FEEDING MORAL RELATIONS

THE MAKING OF KINSHIP AND NATION IN IRAN

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A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia
in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Virginia
May, 2014

ABSTRACT

Feeding Moral Relations: The Making of Kinship and Nation in Iran, draws on 15 months of ethnographic research within the households of pro-regime Shi'i Iranians (or Basijis) to examine how Islamic concepts of purity and morality are shaping social relations at the level of both kinship and nation. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the imperative to protect and create the inner purity of the Shi'i family and nation in the face of impending outside corruption has been a driving force in national politics. Through an intensive investigation of everyday life in the rural town of Fars-Abad and of numerous Shi'i national commemorations in urban Tehran and Shiraz, I explore how Basijis strive to constitute this inner purity by strategically channeling and containing two vital aspects of Iranian sociality: food and bodily substances such as blood. Indeed, while previous scholars have noted the special significance of bodily substance in Islamic family law and the striking display of spilled agnatic blood in Islamic national rituals, my research delves more deeply into the cultural logic of bodily substance in Iran to explore how bodily substances such as blood both naturalize and sacralize claims to common descent, purity, and closeness to God. In addition, my research goes further to show that food provides another key vehicle for imbuing relations of kinship and citizenship with the qualities of purity and spirituality. Apparent in everyday and ritual acts of cooking and feeding within the home, and also in the widespread pious sharing of votive food in national contexts, food works alongside bodily substance in the spheres of both kinship and nation to connect constituents to each other and to the divine. Food, I argue, is not merely transformative of individual family members or citizens, it (re)constitutes and demarcates the moral family and nation as against political and moral others.

Feeding Moral Relations explicitly challenges narratives of modernity that relegate kinship to the domestic domain and assume a secular model of the nation-state. I argue not only that the ideas and practices of kinship can inform nation making, but also that both kinship and nation can be shaped by the same religious and moral concerns. Indeed, although scholars have begun to address the interrelation of kinship and nation, they have largely focused on how the bodily substances of kinship—such as blood and genes—have come to have significance for the nation. While I build on these studies, I also apply more recent insights of kinship theory that move beyond the boundaries of bodily substances to query how other forms of kin making, such as feeding or prayer, may have relevance for the nation. Finally, in the context of the increasing mutual demonization of Iran and the U.S. in contemporary politics, this work provides a nuanced portrait of what the Islamic Republic of Iran looks like from the standpoint of its rural Basiji supporters, a powerful and frequently misunderstood section of Iranian citizenry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great pleasure that I can finally thank those people who have made this project possible. First and foremost, thank you to my host family in Iran for your love, support, and endurance through life's difficulties. I will never forget your kindness and hospitality. Special thanks also to my research assistants Mohammad and Hoda in Fars-Abad and Tehran.

I have been exceedingly fortunate to have a wonderful committee at the Department of Anthropology at the University of Virginia – Susan McKinnon, Ira Bashkow, and Richard Handler – who have provided invaluable advice, support, and constructive criticism over the course of this project. As a student of anthropology, I have been especially honored to work with my advisor and committee chair, Susan McKinnon, who has taught me everything I know about kinship and the anthropological critique of domains. Without her stalwart support and encouragement, this project would not have been possible. Special thanks also to my other committee members, Ira Bashkow and Richard Handler, who have read my drafts and offered valuable feedback and to whom I owe much of my understanding of the discipline. Finally, thank you to Farzaneh Milani, my esteemed outside reader in the Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures, who supported my research and shared with me her love of Iranian poetry, prose, and film.

While at the University of Virginia, I have received additional support, insight, and education from many other professors. I am especially thankful to Zjaleh Hajibashi (who taught me Persian), Eve Danziger, Wende Marshall, Daniel Lefkowitz, Abdul Aziz Sachedina, Roy Wagner, George Mentore, and Lise Dobrin. Finally, thank you to my colleagues at the University of Virginia and beyond: Lydia Rodriguez, Arsalan Khan, Julie Starr, David Flood, Dionisios Kavadias, Roberto Armengol, Jack Stoetzel, Todne Chipumuro, Asiya Malik, Katey Blumenthal,

Amina Tawasil, Claire Snell-Rood, Yu-chien Huang, Nathalie Nahas, Alison Broach, Carolyn Howarter, Jennie Doberne, Irtefa Binte-Farid, Sue-Ann McCarty, Jason Hickel, Jacqueline Cieslak, and to the person who first enlived my interest in all things Persian, my life long friend, Mina Assadollahzadeh.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Edie Turner, who has always been my number one supporter; to my parents, Irene Wellman and Donald Wellman; and to my best friend in the whole world, Naser Alijabbari.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this dissertation, I have largely followed the transliteration scheme outlined in by the journal *Iranian Studies*. Long vowels are represented with the letters *ā* (as in *āb*), *i* (as in *melli*), and *u* (as in *Tus*). Short vowels are represented with the letters *a* (as in *ashk*), *e* (as in *fekr*), and *o* (as in *pol*). Ezafe is written with an *–e* after consonants and *–ye* after vowels. Tashdid is represented by doubling a letter and plural is represented with the addition *–ha*. In addition to this system, however, I have chosen to employ the conventional spelling of key words, events, and public figures as given by the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). For instance, I use the spelling Husayn for the grandson of the Prophet.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Nushin and I sat on the bright red Persian carpet in the sitting room of the home she shares with her husband and three unmarried children in the small town of Fars Abad, Iran.[1] She leaned against the wall, her legs cross in front of her, wrapped in a dark colored home use, old-style *chador* that was speckled with tiny yellow flowers. She reached periodically to sip from a glass of golden tea. "'Ashura' [the day of mourning for the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn] has great meaning for us," she said. "We say that the Imam Husayn brought Islam to life. Specifically, he brought to life 'the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice' (*amr-e be ma'aruf koneh, nahi az monker*). He accomplished this with his act [of martyrdom]." This means, she explained, that we must both "do good" and "reject evil and ugliness" (*duri az badi-ha o zeshti-ha*). It means that we act from within (*baten*), and garner "inner purity" (*safā-ye baten*) to "forbid the indecent." Nushin spoke these words several months into my stay in her home. A fifty-year-old mother of four and wife of a Basiji Iraqi war veteran, she hoped to spark my empathy for the sacrifice of the Imam Husayn at the hands of the evil Yazid, an event that is recorded in Islamic history as happening in 622AD, but which continues to structure everyday life in the Islamic Republic. She spoke, too, of her strategic management of her relationships with members of her extended family who did not fulfill her ideals for purity and morality.

The idea of "promoting virtue and preventing vice," most often in contrast to some outside source of corruption, appears in other parts of Iranian life. In the work of nativist intellectual Ali Shari'ati, for instance, the "prevention of vice" (*nahi az monker*) is evoked as a

[1] In this dissertation, I take great care to avoid endangering informants in relation to authorities. All specific communities and individual research participants are given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

revolutionary act directed against social injustice, "cultural imperialism," "Westernstruckness," and corruption from without. Today, Article 8 of the Islamic Republic's constitution emphasizes the obligation of every Muslim to guide others toward goodness and save them from evil. It describes this act as a "mutual duty" which shapes relations both between people and between people and the government.

This dissertation explores people are mobilizing post-Revolutionary Islamic concepts of purity and morality to shape social relations at the level of both kinship and nation in Iran. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the imperative to protect and create the inner purity of the Shi'i family and nation in the face of impending outside corruption has been a driving force in national politics. In this dissertation, I explore how Basiji families who support the Islamic Republic strive to constitute this inner purity by strategically channeling and containing two vital aspects of Iranian sociality: bodily substances such as blood; and food, whether in everyday meals or public votive offerings.

Previously, scholars of Islam and the Middle East have noted the special potency of agnatic blood and/or martyrs' blood in Iranian understandings of both the family and citizenship (Torab 2007; Mir-Hosseini 1999). They have further noted the striking display of blood and bodily remains in Islamic national commemorations of the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) (Khosronejad 2013). My research delves more deeply into the cultural logic of bodily substance in Iran to ask: how are contemporary Basiji laymen and religious leaders wielding bodily substances to regenerate and demarcate a pure inner Shi'i family and nation?

In addition, this dissertation examines food as another key vehicle for imbuing relations of kinship and citizenship with the "correct" qualities of purity and spirituality. Drawing from the religious significance of everyday and ritual acts of cooking and feeding within the home, and also from the widespread pious sharing of votive food in national contexts, I explore how food works alongside bodily substance in the spheres of both kinship and nation to help connect constituents to each other and to the divine. This research builds on theoretical work on the interrelationship of kinship and nation. It explores the moral and spiritual dimensions of kinship and nation making and provides a much-needed portrait of post-Revolutionary Iranian sociality.

In the following, I will provide an introduction to the key concepts that frame the rest of the dissertation. I will then introduce my research methods and field sites. Finally, this chapter will introduce the key theoretical engagements of this work and provide a brief synopsis of its contents.

Inner Purity and Outer Corruption

Previous scholars have shown than Iranian personhood is conceived in terms of a pure, moral inside (*baten*) and a corruptible, appetite-driven outside (*zāher*). The "right" or "complete" person (*ādam-e dorost*) is someone whose exterior (*zāher*) expresses his or her interior virtue (*safā-ye baten*) (Beeman 2001, 2005; Khosravi 2009; Bateson 1979). For my interlocutors, in particular, such an identity is epitomized, by the pure intentioned self-sacrifice of the martyr or the outward kindness of pious descendants of the Prophet Mohammad (*sayyed*).

