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Iterations of lament:

Anachronism and affect in a Shi'i Islamic revival in Turkey

ABSTRACT

Many Alevis in Turkey today view their community's traditions of ritual weeping as anachronistic in the modern world. In this article, I situate such sensibilities within a political context in which Turkish state agencies have vigorously regulated norms of public affect. I describe the efforts of one Alevi group to counter such sensibilities by cultivating a susceptibility to affective excitation in line with Shi'i traditions of lamentation. The group's practices are exemplary of many Islamic revival movements, which aim simultaneously to spread a religious message and to transform the affective conditions in which that message might be received. [*affect, ritual, historical consciousness, Shi'i Islam, Alevi Islam, Turkey*]

In January 2006, I joined a small group of Alevis—members of a Muslim community in Turkey—listening to an emotional account of the virtuous life and tragic death of Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Rituals of lamentation in honor of Husayn are held every year during the first ten days of the Islamic month of Muharram. These ten days mark the time period that Husayn and his small band of followers spent in the desert of Karbala, Iraq, in C.E. 680, culminating in a battle against the tyrant Yazid. Alevis in Turkey share with the global Shi'i Muslim community annual rituals of weeping, which progressively intensify from the first to the tenth day of Muharram, or Ashura, the day on which Husayn was finally slain.¹

The room in which I observed these rituals of lamentation was draped in black cloth, punctuated with a number of signs, one of which read, “Every place is Karbala, every day is Ashura.” The phrase expresses the promise of believers not only to maintain Husayn’s memory in the present day but also to seize on that memory at any and every opportunity. One Alevi participant explained the intent of this statement to me in the following manner: “I often think about Husayn, and not just during Muharram. At any time of the year, I might think about Husayn, and when I do, I begin to cry.”

The scene of weeping and the sentiment expressed in the sign were at once expected and yet strikingly inconsonant with the surrounding socio-historical context. Like many Shi'as around the world, Alevis in Turkey have traditionally revered Husayn and other members of the Prophet's family as models of piety, courage, and leadership, often commemorating their lives and deaths in rituals of lamentation.² From a historical perspective, it is not at all surprising that a group of Alevis would commemorate Husayn's valor through emotional narrations of the Battle of Karbala. Moreover, since the late 1980s, Alevi public intellectuals have written social histories of their community for a mass audience, oftentimes including in these accounts descriptions of Alevi understandings of early Islamic history. The events of Karbala and the figure of Husayn are topics given central importance in such published work. With the recent rise of such communal histories, Alevi narratives of early Islam have acquired a new mode of public inscription, achieving a wider audience than ever before. Given the recent

expansion of the narrative's textual circulation, one might expect an upsurge in the scale and frequency of devotional narrations such as the one I witnessed.

Yet participation in ritual lamentation is relatively low, and there are few organizations in provincial Anatolian towns, such as the one in which I conducted fieldwork, concerned with sponsoring these events.³ When I questioned Alevi who were not participants in devotional commemorations of Husayn's death, I was often told that weeping for Husayn was common one or two generations earlier, when Alevi still lived largely in rural settings, but that it is no longer relevant in the present day. Indeed, many urban Alevi youth view ritual lamentation as anachronistic in the modern age, incongruent with and irrelevant to the social and political contexts of the contemporary world. I should emphasize that this widespread sense of anachronism does not involve a repudiation of the narrative itself—a narrative that is being produced in the form of written texts at a faster pace than ever before; nor is the primary concern centered on a dispute over textual interpretations of the narrative, as has happened in Iran and Lebanon (Aghaie 2004; Rosiny 2001). Rather, the sense that such practices are anachronistic entails skepticism about the ongoing relevance and propriety of the emotions and disciplines that shape traditional acts of narration. In an era that has witnessed not a decline but, rather, the resurgence of Islamic piety throughout the Muslim world, what is one to make of this estrangement of the narrative text from its ritual narration?

In this article, I explore the social and political dimensions of the feeling, pervasive among urban Alevi, that rituals of lamentation are anachronistic in the present day. I first examine some of the ways in which Alevi understand the ritual's incongruence with contemporary contexts, and then I situate this sensibility within a political context dominated by the Turkish state's regulation of public affect. After locating the formation of Alevi sensibilities toward ritual lament within an institutional context, I describe the efforts of one Alevi group to combat such dispositions. The group in question, which organized the ritual mentioned above, refers to itself not as a political organization or a social movement but as a *cemaat* (Arabic, *jamā'a*), that is, as a congregation of pious individuals. Its efforts are directed not toward explicit political ends, such as forming political parties or lobbying for changes in state policies, but, rather, at creating contexts for the cultivation of devotional emotions, including those that are produced in the practice of ritual mourning.

The sentiment related by a participant in the ritual, regarding the importance of crying for Husayn at any time and any place, represents an aspiration rather than a description of the *cemaat*. Despite the stated intent of weeping whenever one is so moved, Muharram provides the only period in which the *cemaat* ritually commemorates the Battle of Karbala. Most individuals committed to the task of

mourning Husayn's death experience considerable difficulties in weeping at other points in the calendar year. I suggest that such difficulties in weeping for moral exemplars in times and places that exceed the formal ritual moment reveal the lasting imprint of state-enforced norms of public sociability.

The emotive challenges faced by the *cemaat* raise certain questions, often elided in the study of ritual affect, concerning the social and institutional processes involved in developing and deepening affective capacities. An interrogation of such processes requires ethnographic attention to the iterability of affect—that is, the possibility of inciting emotive sensibilities across empirically variable contexts in ways that permit their repetition, recognition, and cultivation. Analyses of lamentation practice that center on its social functions (Durkheim 1995; Radcliffe-Brown 1948), its variable cultural and discursive anchors (Abu-Lughod 1993; Feld 1990a), and its potential for either the contestation or consolidation of reigning sociopolitical ideologies (Goluboff 2008; Seremetakis 1991)—studies that otherwise pursue differing, if sometimes overlapping, analytical ends—share a tendency to posit rather than analyze the practices that facilitate the repetition and excitation of affect from one context to another. Work that has, in fact, described processes of “recontextualization” across events focuses on how texts from prior settings are reported, cited, or parodied in acts of lament (Briggs 1992; Wilce 2005). While demonstrating the indexical, interdiscursive connections forged by textual iteration—connections that are crucial elements of the events described here—such work nonetheless presupposes the affective susceptibility of listeners to the lament. By contrast, I explore the often fragile and contingent practices that enable the spatiotemporal extension of affects, and not simply texts, into contexts that currently do not sustain their formal ritual staging. I examine the practices by which the *cemaat* attempts to iterate the passion for Husayn beyond its conventional contextual circumscription. The *cemaat*'s effort to summon the capacity to weep in diverse spaces and at diverse times invites analysis of the ways in which the susceptibility to affective provocation is fostered, as new contexts of performance are engendered.

Examining the *cemaat*'s efforts to extend the spatiotemporal iterations of mourning facilitates an analytical rethinking of the concept of “context” in the anthropology of Islam. Anthropologists have long insisted that analyses of Muslim societies ought to proceed not in terms of scriptural or exegetical texts but in terms of the invocations of such texts within hierarchies of political-economic authority and institutionalized social relationships (e.g., Bowen 1993; Gilsenan 1982; Lambek 1990; Launay 1992).⁴ Such contexts shape not only the meaning of legal and pedagogical texts but also their styles, genres, and functions (Messick 1993; Starrett 1998). Drawing on these insights, my analysis

examines both the contexts and the genres of ritual lamentation in contemporary Turkey. However, I also grapple with the fact that the cemaat examined here does not invoke religious tradition to achieve ends already given by the regnant context—a context characterized by widespread apathy toward the community’s ritual forms. Incipient and emergent, the cemaat invokes Islamic traditions to disrupt and reshape the very contextual parameters that determine the intelligibility of social and ritual action. In seeking to cultivate the passions of ritual mourning, the cemaat offers a challenge to the semiotic and institutional forms that have sustained the sense of anachronism among urban Alevi communities. I examine the project of the cemaat as a provocation for the anthropology of Islam: how should we understand the work of revivalist movements that seek to bring into being sensibilities and affective susceptibilities whose contextual conditions do not yet exist? The cemaat illustrates the political and moral stakes of many Islamic revival movements, which aim simultaneously to spread a religious message and to transform the emotive conditions in which that message might be received.

