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Blood Brothers: *The Sectarian Story in Pakistan*

By Nicholas Schmidle

APRIL 2006

THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY 25, 1995, began like any other at Mehfil-e-Murtaza, an *imambargah*, or congregational hall for Shia Muslims, in central Karachi. Several dozen worshippers came and performed their *fajr*, or dawn, prayers. After they finished, most people went home. Sixteen of them stayed back to prepare a dead man's body for burial. Hameed Ali Bhojani, a leader of the local Shia community, was one of them. At around 6:30 a.m., Bhojani was in the bathroom washing the corpse when someone kicked in the door and pointed a gun in his face. The armed intruder was joined by a handful of other Sunni Muslim militants who all belonged to a sectarian organization called Sipah-e Sahaba, or Army of the Companions of the Prophet. The gunmen rounded up everyone on the premises and dragged them into the main hall. They were determined to kill every Shia they found. Bhojani was ordered, like the others, to throw his wallet and wristwatch into a pile. Then, with the professionalism of veteran firefighters hoisting a water cannon, the killers sprayed the lineup with gunfire and left.

Hameed Ali Bhojani and 11 others were pronounced dead on the scene. Two more stopped breathing on the way to the hospital. The only two people who survived were wounded in the initial burst of gunfire. After falling on the ground, they were buried under dead bodies that absorbed the bullets like sandbags.

Hameed Ali Bhojani's younger brother, Altaf, recently agreed to see me. He is middle-aged and bespectacled. On the Sunday I meet him, Altaf wears a powder-blue *shalwar kameez* and, in the typical Shia look of mourning, a face full of spiky stubble. He walks with an arthritic and achy gait, and sighs loudly when he finally settles onto a squeaky, wicker-framed couch. After a cold drink, Altaf tells me about how, just six months before Hameed's murder, his other brother, Shaukat, was shot while sitting in his car in Karachi. "At the time [of Shaukat's death]," Altaf says, "We couldn't understand if it was sectarian or something else." In late 1994, Karachi was in the throes of one of its notoriously violent periods and pinpointing a clear motive for a murder was difficult. But months later, looking at Hameed lying in a pool of blood, surrounded by bullet casings rolling around the floor like marbles, Altaf grasped the gravity of the situation. Pakistan was embroiled in sectarian war.

SINCE 1989, AS MANY as 2,000 people have been killed in Pakistan's sectarian violence — more than 100 in the first few months of 2006 alone. *Sipah-e Sahaba* has been implicated in a number of incidents. The party was founded in 1986. Its stated mission is to transform Pakistan into a Sunni Muslim state, following specific codes of Sunni law and jurisprudence, from being just a Muslim state, catering equally to Sunnis and Shiites. Integral to this vision is the labeling of Shiites as a *non-Muslim* minority in Pakistan. In the past, the U.S. State Department has listed Sipah-e Sahaba as a terrorist organization. Some have linked it to al-Qaeda. In January 2002, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf banned *Sipah-e Sahaba*. In response, it regrouped under a new name, *Millat-i-Islami* Pakistan, which itself was

banned in November 2003. In April 2006, the Interior Ministry lifted some of the restrictions on *Millat-i-Islami* Pakistan and allowed a public gathering in Islamabad. Approximately 5,000 people showed up. Movie salesmen sold DVDs featuring beheadings and attacks on American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. The crowd broke into chants of “Shia, *Kafir* (unbeliever)! Shia, *Kafir*!”

Conspiracy theorists here, of which there are many, tell me that the differences and disputes between Sunni Muslims and Shia Muslims have been created by the United States to divide, and eventually conquer, the Muslim World. Closer analysis reveals a picture muddied with all sorts of foreign involvement and inspiration. For example, look at the sectarian dynamic in the Middle East today. Iraqi politicians are almost totally polarized into sectarian camps fighting for their specific interests. This has, consequently, emboldened Sunni groups in Shia Iran and Shia groups in Sunni Saudi Arabia to increase their visibility after decades, if not centuries, of political acquiescence. Therefore, when a bomb kills dozens of Shiites in Iraq these days, it reverberates throughout the region. Sunni-Shia tensions have resurfaced in Lebanon and, according to a March 9 report in *The New Republic Online*, a previously unheard-of Sunni-Shia rift is emerging in Palestine. None of these are isolated incidents. Recent history shows that, behind sectarianism is almost always a hidden hand(s). Pakistan is no exception.