The corrupt person, in contrast, is two faced or hypocritical (*dowru*) (see Bateson 1989:126). He or she pretends to be virtuous on the outside but has malicious or corrupt inner intentions. Such a person, according to host friends and family in Fars-Abad, has replaced inner

virtue and closeness to God with outer corruption and spiritual vacancy. The extreme of this condition is a person who practices “prayer taking,” a kind of witchcraft.

The coordinates of inside and outside, however, are not rigid distinctions pertaining to personhood and self. Rather, they interrelate through a dynamism and tension: outside qualities consistently penetrate the inner core and inside qualities are subject both to outside contamination and continual redefinition that is itself subject to context. Furthermore, persons, qualities, and acts operate in a gradient spectrum in which some more closely exhibit pure core values than others (Beeman 2001). During my stay in Fars-Abad, interpenetrating inside/outside distinctions and values were a matter of daily interest and conversation. In particular, people frequently lamented the changing relationship they saw between people’s insides and outsides in contemporary family, town, and national life.

"There has been a significant change since my childhood," Nushin explained as we walked around a man-made pond in the rural town park with her sister, "the outside of people is becoming their inside." Agreeing with Nushin, her sister added, "Women wear the chador just for show, but what is this [chador] anyway? We wear it because everyone wears it.” The chador, Nushin and her sister agreed, is no longer an expression of inner purity but is instead increasingly masking people’s inner corruption.

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Iranian-style black chador has come to mean many things. More than a sign of modesty or Islamic piety, the chador is an emblem of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. While many women in cities do not wear the chador, in the town of Fars-Abad it is a necessary garment for female professionals, students, and housewives alike. Indeed, in the chador filled park of Fars-Abad, Nushin’s statement sounded rebellious. But she explained: “The women who wear the chador do so just so their husbands can make money or

advance in their careers. But the meaning of the Qur'an is that you don't flaunt yourself. Now, everyone wears makeup and styles their hair. This is about more than dressing simply or having plain hair. In the past, you could trust people. There was more trust." According to Nushin, people's outsides in Iran increasingly do not match their insides, a matter which corrupts not only individuals, but also the ability of members of her community to develop mutual trust. By wearing chadors without pure intention from within, she argues, women are feigning religious modesty and purity. Yet Nushin does not fault the Revolution for this failure: "This is not because of the Revolution – Khamenei and Khomeini are good," she added. "It is because others have surrendered hope."

The family and household in contemporary Iran are similarly modeled on the distinction between a morally pure, protected interior (*darun*) and a dangerous, corruptible exterior (*birun*). For the household, this difference marks both the inner and outer spaces of the household and the relationships they permit. While the inner space (*andaruni*) of the household is the enclosed location of inner purity, "permitted family relations" (*mahram*), physical intimacy, and devotion; the outside (*biruni*) is the location of possible corruption, "unrelatedness" (*nāmahram*), physical restrictions (between sexes), and spiritual vacancy (see also Khosravi 2009:46). As such, each space is similarly inclusive of differing repertoires of intimacy, formality, and expressions of hierarchy. For instance, and as Beeman (2001) explains, siblings, who come closest to being intimate equals in Iranian society, literally sprawl on the floor when alone in their own households. If an older male uncle enters, however, they may sit up and kneel respectfully. In outside situations, in contrast, depending on degree, the same siblings will use formal pronouns and interact with concerted deference and respect (Beeman 2001).

For my host family members, neighbors, and friends in Fars-Abad, the maintenance of "inner purity" (*safā-ye baten*) for both individual kin and the household was a matter of constant vigilance. As I will show in this dissertation, family members frequently acted to protect the inside space of the household and its thresholds from possible outside harm (such as the evil eye) through the use of trinkets, prayer, and by policing what foods or objects entered the home from without. They linked this kind of family inner purity firmly to the model of the family of the Prophet Muhammad and to the proscriptions for religiously permitted, harmonious, loving family relationships found in the Qur'an. They contended that individual family members must strive toward Islamic purity in all acts, prayers, and speech both within and outside the home, and further, that trusted family relationships were the center or heart (*del*) of the household.

For this reason, they endeavored to protect the purity (*pāki*) and esteem (*āberu*) of the family and lineage through acts of praying and incorporating the right substances (e.g., blood and food) overtime, while simultaneously overcoming outside corruption – from distant kin, in-laws or strangers. Here, although a superficial level of association with immoral kin or untrustworthy strangers was sometimes maintained for reasons I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two, such persons are seen as outside the trusted center comprised by the "inner" (*baten*) and "small family" (*khānevādeh-ye kuchik*). Interestingly, the inside space of shrines and mosques in Iran are similarly understood as a pure and moral space of intimacy (with God). While the inner sanctuary of a shrine is associated with the divine, thresholds, and walls are sites of danger and possible corruption.

The framing of the nation bears close resemblance to the inner/outer dimensions of Iranian kinship. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a powerful cohort of religious scholars and everyday citizens have emphasized the need to (re)generate the authentically Islamic interior of

the nation – a citizenry that is composed of virtuous Shi'i brothers and sisters – while resisting an immoral, "Westernstruck" exterior (Shari'ati 1979; Al-e Ahmad 1962). The following sermons provide an glimpse of this position.

> We need a moral refinement…now we are still an irregular European society (The Ayatollah Rafsanjani in a post Revolution Tehrani Friday Prayer Sermon: Tehran Sermon 5.3.83 quoted in Ludwig 1999:192).
>
> They (i.e., the West) write much about man … but with limited (i.e., non-spiritual) and worldly aims (Rafsanjani 10/7/81 quoted in Ludwig 1999:190).

The struggle between the pure forces of the inside and the corruption of the outside is central to how many contemporary Iranians remember the history of their civilization. In particular, the Battle of Karbala, in which the pure Imam Husayn and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad was martyred at the hands of the evil Yazid, has become a meta-historical paradigm of and for the Republic (Khosronejad 2013; Beeman 2005).

In Iran, an imperative for *national* moral purification began before the 1979 Revolution. In the 1960s and 70s, key Iranian nativist intellectuals challenged what they considered to be the autocratic and Western corrupted Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's exorbitant modernization policies (Mirsepassi 2000:73). Nativist scholars such as Ali Shari'ati, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Daryush Sahyegan and Ehsan Naraghi, in particular, decried the Shah's modernization practices as "Western cultural invasion" (*tahajom-e farhangi*). Many also emphasized a yearning for a return to "purity" and Shi'i Islam (see Boroujerdi 1996).[2] Accordingly, the Pahlavi monarchy had to be removed so that society would "sever itself from the outside and rebuild itself internally" (Najmabadi 1987:205). They hoped not return to "tradition," but rather to take control of Western modernity and its machines by employing it within the "authentic" Shi'i spirituality particular to Iran. Here, the influential Iranian revolutionary Ali Shari'ati, in particular, drew on

[2] In some senses, these thinkers can be described as nativists who attempted to delegitimize and decenter Western modes of knowledge and thus counter Eurocentrism (Williams and Chrisman 1994:14).

the alternative image of Fatima, a dutiful daughter, wife and mother as an indigenous and pure model of femininity that could explicitly oppose "corrupt" Euro-American models of femaleness while vividly recalling the suffering of Ali's family under the cruel rule of Umayyad caliphs (Moallem 2005:92). More generally, he argued that religious identity is an integral part of national culture in non-Western societies and that the recovery of this identity is the first step toward self-assertion. In this framework, Shi'i religious spirit frees Iranians from the need to import Western ideology and Islam provides a kind of "ideology" that can supersede humanist ideology by offering extra dimensions such as a belief in "the realm of Divine invisibility (*qayb*), morality, love, worship, redemption, reward, punishment, resurrection (*ma'ad*), and eternity (*baqa*)" (quoted in Gheissari 1997:104).

Imam Khomeini and other clergy such as the Ayatollah Motahhari drew from these arguments to mobilize the masses in the Islamic Revolution of 1979. While Shari'ati can be said to have contributed to this revolution by solidifying the Iranian return to the "Islamic self," the important Iranian writer and political critic Al-e Ahmad made the first [and arguably most important] move to bridge the gap between the clergy and the secular intellectuals through a political Islam and a consciousness of the importance of religious symbolism (Dabashi 1993:44). Although neither Shari'ati nor Al-e Ahmad lived to see 1979 Islamic Revolution and its results, the Islamic Republic of Iran has since praised both intellectuals for their contributions to the movement (Mirsepassi 2000:72). In *Islamic Government* (1971), for instance, the book in which the Ayatollah Khomeini borrows from these ideas to substantiate his influential doctrine of the guardianship of the jurist (*velāyat-e faqih*). He writes:

> Even if they [the imperialist countries] go to Mars or to the Milky Way…they will not experience happiness (*sa'ādat*), moral virtue (*fazāyel-e akhlāq*), and spiritual exaltation (*ta'āli-ye ruhāni*). They will be unable to solve their social problems, because the

> solution of social problems and the relief of their own miseries require moral solutions, solutions based on faith. (Persian edition, my translation 1971)

Khomeini here and elsewhere clearly distinguishes the moral virtue of the revolution and later the Islamic Republic of Iran from the materialism and spiritual vacancy of outside imperialist countries, which he compares to the Westernized Mohammad Reza Shah and ultimately the evil Yazid in the Battle of Karbala. The shift is clear: an Islamic politics that prioritizes achieving morality, not (Western) modernity.[3]

The logic of inside and outside thus pervades Iranian understandings of "right" or ethical sociality for both kinship and nation. In the following chapters, I will make visible the many ways this distinction infuses both everyday family life and Iranian citizenship. In particular, I note how the constantly shifting categories of inside and outside provide real friction for family relations by creating inclusions and exclusions. I futher explore how these categories are wielded to enforce Islamic gendered interaction and comportment in everyday family and national life.