Anachronism and modernity

Alevi constitute approximately 15 percent of the national population in Turkey. In the present day, a growing number of Alevi intellectuals and organizations are engaging in a heated, community-internal debate about the nature of Alevi religious history, belief, and practice. This debate has led to the development of a number of relatively discrete orientations. To name just a few competing stances, one position identifies Alevism with Sufi traditions in Islam, another derives the community’s traditions from non-Islamic sources, and yet another situates Alevism in line with Twelver Shi’ism (see Ocak 2004 and Bilici 1998 for related typologies).⁵ The cemaat that I examine later in this article identifies with the last of these positions, seeking to follow the prescriptions of Shi’i Islam. In this section and the next, I depict certain sensibilities and ideologies shared by many Alevi in Turkey today concerning the sense of anachronism conjured by rituals of lamentation. In the second half of the article, I narrow the focus to the cemaat, examining its project of cultivating affects that are more commonly deemed irrelevant to the present.

Despite the diversity of stances in current debates, most scholars agree that Alevi have historically adhered to at least some traditions of Islam closer to Shi’ism than to those followed by Turkey’s Sunni majority. Specifically, Alevi throughout Anatolia have maintained allegiance to Shi’i accounts of early Islamic history (Mélihoff 1998).⁶ Such groups have embodied their understandings of Islamic history in an array of parables, tales, and rituals of mourning.⁷

Michael Fischer (1980) terms this complex of narrative embodiments—shared by the global Shi’i community

and Turkey’s Alevi alike—“the Karbala paradigm,” in reference to the narrative’s emotional climax with the martyrdom of Husayn in Karbala. Indeed, the valor and death of Husayn provides the primary emotional pivot driving most accounts of the narrative, but in its various recitations, the narrative can emphasize aspects of Islamic history that precede or follow his struggles. As Fischer points out, Shi’i communities narrate the paradigm throughout the year, in commemoration of a number of events that transpired in the early Islamic community. Invoked in a wide variety of ritual occasions, the narrative itself has a social life. In the social occasions of its narration, the Karbala paradigm provides “a mnemonic for thinking about how to live” (Fischer 1980:21) as well as a lived experience of morality.⁸

While Fischer’s notion of a paradigm usefully brings together narratives of early Islamic history with practices of commemorative narration, it reveals less about the social labor involved in making this articulation. It is precisely the articulation of narrative and narration that has grown tenuous among Alevi in Turkey. As I note above, Alevi began producing written narratives of early Islam in their efforts to give public voice to a communal historiography only in the final decades of the 20th century—a process often seen as crucial to a broader awakening of Alevism.⁹ At the same moment, however, many Alevi increasingly started to express a disinterest in weeping to traditional narrations of such accounts.

To understand this disjunction between the recent incitement to discourse on Alevi religion, on the one hand, and the growing disaffection with its characteristic disciplines and practices, on the other, I began asking Alevi interlocutors about their sentiments toward traditional rituals of mourning. Despite salient differences in sensibilities toward communal lamentation, many Alevi frame their conceptions of the practice through a shared historical consciousness of the pastness of its contexts of performance. As I came to learn in the course of my fieldwork, many Alevi who might otherwise differ in their feelings toward the community’s religious traditions nevertheless share a view of ritual lamentation as part of the community’s past, unmoored from the social, moral, and political contexts constitutive of contemporary life.

Zehra, a woman in her early fifties, spent her childhood in a central Anatolian village but had long since moved to the town of Çorum, where she raised a family. Over tea one afternoon, I asked Zehra whether her family attends Muharram mourning rituals. She responded that her children have never participated in such lamentation practices and are uninterested in doing so. She then explained that she knew many traditional Alevi devotional hymns about Husayn and proceeded to sing several of them for my benefit. Both intrigued and surprised, I asked her whether she continued to participate in rituals of mourning in the present day. She answered, “I learned these hymns about

the Twelve Imams in my village, but when I left the village, I left the hymns behind as well.” For Zehra, the biographical moment of migration was marked by a loss of traditional practices. She retained the memory of the hymns as echoes of her youth.

If, for Zehra, the pastness of such practices signals a biographical transition, for the increasing numbers of Alevi youth growing up in Anatolian cities—including Zehra’s own children—lamentation for Husayn conjures a sense of the community’s historical past, unsuited for and anachronistic within contexts of the present day. Consider the conversation I observed between two Alevi men in their midtwenties, Umut and Devrim. I asked them about their views on lamentation rituals, hoping to learn whether they participated in such practices. Intuiting my curiosity about the apathy of many Alevis toward such practices, Umut explained, “My grandparents cry during Muharram, but my parents don’t and I don’t. I don’t really understand how someone can cry for a person who died more than a thousand years ago. I’m not trying to belittle Alevis who do cry for Husayn, but it just doesn’t make sense (*mantıksız*). It seems irrelevant.” Umut’s generational reference is significant. Ritual weeping is undeniably a part of his community’s religious history, but it does not serve as a model for practice in the present day. Umut understands lamenting Husayn’s death as an aspect of his grandparents’ past, but it is, for him, at once incomprehensible and irrelevant in contemporary society.

Reacting against Umut’s criticism of the traditional practice, Devrim countered, “It isn’t irrational (*mantıksız*)—I could weep for Husayn.” Confused by the conditionality of his claim, I asked Devrim whether he actually had participated in lamentation rituals. Meeting my question with a wry smile, Devrim responded, “No, I haven’t. The problem is that we lack the right setting (*ortam*) these days. Were such stories told as they were in the village, I would cry.” Despite his sympathy for the practice, Devrim shared with Umut the notion that such rituals were appropriately sited only in contexts available to the community in the past. He acknowledged that his own capacity to weep for Husayn, for which he otherwise sought to hold out the conditional possibility, was undercut by the absence of an appropriate setting in the urban present.

Many other Alevi youth with whom I spoke about the significance of lamentation rituals were less willing than either Umut or Devrim to entertain the topic of discussion. Erdal, a sociology student in Ankara, challenged the value of the question: “Why are you interested in these old practices? What matters for Alevis today are political divisions between the Right and the Left, not weeping for Husayn.” Erdal’s rebuke of my query was guided by the concern that lamentation practices were unimportant and irrelevant to the issues of the present day. Weeping was, for Erdal, at best a curio of Alevi history, but it was also a distraction from pressing sociopolitical problems.

These interlocutors inflected their responses to my questions about lamentation with a variety of distinct anxieties and concerns—the loss of rituals from one’s childhood, an incomprehension of weeping for a moral personage, the sheer irrelevance of such rituals to the politics of the present—but each respondent shared a sense that the rituals belonged more obviously to the community’s past than to its present. Even as the Karbala narrative finds a new site of inscription in the growing body of literature composed by university-educated Alevi intellectuals, many Alevis feel that ritual expressions of mourning, which once guided traditional narrations of early Islamic history in the community, are insignificant, irrelevant, or inappropriate in the contexts of the contemporary world. Many Alevis raised in urban Turkey perceive practices of lamentation as anachronistic in the present day.

The sense of pastness ascribed to mourning practices is not unique to the Alevi milieu. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000:238) suggests that anachronism is a characteristic sensibility—a “hallmark”—of a modern historicist consciousness. The capacity to see a contemporary practice as a “relic of another time and place” enables the distinction of modern and nonmodern subjects (Chakrabarty 2000:238). Webb Keane underlines this point when he argues that modernity is “a term of self-description in a narrative of moral progress” (2007:201). The modern is defined precisely against that which can be relegated to the past. In his cross-cultural study of lamentation, James Wilce suggests how this temporal division might affect lamentation practices, noting that the “modern sense of ruptured time . . . leaves lament on the other side of a temporal divide” (2008:93).

These approaches to modernity’s temporality submit that ascriptions of anachronism entail an ideological effect, one whose force derives from their institutional embedding. The institutional scaffolding of such sensibilities, I would add, is historically labile, given to variability across contexts. Compare, for instance, the case of Shi’i mourning rituals in Lebanon. The debate that arises in that context, as in Turkey, reveals the characteristic narrative of moral progress noted by Keane. In Lebanon, however, mourning practices have not declined but proliferated in recent decades. The question that emerges for the Lebanese Shi’a is not whether rituals ought to be performed but how they should be enacted. Lara Deeb’s (2006) subtle account of the Lebanese debates shows that some Shi’i actors criticize “traditional” approaches to mourning that emphasize weeping for the sake of achieving salvation. For such Shi’as, preaching at ritual commemorations ought to generate emotions that motivate participants to engage in social and political activism: “Emotion remains important for this recitor [*sic*], yet emotion is given contemporary purpose in its revision from an end to a means” (Deeb 2006:143). For those actors and preachers who adopt the activist position, emotion has contemporary purchase only to the extent that the

traditional ethical practice of weeping for salvation is elided, in favor of a conception of emotion that prompts social activism. In both the Turkish Alevi and Lebanese Shi'i examples, notions of contemporaneity are claimed for certain practices as against others. For Alevis, however, this temporalization relegates the ritual act itself—rather than merely one formulation of it—to the past.

