. This non-metrical part is at the same time non-melodic, too. It means *mollāyeh* recites each verse just on one pitch. Each *mollāyeh* selects a pitch that fits her voice register. This part of *howseh* can be compared to the recitation heard in the *ḥadiṯ*. *Mollāyeh* can choose emphasize some words. She can change the dynamics in her recitation to make the meanings more powerful. All these rhetorical articulations depend on the meaning of the poem. In the performance context, the *mollāyeh* gives her audience various different signals, informing them when and how often they should sing the chorus.

An interesting feature in the recitation of a *howseh* is the temporal aspect. The average length of each phrase is roughly the same. Nevertheless, the duration of breaks between each phrase can differ. Usually, the last break following the last phrase, is significantly shorter than the other pauses between the other phrases. This short pause leads the audience to the upcoming segment and can be regarded as a cue to the chorus. Figure 56 shows both pitch and lengths of each phrase.

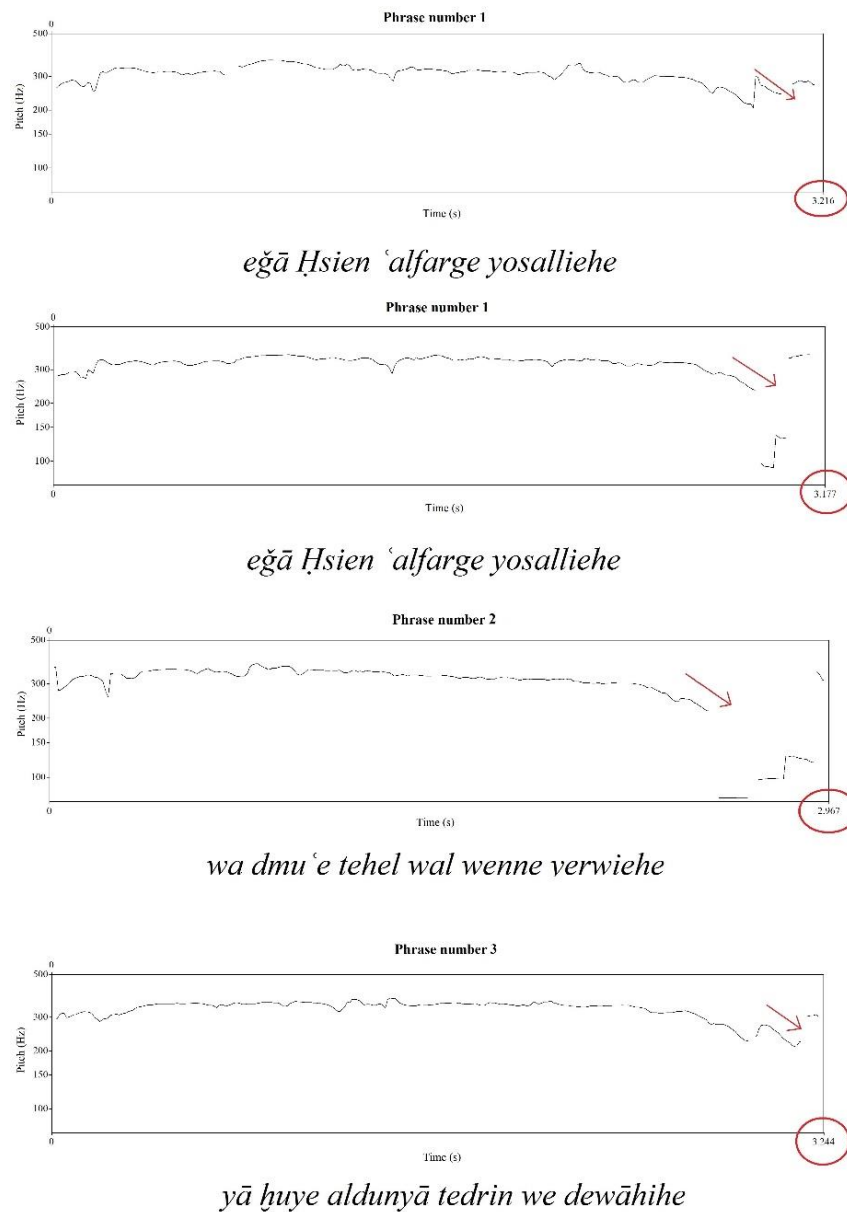


Figure 56: Pitch and lengths of each phrase of the *howseh*.

Based on these analyses, I can summarize that the level of time plays an essential role in the entire *howseh*, especially the transition to the metrical parts which is now going to be explored in more detail.