Of course, a long view of history records a centuries-old chasm within Islam. After the Prophet Muhammad’s death in 632 AD, a fight broke out over who should be the rightful successor and leader of the Muslim world. Some said that the title of *caliph*, or leader, should go to Abu Bakr. Others believed that the Prophet appointed Ali, his cousin, son-in-law and first convert. Those supporting Abu Bakr, a close friend of Mohammad’s, won and are now known as Sunnis. Those supporting Ali lost and are now known as the Shiites. (Ali was eventually named *caliph* after being passed over by Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman, two other close friends of Mohammad’s.) Historical discrepancies and theological differences aside, however, these two sects coexisted in relative peace for centuries, even in Pakistan’s early days.

“In the movement to form Pakistan,” says Dr. Syed Husain M. Jafri, “there was no distinction between Sunnis and Shias.” Dr. Jafri, a Professor of Islamic Studies at The



Aga Khan University in Karachi, is in his early 70s. His hair is smooth, and he wears fine silk ties and starched white shirts. He reminds me that “Mohammad Ali Jinnah [the “father” of Pakistan] was a Shia” and that “the Pakistan movement was a common movement... You cannot separate all this sectarianism in Pakistan from politics,” he says. And he, like many others, points to the Islamic Revolution in Iran as the beginning.

SOON AFTER THROWING THE SHAH out of the country in early 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini took power in Iran. His unique reading of Shiite theology revolved around the notion of *velayat-e-faqih*, or Rule of the Supreme Jurisprudent. This represented a radical break from Shia Islam’s political and theological past because it created a new place in society for the clerical class. Those who attained higher levels of religious wisdom, Khomeini argued, were most fit for political leadership. Armed with undeniable religious credentials and vast amounts of oil wealth, Khomeini touted the greatness of Iran’s revolution. His rhetoric emboldened Shiites around the world. Pakistan’s Shia minority was eager to follow his lead.

Pakistan’s leader at the time, General Zia ul-Haq, wasn’t keen on the idea of Iran trying to export its revolution to his country. While General Zia was an extremely devout man, he had his own plan in mind for introducing Islamic reforms in Pakistani society. Shiites were convinced that these changes would come at their expense. These suspicions were confirmed by Zia’s particular enforcement of the Hudood Ordinance (with “eye-for-an-eye”-style punishments) of Sharia law and the mandatory observance of noontime prayer in government offices.

(Since Sunnis and Shiites pray differently, many Shia felt that the mandatory prayer services unnecessarily exposed sectarian differences.) But the policy that pushed the Shia to the edge was the imposition of *zakat*, an annual two-and-a-half-percent tax explicitly sanctioned by Sunni legal philosophy. Shiites observe their own version of religious tax. And they weren't happy about getting double-taxed.

In July 1980, *Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqh-e-Ja'afria* (TNFJ), a Pakistani Shia party with close ties to Iran, led a massive protest in Islamabad against the new *zakat* law. The demonstrations were large enough to extract concessions from Zia's otherwise uncompromising government. *Zakat*, the government declared, would not be automatically deducted from the bank accounts of Shia citizens as it was for everyone else. General Zia wasn't happy about TNFJ making trouble on Pakistan's domestic scene, but he had something else on his mind: *jihad*, or holy war, in Afghanistan.

It's no coincidence that Pakistan's outbreak of sectarianism began around 1989. For the previous decade, Pakistan had become the main conduit through which money, weapons and ideas flowed into Afghanistan as part of the campaign to defeat the Soviet Army there. The Central Intelligence Agency worked closely with Saudi Intelligence to channel funds and arms to the Afghan *mujahideen*, or holy warriors. *Madrassas*, or Islamic seminaries, were built by the thousands to preach the importance of *jihad*. The version of Islam taught in these *madrassas* was militant and intolerant, not only toward foreign infidels, like the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, but also toward domestic infidels, like, according to the Saudi strain of Islam known better known as *Wahhabism*, Shiites. After the campaign succeeded in wearing down the Soviet army in 1989 and — eventually — leading to the fall of the Soviet Union, many of these *jihadis* returned home, brimming with hatred. The effect of the *jihad* on Pakistani society was profound. It was in this environment, at a time when Pakistan was awash in foreign funds, that *Sipah-e Sahaba* was founded.