This comparison suggests that progressivist narratives characteristic of modernity acquire their force only in their articulation with local historical developments. It is in that articulation that globally circulating narratives of moral progress attain their political charge. Before depicting the cemaat's efforts to cultivate a desire to weep for Husayn, I turn to the political history that has shaped Alevi dispositions toward ritual emotion.

Norms of public affect

The Turkish state has long been invested in shaping its citizens as modern subjects with the requisite sensibilities toward religion. Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper (1987) describe a Sunni context in which the Turkish state regulates the affective performance of devotional rituals and advocates a discourse that deems such affects excessive and antiquated. Their analysis suggests that the demands of Turkish modernity are experienced in the regimentation of public affect.¹⁰

Alevi claims of contemporaneity have similarly taken root in the shadow of state-authorized norms of sociability. Such norms have been constituted historically, and to account for them it is necessary to examine how Alevis began expressing and identifying with the narratives of modernity, a process initiated in the second half of the 20th century.¹¹ Largely because of heavy investments by the state in industrialization and urbanization, the historically rural Alevi community participated in the broader trends of urban migration from the 1960s onward, accelerating in the 1980s. In the course of these transformations, Alevis were increasingly incorporated into the industrial economy, often as wage laborers or low-level bureaucrats. A number of consequences followed from these structural shifts: A large segment of the Alevi population gained access to public schooling, leading to growing rates of literacy; traditional liturgical texts, previously accessible only to spiritual leaders, were translated into the modern linguistic standard and more widely distributed; and city-based Alevis developed civil society organizations to provide social and political support to new migrants (Küçük 2003; Massicard 2005).

Some commentators view these transformations, in conjunction with the proliferation of new media outlets, as providing Alevis with "new opportunity spaces," allowing the community possibilities for political expression in urban sites that had long been dominated by the Sunni majority (cf. Şahin 2005; Yavuz 2003). Yet the sense of possibility opened up by these structural transformations

was tempered by a concomitant history of discrimination and violence directed at the newly urbanizing minority. The late 1970s bore witness to an escalation in civil violence around the country, including large-scale attacks on Alevi communities in several central and eastern provinces. Although the imposition of martial law brought these events to an end, the episodic recurrence of communal violence in the 1990s has suggested to many Alevis that sectarian animus has not comfortably yielded to social or political pluralism. Even though some Alevi intellectuals have been outspoken critics of state policies and discriminatory attitudes found within the Sunni majority, the experience of vulnerability to violence has led many Alevis to abide by, rather than flout, state-sustained norms of public expression.

Elements of Alevi ritual have since found a warm reception in Turkish public spaces but only in particular contexts and on particular stages, as sanctioned by the state. State agencies have, for example, promoted certain Alevi traditions as tokens of national folklore. Folklore, in this context, is a performative category: From its inception, the state established folklore as an institutionalized category that would construct as it described national sentiment (Bryant 2005; Stokes 1992). Since the 1970s, state-approved folklore clubs have performed the traditional Alevi dance of the *semah*, and today the dance is commonly staged at summer festivals, at folklore competitions, at openings for small businesses, and at gatherings of political parties (Öztürkmen 2005; Sinclair-Webb 1999; Stokes 1996). In the same span of time, the state's media outlet, Turkish Radio and Television, promoted certain Alevi hymns that are now performed by state-sponsored musicians and touted as folk art on the private music market (Markoff 1986). Such settings and genres mediate Alevi ritual through patterns of sound and gesture that privilege the formation of a national audience of folklore rather than a community of mourners (Tambar 2010).

This promulgation of Alevi tradition has been accompanied by silencing effects that operate not through legal proscription but by pragmatically excluding certain practices from the state's dispensation of folklore and its concomitant norms of public affect. Notably, lamentations for Husayn have been almost entirely absent from public displays of Alevism. Irene Markoff (1986:50), for instance, notes that one result of state sponsorship was that certain expressive genres, such as hymns (*düvaz*) and dirges (*mersiye*) that contain explicit reference to the Karbala narrative, were largely kept out of the sanctioned repertoire of folklore. For the most part, state officials have refused to authorize Alevi mourning rituals as elements of the nation's historical formation, whether as modes of Muslim worship or of Turkish folklore.¹² The devotional subjectivity fostered by lamentation lacks the anchoring in public life that has been established for those aspects of Alevi tradition integrated into the state's sanctioned forms of sociability.

The sociopolitical history I have outlined here has mediated Alevi dispositions toward the community's rituals. Even though this history was shaped by the structural shifts of modernization, I would caution against viewing the sensibility of anachronism as a necessary outcome of this process—as, for instance, its rationalizing disenchantment. As the contrast with the Lebanese example mentioned above demonstrates, comparative investigation contradicts explanations of modernization that point to one congruent or necessary end point. More importantly, analyses that appeal to a modernizing teleology assign historical finality where revival movements seek to exert practical transformation. Such explanations preclude an understanding of movements that intervene into the sensibilities that guide evaluations of the relevance and purchase of ritual emotions.

The efforts of the cemaat, mentioned at the start of this article, to promote lamentation practices at any time and place counter the dominant ordering of Alevi ritual. Some of these efforts take the form of arguments on websites and in published texts, explicitly criticizing the folklorization of communal tradition.¹³ These public debates are not, however, the only or even the primary form of the cemaat's activities. I use the remainder of this article to depict a different modality of the cemaat's agency, one directed not at parrying nationalist representations of Alevism but at working on the "visceral registers of subjectivity" (Connolly 1999). In what follows, I explore how the cemaat cultivates a capacity to mourn for Husayn in a Turkish context that has stripped such affects of their contemporaneity.

Iterations of affect

Shi'i communities across the globe organize ritual events throughout the calendar year in which to recount the Karbala narrative. These events are most emotional and most elaborate during the month of Muharram, in commemoration of Husayn's death, but such occasions are also convened to commemorate the lives and deaths of other figures from early Islam, especially Fatima, Ali, and their descendants. Scholars of such rituals have often presumed, rather than queried, the capacity of participants to weep in and across such contexts. Scholarship, therefore, has tended to focus on assessing the social function and meaning of weeping while neglecting the social labor involved in summoning the affects of mourning.

David Pinault, for instance, offers valuable insight into the public nature of Muharram processions in India, particularly the function of bloodletting practices found in that context:

If the public dimension of bloody *matam* [ritual mourning] can be a source of criticism for skeptics, it can also explain part of the appeal of this

practice: the chance to demonstrate one's denominational affiliation before others . . . Precisely because bloody *matam* is controversial and generates cries of "Shame!" in some onlookers, it serves as a communal boundary marker and as a way of asserting group identity. [2001:33]

Rituals during Muharram contribute to the production and maintenance of a Shi'i identity in the multireligious Indian context.

Pinault's discussion of the diacritical function of mourning rituals participates in a much longer tradition of anthropological understandings of mourning, one that emphasizes the social rather than the individual purchase of such emotions.¹⁴ Classical analyses of ritual lamentation maintained that such practices are not prompted by the spontaneous emotions of individuals but conform to social conventions and affirm collective bonds (Durkheim 1995; Radcliffe Brown 1948).¹⁵ Such approaches to lamentation presuppose a series of corresponding oppositions between the formal and the spontaneous, the social and the individual, and the ritual and the mundane. Greg Urban elaborates on the classical approach, arguing that ritual wailing functions both to express the affects of mourning and the "meta-affects" that call attention to the social acceptability of the form of the expression: "Hence the sadness itself is rendered socially intelligible, and it is through this intelligible sadness that the basic intelligibility and acceptability of the social actor emerges" (1988:386). The anthropology of lamentation has long been guided by the aim of explaining the ways in which such rituals consolidate the sociality of the performers. Indeed, studies centered on the gendering of lamentation genres, which emphasize the hierarchies of sociopolitical authority embodied in such practices, share with the classical tradition the goal of elucidating how social identities are publicly expressed in the formal staging of such performances (Abu-Lughod 1993; Briggs 1992; Goluboff 2008; Seremetakis 1991). The very capacity to mourn is seldom subjected to critical scrutiny.

What happens, then, when actors fail to summon the emotional resources to weep? Easily dismissed as incidental and contingent on individual capacities, such failures are rarely analyzed as social facts available for anthropological investigation. Yet, in the case of Turkey's Alevis, the inability to weep or disinterest in mourning is pervasive and encouraged by the state's fashioning of public sociability. Widely perceived by Alevis as an anachronism, ritual mourning is perhaps a diacritic of the community's past but is not a principal mode of publicly asserting communal identity in the present, as it is for the Indian Shi'as discussed by Pinault. The meta-affects of weeping, in Urban's terms, are relatively absent in the present-day Turkish situation. The question, here, is not about the function or meaning of weeping in an already established social order but about how weeping

can be cultivated against established social conventions that normatively orient Alevi sensibilities toward the contemporaneity of ritual practice.