10.6.2. Metrical Vocal Parts in *howseh*

The chorus in a *howseh* is always metrical. There are fixed places in the melodies at which the audience must regularly count or clap. This timed phrase is also a melodic phrase. The melody of this part is built only with two tones. *Mollāyeh* sings this phrase

at first as a solo. Then, the audience repeats the phrase. People normally repeat the same phrase four times. The next figure shows the parts emphasized by *mollāyeh* during her performance. In these parts (shown with *) participants have to perform the self-beating tradition. While the self-beating occurs in with regularly timed beats, the emphasis the *mollāyeh* places on certain words confirms this beating tempo.



Figure 57: Melodical chorus of the *howseh*.

While the participants sing the chorus, *mollāyeh* and her other colleagues sing along, too. They sing either the whole phrase or just a few words of that phrase. As long as the solo *mollāyeh* sings, other *umlāli* and participants are supposed to continue singing with her. As soon as the *mollāyeh* interrupts her singing, all other women have to stop. This interruption of *mollāyeh* mostly happens with a non-musical sentence such as *yā Ḥossein, yā Ḥossein*, which means oh, our Ḥossein.

10.7. *Do'ā* (Prayers Chant)

Do'ā is the last part of *rowzeh* where the participants say prayers, and then leave the ceremony. Literally, the word *do'ā* means invocation. It is always a non-metric song. In many *rowzehs* that I visited, Maman Zohreh was the person who performed the *do'ā*, almost every time. Maman Zohreh is not a *mollāyeh*. Instead, she had attended several Qur'an recitation classes in Khorramshahr. Reciting the Qur'an plays an important role in the world of Islam. Many pious Sunni and Shia Muslim people around the world participate in recitation courses. Attending the Qur'an courses in Khorramshahr can be regarded as a leisure activity for many women between the age of 18 till 40 and children. It should be mentioned that the Iranian Qur'an courses are held separately for men and women. Due to the opinion of many Qur'an students in Khorramshahr whom I encountered, "attending a Qur'an class is a hobby. One can meet one's colleagues and extend one's social life. This is especially true for women. Attendance at such classes also supports one's spiritual life and gives chances to live in

Paradise after death” (from informal interviews with Qur’an students in Khorramshahr, September 2019).

Qur’an courses in Khorramshahr and other Iranian cities are under the control of the state. Owners have to get permission from the state to be able to run their classes. Teaching methods are regulated by the state. Teachers have to complete their long-term education under the supervision of highly placed theocratic persons in Khorramshahr, Ahwaz (the capital city of Khuzestan), and Ghom. The teaching material used in recitation courses is also provided by the government. In contrast to *mollāyehs* who learned their profession by other *mollāyehs*, women who attend the Qur’an classes have a different approach to religious songs. In contrast to learning *rowzeh* in the performance context or in a course, instructors in a Qur’an lesson use numerous definitions and terms from the Persian or Arabic art music during their teaching. Nonetheless, the focus is on the right interpretation of the melodies and not on the musical terms. Students are not expected to memorize the names of the different musical modes they use. They learn these melodic phrases through successive repetitions. All learning in these classes is based on an imitation method.

Māmān Zohreh speaks about the most commonly used melodic contours in a *do’ā* that she already mastered in recitation courses. She says, “you can chant the *do’ā* in different *maḡāmāt* [different musical modes]. If you attend a Qur’an course, they will teach you all possible styles of recitation. For example, we can perform the *do’ā* prayers in *sabā*, *bayāt*, *dašti*, *erāḡ*, *heḡāz*, *aḡam*, *nahāvand*, *rāst*, and *moḡāleḡ*” (Māmān Zohreh, personal communication, 13.04.2017).⁷⁵ These terms which Māmān Zohreh referred to, come from the repertoire of Persian classical music, known as *radif*:

“Persian classical music is represented by a corpus of amorphous pieces that are subject to extemporized renditions. They adhere to a modal principle that is defined by a set of pitches (*maqām*) and a certain melodic contour (*māyeh*). The pieces are collectively known as the *radif* (‘row’, ‘line-up’)” (Blum & Farhat 2001:).⁷⁶

The selected *do’ā* in this work is one of the most famous praying chants in Iran. Almost every day, Iranian national radio and television broadcasts this chant. Children in schools are also supposed to learn this famous *do’ā* and sing it in the school events during the month of Muḡarram. Figure 58 shows the melodic line of our selected *do’ā*.

⁷⁵ دعاهاى مختلف را مى شود در مقام هاى مختلف قرائت كرد. اگر در اين كلاس ها ثبت نام كنى، همه ى مقام ها را به تو ياد خواهند داد، مثلاً صبا، بيات، دشتى، عراق، حجاز، عجم، نهاوند، راست و يا مخالف.

⁷⁶ <https://www-1oxfordmusiconline-1com-10000089808a6.han.kug.ac.at/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013895>, accessed January 9, 2020.

This *do'ā* consists only of one phrase which comes from the Quranic Sura 'al-Naml' (the ant):



Figure 58: Melodic line of a *do'ā*.

Translation of the text:

amman yoğibo almođtara eđā do 'ā va yakšefo alssu,
Are these idols who you pray to better than the only God who hears and fulfills your needs?