Nation-State or Community of Believers? Categories of Analysis

In this dissertation, I largely focus on the making of a Shi'i nation rather than its counterpart, the transnational community of Muslim believers, the *umma*. Yet it is necessary to note that the precise relationship between Islam and the nation-state has been a continuing matter of tension and debate in Iran. Most scholars agree that early Islamic revolutionaries were initially internationalist: they sought to export their Revolution to other Muslim countries and called for liberation and solidarity for the whole Islamic world (Zubaida 2004). The Ayatollah Montazeri's

[3] For more insight into this spiritual inside versus materialist, corrupted outside see the Ayatollah Rafsanjani's Friday Speech for October 7, 1981: "They (i.e., the West) write much about man ... but with limited (i.e., non-spiritual) and worldly aims" (quoted in Ludwig 1999:190). Similarly, in a Friday sermon on September 5, 1980, soon after the Revolution, the current Supreme Leader of Iran, Khamenei'i, related "The (Western) superpowers don't understand what *martyrdom* means. Their materialistic point of view doesn't allow Western journalists to understand why (our) youth want to die (as martyrs)" (quoted and translated in Ludwig 1999:180).

statement in a post 1979 Tehran Friday Prayer Sermon is typical of this early sensibility: "The Iranian nation doesn't want one span of Arab soil ... instead we want Islam, which doesn't know borders" (Montazeri, 5/10/1979, quoted in Ludwig 1999:190). Similarly, the Ayatollah Motahhari, a close aide to Khomeini and the chairman of the Revolutionary Council until his assassination (often described as martyrdom) on May 1, 1979, was a firm critic of nationalism. In contrast to influential figures such as Shari'ati, Motahhari argued that nationalism was inadequate in comparison to the positive aspects of Islam, which provides a transnational framework of potentially global reach. He adamantly dismissed definitions of nationalism based on the individual, race, ethnicity, or even place. Nationhood, he said, is a myth constructed by governments.[4] He argued, in particular, against the Pahlavi state ideology of Iranian national identity, which had been modeled on Ataturk's nation building in Turkey (Fischer and Abedi 1990:191).

Yet despite an early anti-nationalist and anti-territorial focus on the Islamic community (*umma*), the new Islamic Republic of Iran was never strictly pan-Islamic. Anthropologist Ziba Mir-Hosseini, for example, notes that since its inception, the 1979 Constitution fused democratic and theocratic principles and institutions (Arjomand 1992; Shirazi 1997).[5] Other scholars contend that the failure to export the Revolution elsewhere and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (Ludwig 1999; Zubaida 1997) led those in power to refocus on the territorialized (Muslim) nation-state as the category of import (Ansari 2004:416). They imagined a Republic that was established and founded on the *spirit* of Islam (Paidar 1995:175). Thus as Iranian political

[4] For instance, he argued that the Farsi term for nation, *mellat*, was a philological mistake. *Mellat*, he argued, is a Qur'anic word, which means a path that the prophet offers for people, not a nation (Fischer and Abedi 1990:192).
[5] She further argues that although Khatami and the reformists failed to bring tangible changes to the structure of power, they provoked a new notion of the sharia as an ideal. In so doing, they appealed to Islam's higher values and invoked concepts from within Islamic legal theory, notably the distinction between sharia as "divine law" and jurisprudence (*fegh*) as the human understanding of the requirements of divine law (2010:355).

scientist, Mostafa Vaziri relates: "The relationship between Islamism and Iranism – their boundaries of consciousness, their authority and sentiment – however, remained a gray area until the 1979 Revolution (and indeed continues to be one today, under different circumstances)" (1989:189).

This debate over the precise relationship between Islam and the nation-state was also, not surprisingly, a frequent subject of conversation among my host friends and family in Iran. In the following, I will briefly sketch how this issue was understood by people I spoke with in Iran.

Mehdi

According to Mehdi, a young Basiji computer scientist living in Ekbatan, Tehran, religion supersedes nationalism. He explained: "There are two things: Islam and 'Iranian culture' (*farhang-e Iran*). The chador is Iranian but wearing hijab is from Islam" (interview 3/2/2010). He continued, "Islam is adapted by different 'cultures' (*farhang-ha*) differently….Religion comes first, then culture." When I asked him if the citizens of Iran feel a connection with each other, he responded: "Yes, we have a connection in Iran. We are good to each other. We are brothers of Islam. We say that [because] they [formal *eshun*] and I have Islam, we are like brothers. To someone who is older, I say 'father.' If there is an elderly lady, I say 'my mother.' She is my mother. Religion is important. It is very important in this manner. Overall, religiosity (*mazhabi*) is very important in Iran." Mehdi employs terms such as mother, father, and brother when referring to other Shi'i Iranians because, as he says, they share the same religion, the same emphasis on purity, religiously permissible family relationships, trustworthiness, and closeness to God.

Ahmad and his brother-in-law, Hajji Nazari

On another occasion, in Fars-Abad, I asked my host father and his brother-in-law whether they regarded Iran first as an Islamic entity or as a territorial entity (*khak*). Their debate grew increasingly intense, almost to the point at which I worried I had caused a family feud. The brother-in-law was in his fifties and was a member of the Azeri Turk minority and had a fondness for poetry, Nescafe American style coffee, and Farsi translations of Blake. He argued that Iranians are connected by the land (*khak*). "The nation and its borders," he said, "come before the religious aspects of life." He further contended that people in Iran have different religions. He also argued that, "If something helps someone in Iran, it helps the people of Iran, not the religion of Islam." My host father, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War, adamantly disagreed. He argued, as had Mehdi, that Islam comes first, that religion is first. He said that he counts the Palestinians and other Muslims as his brothers and that helping them is helping Islam: "The commands of Allah," he explained, "extend beyond Iran's borders. Islam established (*ijād kard*) the Republic. Khomeini [the founder of the Islamic Republic] 'believed' (*mo'taqed budan*) this from the beginning." His brother-in-law responded, "First comes a house that you can pray in. Being Iranian means having a house that you can pray in. It means respecting the air, the soil, the mountains, and the forests."

Ahmad's brother-in-law's argument that the nation and land are like a house, a container that must provide the land, air, soil, mountains, and forests for prayer and religion, was, although not uncommon, a controversial position in conservative leaning Fars-Abad. Several months into my fieldwork, I could sense the disquietude of the room as the two men argued. Other family members grew quiet as the debate continued, aware that this topic was political (*siāsi*) and heavy (*sangin*), as well as potentially dangerous – both for their own social relations and vis-à-vis their

positions with the state. Nevertheless, the debate revealed two distinct understandings of how to interpret national and transnational solidarity as well as martyrdom (as an Islamic or national or Islamic/national enterprise). It also reveals differing and consequential perspectives for who is inside and who is outside the pure moral core.

Zahra

A young Tehrani Basiji woman whom I will call Zahra shared yet another position in this debate with me. I had asked her why or for whom she prays and practices charity. She responded:

> We say that "the Islamic Republic of Iran," first "Islamic" and then "Iran." Do you know what I mean? They say that, for example, Islam and Iran together are one. This means that it must be both Islamic and Iran. They are one and the same. Their value is equal. It is really important that they say it this way. Because, for example, we fought in a war, it is because of Islam that we fight. Both because of the nation (*vatan*) and because of Islam….They say that if Iraq attacks Iran, if it takes the country, Islam will die. Shi'ism will be destroyed….We fight both to protect Islam and the nation. (Interview conducted on 2/29/10)

For Zahra, the nation and Islam, meaning "Iranian Shi'i Islam" have roughly the same shape, the same boundaries, and incorporate the same people. "If another country attacks Iran, Islam will die. Shi'ism will be destroyed," she explained. During the interview, I noted that her words were carefully chosen to reflect what she felt to be the position of the government. Yet at the same time, she and others I spoke with recognized and even took pride in the existence of certain other non-Shi'i Iranians – such as Zoroastrians, Jews, and Christians – in the country. The point, she explained, is not that diversity does not exist or that it cannot be appreciated. Rather, it is that the nation is an Islamic nation, guided by Islamic principles.

The precise relationship between Islamism and Iranism remains a matter of debate in contemporary Iran. Regardless, and as I show in Chapters Four and Five, through the continuing

burial of martyrs from the Iran-Iraq War and the regulation of "religiously permissible" (*halal*) food products at national borders, the Islamic Republic seems currently to be emphasizing the sacred defense of a pure *national* space, bounded by territory, yet nevertheless, built upon and with the spirit of Islam: an Islamic nation-state.