Talal Asad's (1993) discussion of ritual emotion troubles the anthropological truism that affective expression emblemizes already existing social groupings. Discussing ritual traditions of medieval Christianity, Asad describes the efforts of monastic communities to shed "tears of desire for heaven"—a desire that these communities could not presuppose but needed to cultivate. "In this way," Asad writes, "emotions . . . could be progressively organized by increasingly apt performance of conventional behavior" (1993:64). At stake in such Christian communities is not the symbolic meaning or social function of the tears but the ability to weep, which has to be engendered across distinctive events over time. Similarly, Saba Mahmood (2005:128–131) describes the manner in which members of a Muslim piety movement in Egypt participate in projects of disciplined self-cultivation, including developing the capacity to weep in the act of ritual worship. For members of this movement, Mahmood explains, the capacity to weep cannot be taken for granted; it has to be fostered across enactments of ritual worship. In this model of piety, the iteration of ritual practice is seen to have a cumulative character, progressively enabling the development of a pious self, capable of emotional expression.¹⁶

The Alevi cemaat examined in detail below evinces a similar aspiration to affective cultivation across events of ritual performance. Yet, for the Islamic movement studied by Mahmood, the contexts of performance, across which ritual emotions iterate, are themselves well established, having acquired institutional form over the past several decades.¹⁷ For the cemaat, however, a central anxiety concerns the chain of iteration itself. The goal of weeping not only during Muharram but also at other points in the calendar year—indeed, at any time and place—is not easily achieved. The concern is not simply that members of the cemaat lack discipline but that, for many participants, disciplined performance appears to be contextually appropriate only once a year. The challenge confronted by the cemaat is to extend the temporal relevance of mourning, such that weeping might be summoned into events of narration, even in moments when such emotions currently appear out of place or anachronistic. What require closer analysis are the practices by which an affect iterates or is impeded from doing so.

The concept of "iteration," as I use it here, derives in part from Jacques Derrida (1982), who deploys it to challenge the idea that the contextual conditions of a sign's effective enactment can be stabilized in advance of its use. Rather, the fact that a sign can be reported, cited, parodied, or theatrically represented always opens up the possibility that it will be detached from one context and reinserted into others, acting on and engendering new

contexts in its wake. Yet this iterable property of all signs is differentially available, based on uneven distributions of institutional power—a point on which Derrida does not linger. In what follows, I explore the conditions under which the corporeal and affective signs that give form to practices of lamentation are either prevented from circulating across certain contexts or are made to iterate anew.

In the following sections, I present three different events in the cemaat's mosque during which the Karbala narrative was invoked. The first event took place during the month of Muharram. It represents the paradigmatic moment of ritual lamentation, when most members of the cemaat expected to weep and performed this task with little hesitation. During Muharram, the affects of mourning were felicitously enacted. In the second event, which occurred several months after Muharram during a commemoration of the birth of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, members of the cemaat struggled to weep and were uncertain about whether the event-space was appropriate for the expression of mourning. The final event took place during Ramadan, the month in which Ali was martyred. In this event, members of the cemaat manifested preliminary signs of mourning—by placing their heads in their hands, for instance—but the intensity of the moment quickly gave way, impeding any expressions of weeping.

My description of the last two events reveals the challenges faced by the cemaat in motivating a scene of weeping. Although members of the cemaat seek to cultivate within themselves the susceptibility to an emotion that is otherwise absent in the urban setting, they do not always succeed at this task. The extent to which the cemaat can conjure contexts of mourning must not be taken for granted but should be examined within and across practices of narration themselves.

Morality and the *meclis*

Shi'i commemorations of the Karbala narrative take place in *meclis* (Arabic, *majlis*) gatherings. Such gatherings create contexts in which listeners can weep to emotional narrations. The *meclis* is not necessarily attached to any particular physical location: Across spaces and times, Shi'i communities have organized such gatherings in mosques, in public squares, or in private homes. The *meclis*, rather, is a ritual event-space, in which the narrative text of the Karbala paradigm is articulated with an affect-laden ritual narration.

The cemaat's *meclis* gatherings take place almost exclusively in a single mosque that it erected in the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹⁸ During the course of the year, approximately eighty to ninety individuals regularly attend Friday prayers at the mosque. These numbers swell to several hundred attendees for commemorations of Husayn's death on the tenth of Muharram. Whereas most mosques in

Turkey are under the supervision of the state's Directorate of Religious Affairs, the cemaat's mosque is autonomous of this administrative entrenchment. Its preachers deliver sermons that are not vetted by state officials, and the congregation organizes acts of worship, like mourning rituals, that are not performed in state mosques.

Despite the relative organizational autonomy of its mosque, the cemaat has faced difficulties in provoking event-spaces of mourning. In contrast to many other Shi'i communities around the world, which enact events of ritual weeping throughout the year, the cemaat concentrates its mourning rituals largely within the first ten days of Muharram. Although the cemaat holds events at other points in the year to commemorate early Islamic history, they are attended by far fewer participants and are organized and announced with less formality. There is, in other words, a disparity between the cemaat's broader intention to foster ritual weeping at any point in time and its actual ability to convoke event-spaces in which that weeping can be induced.

The difficulties faced by the cemaat in staging meclis gatherings before or after Muharram are not merely a function of organizational limitations, such as limited resources for creating posters and announcing events in the neighborhood or the state's legal restrictions on ritual expression. Such constraints, which do exist to varying degrees, could be addressed by means that are external to the ritual itself—for instance, by finding new sources of funding or by pursuing legal action against the state. Yet such ritual-external means do not account for the challenges cemaat members themselves face when they set themselves to weep for exemplary moral personae.

Confronted with the cleavage of the narrative of Karbala from the act of ritual weeping, the cemaat attempts to create the conditions for the story's proper narration. To this end, it hosts rituals for the first ten days of the month of Muharram, in which the struggles and the martyrdom of Husayn are discussed in depth. In the cemaat's mosque, the ten days of meclis gatherings witness a gradual escalation in the intensity of activities. The mosque's preacher devotes approximately thirty minutes prior to the afternoon prayer to recounting tales from the Karbala narrative. Participants are mostly elderly and middle-aged men, though occasionally some younger boys and girls attend—often grandchildren of the older participants. Several younger men are also present. As these sessions are held in the middle of the day, attendance is often restricted to those who are either unemployed or retired. Only rarely can someone leave work to participate.

The narrations performed in the mosque are emotional. Audience members respond to the preacher's discourse by weeping and cursing. Participants view the expression of emotion in the ritual as achieving a moral aim. At the first meclis session during Muharram 2006, the

preacher began by conjoining the emotional character of the event to a moral pedagogy: "Muharram is a month of sadness (*hiüzün*), a month of sorrow (*keđer*), a month of pain (*dert*), but it is also a month in which to learn some lessons." The meclis gatherings bring together the emotions of mourning with moral lessons derived from the exemplary life of Husayn.¹⁹

The connection drawn by cemaat members between morality and mourning is well established in the Shi'i tradition. In his study of Shi'i piety, Mahmoud Ayoub (1978) argues that the martyrdom of Husayn has been regarded as morally redemptive in two ways. First, the content of the narrative carries a moral lesson. Husayn's death highlighted for his contemporaries, as for future generations, the difference between divine truth and falsehood. His death established an ideal to which all Muslims must continue to struggle. Second, the events of Karbala are imagined to be redemptive through the participation of present-day believers in the sorrows of Husayn and his companions. Describing Shi'i traditions that mention the sorrow of the Twelve Imams and their followers, Ayoub writes, "Sorrow and weeping for the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and the suffering of the Holy Family became a source of salvation for those who chose to participate in this unending flow of tears" (1978:147). In Ayoub's account, the narrative content of Husayn's struggle is but one part of the morality of the tale. The weeping of believers in the present is itself a moral act, contributing to the practitioners' efforts to achieve salvation.²⁰

Consistent with Ayoub's description, leaders of the cemaat encourage the expression of mourning during Muharram. Ritual commemoration across these days tends not to be of the variety and symbolic pomp found in other parts of the Shi'i world. For instance, the cemaat does not sponsor theatrical representations of the Battle of Karbala, as is common in Iran (Chelkowski 1979). Nor does it lead public processions on neighborhood streets in honor of Husayn, like those that occur in the Shi'i neighborhoods of Beirut (Deeb 2006). The cemaat's most public gesture lies in certain adornments placed on the outside of the mosque, such as black flags hanging from the dome and signs draped across the front that include quotations attributed to Husayn. Commemorations at the mosque leading up to the tenth of Muharram are far more subdued than in many other countries. Nonetheless, believers at the mosque participate in prescribed acts of weeping every day for the first week and a half of the month.