During performing a *do'ā* hosts serve again tea and snacks. It is very common that some guests donate something after a ritual for a variety of reasons. It can either be for the forgiveness of the souls of their deceased, for the improvement of the sick relatives or for the fulfillment of their own wishes. Usually they give the ritual organizer some money. Some of them share the reason for this donation with them, too, said one ritual organizers. The organizer can decide how to spend the money. Mostly, they save that money for upcoming rituals. It is also common for donors to tell the organizer what they exactly should do with the money. For example, they give her the order that she should buy new candles or new black fabrics for her *hosseiniyeh*.

After the *do'ā* has been recited, the oldest *mollāyeh* usually asks the *rowzeh* participants to pray for the forgiveness of the dead souls. The organizers and her friends serve snacks. And, thus, concludes the *rowzeh* ceremony. Usually, after the end of this part, I had to hurry up and bring the empty cups of tea back into the kitchen. At the same time, this time was always a good opportunity for me and for the *umlāli* to ask them questions and make interviews. Women leave the *hosseiniyeh* one by one. Some have to hurry to take part in another ceremony. Some of them stay a bit longer and talk to each other. *Umlāli* take off their veils and drink tea. Together they all laugh out loud and talk about different things. This atmosphere is by no means comparable to the mood during the ritual. You can't believe that these are the same women who sang sad chants, cried, screamed and beat themselves.

“Before visiting the *hosseiniyeh* of Um Seyed Karim, I went to the fish market. The market was full of Iraqis. I wanted to buy only two Ilish fishes. The whole market was empty! They bought everything. Only some small fishes were there” says *Mollāyeh* Māmān Marziyeh. “It is nothing compared to the *safā* market! You don’t believe how much they now demand for a kilo of tomatoes! If you ask the sellers if they are Muslims [Author’s note: it means if they are serious with these high prices], they will tell you that they can no longer pay their monthly rents. God is the witness above everything”, answers *Mollāyeh* Um Sadegh. Um Shahin continues: “It is even worst in Khuzestan. My children in Kashan don’t claim so much. They [the government] don’t care at all how many martyrs were from here to save the whole country. They have forgotten us all. The only thing they want from us is petroleum. We are sitting on the oil source and that is how our life looks. Our streets. Our hospitals. We even don’t have clean drinking water”. “I don’t know. May Imam Ḥossein bless us” says Um Sadegh. All other confirm her by saying “*inṣā-allāh*”.

Someone rings the bell. I open the door. Taxis are waiting of the *umlāli*. They wear their headscarves and *'abāyā*. They say goodbye and wish each other goodnight. They leave the *hosseiniyeh* one by one. It is now midnight. Shirin and I try to vacuum the entire area of the *hosseiniyeh* as quickly as possible. We are all very tired. Tomorrow is another day, another event in this busy ritual season. Everything has to be prepared and made ready for the next *rowzeh*.

Epilogue

It is a pleasant summer day in Austria. Writing this epilogue, I hear the beautiful song of a nightingale somewhere in the trees above me. Shirin writes me a message via WhatsApp. She does that almost every day. If she doesn't write me, I'll write to her. She asks, when I will visit her again. I tell her that my project is now finished. She is happy and suggests that I should use a black binding and cover for the thesis. After all, the work is about a mourning ritual. I smile and think seriously which color could be the right color!

If I speak again to all those women with whom I made interviews and ask them about the reason for their participation in *rowzeh*, their answer would be the same as before. "We are only because of God and Imam Houssein here". However, after spending four years of my life researching about this topic, I have discovered deeper meanings of being a part of an Islamic ritual. No matter whether one is religious or atheist, old or young, Persian, Arab, or any other ethnicity, countless Iranian women suffer injustices and inequality. Misogynistic divorce laws, polygyny, lack of moral freedom and self-determination are just a few examples of the problems that Iranian women have to deal with. Some women become feminists, social and political activists, and encourage other women to defend themselves and others against injustice. Some do this battle silently, hence I call them silent heroines.

Among the group of *Khorramshahri* women who put in so much effort to organize Islamic rituals, religion has more than one role in their lives. In addition to structuring society and gender relations, organizing their personal and family lives, regulating how they move through the world in every way, it also functions as 'appropriate clothing' for in that it allows them to achieve other goals in a publically sanctioned, safe way. Participating in religious rituals such as *rowzeh* creates safe spaces to enjoy a little more freedom in a closed society, to create internal public spaces in which they can exercise power and develop their own agendas. It has to be said that the men in the families of women who organize *rowzeh* or those whose wives are *umlāli*, actually accrue power and status, as well as financial gain to themselves because of the fame of their wives, albeit in subtle ways.