Guest and Daughter

When I arrived in Tehran in 2010, unrest over the disputed 2009 presidential elections was gradually dissipating due to a strong government clampdown. Despite the lessened street turmoil, a general feeling of wariness pervaded the streets of Tehran. In the universities, tensions ran particularly high. Fearing unwanted government attention, many professors and academics were reluctant to help me secure a research visa. I heard stories of frequent faculty firings, especially in social sciences departments. Fortunately, through the help of several professors and officials affiliated with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tehran, I was eventually able to obtain an official research permit at the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Soon after, I began my fieldwork with a pro-Khomeini, Basiji family in the Tehrani suburb of Ekbatan, a family with whom I had conducted preliminary research in the summers of 2007 and 2008. In Tehran, I accompanied this family on outings to parks, restaurants, and food shows, and to religious national sites such as Imam Khomeini's shrine and Zahra's Paradise, Tehran's largest graveyard.

In 2010, I also accompanied my host Basiji family's father, daughter, son, and mother to the father's hometown of Fars-Abad, the rural town that would become the central site of this research. This was not my first visit to the region. In the summer of 2008, I similarly sat in the back of Mahmud's green Tehran Taxi with Haleh, his daughter, while he and his son Mehdi

alternated driving. We had driven south along the Amir Kabir Highway toward the home of their patrilateral kin and were greeted with a beautiful multi-dish feast. This time, in 2010, Mahmud and his daughter Haleh helped me made arrangements to stay with their extended kin, in particular Mahmud's brother, Ahmad, for the duration of my research.

My experiences in the household of Ahmad, brother to Mahmud from Tehran, his wife Nushin, and their four children, together with their immediate neighbors and extended kin in Tehran and Shiraz, form the heart of this ethnography. I lived in their home in Fars-Abad as a guest and daughter for approximately ten months through many changing circumstances: a move to a new house, the death of a cousin, the days and nights of Ramadan, and the New Year celebrations. Most nights, I slept in a room and bed they had provided me with their daughter Maryam. I cooked with Nushin, washed dishes, and spent hours conversing with family members and visitors. In different ways, all three of Ahmad and Nushin's young adult children – their fourth child was newly married and less present in the household – became my research assistants and escorts for research interviews around town.

The move to the new house, in particular, shaped my research and provided me with two contrasting household contexts. Our first residence, the alley in the center of town, was the home of Ahmad's kin. Along a row of adjacent house complexes, his family members included: Ahmad (and Mahmud's) recently widowed mother, Hajj Bibi, a woman folded by time and wrapped in cotton chador; Abdul, the mutual brother of Ahmad and Mahmud; Abdul's wife, Farah; three of Abdul and Farah's four teenage children; and the wife and infant daughter of Abdul's their eldest son. There were also frequent visitors: Ahmad's patrilateral cousins and cousin's children; and, importantly, the matrilateral kin of Ahmad's wife, Nushin, including her

wise elderly mother, her four sisters and brothers and their affines, her nieces and nephews, and finally, her half siblings – the children of her father's second wife.

In the new house, in contrast, with the exception of Nushin and Ahmad's married daughter who lived a block away, we were surrounded a very different set of non-kin neighbors: a local "descendant of the Prophet" (*sayyed*) and his son, two married couples with young daughters, and a family from Shiraz. We were also close to Nushin's niece and her husband, who lived in a nearby apartment complex. As in the alley, however, we were frequently visited by the larger families (*qom o khish*) of both Ahmad and Nushin. Indeed, especially in the first few weeks after the move, we had visitors almost every evening. The people and social relationships surrounding both the old house and the new house shape this research in different ways. My host family gave varying reasons for the move: "the air (*havā*) is better and cooler," they said, or, "the house is bigger, including an extra bedroom and a foreign toilet… better for the knees." Most importantly, the new house created a future living space for Ahmad and Nushin's two teenage sons and their future wives.[6]

Yet despite its practical reasons and the relative nearness of the new house to the old (not more than 1 kilometer apart), the move was not without difficulties. Indeed, it became the source of family anxiety. My host family missed the elderly grandmother, Hajj Bibi, in particular. Unfortunately, the physical distance, combined with my presence as an American guest in one sibling's household rather than the others, gradually became source of tension between Ahmad and Nushin's immediate family and their patrilateral kin.

[6] According to custom, Nushin, in consultation with her sister and sister-in-law, arranged the day of the move on an auspicious day in the Islamic calendar. On moving day, she stopped us at the door and asked that each of us say the *salavat*, "may the praise and blessings of God be upon Mohammad and the progeny of Mohammad," five times for protection before entering the threshold, an explication in remembrance of the family of the Prophet or *panjtan*: Mohammad, Fatimeh, Hassan, Hossein, and Ali. She hung an evil eye protective ornament near the door to protect those within.

My introduction to the community of Fars-Abad through Ahmad's extended Tehrani family thus greatly influenced my research. I entered Ahmad's household as an already known and (somewhat) trusted person, a person that my Tehrani family had known and been in touch with for three years. During my time in Ahmad's household, moreover, I gradually shifted from the role of guest to that of a kind of daughter. I was increasingly regarded as a member of the family whose modesty and actions reflected on the family as a whole. I participated intensely in the daily life and inter-family politics of my immediate household. My closest friends and family in Fars-Abad and Tehran saw me as a "good person," a Christian who was learning about Islam (I emphasized my grandmother's Catholicism). They also saw me as possible convert to Islam. As such, I spent a lot of time being instructed in the right way to act, cook, pray, and read the Qur'an, much of which I draw from in this dissertation. When I returned to the U.S. after approximately 10 months in Fars-Abad and one month in Tehran, my host family sacrificed a henna painted sheep and distributed it among their kin to bless my departure. They filled my suitcases with homemade pomegranate sauce and quince lemon syrup.

The research for this dissertation is colored in both positive and negative ways by my position as guest and daughter in Ahmad and Nushin's household. On the one hand, I became a confidant, a guest-family member, and a trusted ally in inter-family politics. On the other hand, I was constrained by local officials and family members who, concerned both with my safety as a British-American anthropologist, and with their own safety as my hosts, required that I conduct research with a family member escort. Necessarily, the frequent presence of another person – most often one of my host siblings – shaped the course of the interview or conversation and the questions I was able to ask. I sometimes struggled with the restrictions placed on my movement and the people I could speak to within the community. At the same time, the more imbricated I

became in family life, the more I came to understand my obligations to my hosts and their specific circles of accepted relations.

Finally, given the tense political atmosphere of 2010 Iran, the power of the state was a very real presence. Often, my interlocutors and I were forced to veer away from political subject matters and tread with care. There was a tacit understanding that I would not ask people to talk about their politics – especially if they contested the regime – and that they would not ask me to talk about mine. Within the family household, however, this understanding was somewhat relaxed. Nevertheless, during fieldwork, I endeavored to protect my interlocutors and myself by leaving any explicit discussion of politics out of my notes, tape recordings, or interviews.

Methods

Despite these challenges, and with the help of my host family, I was able to conduct ethnographic research with numerous families both within and in the neighboring smaller villages around Fars-Abad. Adapting methods employed by anthropologist Krista Van Vleet (2008), in my research on kinship, I began with conversational narratives about kinship inclusions and exclusions and about how particular people become part of kin groups (e.g., fetuses, newborns, affinal relatives, friends, neighbors, and strangers). I endeavored to ask simple, open-ended questions, such as "what is family?" or "who is kin and who is not?" I also gathered material on daily processes of cooking, feeding, and eating. This included: all daily meals – especially lunch, the central meal in Iran; tea drinking; and picnics in public parks. It also included shopping trips and daily votive food distribution at mosques and graveyards. Finally, I carefully observed life cycle events such as birth ceremonies, engagements, weddings, and funerary rituals.

In addition, I conducted participant observation of both the everyday conversations and practices that surround ideas of nation and citizenship (Abu-Lughod 2004) and of the annual cycle of national holidays as they occurred in my host family's household. I further attended many gatherings in the local mosque, Islamic school, and Islamic meeting house for the Imam Husayn (*hosseinieh*), participated in regular Friday public prayer services held for the community, memorial services for martyrs, and local street rallies. I also joined in pilgrimage to local national/Islamic sites such as graveyards and shrines in Fars-Abad, Shiraz, and Tehran and participated with members of my host family in distributing or accepting votive foods. Finally, between 2007-2010, I carried out direct observation of national iconography such as murals and signs and its passersby in public parks, city streets, universities, and bazaars in Shiraz and Tehran.

Although I conducted interviews with Tehrani university students, female scholars of Islamic law, university professors, and Muslim reformists from varying walks of life in Tehran and Shiraz, many of my key host family members and friends in this study are supporters of the Islamic Republic, the Imam Khomeini, and Iran's current Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Khamenei. The following statement by my host father, Ahmad, epitomizes his devotion to the Islamic Republic and its founders.