Participants arrive prior to prayer time to hear the mosque's preacher speak about the events of Karbala. Taking cues from their contextual surround, participants adopt a demeanor similar to the one they would evince in listening to a sermon.²¹ The preacher opens each session with salutations to the Prophet and to those of his kin that the Shi'a revere as the Twelve Imams. Delivered in Arabic,

this brief recitation calls the meclis into being. Informal chatting comes to a close, and individuals align themselves into prayer rows, adopting a quiet and attentive comportment.

The meclis gatherings reproduce a relatively stable rhetorical structure. In the first half, the preacher offers justifications for the gathering, often invoking hadith reports of exemplary figures from early Islamic history that assert the moral purpose of weeping for Husayn.²² Such invocations enable a reflexive discourse on the purpose and legitimacy of the gathering itself. In the second half of the meclis, the preacher relates tales from the Karbala narrative and induces the audience to weep. In effect, the meclis at once anchors a “discourse on emotions” and an “emotional discourse” (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990).

The preacher opened the first meclis session by emphasizing the moral value of attendance: “May God be satisfied with your coming here today, remembering the name of Husayn, and grieving (*hüzünlenmeniz*) the events of Karbala.” Participation in the meclis has its own value, irreducible to the import of learning about what happened at Karbala. Indeed, most participants know many of the details of the battle, having heard such narratives in ritual occasions stretching across their lives. Few if any participants are unfamiliar with the substantive content of the moral lessons to be drawn from such narratives. Rather than remain content with the knowledge of such narratives as acquired through previous ritual participation, attendees continue to return year after year to the meclis of Muharram.

Specifying the value of attending the meclis, the preacher referenced a story about Imam Sadiq, the sixth of the Twelve Imams and great grandson of Husayn, in which the Imam relates the importance of weeping for his ancestor:

One year, during Muharram, Imam Sadiq asked a poet if he knew any poems about Husayn. When the poet began to recite the requested pieces, Imam Sadiq began to weep. His weeping was so loud that people passing by took notice of it. Imam Sadiq then told the poet that whoever recites a poem about Husayn or explains the events, will go to heaven if at least 50 people around him cry as a result. A little while later, Imam Sadiq said that only 40 people need to cry for that reciter to go to heaven. Then he brought the number down to one. Only one person needs to cry. Finally, Imam Sadiq said that if a single person, sitting by himself, thinks about Karbala, remembers Husayn, or remembers Ashura [the day of Husayn’s death], if that person cries, he will go to heaven.

This hadith report endows the act of weeping with soteriological value. The significance of attending the meclis is that it provides a site in which to cry for Husayn. Weeping reflects the emotional relationship that one should maintain with the narrative of Karbala.

In invoking this hadith passage, the preacher commented on the importance of remembering Husayn’s struggle through the act of weeping. The meclis is not only a context for narrating the Battle of Karbala but it also contains within it a metanarrative about how one should hear the narrative and respond to its affective cues. The metanarrative elaborated in the first half of the meclis develops ideas about the proper comportment of the self in relation to that narrative. The narrative and metanarrative represent the two sides of what Ayoub calls the “redemptive” character of Husayn’s death, each contributing to the morality of mourning during Muharram.

As the first day’s meclis progressed, the preacher transitioned from a discourse on the virtues of weeping to an emotional discussion of Karbala. He marked this transition with the statement, “I am now going to relate the calamity (*musibet*) of Karbala. May our emotions be inflamed and our affections be kindled” [*yüreklерimiz yansın, ciğerlerimiz tütüştün*].

Although the content of the narrative is crucial to the task of inflaming the emotions, the preacher is aware that how he presents this content is equally important. The speech genre he employs when he intends to induce weeping is the *mersiye* (Arabic, *marthiya*). The *mersiye* is a manner of describing the events of Karbala that stirs the emotions of the audience.

“On the way to the mosque today,” the preacher began, “I was trying to think about whose story to tell. If people are to grieve (*kederlenseler*), who among the oppressed (*mazlum*) of Karbala should I describe? And then it struck me. I should tell you about Ruqaya, the four-year-old daughter of Husayn.” When the preacher uttered the name Ruqaya, his voice began to tremble. He proceeded to list the many deaths the young girl had to witness in Karbala—the death of her older brother, Ali Akbar; the death of her valiant uncle, Abbas; and the death of her father, Husayn. With his voice shaking, he described how she was taken prisoner. Held in chains, she was forced to march from Karbala to Yazid’s palace, along with the other survivors. Finally, the preacher described how she ceaselessly called for her father as she lay in Yazid’s prison. Zaynab, Husayn’s sister, was unable to comfort Ruqaya. Eventually, she died of sorrow. By this point, the preacher had broken down in tears. His words became difficult to parse.

In the midst of the *mersiye*, members of the audience regularly commented on the narrative, occasionally calling out curses when certain names were mentioned or their wicked deeds related. The preacher explained how, upon hearing Ruqaya continually calling for her father, Yazid sent her Husayn’s head, which had been chopped from his body at Karbala. The sound of weeping in the audience quickly and briefly transformed into curses: “Lanet olsun!” [May Yazid be damned!]. Such curses do not figure as interruptions, as the ringing of a cell phone might. They do not break

the emotional force of the preacher's speech, nor are they unexpected. They function as an expected part of the discursive moment. Cursing the enemies of the Twelve Imams has long been part of the repertoire of Alevi mourning during Muharram and is a practice authorized by the Shi'i doctrine of *teberra* (Arabic, *tabarra*).²³ Damning Yazid is one of the ways that members of the audience follow a prescribed form of participating in the *mersiye*.

The crying of the preacher and the curses called out by members of the audience interfere with the strictly denotational content of the narrative being related. It was hard to hear the words of the preacher when he began to sob. His hands covered his face, he sniffled between and over words, and his voice trembled. The curses of participants were not whispered but yelled and were often much more clearly uttered than the narrative voiced by the weeping preacher. This sort of denotational interference, akin to what Steven Feld describes as "the sonic features of the crying voice" (1990b:242), is not external to the event of narration but a central part of it. It contributes to the material economy of mourning through which participants morally engage the narrative.

The *cemaat's* *meclis* gatherings during Muharram facilitate narrations of the Battle of Karbala guided by the experience of weeping and cursing. Such gatherings establish a ritualized articulation of the narrative text with an emotional narration, calibrated in part through an explicit discourse on the significance of weeping. Cursing, crying, and covering one's face contribute to the authorized mode of narrating the Battle of Karbala in the Muharram *meclis*.

However, establishing events of mourning outside of the restricted temporal frame of Muharram has proven more challenging. In the second event that I describe, one involving commemorations of Fatima's birth, the narration of early Islamic history did not immediately or uniformly prompt bouts of weeping in members of the audience. Although members of the *cemaat* commonly say that a true believer feels sorrow whenever he thinks of Husayn, regardless of the day or the time, as an empirical matter, members of the *cemaat* do not regularly shed tears of lament before or after Muharram. The cordoning off of mourning rituals to a single month reveals a lasting imprint of the wider Turkish Alevi milieu on the *cemaat*. Relative to Shi'i communities elsewhere, it conjures contexts of mourning in small measure. The *cemaat's* project of combating anachronism demands that its members summon the contextual event-space of the *meclis* in periods in which it otherwise seems typically out of place.

Engendering contexts

Fatima was the daughter of the Prophet and the wife of Ali. She is honored by all Muslims but is given special reverence

by the Shi'a. Given particular significance is the relationship she maintained with her father, what Louis Massignon (1969:587), in his discussion of devotion for Fatima, calls a "spiritual connection." Fatima was said to have been so devoted to her father that, within months of his passing, she died of grief. During this final period of her life, Shi'i sources claim, she vigorously argued for Ali's claim to the caliphate and was consequently abused by his political opponents, Abu Bakr and Umar.²⁴ For the Shi'a, Fatima's devotion to her father and her suffering after his death are intimately connected. Together they form a critical moment in the Karbala narrative that ultimately leads to the martyrdom of Fatima's son, Husayn.

Even though Alevis have historically revered Fatima as an individual who was granted divine pardon for her sins, very few Alevi individuals in contemporary urban Turkey engage in ritual commemorations of her birth. Most Alevis I knew were unaware when her birthday had passed that year.