QARI SHAFIQR REHMAN runs a small *madrassa* tucked near the back of a dusty slum in Karachi. He is an unabashed member of *Sipah-e Sahaba*. (Although the party officially doesn't exist, and when it did hold its recent gathering in Islamabad, it did it under the name of *Millat-i-Islami* Pakistan, everyone still knows it and refers to it as *Sipah-e Sahaba*.) I recently went to meet him, accompanied by a local journalist named Rafi.

Rafi is thin and in his early 30s. He frequents the Press INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Club, an old mansion in downtown Karachi surrounded by a wall overgrown with ivy and populated with an eclectic combination of drunks, journalists, and charlatans. Rafi has one small daughter, who, for fun, drew all over his business cards with a blue pen.

It would be impossible to find Qari Shafiqur Rehman's *madrassa* without an escort. There are no landmarks to guide you through the maze of nondescript streets leading from the main road to his *madrassa* — only sandy roads, chalked-up walls and piles of garbage. For this reason, Rehman is meeting us in front of an auto parts store in Dalmia Colony, a neighborhood near the Karachi airport, at 12 o'clock sharp. From there, we can follow him to his place.

Twenty minutes before our appointment, Rehman calls to re-confirm that we are coming. This is the second confirmation call of the morning. I ask Rafi, half-joking, if he is tempting us into his lair. Why is *he*, after all, so anxious about *our* arrival? Shouldn't we be the ones that are a little jumpy?

We are, nonetheless, on schedule. At five minutes before twelve Rafi pulls off the road in front of a line of stores. He leans forward on the steering wheel and scans the cluster of people and cars and motorbikes. A minute later, we start up a narrow dirt road. "That's who we are meeting," Rafi says with a head twitch. "Up there on the motorcycle."

After following Rehman for about ten minutes, during which a few less-than-pleasant thoughts cross my mind as to where he was leading us, we pull up to a brick residence and Rehman gets off his bike. I see a husky man in a white *shalwar kameez* with a crocheted prayer cap. He smiles and points to a sliver of shade where we should park. I ask Rafi if I should say that I am Canadian or something. "It doesn't matter," he replies, "To these guys, you are all infidels. And anyway, it will be interesting to see his eyes when we say that you are an American." I'm not sure how this is supposed to make me feel. At least I get a chuckle out of watching Rafi shuffle through his business cards in search of the few that have escaped his daughter's artistic rampage.

Although Qari Shafiqur Rehman's affiliation with *Sipah-e Sahaba* could land him in jail, he seems to have little to hide. (Rehman's nonchalant attitude regarding his membership in the party, coupled with the fact that other proscribed *jihadi* parties have continued publishing magazines and newspapers since being banned, leaves many wondering how serious the government is about curtailing the activities of these groups.) He welcomes us into his small *madrassa* and promptly sends someone to bring a tray of *samosas* and 7-UP. He's not the slightest bit cagey about either his connections or loyalty to the banned militant organization. Shortly after we all sit down, he delights in showing me pictures of himself pos-

ing with long-time *Sipah-e Sahaba* luminaries.

One of the first things I notice is a birthmark on Rehman's forehead, beside what looks like a bruise from praying. A smudgy bruise on the forehead is commonly a feature of Shiites. When they pray, they typically press their foreheads against a small stone from Karbala, a city in modern-day Iraq where the Prophet Muhammad's grandson was killed in 680 AD. In South Asia, Shiites wet the stone, making the smudge/mark/bruise more visible. I consider asking Rehman why he, an avowed Shia-hater, also has this mark, but decide that it might not be the best conversation-starter in my quiver.

Rehman calls a 15-year-old *talib*, or student, into the room. We are all sitting on the floor. The boy's eyes are the color of freshly stained wood, and equally as emotionless. Rafi, tilting his head at me, asks the boy, in Urdu, how he feels in the presence of a foreigner. "I feel fine," the boy answers, "because he is also made by God." Rehman watches from behind his desk with a zipper smile. I am caught slightly off-guard by the boy's answer. How someone with eyes so visibly detached from here and now could come up with such a rich answer baffles me. "But how do you feel in the presence of an American?" I ask him. His answer starts out the same, remarking that I am a guest and deserve the same treatment as any other guest would receive. "But I also have strong feelings against the Americans and I want to become a *mujahid* [holy warrior]," he says. Rehman's face glows like a proud father's. Then the boy continues, "Now, I am too young to be recruited...but definitely, if any person, *inshallah*, comes to me, I will go to *jihad*."