As I started to investigate this topic, I received many negative reactions from different people, especially from Iranians who identify themselves as 'pure Persians', both in and outside the country. Besides the university colleagues and teachers to whom

I presented my topic, the only group that was supportive and encouraging about my pursuing this topic was the group of *Khorramshahri* women with whom I worked. Many people in Iran asked me, why I would investigate such a ritual practiced by strictly religious women. The comments that bothered me most were those with implied essentialist bias in them: “why do you research an ‘Arab’ tradition? You are a ‘Persian’ woman. You should investigate your own ‘Persian’ culture. The whole world associates ‘Persians’ with ‘Arabs’! You should change your topic and investigate a pure ‘Persian’ ritual. The world should know that we are not ‘Arabs’”.

These sentences were like strong knife stabs into my heart. I sincerely hope that if people with those kinds of prejudices were to read my thesis, they would look at Iran, the Iranian-Arab minority, and religious rituals from a different perspective. As an Iranian Arab woman, I want to state that there is no Iran without its different ethnicities and their cultural traditions. Although the rulers promote several select tribes and make profoundly political use of religion to achieve economic and culture-controlling goals of dominance, no human should be judged regarding her or his ethnicity, language, or religious beliefs.

Register of Illustrations

Figure 1: Unemployment rate of Iran (Plecher 2020). “This statistic shows the unemployment rate of Iran from 1999 to 2019. In 2019, Iran’s unemployment rate was estimated to amount to 11.99 percent of the total labor force”.....	7
Figure 2: Typical setting of a <i>rowzeh</i> in Khorramshahr city. The group of <i>umlāli</i> sits habitually on a corner of the room. All people sit cross-legged on the floor, except those who suffer knee diseases and cannot sit cross-legged. Under the green cloth is the representation of the cradle of Ali Asghar, the six-month-old child of Imam Ḥossein. (Photo taken by the author).....	15
Figure 3: Khorramshahr Central Mosque. (Photo taken by the author).	21
Figure 4: Imam Ḥossein Shrine (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).....	21
Figure 5: <i>Beynol ḥarameyn</i> (between the shrines) is a street that connects the shrines of Imam Ḥossein and his cousin. This street, which consists of souvenir shops from both sides, is a traveler attraction in Karbala (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).....	22
Figure 6: Several symbols from the Karbala battle. These symbols can also be found in various <i>rowzeh</i> rituals. These can either be distributed as objects in the room, or in posters or cloths...	25
Figure 7: Performance of a <i>ta’ziyeh</i> . © 2002 by Iranian Dramatic Art Center.	27
Figure 8: Arab villages in Iran. One can see the geographic location of the city of Khorramshahr as a city with a majority of the Arabic-speaking people with red mark.	30
Figure 9: Geographical location of Khorramshahr shows the location of this border city on the map of Iran.	31
Figure 10: Multilingual villages in Iran. Khorramshahr is again marked with red.	32
Figure 11: ‘Welcome to Khorramshahr, Population: 36 Millions’. This number shows the total population of Iran by the Islamic Revolution. Compare it with the current population of the Islamic Republic of Iran about which is stated to be 82,651,386 (as of Wednesday, April 17, 2019, based on the latest United Nations estimates).	37
Figure 12: Women watch the group of male performers on the street, while they perform the chest-beating tradition (<i>sineh-zani</i>). (Photo taken by the author).	40
Figure 13: A group of male performers, known as <i>buṣehri-hāye</i> Khorramshahron, plays drums and cymbals on Fakhr-e Razi Street in Khorramshahr. (Photo taken by the author).	40
Figure 14: Opening of a <i>rowzeh</i> . A ritual organizer is welcoming her guests with tea. Guests are called in Arabic <i>mostame’in</i> (listeners). (Photo taken by the author).....	42
Figure 15: <i>leffeh</i> , rolled flatbread filled up with cheese, cucumber and fresh herbs like basil, mint and chives. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).	42
Figure 16: Different types of sweets that will to be divided into smaller portions in plastic bags. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).....	43
Figure 17: Women sit for hours and prepare these snacks. They usually divide the snacks in plastic bags. Usually 2 to 4 women are involved in this activity. The atmosphere during the division is usually a happy atmosphere. Women like to laugh and talk about everyday life and the latest news about their family or friends. The social issues naturally depend on the current situation in the country. During my last field research trip, talking about the nuclear sanctions and increased prices was the topic that was most talked about. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).	43
Figure 18: Portions of fruit and small snacks for the end of a <i>rowzeh</i> ceremony. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).....	43
Figure 19: There is also a possibility for the guests to take their snacks with them. Many of them want to take these foods for their family members who could not attend the ritual for some	