Across a two-week span around that date, one of the *cemaat's* preachers narrated the life and death of Fatima at the mosque. He spoke of these narrations not as *meclis* gatherings but as lessons (*dersler*). The lessons were informally convened and saw significantly smaller numbers of participants than the *meclis* did. The preacher explained the purpose of these narrations to me, saying that he wanted to "convey information to the *cemaat* about one of Islam's most virtuous individuals." He did not classify his narrations as *mersiye*, such as are performed during the Muharram *meclis* in an effort at inducing weeping. The conveyance of information (*tebliğ etme* < Arabic, *tablīgh*) constitutes a speech genre distinct from that of the *mersiye*, one that ostensibly is about transmitting the content of the narrative. One consequence of this orientation toward speech genres was that the first week and a half of lessons about Fatima did not involve acts of weeping.

As became apparent in the course of these lessons, however, the sharp distinction between the genres of the *mersiye* and the *tebliğ* would be blurred. In the final three lessons, the narrations grew increasingly emotional, not only expressed with the aim of clear denotation but also intoned with the passions prescribed by Shi'i traditions. During these final lessons, in contrast to those that preceded them, the preacher and several in his audience broke down in tears. The intelligibility of the narration, as contextually given by the event-space of a lesson, gave way to a scene charged with the emotions of a *meclis*. How did this iteration of affect come to pass?

The final set of lessons witnessed a narrative shift, in which the preacher focused on the hardships endured by Fatima toward the end of her life. The preacher mentioned, in particular, the manner in which land left by the Prophet to Fatima was usurped after the Prophet's death. He also described in detail how Fatima was physically assaulted,

leading her to miscarriage. Yet this narrative shift was not the only significant change: The mode of the preacher's exposition and the style of participation of certain audience members were also realigned. As the preacher described the manner in which Fatima was assaulted, an elderly member of the audience shouted out a curse on the aggressor. As in the meclis gatherings during Muharram, the act of cursing interrupted the referential flow of the preacher's rhetoric, even as it contributed to the ethos of mourning. The shouting of curses helped to create a meclis-like environment within the context of the lessons. The tebliğ began to recall the affective force of the mersiye.

In contrast to the Muharram commemorations, however, not all of the participants in these lessons were committed to an ethos that would sacrifice communicative clarity for emotional intensity. If many participants called out curses at meclis gatherings, most members of the audience at these lessons refrained from such response-talk. As the elderly man continued cursing amidst and over the preacher's speech, another participant offered his own interjection, insisting that members of the audience remain silent. The clamor interrupted his ability to hear and understand the content of the preacher's narrative.

At issue in this reprimand was whether such curses were contributing to or interrupting the coherence of the communicative moment as a whole. In this case, the judgment depended on the conflicting speech genres that participants attributed to the preacher's discourse. The lessons about Fatima were not reflexively characterized as meclis events, and the genre of the narration was not classed as a mersiye. As a symptom of this ambiguity, participants held differing expectations about the "ethics of listening" appropriate to the event (Hirschkind 2006). Whereas some participants sought to forge an emotional relationship to the narrative, others wanted to silently listen to a historical account of Fatima's life. What was being negotiated in the midst of the narration was its moral authority: Was Fatima's life meant to be narrated as a referential historical account or as a discourse that might compel tears in its audience?

The preacher helped resolve this ambiguity. Following the acts of cursing, the preacher began to weep as he narrated the final days of Fatima's life. As in the meclis gatherings during Muharram, the preacher's weeping interrupted the denotation of his own discoursing. The trembling of his voice and the raising of his hand to his face made it difficult for participants to hear the words of his narrative but did not impede the capacity of many to attend to his discourse. Weeping may have disrupted the flow of referential speech, but it was communicative all the same. The noise of the preacher's weeping, like the cursing that preceded it, further established the ethos of a meclis amidst the lessons. Before long, others in the audience began holding their heads in their hands or crying.

Taken in isolation, the emotions provoked by these lessons may have been anomalous within a Turkish context, in which Fatima's birth and death are not often the objects of ritual commemoration. Yet seen as one moment in a series of ritual excitations within the cemaat, the tears shed for Fatima recalled the acts of weeping performed for Husayn several months earlier. The interplay of discourse, cursing, and weeping established a discernible communicative pattern, iconic of the meclis gatherings. A lesson that began as a biographical account of Fatima's life was effectively transformed into an event of devotional mourning.

It is worth noting that the lessons on Fatima did not yield any clear dichotomies between the formality of ritual and the spontaneity of quotidian acts or between social obligation and individual emotion—dichotomies that, as mentioned above, have long been emphasized in anthropological scholarship on ritual emotion. An event that began as a rather mundane effort at conveying knowledge about moral exemplars shifted, in the real-time of the narration's unfolding, into a scene of ritual mourning. The iteration of the affects of mourning was not simply the result of the spontaneous compulsions of particular individuals, as expressions of lament follow historically formalized practices of cursing, weeping, and narration; yet they were not, for that reason, solely dependent on social conventions either, given that nearly no other Alevi group organized such practices in honor of Fatima that year. The iteration of affects that are often perceived as anachronistic requires both the cultivation of individual compulsions in repeated ritual performances and the engendering of new contexts for the staging of such rituals.

Moral limits

From the Muharram meclis to the lessons on Fatima, one sees some of the challenges involved in coordinating the articulation of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "the event that is narrated in the work and the event of narration itself" (1981:255). Whereas cemaat participants entered the mosque during Muharram prepared for the emotional demands of a meclis event, these expectations of affective engagement could not be presupposed in the lessons on Fatima. Such expectations were established in the act of narration itself. Weeping for Husayn and Fatima may be prescribed by doctrine, but its ritual performance has to be cultivated within its iterations in actual events.

That ritual emotion needs to be cultivated across performances is not unique to the cemaat. One scholar of Shi'ism, Syed Akbar Hyder, describes attending meclis events as a child in India, emphasizing the emotional limits of moral immaturity: "At times when we tried our very best to cry, our theatrical sobs gave way to gales of laughter, much to our elders' dismay. That sorrow comes with age is self-evident to young Shi'as" (2006:50). Through a process

of moral maturation, acquired by ongoing participation in such events across one's life, Shi'i individuals attain the capacity to mournfully respond to the Karbala narrative.

The cultivation of ritual weeping is constituted by a seeming paradox. On the one hand, weeping is spontaneous and dependent on the emotive capacities of the individual. Not everyone is equally capable of weeping for exemplary figures. On the other hand, weeping is formally prescribed. When entering the mosque to attend a meclis session, people expect that, as in years past, they will be told narratives that are meant to induce tears. As one Indian Shi'a critical of certain mourning rituals in his community is reported to have said, "*Matam* [mourning] is supposed to be a spontaneous show of grief; how can you schedule it? . . . How can you schedule your grief if it's real?" (Pinault 1992:148).

The scheduling of a "spontaneous show of grief" is paradoxical, I suggest, only if the scheduled event is abstracted from the series of iterations across which it affects acquire momentum and impetus. Discussing traditions of weeping within Sunni Islam, Mahmood (2001) characterizes the cultivation of the capacity to experience spontaneous emotion within a formal ritual progression as "rehearsed spontaneity." The phrase refers to the process by which a susceptibility to emotive response is developed through repeated practice. The fostering of this susceptibility is a moral task. In the Shi'i tradition, ritual weeping contributes to the realization of a soteriological aim. The incapacity to cry indexes a moral limit.

Efforts by the cemaat to cultivate pious sensibilities are not restricted to the mosque. One of the ways that the cemaat's preacher seeks to indirectly spread knowledge about figures such as Fatima to the wider Alevi community is by utilizing the kinship connections of mosque participants. Both in his lessons relating to Fatima and in his Friday sermon that same week, he told participants that they should distribute candies or small gifts to friends and family members on Fatima's birthday. Recipients of the gift, consequently, would be prompted to remember the significance of the day.

Fatima's birthday came and went. The lessons came to an end. Curious about the extent to which members of the cemaat followed the preacher's instructions about distributing gifts, I asked various individuals where they had handed out the candy. To my surprise, not a single member of the cemaat had distributed gifts or otherwise disseminated knowledge about Fatima's life. I noticed the same pattern when, several weeks after Fatima's birthday, the birthday of Fatima's husband, Ali, arrived and passed. Encouraged to distribute sweets to mark the occasion, members of the cemaat again failed to do so.