I turn to Rehman and ask if he teaches *jihad* at this school. With one question, his lighthearted expression transforms to one that makes me wonder whether I'd asked the wrong question at the wrong time. Tact with these fellows is the name of the game, and I am not sure if what I said qualifies.

"What is wrong with *jihad*?" Rehman says, throwing his hands into the air. I immediately start to backpedal and try to articulate how I feel the West has confused the complexity of *jihad*. Maybe, I think, I can circle around and come back to the discussion at his pace. No time for that. "We teach *jihad* as part of our teachings of the Holy Koran," he says in a voice at least twice as loud as any he's used so far, "*Jihad* is used to bring peace to a part of the world. If anybody usurps

our rights or threatens our faith, there will be *jihad*."

"What about Shiites?" I ask, "Are they a threat to your faith?"

"The Shia aren't Muslims," Rehman answers without a second thought.

WHILE LISTENING to Qari Shafiqur Rehman and his adolescent protégé share their views, my thoughts drift to Altaf Bhojani and his two slain brothers. On the morning I meet Altaf in his apartment, after we sit on wicker couches and leaf through a book with pictures of Hameed Ali Bhojani at various points in his life, including one where is covered with blood and lying on the ground with side of his head blasted out, we walk to *Mehfil-e-Murtaza*, the scene of the crime on February 25, 1995.

At the entrance of the *imambargah*, I see a platoon's worth of private security guards.¹ Along the wall, there are watchtowers manned by marksmen balancing machine guns on the parapets. "Back then [in 1995], there was no security. You could just walk right in," Altaf says, "All these sectarian killings were new."

Inside the *imambargah*, Altaf describes events of that February morning. While he talks, I turn around slowly, trying to envision the tragedy that morning. "Do you think the Murtaza killings were targeted at your brother Hameed?" I ask. Hameed, after all, was presiding over a local community of Shiites at the time of his death. Altaf pauses, but not because of indecision. I know that he thinks about this plenty. Targeted attacks against successful Shia businessmen and doctors are frequent. Altaf owns a thriving travel agency. In 1995, after Hameed's murder, he saw a hit list that had been confiscated from a *Sipah-e Sahaba* cell in Karachi. His name was Number Two. And though he spent a few weeks in London right after his younger brother's murder, he says that never considered moving away for good.

"I don't think they [*Sipah-e Sahaba*] had any idea who was inside," Altaf Bhojani finally answers, "They just knew that they were Shia."

SINCE THE EARLY 1980s, the sectarian landscape in Pakistan has been manipulated by the governments and charities tied to, on the one side, Shia Iran and on the other, the Sunni Persian Gulf states. During his sec-

¹ In Karachi, the Rent-A-Guard business is booming. The problem with this is that no one seems to have any clue what they are doing. These guards aren't former Special Forces or Navy SEALs, like the hired guns working alongside the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Mostly, they are unemployed older men who aren't cut out to be a *chaiwallah*, or tea man. At the hotel where am I am staying in Karachi, a scrawny teenager with a peach-fuzz mustache and a blue hat with yellow letters that read *GHAZI*, or warrior, totes a shotgun around the lobby. He looks no older than 18 and perhaps the product of close familial intermarriage. It's not that I doubt his ability to spray buckshot at an intruder, but that, as a security guard, there is little about his presence that makes me feel any more secure than I would have felt if he wasn't there at all. Not only does the Armed Guard phenomenon not make anyone more secure, it actually contributes to the pervading sense of insecurity throughout Karachi.

ond term in office, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif traveled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to insist that Sheik Zayed, the now-deceased former president of the UAE, put a stop to his country's support for Sunni sectarian groups in Pakistan. And in September 2003, a report in *Herald*, a monthly Pakistani magazine, reported that *Sipah-e Sahaba* was receiving at least \$50,000 a month through a single go-between in Saudi Arabia, on top of tens of thousands of dollars through various contacts in Muslim and non-Muslim countries around the world, including the United States.