> During the time that he [the Imam Khomeini] was alive people didn't think of themselves. They thought about others. For his funeral, I went to town [Tehran] for three days. Three or four million people filled the streets, crying together. Many fainted. They hit their heads rhythmically. Even when he [the Imam] waved his hand it was because of God. Everything he did was like his holiness Ali [nephew and son-in-law of the Prophet]. He and the current leader [the ayatollah Khamenei] have a relationship with the Twelth Imam, the Imam Mahdi. [Ahmad 9/30/10]

This emphasis on the divine qualities of Iran's leaders was not uncommon for members of my host family, particularly Ahmad and his brother Mahmud, who had each fought in the Iran-Iraq

war, participating in Iran's "sacred defense of Islam." Indeed, both brothers' families were card-carrying members of the *Basij*, a voluntary force founded by late Imam Khomeini in 1980 "to help protect the moral values, unity, and self-sufficiency of the Islamic Republic and its constitution" (Ahmad, 2/22/10). Often translated as the "people's militia," the term Basij is the name of the force, while the term Basiji refers to an individual member. According to anthropologist Roxanne Varzi, the Basij were the "original revolutionaries" who upheld the holy war (*jihād*) and who were the first to go to the front and be martyred. They were "the survivors, veterans of the Iran-Iraq War who still believe in the Islamic republic, spend their days policing the streets from their motorcycles, searching for behavior that is out of line with Islam" (2006:221).[7]

"We are Basij, We are not Sepah"

Although my Basiji family members and friends similarly believe in the sacred defense of the Islamic Republic and come from families with male Iran-Iraq War veterans, they do not usually fit the stereotype of an ideological bearded and brutal (morality) police so often depicted by the media. They did not seek to patrol their neighborhoods or streets in search for behavior outside of Islam, but worked as farmers, teachers, taxi drivers, secretaries, or even small business owners. In the following, I briefly sketch two events to elucidate the particular positionality of my Basiji friends and family.

[7] Officially, there are three main working branches of Basij in Iran: the "ʿAshuraʾ and Al-Zahra Brigades," a security and military branch tasked with defending neighborhoods in case of emergencies; the "Imam Husayn Brigades," which cooperate closely with the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution (IRGC) ground forces; and the "Imam Ali Brigades," which deal with security threats (Frontline, Ali Alfouneh). Estimates of the total number of members vary according to the source. In 2009, the IRGC Human Resource chief Masoud Mousavi claimed to have 11.2 million Basij members, a number that probably includes members of my host family. In 2005, a U.S. think tank at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, in contrast, counted the number of full time, uniformed members and came up with a number closer to 90,000, with 300,000 reservists and one million that could be mobilized (Frontline, Ali Alfouneh).

A Rally

"Down with America, Down with England, Down with Israel!" My host father Ahmad yelled these words into a megaphone as he rounded a corner on Khomeini Street in the center of Fars-Abad. He stood in a silver haired group of respected townsmen and officials, behind of which marched hundreds of men and then women in chador, his wife and I among them. Five minutes before, we had left the Friday prayer at the town's meetinghouse for the Imam Husayn with excitement. There is going to be a march to protest a Florida priest's recent threat of Qur'an burning, women said. Nushin helped me hurriedly put on my shoes as I attempted to keep my black chador centered over my headscarf and follow the crowd. Almost before we knew it, we were whisked along with the other women, some of whom beat their chests in the style of mourning for the Imam Husayn during the commemorations for his martyrdom in the month of Muharram. As Ahmad led the crowd around a U-turn, returning to the center of town, we shared an ironic glance, a moment we would laugh about at home not twenty minutes later.

The Florida priest's threat to burn a copy of the Qur'an was an issue that had been circulating on national news and that had already spurred protests in other parts of the country. As a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War and one time town mayor, Ahmad had been called on by the local Imam to lead the rally. I will not soon forget the irony of being a guest in the household of a person who led such a rally. When we returned to the house, Ahmad told me with twinkling eyes that he had not himself yelled out "down with America." In any case, "when I say this phrase, or when people here say it," he explained, "they don't mean, down with the American people, only the government." Nevertheless, throughout my time in his home Ahmad upheld a purposeful "defense of Islam" and adamantly insisted that he would sacrifice his own life to prevent the burning of a Qur'an.

2009 Election Turmoil

The young adult children of Ahmad in Fars-Abad and Mahmoud in Tehran were even further removed from these politics. In June of 2009, for instance, members of the Iranian Green Movement (*moj-e sabz*) took to the streets, protesting the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Second Term election victory over the incumbent, Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The resulting U.S. sensationalist media coverage of U.S. / Iran relations portrayed Basijis indiscriminately as terrorists, killers of dissidents, and fundamentalist militia. Although I was not in Iran at the time, Haleh, Mahmoud's daughter wanted me to understand something important. She wrote in an email: "We [the Basij] are not the police (*sepah*). We, too, are afraid of police." Haleh wanted me to understand that although she was ideologically committed to the Islamic Republic, she did not condone the recent turn of events, violence, and suppression of protests. She asked me, "What has your media been saying about us?" She told me she felt that her Basiji friends and family had been inaccurately depicted, and with excitement, told me about how the suburb of Ekbatan was filled with the voices of people chanting, "God is Great" in support of the protesters. At the same time, she wrote, "I cannot stand to see effigies of the Supreme Leader desecrated. When they tore up his picture, I turned away from politics" [7/22/2009].

In this dissertation, I do not deny the atrocities committed by particular categories of Basij or affiliated groups within the Islamic Republic. However, I do seek to interrogate common understandings about what it means to be affiliated with the Basij in contemporary Iran by exploring them from a perspective of humanism and exploring not only their critique of the West and its "corruption," but also the aspirations for Islamic spirituality and morality that shape their

Fars-Abad, Landscape, and History

As previously noted, Fars-Abad lies near the long Amir Kabir highway that connects Tehran, Esfahan, and Shiraz. The town is known locally for its relative conservatism. In contrast to Tehran and even some neighboring regions, the black chador is required street attire for women and men rarely wear t-shirts in favor of long-sleeve garments. The local Friday Imam is said to be "strict" (*sakht-gir*); and, in general, religiously permissible interaction is maintained in public and private.

Located in the northern region of the Fars province, Fars-Abad is built on mostly flat, irrigated land and is surrounded by rolling hills. A single main street connects its three neighborhoods. The first is called "the valley of the river of the birds" and is the site of the former khan's mansion and the local pickling factory (one of the town's major employers). The second and most central neighborhood is the town's shopping and ritual center, called by the town name, Fars-Abad. The third is poorer and is known by locals as the Arab district. Quiet at midday, the town's main street springs to life with heavy traffic in the late afternoon: Pekans, Peugeots, farm trucks, semis, and motorcycles fly past in all directions carrying teenage boys, families, or old men in tieless suits. (Women never drive motorcycles but they do sometimes drive cars in town). On the sidewalks, women in black chadors and men in white or light blue collared shirts walk to and fro or wait in line. They carry plastic bags of bread or milk, stopping at tiny convenience stores, bakeries, butchers, and fruit or vegetable markets. Male teenagers assume the most risky attire and postures, occasionally gelling their hair, wearing short sleeves, or stylish jeans. At dusk, the Muslim call for prayer blares out from the speakers of the meeting house.

In the old section of town, near the center, families live in narrow brick or cement walled alleys that extend from the wider main street. The mosque and meetinghouse for the Imam Husayn, along with the nearby educational center and graveyards, form a local ritual center. The large building of the meetinghouse, in particular, holds events as diverse as Friday prayer, commemorations for dead martyrs, and funerals for the family members.

Surrounding the mosque and meetinghouse, older streets wind and crisscross, resembling the neighborhoods of South Tehran. Often no wider than the width of a car, these streets are marked by steep drainage divots. Even narrower alleys extend from these streets to household units, often an arrangement of two or three homes occupied by the families of male siblings and their parents. This was the kind of alley I moved into when I first arrived in Fars-Abad.

Such side streets often house an entire patrilateral extended family. Each home has its own gated courtyard, but has no more than three or four rooms. Showers and bathrooms are in separate, "out house" style facilities within each family's courtyard space. Inside these homes, intricate red Persian carpets cover the floors and bright red cushions line the walls for leaning and sitting on the floor. Typical designs have a central skylight and a kitchen with cabinets, a sink, a meat grinder, and a teakettle but no microwave. Some houses now have wooden kitchen tables and chairs but many do not. Where they do exist, they are often more for decoration than for meals.

A large number of homes in the oldest parts of town are made of mud and clay or a mixture of mud, clay, and brick. These homes have high mud walls and flat roofs of mud and straw supported by wooden rafters.

The new housing structures, such as the one my host family moved to, stand in direct contrast both to this past and to the alleys and narrow streets in the older center of town. Outside the town center, several multi-story, gated apartment complexes poke up to two stories high. These homes are made, largely by manual labor, of brick and iron rod fixtures, and house newly married couples. Other new homes are built as individual structures, for a single family and perhaps their parents. They have a garage style car park and walled courtyards in the back. The richest of the town residents – factory owners or those who had connections with the previous King or his stewards – have large homes, both old and new, enclosed on all sides by gardens filled with fruit trees and flowers, patios, and shallow pools. During my time in Fars-Abad, I counted only three or four homes in this style.