When I asked a number of cemaat members why they had not complied with the preacher's suggestion, most interlocutors quietly ignored my question or changed the topic. Sensing the discomfort prompted by my query, one

member offered a forthright response: "Our people don't like hearing about religious things. If we started talking to our relatives about Fatima, they wouldn't consider it to be pleasant (*hoş*)." This rather blunt statement need not be taken at face value—many Alevi, of course, do not dismiss religion out of hand. The comment does, however, index the fact that Alevi organizations rarely transgress state-sanctioned norms of sociability by narrating emotional tales about early Islamic martyrs, especially after Muharram. As a result, only a small number of Alevi regularly participate in practices of listening to such narratives, in which they might develop the capacity to weep. To the extent that it occurs, the distribution of candy to those outside of the cemaat is not an activity shaped by the practices and expectations appropriate to meclis event-spaces, in which the normative task of moral cultivation is regimented. Such encounters transpire outside of the chain of iteration that the cemaat forges within the mosque itself. The forms of disciplinary practice cultivated in narrative iterations within the mosque tend not to shape informal conversations emergent in encounters between neighbors and kin outside of it.

The limits of moral discipline do not lie, however, only at the boundary of the cemaat; they exist within it as well. As emphasized throughout this article, Alevi in Turkey, including those at the cemaat's mosque, rarely convene meclis gatherings after the annual mourning rituals during Muharram. This temporal circumscription contrasts with expectations elsewhere in the Shi'i world, where commemorations of the lives and deaths of the Twelve Imams take place throughout the year. "This is clearest in the month of Ramadan," writes Fischer, "which in contrast with the Sunni calendar has become a memorial for Ali" (1980:172). Ali, the husband of Fatima and father of Husayn, was killed during the month of Ramadan. As a result, the final ten days of Ramadan "are dedicated to the memory of Ali and [are celebrated] for the gift of revelation of the Qur'an" (Fischer 1980:173). In Iran, Ali's death is commemorated as a public holiday (Momen 1985). For Iranian Shi'as, the end of Ramadan conjoins sorrow for the death of Ali with a celebration of Qur'anic revelation.²⁵

Ali's death is an important moment in the Karbala narrative. Beyond his martyrdom, his death marks the end of his command of the Muslim community and the onset of Muawiya's ascent to the caliphate, which culminates in the killing of Ali's son Hasan and precipitates the martyrdom of Husayn at Karbala.

With regard to the mourning of Ali's death, Ramadan in Turkey bears little resemblance to the situation in Iran. Even within Alevi neighborhoods, such as the one in which the cemaat's mosque is located, there are almost no sites in which memorials to Ali are organized. The ethos is decidedly festive, even for those who are not fasting, and lacks traces of lament for Ali's death. In the face of the prevalent norms of sociability, the cemaat's mosque represents one of the few organizational sites concerned with

informing Alevi of Ali's death. One Friday during Ramadan happened to fall on the day of Ali's death, and the mosque's preacher used the occasion to deliver a sermon about his martyrdom. He related familiar aspects of the Karbala narrative, explaining how Abu Bakr prevented Ali's wife, Fatima, from inheriting land left to her by the Prophet. He further described how Umar set Ali's house on fire when Ali refused to acknowledge Abu Bakr's claim on the caliphate. Both of these stories contributed to the narrative lessons on Fatima discussed above. They are crucial pieces of the repertoire of tales that are widely known by Alevi in Turkey and are often described in the texts produced by public intellectuals as part of the new corpus of communal historiography that has appeared in the last several decades. Despite the widespread textual circulation of the narrative, however, most Alevi do not expect to participate in rituals of lamentation for Ali's death.

The accounts offered by the cemaat's preacher, nevertheless, functioned to invoke the narrative of Karbala as well as the genres appropriate to its narration. Responding to the emerging signs of the narrative's unfolding, several audience members called out curses on Umar. Elements of the genre of the *mersiye*, known to participants through their formal presentation in the context of a *meclis*, began to enter the sermon (*hutbe*). Just as the preacher's *tebliğ* about Fatima acquired emotional momentum in the degree that it resembled a *mersiye*, his sermon began to conjure a context of mourning.

The intensity of the moment, however, collapsed quickly. Unlike the *meclis* sessions or the lessons on Fatima, the sermon did not lead to bouts of weeping, although the preacher's voice quivered at points, prompting some listeners to place their heads in their hands. Such icons of mourning arose out of participants' recognition of the intergeneric indexicality that summoned the conventions of the *mersiye* in the midst of a sermon, yet these signs did not crescendo into a ritual of weeping. The preacher and his audience regained their composure, and the narration concluded without the redemptive tears that mark the moral experience of its reception.

The relatively limited degree of weeping and cursing reveals the extent to which the cemaat's members continue to be shaped by the reigning social ethos in Turkey, despite their claim to mourn at any time and place. Aware of this situation, the mosque's preacher suggested to me one way of interpreting the Ramadan event: "In these sorts of affairs, we Alevi are like schoolchildren or novices, still in the process of learning about Islam." In referring to the cemaat members as novices, the preacher was not trying to disparage their efforts. He was suggesting a trajectory of development. Situating the cemaat's efforts within the dominant sensibilities of the broader Alevi milieu, his comment indicated the way in which such events continue to give the cemaat its impetus, as it aims to engage and transform the existing affective capacities of its Alevi constituents.

Conclusion

In this article, I have described some of the attitudes and dispositions that Alevi in Turkey hold with regard to traditions of mourning. Between Alevi like Umut and Erdal, who view ritual weeping as incongruent with or irrelevant in the contemporary world, and those among the cemaat, who seek to cultivate the capacity to mourn as a moral experience, lies a difference not primarily of textual interpretation but of affective disposition and historical sensibility. The cemaat's struggle to excite affects that many Alevi regard as anachronistic raises questions about how the concomitant experience of contemporaneity is claimed for certain practices and withheld from others. The sense that a practice or personage belongs to the historical past—that, for instance, the lives and deaths of figures from the seventh century have no claim on the actions of individuals today—is neither natural nor politically innocent. Instead, I have argued that the demarcation of the boundary between the contemporary and the anachronistic is institutionally regimented.

The cemaat's practices of lamentation represent one effort at remaking sensibilities that concern the role played by an exemplary moral past in the community's present. Rather than take for granted the cemaat's stated goal of mourning exemplary figures "at any time and in any place," I have ethnographically examined various moments in the social life of the Karbala narrative, exploring the practices involved in creating contexts in which the affects of mourning can be aroused and embodied. Focusing on the iteration of affect enables an analysis of Muslim practice that does not assume its intelligibility or efficaciousness within already existing contexts but examines how new contexts, adequate to the task of affective excitation, are brought into being or prevented from emerging.

As some of the examples described above demonstrate, the cemaat has not in any thorough sense produced a recalibration of historical sensibility, even within its own ranks. Many of its members prove unable to weep in the months following Muharram. Its efforts are ongoing, uneven, and continually subject to failure—failure that reflects some of the limits that the revivalist project has yet to overcome. Such limits are not merely those of knowledge alone (such as knowledge of Fatima's birth or of Ali's death). Rather, the limits of mourning I have sought to highlight are products of the way the Turkish state has regulated forms of public affect and sociability over the past several decades. The fragility of efforts to provoke lamentation in moments that confound conventional expectation reveals the institutional constraints confronted by efforts to extend and intensify the iterability of Alevi lament.

The limits of mourning in the cemaat exemplify the challenges faced by many Islamic revivalist projects. Movements committed to refashioning moral selves may find that existing contexts are hostile to their projects, exerting

a normative charge on the subjects listening to their narratives. Such movements cannot remain neutral with regard to the contexts, habits, and dispositions that give meaning to their moral messages but struggle to reshape the contextual sensibilities their messages can provoke.

Notes

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1. Throughout the article, I make use of modern standard Turkish orthography for most technical Islamic terms. Hence, I use *cemaat* rather than *jamā'a*. Where relevant, I note the standard transliteration of Arabic in parenthesis. Exceptions to the use of Turkish orthography include words that are commonly represented in English. For instance, I use *Shi'i* rather than either *Shi'ī* (formally transliterated Arabic) or *Şii* (Turkish). I have also rendered proper names derived from early Islamic history with conventional English spellings, for example, *Husayn* rather than *Hüseyn* (Turkish). All translations are my own unless noted.

2. In the context of Shi'i and Alevi belief, the family of the Prophet includes the patrilineal chain of descent originating with Ali and Fatima—the Prophet's cousin and daughter, respectively.

3. Research for this article is based on two years of fieldwork between 2005 and 2007, largely focused in the central Anatolian town of Çorum as well as in Ankara, the nation's capital.

4. The methodological concern with contextualizing Islam within specific societies and histories has been a central motif of anthropological work at least since Clifford Geertz's *Islam Observed* (1968). Some of Geertz's critics from within the discipline have faulted him not for his methodological program but for falling back on ideal types, at the expense of the thick descriptions of local contexts that he otherwise advocated (cf. Varisco 2005).