Financial, and moral, support is critical for an organization like *Sipah-e Sahaba* to be able to carry out terrorist attacks. At one point during my conversation with Qari Shafiqur Rehman, just after he had finished telling me how poor his students are, I ask him who funds the *madrassa's* day-to-day activities. "We are very small," he answers, "so we can afford it." Are there donors who help ease some of the burdens? He smiles, I presume because he knows where my question is leading. "We don't mention the names of our donors." But nevertheless, weeks of reporting and numerous visits to *madrassas* around the country suggest that the sectarian story today is more complicated than one simply about wealthy overseas donors wiring money to terrorist groups in Pakistan. While Pakistan's sectarian war may have been originally cooked up by outside actors, the situation today has a life all its own. Militant groups on either side are sufficiently entrenched in the business of killing one another that they don't need encouragement from Iran or Saudi Arabia. The dynamic is self-perpetuating, and, perhaps, less reversible than ever.

Consider the case of Ali Gardezi. Gardezi is a Pakistani businessman living in Dubai. He is in Karachi for a couple of nights and a friend arranges for me to meet him. Gardezi chain-smokes Durham cigarettes with a clear plastic tip and has a loud, nasal voice. He introduces himself to me by saying, "I am Shia, not a Muslim. If anyone tells you otherwise, they are telling you lies." This kind of talk sounds normal coming from someone like Qari Shafiqur Rehman, who calls Shiites *kafirs* for their polytheistic "worship" of the Imams. But I have never heard such things coming from a Shia. Gardezi has no beard, plenty of rich friends, and a knack for business. He has as many bad things to say about the Iranians as he does about the Saudis — not your prototype sectarian. "There is nothing similar [about Sunnis and Shia]," he says. "Our concept of God is different; our concept of Koran is different; our concept of Imam is different; our prayer is different; our *zakat* is different. The only thing we believe in together is Allah, and that Mohammad is his Prophet." I agree with him that Shiites, like most minorities around the world, have a heightened sense of community and identity. But some aspects of Gardezi's history seem questionable. He senses my skepticism. "These aren't my ideas," he responds. "These are in the books." Clearly, this man is no Derridean.

Ali Gardezi suggests we drive across town to a home

where Shiites gather on Wednesday nights to do *matam*, or self-flagellation. Halfway there, Gardezi's phone rings. Instead of a jazz tune or a pop jingle, I hear a preacher fuming about something. I ask Gardezi what he is saying. "He is cursing the first three *caliphs* [Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman]," he answers with a sly grin. (Such a ring would be like living in Atlanta and having a Ku Klux Klan speech programmed as your ringtone.) Later in the ride, we get to talking about Ashura processions and *Sipah-e Sahaba*. (Ashura is the 10th day of Muharram on the Islamic calendar. It is the holiest day in Shia Islam, when followers mourn the death of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson, Imam Husayn.) *Sipah-e Sahaba* activists have been known, in the past, to follow behind Shia processions, chanting nasty things about Husayn and trying to tantalize Shiites into a fistfight. People like Ali Gardezi, in turn, commonly swear against the first three *caliphs*, as well as some of the wives of the Prophet Mohammad.

A FEW DAYS AFTER I met with Qari Shafiqur Rehman, I went to Karachi's largest Shia ghetto at the invitation of Allama Abbas Kumaili. Kumaili is one of Pakistan's most renowned Shia orators. He is a tall man, well over six feet, in his late 60s. He has a bulbous nose, large ears, and a soft voice. The day of the *majles*, or congregation, that he is addressing, I meet him at his home in a predominantly Shia neighborhood that flutters with the sound of ubiquitous black flags mourning the death of Imam Husayn 1400 years ago.

When I arrive, one of Kumaili's sons approaches me with a camcorder. He asks if I know how to film. I stare back quizzically. Kumaili pokes his head around from behind a door.

"I told them [the hosts of the event] that you were a Canadian journalist filming a documentary."

"But I'm not."

The Canadian-journalist identity Kumaili tries to give me is well-intentioned. In *Jafar-e-Tayyar*, the neighborhood where we are going, Western journalists have been beaten up in the past. But a Canadian cinematographer? Regardless, the camcorder debacle goes on for a few minutes before they pawn it off to someone I surmise to be Kumaili's brother-in-law.

We have an armed escort on the car ride from Kumaili's home to *Jafar-e-Tayyar*. As we zip through traffic with guards waving guns at cars too close, Kumaili tells me about the two assassination attempts he ducked. "I know my name is still on the hit lists," he says. Of the three cars in our caravan, everyone except Kumaili, his Camcorder-toting brother-in-law, and I are packing heat.