Finally, two or three parks for recreation and picnicking, two well used graveyards, a major industrial pickling factory, a small university providing associate's degrees, and a multitude of schools for children complete the town's landscape. The parks offer recreation, exercise equipment, flowing water, and the shade of trees. The older graveyard is in the center of

town and houses the town's martyrs from the Iran-Iraq War. The newer graveyard is on the fringe of town on a slight hill and is the site of present day burials and commemorations. Schools are sex segregated until high school, after which they become co-ed.

Outside these living and Shi'i ritual spaces, family owned orchards extend to the north and west. Arranged as plots of land with high mud walls with tiny paths between them, these gardens grow an array of fruit trees and shrubs: apricot, plum, or apple, walnut, almond, and grapes. Often they include cement platforms for sleeping or spending the afternoon. These gardens are an important part of family life and are often a place for family picnics or the enjoyment of fresh fruit. Finally, farmlands skirt the town with fields of wheat, barley, tomatoes, cucumbers, and saffron, among others. Several farms raise cattle or other animals for slaughter. Itinerant nomads herd sheep and goats on the town's outskirts.

Locals describe the edge of town as a desert (*kavir or kabir in local dialect*). For town dwellers, especially, the desert is the place where settled, agricultural land ends. As such, the agricultural outskirts of town are considered a kind of in-between place and beyond it is a wild land (*zamin-e vahshi*) replete with mountain *jinn*. Outside of Fars-Abad, however, the desert is not entirely barren. Green plants, grasses, and trees grow around small streams and rivers and the surrounding rolling hills have copious amounts of scrub vegetation. Neighboring settled Basseri nomads frequently camp out at night in the desert, collecting plants and herbs or hunting wild animals such as hog.

In general, people in Fars-Abad describe the plain on which they live with pride. "This is the plain chosen by King Cyrus the Great," they say, in reference to the good agricultural lands, underground water tables and streams, and proximity to his tomb.

Historical Context

Fars-Abad's past remains an active part of living memory in contemporary town life. The remnants of the castle or fortress (*qal'eh*) that once enclosed Fars-Abad are still visible in several places, a structure that stood until around 1975. "Before the meeting house for the Imam Husayn, there was a fortress in the center of town," remembered Goli-Mehrebun, Nushin's 80 something-year-old mother. Born in the 1930s in Fars-Abad, Goli-Mehrebun was the first wife of her husband, an affluent man with royal ancestry. She was in the process of raising her first two of five children when her husband took his second wife, with whom he had four more children, my host mother's half siblings. According to her children, Goli-Mehrebun was always respectful of this other wife who lived in a separate dwelling, but was herself much more proficient at raising and educating her children. Goli occasionally smoked opium to calm her aching joints, but was intelligent and alert. In the style of the town's older generation, she wrapped her body and head in a dark colored cotton chador with tiny flowers. She moved slowly and methodically, always commenting on the state of affairs in the town.

Goli and her son Sami, Nushin's brother, were in the process of recounting Fars-Abad's past when my host sister and I came to visit near midday on a hot summer day. She offered us tea from her tiny pot in her one room home, located within the same courtyard as the home of her son. A fan whirred in the background.

"The walls [of the fortress] formed a gated, twenty meter tall enclosure, and were designed to keep thieves out," she said.

> Within, there were one hundred and fifty household complexes with one or two floors, each with between five and ten members. In the center of the fortress was a market that divided into dozens of narrow alleys. Some of them had corners and twists. The doors of homes opened to the alleys, which were very narrow because there were no cars. Only donkeys (*olagh-ha*) crossed with hay on their backs. The first floor of the homes stored

> this hay and people lived on the second floor. Next to the fortress was a tower. At night they went into the tower and watched over people with guns.

Goli and others I spoke with explained that those who were there from the beginning had bigger homes and many residents were extended family. This continues to be true in Fars-Abad today. They said that those who came from the outside villages built small homes in the corner of the courtyard of a larger home.

Before land reform took place in Iran 1962, Fars-Abad had a ruler or *khan*, a relation of the Qajars (a dynasty that ruled Iran between 1785 to 1925). In this system, the khan controlled access to agricultural land and other means of livelihood. Farmers had traditional rights to land as shares, but not to ownership of specific tracts of land. They received half of the harvest and the king received the other half. Although this history of kingship has largely been erased from public town history, town residents I spoke with remembered their king as a good person. They described him as "literate" and "cultured," and specifically mentioned his degree in architecture. They further emphasized that he did not oppress people as kings in other townships did. Rather, he helped them by giving them medicine.

During the 1960s land reform of Iran, the land of Fars-Abad was divided, but supporters of the Shah took or bought the majority of good farmland, while the peasants and the recently settled nomads were allotted next to nothing. As a result of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the land was again redistributed. Locals remember how people filled the streets in protest, entering the king's former living quarters and beautified tree filled gardens with the intention of ousting his supporters. They described their fight as one of social equity. My host family, in particular, proudly remembers the role of Nushin's father in this movement and his fight for a more equitable distribution of land and for the inclusion of the more peripheral settled nomads and Iranian Arabs into the Fars-Abad community. In 2010, in rural Fars-Abad, Basiji friends and host

family members describe this greater equity as a reason for their continuing support for the Islamic Republic. This ethnography is shaped by these local histories and relations between the town and state. I now turn to the key theoretical frameworks that have both inspired and emerged from this research.

Theoretical Engagements

Since the 1960s, anthropologists have interrogated the Euro-American presupposition that biology is always the ultimate referent of kinship relations (Schneider 1984; Yanagisako and Collier 1987; Franklin and McKinnon 2001). Drawing on local models of kinship, these anthropologists argue that researchers should focus, not only on what is "given" or "inherited" in reckoning kinship, but also on what is "created." They have pointed to the ways people create "relatedness" (Carsten 1995) through processes such as residing together in a house or on land (Bahloul 1996; A. Strathern 1973), choosing LGBT families (Weston 1991), sharing food at the hearth (Carsten 1995), working on land (Labby 1976), or caring for others (Bodenhorn 2000). This approach has, importantly, challenged presumed analytical distinctions between "fictive," or "pseudo," kinship and "real," or "natural," "biological" relationships.

Building on this literature, my project contributes to research that investigates a full range of possible kin relations and forms – both those that are inherited and those that are created through other processes such as feeding or prayer. I therefore build on two growing and interrelated literatures: the study of food and kinship and the study of kinship and religion. While anthropologists have widely addressed metaphorical associations between eating and reproduction (Weiner 1988; Counihan 1999), only recently have they begun to explore how feeding may influence which persons count as kin (Janowski 2007; Carsten 2004; Weismantel

1995; Richards 1932). Carsten (2000), for example, argues that Malay incorporate new kin both through ties of inherited substance and through every day acts of feeding and living together in a house. She highlights the convertibility of kinship substances such as shared cooked rice, breast milk, and female blood in processes whereby Langkwai become kin (Carsten 1995); and in particular the unidirectional transformation of cooked rice into blood and flesh. Similarly, Weismantel (1995) explores how Zumbagua people become parents by feeding and caring for children over extended periods of time. These scholars further describe instances in which procreation is described as a "cooking process," or a process of heating, cooling, and the mixing of "ingredients" (Feldman-Savelsberg 1996). These investigations usefully question the boundaries between what is "given" and "created" in kinship, showing these distinctions to be culturally relative, dynamic categories, capable of converting to each other (Carsten 2000).[8]

Initially, my research was centered on an exploration of the relationship between "biological," inheritable substances (what is given) and acts of feeding and cooking (what is made) in Iranian sociality. However, during my stay in Fars-Abad, I found that, at every turn, the tension I had expected to find between what is given and what is made was complicated by even more salient spiritual and moral concerns surrounding Islamic inner purity and outer corruption that cut across these analytic categories. Friends and family in Fars-Abad attended to the spiritual, moral, and physical qualities of inside and outside rather than to a distinction between given and made. Indeed, both the given and made were predicated on God's creation such that

[8] According to anthropologist Shahshahani (2004), for example, the Iranian notion of a person is dynamically associated with three states of being – gas, liquid, and matter – whose combinations and mixing are greatly affected by having either "hot" or "cold" temperament and may be actively influenced by the consumption of either "hot and cold" or "wet or dry" foods (Loeffler 2008). These qualities of food may further influence the blood consistency, appearance, gender, and moral character of developing persons (Good 1980; Bromberger 1994). Similarly, scholars have noted a relationship between the laborious preparation of rice, bread, and sweet wheat dishes – such as the *samanu* – by Iranian women and the swelling of the womb during pregnancy (Torab 2007). Finally, they have shown that acts of sharing breast milk create marriage prohibitions and thus kinship (*mahram*) in many Islamic societies (Parkes 2005; Clarke 2007). This current dissertation brings these studies together with recent advances in kinship theory to explore how food helps create kin ties in Iran.

there was little separation between material expressions of kinship– whether food, blood, milk, or semen – and immaterial qualities such as purity, esteem, or corruption.

Scholars have rarely fully addressed how specifically immaterial, spiritual or moral qualities can define kin relations within and against outside others or form the very foundations for understandings of kinship, procreation, and creation. Schneider, for instance, examined religion as a second-order phenomenon in his work on the meanings of "blood" and "law" in American kinship. As Cannell argues, he largely neglected the particular religious formations – and their related historical contingencies – that constituted American modernity (Cannell 2013; Feeley-Harnik 1999). Indeed, in much recent literature, too, kinship continues to be regarded as a secular affair (McKinnon and Cannell 2013) or a relic of the pre-modern past (Alfani and Gourdon 2012).