reasons, for example for their husbands or their sick parents or children (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).....	44
Figure 20: Brewed saffron is the base for Safran tea, the most expensive and popular sort of tea served at <i>rowzeh</i> rituals. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).	44
Figure 21: People usually use one the above symbols in a <i>rowzeh</i> . These elements represent: 1. Roghayyeh bint Houssein mourning for her brother Ali Asghar. Roghayyeh and Ali Asghar are the children of Imam Houssein. The six-month-old Ali Asghar who was killed by an arrow during the battle. The three-years-old Roghayyeh was dragged as slave to Damascus, after the battle. 2. Cradle of Ali Asghar. 3. The dead body of Imam Houssein. 4. Hands of Abbas ibn Ali, the half-brother of Houssein. 5. The helmet of Imam Houssein, and 6. Lanterns. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).	49
Figure 22: In the above cloth you can see the name of a <i>hosseiniyeh</i> ' <i>hosseiniyeh hazrat-e roḡayyeh</i> '. This <i>hosseiniyeh</i> is founded in 1989. It is exactly one year after the end of the war. The owner of this <i>hosseiniyeh</i> had to leave this house during the war to the Ghom city. After her return to Khorramshahr, she realized that her house was a military barrack used by the Iraqi army and for sometimes by the Iranian soldiers. On the walls of her house there are numerous holes and damages by mortar shells. The owner of this <i>hosseiniyeh</i> was my grandmother, <i>ḥaḡiyeh</i> Fatemeh Bahrani. Today, my cousin Shirin is the owner of the <i>hosseiniyeh</i> and organizes several Islamic rituals such as <i>rowzeh</i> . (Photo taken by the author).	50
Figure 23: Ritual participants are waiting for the opening of a <i>rowzeh</i> ceremony. (Photo taken by the author).	51
Figure 24: Written across the top cloth: "welcome to the mourning ritual of Imam Houssein". On the bottom is written "God bless Houssein, the martyr". (Photo taken by the author).	51
Figure 25: The high chair of the ritual leaders, as well as the cradle of Ali-Asghar. On the top cloth above the chair is written: Oh, <i>sāḥeb al-zamān!</i> (the Twelfth Imam), we swear you that God bless us. (Photo taken by the author).	51
Figure 26: Ritual attendants, also children, gather around the ritual leaders in a particular kind of <i>rowzeh</i> , a <i>šāme ḡaribān rowzeh</i> . This <i>rowzeh</i> takes place at the evening of the ' <i>āšūrā</i> ' each year. This ritual commemorates the slavery of the survivors of the battle. Lighting candles is an integral part of this ritual. (Photo taken by the author).	52
Figure 27: "And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that which their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire, or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed" (Qur'an, surah al-nour: Verse 31).	56
Figure 28: Hierarchy of the involved persons in a <i>rowzeh</i> who receive the food.	71
Figure 29: Preparing <i>šolleh-zard</i> , a sweet saffron rice pudding. (Photo taken by the ritual organizer Shirin Attarzadeh).	72
Figure 30: quantitative results from the study by Sosis show the differences between participating in religious and secular communes.	79
Figure 31: Melodic phrase of the chorus in the <i>nowḥeh</i> ' <i>ḥāharam</i> '.	83
Figure 32: The entire <i>nowḥeh</i> , <i>ḥāharam</i> , is mainly based on these notes. Each melody line ends up on the circled note.	84

Figure 33: Schematic representation of the <i>nowḥeh</i> . In many vocal practices from Khorramshahr poems play a crucial role in determining the musical structure.	84
Figure 34: Two <i>umlāli</i> hit their poem booklets in a <i>nowḥeh</i> to amplify the sounds of <i>sineh-zani</i> whereas a <i>mollāyeh</i> sings the <i>nowḥeh</i> . (Photo taken by the author).	85
Figure 35: Notation of the chorus's melody on five-line system with the beating points at the beginning of each bar.	86
Figure 36: Representation of the melismatic structure and ornaments of a <i>ḡaṣid</i>	90
Figure 37: The entire <i>ḡaṣid</i> is mainly based on these five notes. Each phrase ends up with the note circled.	90
Figure 38: Transcription of the abstracted melody on the staff.	90
Figure 39: The main notes of <i>ḡaṣid</i> after modulation. The two notes with the <i>koron</i> sign are microtones that need to be sung lower than the standard pitch indicated. The degree to which the note is lowered depends on the particular <i>lahn</i> and also the performer.	91
Figure 40: Transcription of the melody after the modulation on the staff.	91
Figure 41: The melody of a <i>na'ā</i> . We can see the melismatic structure of this part, as well as the use of many ornaments.	95
Figure 42: During the emotion performance of <i>na'ā</i> , women have to hide their eyes behind their head scarves or robes. (Photo taken by the author).	96
Figure 43: Women mourn around the cradle of Ali-Al-Asghar. (Photo taken by the author). ...	98
Figure 44: Regardless of whether they are Arabs or not, all participants are most interested in this part of the ritual. (Photo taken by the author).	99
Figure 45: Even small children are taken by their mothers so that they can get familiar with this old tradition. (Photo taken by the author).	99
Figure 46: <i>laṭmiyeh</i> ' <i>al-salāmo 'ala-alḥawrā-e Zeynab</i> '. (Photo taken by <i>Mollāyeh</i> Um Shahin, from 26.01.2020).	101
Figure 47: Chorus and verses in this <i>laṭmiyeh</i> employ the same melody.	102
Figure 48: Poem's structure of a <i>laṭmiyeh</i> . The photo is taken from a <i>ḡaṣid</i> booklet, written by Um Shahin.	103
Figure 49: Chorus of the <i>laṭmiyeh</i>	104
Figure 50: The main melody of the stanzas in the selected <i>laṭmiyeh</i>	104
Figure 51: Transition between the stanza and the chorus.	105
Figure 52: <i>laṭmiyeh</i> ' <i>aziz-e Zahrā Hossein</i> ', (Photo taken by <i>Mollāyeh</i> Um Shahin, from 26.01.2020).	106
Figure 53: Melody of the stanzas and the chorus.	106
Figure 54: Beating the forehead is a typical characteristic of the <i>sineh-zani</i> in a <i>howseh</i> (Khademi 2017:1). The hand positions of the woman in the center of this photo suggest that she is not hitting her chests, but her forehead.	108
Figure 55: Structure of the poem in a <i>howseh</i> . The sections marked in blue are the non-metrical stanzas, and the parts marked in red represent the metrical choruses.	109
Figure 56: Pitch and lengths of each phrase of the <i>howseh</i>	111
Figure 57: Melodical chorus of the <i>howseh</i>	112
Figure 58: Melodic line of a <i>do'ā</i>	114