Jafar-e-Tayyar is more than an hour outside the center of Karachi. Amid the upsurge in sectarian violence in the mid-1990s, lots of Shia families moved from mixed neigh-

borhoods closer to the city for the security and comfort of Jafar-e-Tayyar. I know we are there when the flags on the roofs, and banners hung across the street, are all black. I *really* know we are there when I see a tent, adorned with posters of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei, selling religious literature and videocassettes of past Ashura processions.

There is a small roundabout in the center of Jafar-e-Tayyar flying a black flag more than three stories high. Kumaili and I are ushered into a home with black curtains where we drink tea sheltered from the sun. Three decorations hang on the wall — a painting of Imam Husayn, replete with dark, flowing locks and stenciled makeup around the eyes; another painting of Husayn's white horse, covered with lance wounds and standing on the edge of some precipice looking out onto a sunset the color of blood oranges; and a photograph of the latticed tomb of Imam Reza.

After a few minutes, I excuse myself to walk around before Kumaili begins his speech. There is a tent in the middle of the street, under which people are listening to a singer on a stage a few hundred yards away. The tent is probably half-a-mile long. On one of the inside walls there is another, different poster of Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei. Their faces are floating in the sky and, in the shape of a dying woman's craggy finger, a lighting bolt shoots from a cloud and zaps an American flag. I realize that I forgot my camera and have only the



Children preparing to mourn for Imam Husayn.

one on my cell phone. I'm a pathetic excuse for a Canadian cinematographer.

These posters, I later learn, are the work of the Imamia Students Organization (ISO). The ISO started in the early 1970s and, from early on, swore its allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini. Today, the ISO follows the word of Iran's current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "We are attached to the system of *velayat-e-faqih*," an ISO leader named Naser tells me. According to Naser, after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, a delegation of ISO leaders went to Iran to tell Khomeini that "we are with you." Khomeini replied by telling the delegation what they wanted to hear: "We are also with you."

This relationship has always been worrying to Sunni groups. Some even say that this is *Sipah-e-Sahaba's* whole reason for being, that is to challenge Iran's influence, via its alleged proxies like ISO, in Pakistan. This doesn't seem to bother Naser. The ISO, he says, has always been one of the most active Shia forces in Pakistan. "We might not be on the front line [of sectarianism]," he admits, "but we are on the second line."

The ISO-Iran relationship even creates a dilemma for moderate Shia leaders like Allama Abbas Kumaili. Kumaili explains that the Iranian Revolution has done Pakistani Shias more harm than good. "*Sipah-e-Sahaba* was not even in existence before this revolution," he says. "Ever since 1979, we [Shiites] have been killed." When I ask him directly about the ISO, he answers confidently, "I soothed the ISO."

But when I look around Jafar-e-Tayyar at the posters of Iranian leaders, I question just how soothed the ISO really is.

ON THE OTHER SIDE of the tent wall that the Ayatollahs' posters are hanging from is a small, crowded sidewalk. I take a glass of chilled rosewater from a young boy standing over a wide-mouthed tin. Other children gather to watch me drink. They wear strips of white cotton, splattered with paint to look like blood, tied around their heads. Another group of kids practices self-flagellations. At the very back of the tent, a man moves through the crowd spraying rosewater in the air using an exterminator's jug-and-hose set-up. Seventy-two "coffins," meant to symbolize those who died alongside Imam Husayn in 680 AD, are covered with lace and fake paint. Women are weeping loudly and it smells sticky-sweet.

The *majles* finally starts about an hour after we arrive. For an hour, Allama Abbas Kumaili speaks, without notes, to a crowd exceeding 10,000 people. Toward the end, Kumaili recites the events that occurred in the fields of Karbala in 680 AD. This brings grown men to tears. There are several thousand grown men weeping. The only people who aren't crying are me and the young boys with blood-splattered headbands. Perhaps they aren't old

enough to really get into it all.

When the *majles* ends, a crowd gathers around the flagpole in the center round-about to do *matam*. It is the time of day in Karachi when dusk thickens into night and a calm breeze, even miles away from the beach, blows across the city. Some boys are singing, *a cappella*, about the tragedy at Karbala. Others are shirtless, standing in a circle, beating their breasts with closed fists. It sounds like stomping elephants. Everyone is sweating. Some draw blood from their chests, all of which are pink and bruising quickly. One of the ringleaders calls out chants that function as marching orders, and the *matam* becomes faster and harder. Under the feet of these self-punishers is a giant mural with an American and Israeli flag painted side-by-side, reading "DOWN WITH THE USA." It looks like a billboard you might see in Tehran.