This dissertation contributes to an emerging critique of kinship theory's secular orientation (Chipmuro 2012; Cannell 2012; Delaney 1986, 1991). Fenella Cannell, for instance, argues that Mormon "recognition" of past and future kin occupies a third space in which kinship rests on neither biogenetic substance, nor man-made law/convention, but rather on something spiritual, immaterial, and ineffable (2007:6; 2013). Here, as Cannell relates, because contemporary American Mormonism refuses to oppose spirit and matter, religious and family concerns are intensely integrated such that "'ordinary' relatedness is literally identified with the stuff of divine salvation" (Cannell 2013). Similarly, Carol Delaney (1986) has argued that Abrahamic, monotheistic understandings of divine creation link in important ways to concepts of monogenetic human procreation in Turkey, in which paternity is primary in the same way that God is the Father of creation. More recently, Sabean and Tuscher (2013) have shown the cultural and historic specificity of theorists' analytical separation between substance as a means of

somatic or physical incorporation into kin group and non-physical acts and qualities that create kinship, by contending that medieval and Roman concepts of substances such as blood were inseparable from notions of purity, filiation, and spirit.

Similarly, I endeavor to broaden the scope of kinship studies to examine both the material forms of kinship making and the immaterial, spiritual, and moral properties of substance that combine with the material or work alone to bind people together. Specifically, I draw from local models of Shi'i kinship in Iran, to explore not only the interrelation between what is given (blood) and what is made (e.g., food), but also a third and mutually constitutive referent point: the divine (*khodā*).

To date, most scholars of Islam and the Middle East have focused on the power of what is given or inherent in Islamic kinship to the exclusion of "what is made." These anthropologists frequently describe Islamic kinship systems as patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal (Delaney 1989 Mir-Hosseini 1998).[9] Others contend that kinship in the region is not always determined via agnatic blood (Abu-Lughod 1989; Abu-Lughod 1990; Eickelman 1998). Instead, they point to the persistent recognition of matrilateral blood and relations in Shi'i inheritance law, in which the "immediate family" consisting of "bilateral descendants" acknowledged first in inheritance; regardless of gender (although a woman inherits half of what her brother inherits). A few anthropologists have gone further, suggesting that more attention should be paid to local creativity in the wielding and developing of kinship ties in the Muslim world (Hegland 2008:105). Clarke, for instance, contends that Islamic kinship can be fully understood only in the larger context of ideas such as "closeness" (*qaraba*) (Clarke 2009). Here, "permitted relating" in

[9] Similarly, sociologists of Iran have focused on population growth, statistics on cousin marriage, family planning, and the question of the "nuclear family" (Nassehi-Behnam 1985, 1971; Gulick and Gulick 1975). These sociologists agree that something akin to a nuclear family in Iran has increasingly developed in urban settings and argue that such urban families often include patrilateral and matrilateral co-residents such as divorced aunts and uncles or widowed parents (Nassehi-Behnam 1985).

Lebanon, understood in terms of the Islamic-Arabic categories of *nasab* (filiation), *musahara* (a spouse's lineal kin), or *rida* (milk-kinship), may be subsumed under an overarching understanding of "closeness."

These anthropologists have begun to investigate "what is made" in Middle Eastern kinship, arguing that "closeness," shared houses, or "active networks of relations" can also shape kin relations among Muslims (Clarke 2007; Bahloul 1996; Shahshahani 1990). In this dissertation, I take these investigations further to show that, for Shi'i Basiji families, what is given (blood) and what is made (food or prayer) are not only dynamic categories: but also, they are encompassed by and predicated on the divine.

Kinship and Nation

While many disciplines limit their objects of analysis to particular domains – the political, the religious, the domestic – recent anthropological research insightfully draws attention to the necessity of looking across domains such as kinship, cosmology, and nation (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Schneider 1969). A rich anthropological literature, in particular, has addressed the interrelation of kinship and nation (Delaney 1995; Sutton 1997; Herzfeld 1997; Bryant 2002; Heng and Devan 1992; Nash 2008). Yet although scholars of Iran—in history, politics, and anthropology—have written widely on the Revolution of 1979 (Fischer 2003; Keddie 2006), the shaping of the nation (Vaziri 1993; Ansari 2007), and the "paradox" of sustaining an Islamic republic (Zubaida 2004), they have too often relegated kinship to the domestic sphere and disregarded its significance for the nation, its politics, or religion.

In contrast, the current dissertation builds on a rich anthropological literature that argues that concepts and practices of kinship are crucial for understanding the nation (Delaney 1995;

Sutton 1997; Herzfield 1997; Bryant 2002). David Schneider (1969) pointed out that the cultural understandings that underlie American kinship also underlie the nation. He argued that the dual aspects of kinship – "natural substance" and "code for conduct," previously discussed – inform kinship, nationality, and religion in identical ways. More recently, anthropologists have explored the multiple ways that concepts of kinship and nation are inextricably interrelated, often manifesting similar "forms of inclusions and exclusions, hierarchies and equalities, movements and restrictions, shared essences and essential differences" (McKinnon and Cannell 2013:24). Feminist scholars, for instance, have demonstrated how state elites consciously utilize notions of gendered contributions to procreation to legitimize hierarchical access to citizenship (Heng and Devan 1992; Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989). Similarly, researchers have shown how ancestry, shared origins, genealogy, and blood infuse both ideas of national identity and the reckoning national relatedness (Nash 2008:10; Bear 2007; Bryant 2002; Alonso 1994).

Yet despite growing recognition of the relation between kinship and nation (Joseph 1999; Delaney 1995), researchers continue to apply notions of kinship that are limited to "inherited," bodily substances to their analyses of nation (e.g., Altuntek 2006) without exploring how other means of creating kinship may likewise contribute to nation-making. In particular, they have largely focused on how the bodily substances of kinship—such as blood and genes—have come to have significance for the nation.[10] While I build on these studies, I also apply more recent insights of kinship theory that move beyond the boundaries of bodily substances to query how other forms of kin making, such as feeding and prayer, may have relevance for the nation. Further, I argue that Basiji families seek to produce the inner purity of Shi'i citizens in the same

[10] Shever (2013:88) is an important exception. She queries how kinship and national sentiments depend on the same tropes of "familial bonds as the authentic basis for solidarity, care, obligation, and sacrifice."

manner that they produce relations at home – through understandings of potent agnatic blood and acts of martyrdom and through pious food practices.

Feeding Moral Relations explicitly challenges such narratives of modernity that relegate kinship to the domestic domain and assume a secular model of the nation-state. I argue not only that the ideas and practices of kinship can inform nation making, but also that both kinship and nation can be shaped by the same religious and moral concerns.

Outline of Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation has four ethnographic chapters, which make two cross cutting comparisons. The first compares the making of kinship to that of the nation. The second comparison is an exploration of how two kinds of sacred materiality play out in Iranian sociality – inheritable bodily substance and food.

As previously mentioned, in Iran, the person is composed of a pure, moral inside (*baten*) and a corruptible, appetite-driven outside (*zāher*) (Bateson 1977; Beeman 2005). Similarly, the Iranian family is modeled on the distinction between a morally pure, protected interior (*darun*) and a dangerous, corruptible exterior (*birun*). In Chapter Two, "Blood and the Making of Moral Kin," I examine how bodily substances such as blood, breast milk, and backbone structure the inside/outside distinctions of house and family. I show that, in addition to providing the Shi'i legal framework for "permitted relating" (*mahramiat*) and "descent" (*nasab*), bodily substances transfer spiritual qualities such as Islamic purity and ethics across generations. These immaterial qualities can either be God-given and innate or created through pious acts, the former exemplified by the esteem given to the descendants of the Prophet. This chapter then explores how ideas and practices surrounding the substances of kinship actually play out in everyday life.

I argue that although Islamic understandings of inheritable bodily substances partially determine who counts as kin, they do not necessarily predict how Basijis distinguish pure inside relations of family and household from outside and possibly corrupt kin, in-laws, or strangers.

Chapter Three, Feeding the Moral Family: The "Spirit" of Food in Iran, demonstrates how pure and moral kin are constituted and protected specifically through a range of ritual and everyday food practices. I show that food in Iran is more than a means of providing nutrition. Rather, it is an agent of transformation and a vehicle for channeling divine blessing (*ne'mat*) – whether directed inward, to the pure family core (*safā-ye baten*), embodied by table spread (*sofreh*), or directed outward, for the spiritual nourishment of extended kin. This chapter further explores how acts of fasting and participating in ritual meals shape and protect "correct" and ethical kin relations.