Bibliography

ABOU ZAHAB, Mariam

2007 "The Politicization of the Shia Community in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s", MONSUTTI, Alessandro/ NAEF, Silvia/ SABAHI, Farian (Eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*. Vol. 2, Bern: Peter Lang, 97-112.

AGHAIE, Kamran Scot

2005 *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

AKHAVI, Shahrough

1983 "The ideology and praxis of Shiasm in the Iranian revolution", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25.2, 195-221.

AXWORTHY, Michael

2008 *Empire of the Mind: A History of Iran*. New York: Basic Books.

BAUTISTA, Julius

2015 "The localization of Roman Catholicism: Radical transcendence and social empathy in a Philippine town", *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*, 96-108.

BIGLIARDI, Stefano

2014 "Above analysis and amazement: some contemporary Muslim characterizations of 'miracle' and their interpretation", *Sophia* 53.1, 113-129.

BINESH, Mohammad-Taghi

2003 *Tārīḥ-e moḥtasar-e musīḡi-e Irān*, Tehran: havāye tāzeh.

BLUM, Stephen/ FARHAT, Hormoz

2001 "Iran", *Grove Music Online*, Oxford University Press,
<https://www-1oxfordmusiconline-1com-10000089808a6.han.kug.ac.at/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000013895>,
accessed January 9, 2020.

BROCKELMANN, Carl/ FISCHER, August/ TAESCHNER, Franz

1935 "Die Transliteration der arabischen Schrift in ihrer Anwendung auf die Hauptliteratursprachen der islamischen Welt", Denkschrift dem 19. Internationalen Orientalistenkongreß in Rom. Leipzig: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft.

CHELKOWSKI, Peter J.

1980 "Iran: Mourning becomes revolution", *Asia* 3, 30-37.

2005 "Iconography of the Women of Karbala", Kamran Scot Aghaie (Ed.), *The Women of Karbala*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 119-138.

2005 "Time out of memory: Taziyeh, the total drama", *TDR/The Drama Review*, Vol. 49, 15-27.

DORRAJ, Manochehr

1997 "Symbolic and utilitarian political value of a tradition: martyrdom in the Iranian political culture", *The Review of Politics* 59.3, 489-522.

Eastbound Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica

2018 “Iran-Iraq War”, *Britannica Academic, Encyclopedia Britannica*, academic-1eb-1com-1000048o7026d.han.kug.ac.at/levels/collegiate/article/Iran-Iraq-War/42742, accessed April 19, 2019.

Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

2020 “Googoosh”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Googoosh>, accessed May 1, 2019.

2017 “Qājār dynasty”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Qajar-dynasty>, accessed March 9, 2020.

2013 “Khorramshahr”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Khorramshahr>, accessed April 18, 2019.

ENGEL, Hans

1987 *Die Stellung des Musikers im arabisch islamischen Raum. [Mit Abb.]*. Vol. 49., Bonn: Verlag für systematische Musikwissenschaft.

GAFFARY, Farrokh

1984 “Evolution of rituals and theater in Iran”, *Iranian Studies* 17.4, 361-389.

GREENFIELD, James

1904 “Die Verfassung des persischen Staates: Kalifat und Imamat, das schiitische Persien in seinen Beziehungen zum Kalifat”, *Blätter für vergleichende Rechtswissenschaft und Volkswirtschaftslehre* Nr. 1/3, 70.