Then I notice the backs of the self-flagellators. The skin is torn and the tissue is puffy and grossly pink from whipping themselves with chains on Ashura. At that moment, a fat teenage boy taps me on the elbow and wants to know what I am doing there. I tell him I am a friend of Allama Abbas Kumaili.

"Do you want to be a Shia?" he asks.

THERE IS A VERY slippery slope in Islam from doctrine to intolerance to sectarianism. You can hear it in Ali Gardezi's voice (and, of course, his ring tone). When I bring this question up with Naser from the ISO, he shrugs his shoulders and says unapologetically, "What? We're better than they are." And it's obvious that Qari Shafiqur Rehman, who denies that Shiites are even Muslims, is off the slope altogether.

But it's not these people on the "first" or "second" line



The blur of matam.

of the sectarian war that are most indicative of the state of sectarianism in Pakistan today. It's the dozens of other, politically less-active Pakistanis who, during the course of my reporting, readily offer opinions or make statements that truly shed light on the situation. It is, most worryingly, these people who are, at heart, deeply suspect and even derisive of other sects. And it is these people who will be around long after the foreign bank accounts are closed. □

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Current Fellows and their Activities

Richard D. Connerney (January 2005 - 2007) • INDIA

A lecturer in Philosophy, Asian Religions and Philosophy at Rutgers, Iona College and the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Rick Connerney is spending two years as a Phillips Talbot Fellow studying and writing about the intertwining of religion, culture and politics in India, once described by former U.S. Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith as "a functioning anarchy." Rick has a B.A. and an M.A. in religion from Wheaton College and the University of Hawaii, respectively.

Kay Dilday (October 2005-2007) • FRANCE/MOROCCO

An editor for the *New York Times*' Op-Ed page for the past five years, Kay holds an M.A. in Comparative International Politics and Theory from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, a Bachelor's degree in English Literature from Tufts University, and has done graduate work at the *Universiteit van Amsterdam* in the Netherlands and the *Cours de Civilisation de la Sorbonne*. She has traveled in and written from Haiti and began her journalistic life as city-council reporter for Somerville This Week, in Somerville, MA.

Cristina Merrill (June 2004-2006) • ROMANIA

Born in Bucharest, Cristina moved from Romania to the United States with her mother and father when she was 14. Learning English (but retaining her Romanian), she majored in American History at Harvard College and there became captain of the women's tennis team. She received a Master's degree in Journalism from New York University in 1994, worked for several U.S. publications from *Adweek* to the *New York Times*, and is spending two years in Romania watching it emerge from the darkness of the Ceausescu regime into the presumed light of membership in the European Union and NATO.

Nicholas Schmidle (October 2005-2007) • PAKISTAN

Nicholas is a freelance writer interested in the intersection of culture, religion and politics in Asia. He is spending two years in Pakistan writing on issues of ethnic, sectarian, and national identity. Previously, he has reported from Central Asia and Iran, and his work has been published in the *Washington Post*, the *Weekly Standard*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and others. Nick received an M.A. in International Affairs - Regional Studies from American University in December 2005. He lives with his wife, Rikki.

Andrew J. Tabler (February 2005 - 2007) • SYRIA/LEBANON

Andrew has lived, studied and worked in the Middle East since a Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Fellowship enabled him to begin Arabic-language studies and work toward a Master's degree at the American University in Cairo in 1994. Following the Master's, he held editorships with the *Middle East Times* and *Cairo Times* before moving to Turkey, Lebanon and Syria and working as a Senior Editor with the Oxford Business Group and a correspondent for the Economist Intelligence Unit. His two-year ICWA fellowship bases him in Beirut and Damascus, where he will report on Lebanese affairs and Syrian reform.

Jill Winder (July 2004 - 2006) • GERMANY

With a B.A. in politics from Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA and a Master's degree in Art Curating from Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, Jill is an ICWA Donors' Fellow looking at Germany through the work, ideas and viewpoints of its contemporary artists. Before six months of intensive study of the German language in Berlin, she was a Thomas J. Watson Fellow looking at post-communist art practice and the cultural politics of transition in the former Soviet bloc (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine).

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