5. Twelver Shi'ism is one of the branches of Shi'i Islam. Twelver Shi'as refer to Ali and 11 of his male descendants, including Husayn, as the Twelve Imams, charged with the divinely apportioned task of spreading and administering God's word as given to the Prophet Muhammad. The majority of the world's Shi'as are Twelvers.

6. Referring to such historical communities as "Alid loyalists," Marshall G. S. Hodgson (1974:446) explains that this allegiance has entailed reverence paid to certain figures in early Islamic history, such as Ali and his 11 descendants, and also assent to certain beliefs associated with Shi'ism, such as the expectation of a coming *mehdī* to restore justice to the world at the end of time.

7. Historical evidence suggests that such practices have existed among communities in Anatolia for at least 500 years. Sixteenth- and 17th-century Ottoman state officials chronicle the gatherings of "apostate" (*rafizi*, *mülhid*) groups, which engaged in "heretical"

acts of cursing the companions of the Prophet revered by Sunnis, such as Umar and Uthman (Imber 1979; Ocak 1991). As is well known, a crucial piece of the Ottoman Empire's expansion in the early 16th century involved the massacre of large numbers of Anatolian supporters of the Shi'i Safavid Shah (Cole 2002; İnalçık 1994; Zarinebaf-Shahr 1997). Ethnographic research across much of the 20th century confirms the presence of such practices among rural Alevi communities (see Yusuf Ziya Yörükkan's [1998] studies from the 1930s and And 1979).

8. For extended descriptions of the Shi'i narrative of early Islamic history, see Ayoub 1978, Momen 1985, and Pinault 1992.

9. Markus Dressler refers to this upsurge in written narratives as an "increasing scriptural fixation of the predominantly oral tradition" (2008:301). David Shankland similarly argues that this unprecedented scale of textual production reveals "the express process of codification of [the Alevi community's] previously diverse largely unrecorded culture within the modern city setting" (2003:13). A central aspect of this "codification" of Alevi tradition involved writing the history of the community, often beginning with early Islam and with invocations of the Karbala paradigm, including descriptions of the lives and deaths of Ali, his wife Fatima, and their sons Hasan and Husayn (see Şener 1989 for one prominent example). As one analyst of such texts notes, "The introductory chapters in many books generally endeavor to prove that Alevism dates from the times of Ali" (Vorhoff 1998:237).

10. For analyses of the Turkish state focused on its investments in the styles and sensibilities of citizen sociability, see Göle 2002, Navaro-Yashin 2002, Çınar 2005, Özyürek 2006, and Tambar 2009a.

11. In beginning my account of Alevi narratives of modernity in the mid-20th century, I am following the work of some Alevi intellectuals, who have critiqued one tendency within the Alevi community to project certain notions of modernity back to Alevism's historical religious origins. See, for instance, Reha Çamuroğlu's (2005) critical discussion.

12. It is, however, worth noting that, in the past several years, Turkey's governing party, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), has hosted Muharram commemorations as one way of reaching out to the Alevi population. Although many Alevis have refused to participate in these events, critiquing such efforts as insincere and driven by cynical political calculations, the promotion of such commemorations is, to my knowledge, wholly novel for a Turkish governmental regime. The effects of this project on state policy and on public sensibility remain to be seen.

13. See Tambar 2009b for a discussion of the cemaat's deliberative engagements in Turkey's public spheres. Şahin 1995 represents the most detailed criticism by a cemaat member of the folklorization of Alevi tradition.

14. On the notion that Islamic ritual serves a diacritical function, see also Bowen 1989.

15. Emile Durkheim notes, "Mourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions . . . Mourning is not the natural response of a private sensibility hurt by a cruel loss. It is an obligation imposed by the group" (1995:400–401).

16. See also Brian Silverstein's (2008) discussion of analogous processes of ethical cultivation through disciplinary practices among Turkish Sufi communities.

17. Describing the well-established character of the Islamic movement at the heart of her study, Mahmood writes, "By the time I began my fieldwork in 1995, this movement had become so popular that there were hardly any neighborhoods in this city of eleven million inhabitants that did not offer some form of religious lessons for women" (2005:3–4). Turkey has witnessed an Islamic revival of similar scope within the majority Sunni Muslim community.

Examining Sunni Muslim movements in Turkey committed to disciplinary exercises of piety akin to the groups studied by Mahmood, Heiko Henkel (2005) explains that participants' efforts are not marginal to but have come to be integrated within mainstream, public Turkish society over the past few decades. Henkel suggests that the electoral success of what he terms "the post-Islamist" Justice and Development Party represents the most "tangible aspect" of this integration (2005:487–488). Most Alevi organizations, including the cemaat that I describe in this article, are marginal to the mainstream established by the revivalist currents of the Sunni majority.

18. Alevi groups that reject the thesis that Anatolian Alevism is akin to Twelver Shi'ism often balk at the premise that the community's rituals ought to be organized in a mosque. For many such Alevi, the mosque is an institution sustained by an alignment of state power with the Sunni majority's religious traditions. One Alevi intellectual explains this antipathy toward mosques as follows: "Most of the threats that Anatolian Alevi have [historically] faced have originated in mosques. Mosques are accepted by [Alevi] as a center of conservatism, fanaticism, and hostility toward Alevi" (Şener 1989:97). The writer adds, "For Alevi, a Shi'ism that arose and developed within the mosque appears to be a phenomenon closer to Sunnism" (Şener 1989:97). Over the past several decades, a number of national Alevi organizations have built alternative sites of ritual, known as *cemevis*, in towns and cities throughout Turkey. Such organizations sponsor annual rituals of lamentation during Muharram at these sites, but, as I emphasize in the text, they often attract low numbers of participants. For the cemaat, authoritative traditions within Shi'ism warrant the mosque, rather than the *cemevi*, as the primary site of congregational prayer and ritual mourning.

19. In his assessment of the contemporary Islamic revival, Olivier Roy (2004) highlights the growing prominence of emotional discourses on morality, salvation, and end-times. Roy's observation resonates with the group discussed here, but he concludes rather simplistically that, for such movements, "feelings are more important than knowledge" (2004:31). As I show in this article, any oppositional dichotomy between emotions and knowledge is untenable in such movements, as they seek both to convey information about moral narratives and to transform the sensibilities and affects through which such narratives can be experienced.

20. According to the Shi'i tradition, the practice of gathering for the sake of praising Husayn's valor and excoriating his killers originates in a speech given by Zaynab, Husayn's sister and one of the survivors of the Battle of Karbala, only 40 days after her brother's death. The wide variety of literary and ritual forms now found across the Shi'i world developed in the succeeding centuries, beginning in the Abbasid period, during which time pro-Alid sentiments were promoted by the state (Hussain 2005; Nakash 1993). It is worth noting that soteriological traditions of weeping are not restricted to Shi'ism; Sunni traditions of weeping, unrelated to Karbala lamentations, have a lengthy and rich history. See, for instance, Jonathan Berkey's (2001:48–50) description of the significance attributed to weeping for one's sins in popular preaching in the medieval Near East.

21. In several important respects, the genre of the preacher's discourse was not, in fact, a sermon (*hutbe*). Several features distinguished it from the latter. First, it was not delivered on Friday, which is the requisite day for a sermon. Second, the preacher's discourse at the meclis gatherings was restricted to the topic of Karbala rather than to the broader ethical and social concerns that form subjects of sermons. Finally, whereas attendance at Friday prayers is obligatory for men, attendance at the Muharram sessions was not.

22. Hadith reports generally concern the sayings and deeds of the Prophet. For the Shi'a, hadith reports can also include the exemplary sayings and deeds of the Twelve Imams.

23. The Shi'i doctrine of *teberra* licenses expressions of hostility toward those that Ali and his descendants opposed. Evidence of doctrinally prescribed, ritual cursing can be found in a number of historical Shi'i communities. Juan Cole (1988:239–244), for instance, describes the way in which acts of ritual cursing both expressed and instigated communal violence between Sunnis and Shi'as in the 19th-century Indian state of Awadh. Cole reports that when confronted with the question of whether acts of cursing should continue in the face of escalating societal tensions, one prominent Indian Shi'i jurist argued that the "Shi'i ruler [of Awadh] should address any public disturbances by suppressing them rather than by forsaking the ritual prescribed by the faith" (1988:242). According to Cole, the jurist "held cursing the caliphs to be as necessary a ritual obligation for Shi'is as sounding the call to prayer or slaughtering the cows of Hindus" (1988:242).

24. Abu Bakr and Umar are regarded by Sunnis as the first and second caliphs of Islam.

25. For Sunnis, as for Shi'as, the day on which the Qur'an was revealed in its entirety to the Prophet fell within the final third of Ramadan. They disagree, however, on the specific day it occurred.

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