GRUBER, Christiane

2012 “The Martyrs’ Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran”, *Visual Anthropology*, 25 (1-2), 68-97.

2016 “Nazr Necessities: Votive Practices and Objects in Iranian Muḥarram Ceremonies”, Ittai Weinryb (Ed.), *Ex Voto: Votive Giving across Cultures*, Chicago: Bard Graduate Center, 246-275.

GUESSOUM, Nidhal

2011 *Islam’s quantum question: Reconciling Muslim tradition and modern science*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

HAJJI PIRZADEH

1963 *Safarnama-yi Hajji Pirzadeh, 1*. Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Asātir.

HASSANZADEH, Alireza/ KARIMI, Somayeh

2018 “Ritual of Holy Healing in Northern Iran: Rebellion Rituals of Spiritual Power”, *Anthropologist* 33 (1-3), 80-90.

HICKMANN, Hans

1970 „Die Musik des Arabisch-Islamischen Bereichs“, Bertold Spuler (Ed.), *Handbuch der Orientalistik. 1. Abteilung: Der Nahe und der Mittlere Osten. Ergänzungsband 4: Orientalische Musik*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1-134.

HOLLAND, Tom

2011 *Persian Fire: The First World Empire, Battle for the West*. London: Hachette.

KALINOCK, Sabine

2003 "Between party and devotion: Mowludi of Tehran women", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 12.2, 173-187.

2004 "Touching a sensitive topic: research on Shiite rituals of women in Tehran", *Iranian Studies* 37.4, 665-674.

KARSH, Efraim

2014 *The Iran–Iraq War 1980–1988*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.

KASI, Mirza Djevad Khan

1918 „Das Kalifat nach Islamischem Staatsrecht. Eine Historisch-Dogmatische Studie“, *Die Welt des Islams*, Nr. 5/4, 189–263.

KATZ, Marion Holmes

2008 "Women's Mawlid Performances in Sanaa and the Construction of Popular Islam", *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40.3, 467-484.

KAZMI, Nadeem

2008 *Why self-flagellation matters for Shias*,

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/aug/28/religion.islam>, accessed February 12, 2020.

KHADEMI, Hedayatollah

2017 "ġedmat-e 200 sāl-e tazie ħāni dar Ĥuzestān", *ĥāneh-e mellat*. <http://www.icana.ir/Fa/News-Print/350023>, accessed November 7, 2017.

LAINER-VOS, Dan/ PARIGI, Paolo

2014 "Miracle making and the preservation of charisma", *Social Science History* 38.3-4, 455-481.

MARSHALL, Douglas A.

2002 "Behavior, belonging, and belief: A theory of ritual practice", *Sociological Theory* 20.3, 360-380.

MASSOUDIEH, Mohammad-Taghi

2003 "Rowzehkhāni and its Relation to the Radif of Persian Traditional Music", *Mahoor Music Quarterly* 18, 11-25.

MATRAS, Yaron/ SHABIBI, Maryam

2007 "Grammatical borrowing in Khuzistani Arabic", Yaron Matras and Jeanette Sakel (Ed.), *Grammatical Borrowing in Cross-Linguistic Perspective*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 137-151.

Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, Islamic Republic of Iran

2020 <https://www.mc.th.ir/english>, accessed June 14, 2020.

MONSUTTI, Alessandro

2007 "Image of the Self, Image of the Other: Social Organization and the Role of 'Ashura' among the Hazaras of Quetta (Pakistan)", MONSUTTI, Alessandro/ NAEF,

Silvia/ SABAHI, Farian (Eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*. Vol. 2, Bern: Peter Lang, 173-191.

MORATILLA, Noel Christian A.

2018 “Exotifying Bodies: Self-Flagellation, Abjection, and Social Memory”, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 10.3, 149-157.

MOSTOFI, Khosrow/ AVERY, Peter William

2019 “Iran”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*,
<https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran/Religion>, accessed June 4, 2020.

NAEF, Silvia/ SABAHI, Farian

2007 “The Other Shiites: An Introduction”, MONSUTTI, Alessandro/ NAEF, Silvia/ SABAHI, Farian (Eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*. Vol. 2, Bern: Peter Lang, 7-15.

NAKASH, Yitzhak

2007 “The Muharram Rituals and the Cult of the Saints among Iraqi Shiites”, MONSUTTI, Alessandro/ NAEF, Silvia/ SABAHI, Farian (Eds.), *The Other Shiites: From the Mediterranean to Central Asia*. Vol. 2, Bern: Peter Lang, 115-136.

NIKZAT, Babak/ GRUPE, Gerd/ ZIAGOS, Sandra/ EL ZARKA, Dina

2018 “Sprache und Musik der arabischen Minderheit im Südiran”, Ralf Vollman (ed.), *Graz Linguistic Studies*, Vol. 90, Graz: Karl Franzens Universität Graz, 5-32.

OLSEN, Poul Røvsing

2002 *Music in Bahrain: traditional music of the Arabian Gulf*. Aarhus: Universitetsforlag.

PAASI, Anssi

2003 “Region and place: regional identity in question”, *Progress in human geography* 27.4, 475-485.

PELLETIERE, Stephen C.

1992 *The Iran-Iraq war: chaos in a vacuum*. New York: Greenwood Publishing Group.

PLECHER, H.

2020 “Iran: Unemployment rate from 1999 to 2019”, *Statista*,
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/294305/iran-unemployment-rate/>, accessed April 16, 2020.

QA'EMI, Ali

1981 *nağše zanān dar 'āšūrā*. Qom: Shafagh.

QARASU, Maryam.

2008 “Music, Ecstasy and Healing: The Case of Zâr Ritual in Southern Coasts of Iran”, *Mahoor Music Quarterly* 40, 115-141.

RACY, Ali Jihad

2000 "The many faces of improvisation: The Arab Taqāsīm as a musical symbol", *Ethnomusicology*, 302-320.

RICHARD, Francis

1995 "Raphaël du Mans, missionnaire en Perse au XVIIIe s", *Société d'histoire de l'Orient* 9, 26.

RUFFLE, Karen G.

2009 "Who could marry at a time like this? Debating the Mehndi ki Majlis in Hyderabad", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 3, 502-514.

RUUD, Even

2017 "Music, identity, and health", Raymond Macdonald and David J. Hargreaves (ed.), *Handbook of musical identities*, Croydon: Oxford University Press, 589-601.

SALIM, Ali

2002 „al-laṭm“, *mağallabaḡiatallāh* 126, 21.

2020 "ādāt 'āṣurā", *baḡiat allāh*, <https://baqiatollah.net/article.php?id=4208>, accessed November 10, 2016.

SAMVELIAN, Pollet

2018 "Villages arabes", *irancarto*, *Études Cartographiques sur l'Iran et le Monde Iranien*, <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/record.php?q=AR-040535&f=local&t=document&l=fr>, accessed October 23, 2019.

2018 "Villages multilingues", *irancarto*, *Études Cartographiques sur l'Iran et le Monde Iranien*, <http://www.irancarto.cnrs.fr/record.php?q=AR-040506&f=local&t=document&l=fr>, accessed October 23, 2019.

SHABIBI, Maryam

2010 "Khuzestani Arabic: a case of convergence", *Manchester Working Group on Language Contact, migration, diaspora, and hybridity in language*, <http://languagecontact.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/McrLC/casestudies/MS.html>, accessed October 15, 2019.

SHILOAH, Amnon

1995 *Music in the world of Islam: a socio-cultural study*. Guildford: Scholar Press.

SHIRAZI, Faegheh

2005 "The sofreh: comfort and community among women in Iran", *Iranian Studies* 38.2, 293-309.

SOSIS, Richard

2004 "The adaptive value of religious ritual: Rituals promote group cohesion by requiring members to engage in behavior that is too costly to fake", *American scientist* 92.2, 166-172.

TORAB, Azam

1996 "Piety as gendered agency: a study of *jalaseh* ritual discourse in an urban neighbourhood in Iran", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 235-252.

2011 "The politicization of women's religious circles in post-revolutionary Iran", Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin (ed.), *Women, religion and culture in Iran*, Abingdon: Routledge, 143-168.

TOWFIQ, F.

1987 "'ašāyer tribes", *Encyclopaedia Iranica II*, 707-724.

ZOLFAGHARI, Hossein

2010 *One Book Arvand, Khorramshahr*. Khorramshahr: Miad.

Online Sources with Unknown Authors

2015 "*namād-hāye 'āšūrā-yi*", *rasekhoon*, <https://rasekhoon.net/photogallery/show/1112152/های-نماد-عاشورایی/>, accessed March 9, 2020.

2017 "Verse (24:31) - English Translation", *Quranic Arabic Corpus*, <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=24&verse=31>, accessed August 8, 2019.

2018 "Iranian Arabs: Caught Between Arab Nationalism and Regional Sectarian Rivalry", *fanack.com*, <https://fanack.com/iran/population/iranian-arabs/>, accessed September 24, 2018.

2019 "*Irān, ġabl va bad az enġelāb az negāh-e āmār; ānċe bud, ānċe hast*", BBC News Farsi, <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran-features-47192445>, accessed April 18, 2019.

2020 "Iran Population", *worldometers*, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/iran-population/>, accessed April 18, 2019.

2020 "Flag Description", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/320.html>, accessed July 14, 2019.

2020 "Iran", Central Intelligence Agency, the World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>, accessed October 1, 2019.

2020 "Ritual dramatic art of Ta'zīye", *unesco.org*, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ritual-dramatic-art-of-taziye-00377>, accessed June 14, 2020.