The second half of *Feeding Moral Relations* shows that Iranian understandings of the nation bear close resemblance to the inner/outer dimensions of Iranian kinship. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a powerful cohort of religious scholars and everyday citizens have emphasized the need to (re)generate the authentically Islamic interior of the nation – a citizenry that is composed of virtuous Shi'i brothers and sisters – while resisting an immoral, "Westernstruck" exterior (Shari'ati 1979; Al-e Ahmad 1962). In Chapter Four, Regenerating the Islamic Republic: the Magic of Martyr's Blood, I explore the symbolic role of bodily substances such as blood in post-Revolutionary Iranian nation making. In Iran, scholars and laymen who support the regime delineate a pure Islamic nation both through concepts of shared patrilineal blood and through a continuing emphasis on the bloody sacrifice of citizen martyrs. Yet, while patrilineal blood is the determining factor for legal Iranian citizenship, the sacrificial spilt blood of martyrs has even greater potency. Spilled through the pure intentioned "act" (*amal*) of the

martyr, such martyrs' blood – which is on striking display in a range of national contexts – is considered purifying, healing, and spiritually nourishing to the Islamic Republic. It is, further, regenerative, spilled from the "veins" of Muslim citizens to nurture the land and territory. Indeed, for Basiji supporters of Khomeini, it is the blood of martyrs and martyrs' bodies that have become integral to the (re)generation and spiritual defense of the Islamic Republic.

In contrast, Chapter Five, The Return to a Shi'i Brother and Sisterhood: Creating an Islamic Nation through Moral Food Practices, examines how Iranians employ food to help articulate, shape, and contest the making of an Islamic nation (*mellat*). I show that, like kinship, the nation is shaped by the imperative to create and contain inner purity within its borders. Indeed, as an *Islamic* Republic, the Iranian nation-state depends on the continual regeneration of a pure, Islamic interior composed of the right kind of "virtuous" (*bā-taqvā*) brother and sister citizenry. This chapter foregrounds an analysis of food and food ritual not only because of its unique ability to forge, circulate, and internalize these "right" virtues and qualities into and within the nation, but also because of the powerful analogy between food sharing at home and food sharing for the nation. I suggest that, for my interlocutors, food sharing works in tandem with other means of making (national) religious kinship in Iran, such as prayer and martyrs' sacrifice, to relate Muslim citizens both to each other and to the divine.

Chapter 2

BLOOD AND THE MAKING OF MORAL KIN

This chapter draws both from national debates about kinship in Iran and extensive ethnography on the ideas and practices of kinship in the small town of Fars-Abad in order to examine how understandings of inheritable bodily substances shape and demarcate post-Revolutionary Iranian kinship. To date, anthropologists have widely concurred that kinship in Iran can be traced through concepts of shared blood – both patrilineal and/or matrilineal, as is set forth in Shi'i inheritance law (*sharia*). Shi'i Iranian kinship, they argue, along with key scholars of Islam, is configured by fixed, God-given, "natural laws (*ein-e fetri*) that govern the rules for gender and family roles as well as for the inheritance of property and "permitted relating" (*mahramiat*). In addition, they widely agree that kinship specifically depends on understandings of potent shared blood (Torab 2006), breast milk (Khatib-Chahidi 1992), marriage (Haeri 1989; Ziba Mir Hosseini 1999), and increasingly, on understandings of "biological descent" and genes.

The current chapter delves more deeply into understandings of the fixed, God-given, "natural laws" and inheritable bodily substances that inform gender, family, and descent for contemporary Basiji families in Iran. It goes further, however, to show that inheritable bodily substances in Iran cannot be understood apart from the spiritual and moral qualities they channel. Indeed, according to host friends and family in Fars-Abad, the shared substances of kinship (e.g., blood, milk, and lineage, figured through backbone) can transmit not only physical qualities (e.g., beauty or skin color) but also immaterial, ineffable qualities of purity, faith, or corruption across generations. For descendants of the Prophet (*sayyeds*), in particular, intergenerational flows of blood explicitly transmit divine light, purity, and "closeness to God." Here, notions of

substance do not oppose spirit and matter, light or blood. Rather, material and immaterial qualities flow together between generations.

Non-*sayyed*s in Fars-Abad similarly argue that bodily substances such as male and female blood (*khun*) and milk (*shir*) carry properties of person such as purity or moral character.[11] They contend that the material substances of kinship are imbued with spiritual and moral properties that help connect people or set them apart. Yet while some qualities of substance are inherited (*ersi*) or innate, literally "born of the inside" (*darunzad*), as is the case of the purity of the descendants of the Prophet, others are constituted through acts in daily life and passed along from ancestors to descendants.

This chapter makes the argument that the qualities of shared kinship that meaningfully shape networks of moral family relations are not always immutable or uniform. Instead, they can be meaningfully contoured by ritual and daily acts (*amalat*) that protect, maintain, and otherwise demarcate the family according to moral and spiritual qualities. In many cases, innate or inherited qualities may be protected or altered by good deeds that garner religious merit or blessing for future generations. Relatedly, lineages may be corrupted by the sins of ancestors with severe consequences for both the physical and spiritual health of descendants.

The second half of this chapter explores how ideas and practices of God-given, natural law and bodily substances that demarcate kinship actually play out in everyday life. I show that although Islamic understandings of inheritable bodily substances, laws of inheritance, and marriage exclusions partially determine who counts as kin, they do not necessarily predict how relations unfold or are actively demarcated. In particular, I show how Basijis distinguish active

[11] According to Khuri, for instance, purity is mentioned in the Qur'an either as a property of the body or as a quality of the *seyyids* (2001:34). He adds, "Islam submits that kin are either pure or polluted by virtue of their own constitution" (Khuri 2001:34). Here, spiritual impurity is linked to conditions of the body. Women's bodies and women's menstrual blood are especially impure, as are those of strangers (Khuri 2001:29).

and pure inner relations of family and household from outer and possibly corrupt kin, in-laws, or strangers. I foreground three Islamic Iranian concepts – "permitted relating" (*mahramiat*), "the unbreakability of kin relations" (*saleh rahm*), and the notion of "degrees of relatedness" (*darajeh*) to explore how concepts surrounding bodily substances interweave with ideas and practices of "correct" relating. Here, I point to interesting tensions between Islamic kin obligations and prohibitions based on the fixity of family roles and shared inheritable bodily substance and the equally salient imperative to protect the family from outside, immoral kin and in-laws. Those who are ultimately included, I argue, are those who shared kindred spirit, purity, and trust, while those who are excluded are marked by impurity and corruption.

The final part of this chapter forms a bridge to Chapter Three to explore how specific acts of praying or feeding help create and protect moral Islamic kinship. This chapter begins an exploration that is continued in Chapter Three on how a fixed sense of who counts as kin in Iran corresponds with an equally malleable understanding of the spiritual and material properties that organize and demarcate moral, trusted circles of family relations.

Theoretical Directions

This chapter and the next chapter, Chapter 3, build on the recent advances in kinship theory noted in the Introduction (pp. 31) to explore the ideas and practices that constitute Shi'i Iranian kinship. I suggest that Iranian kinship is shaped both by understandings of what is given (e.g., shared blood or purity via descent from the Prophet) and by acts of doing (e.g., everyday good deeds, prayer, or acts of feeding). Importantly, however, I also emphasize that although the categories of "given" and "made" are analytically useful in the study of Shi'i Iranian kinship, they do not precisely map on to local models of kinship, which instead privilege a *divinely*

ordained model of family founded on Qur'anic exegesis and "natural law" (*ein-e fitri*) on the one hand, and a distinction between the inner and outer qualities of person, family, and household on the other. I argue that although people in Fars Abad see kinship as fixed in divine and natural law, in their daily lives they also emphasize the channeling and containment of mutable qualities such as Islamic purity via flows of blood or acts of feeding and prayer.[12]

This chapter therefore builds on the new and important studies of spiritual kinship(s) reviewed in the Introduction (pp. 31) and endeavors to broaden the scope of kinship studies to examine how concepts of creation, God-given natural law, and spiritual qualities figure in the making of Iranian kinship. I contend that, for my interlocutors, "ordinary" Iranian kinship is predicated on cosmological understandings of divine creation, and further, that relationships are often made meaningful by the purity and esteem – whether innate or actively created and maintained – that may be transmitted between generations.

Substantial Debates: "The Law of Nature," Biology, and the Divine

Before I begin my discussion of Basiji kinship in Fars-Abad, it is important to provide a brief background of the debates that surround inheritable substance and kinship in Iran more generally. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, questions concerning the shape of the Iranian family and its protection have been central to the Islamic Republic (Osanloo 2009; Iranian Constitution 1989). In the early years of the Revolution, for instance, the new government, led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, advocated population growth and adopted social policies that benefited larger families. Following the Revolution, the regime further repealed the Family Protection Law of 1967, which, during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, had raised the

[12] As previously noted, for my interlocutors, divine qualities equally infuse both concepts of given and made, and both the physical and spiritual qualities of shared kinship may be "given" by God or constituted through (pious) acts (*amalat*) of prayer, feeding, or everyday deeds.

marriage age to eighteen, abolished extrajudicial divorce, and greatly limited polygamy (Hoodfar 1994:16). After the Iran-Iraq War ended in 1988, however, the official position of the Islamic Republic began to shift.

First, in 1989, as a result of women's and health professionals' activism and protest, Ayatollah Khomeini introduced a new family law which reinstated some of the provisions of previously repealed Family Protection Law of 1967 (Hoodfar 1994:16): the minimum age of marriage was again moved up from nine (this time to the onset of puberty); and child custody, no longer an inalienable right of fathers, became the decision of special civil courts. Additionally, in 1992, a law extended a wife's access to and right to request divorce. Finally, and partially as a result of the huge increase in Iran's population between 1976-1986 (Tober 2006:51), the Islamic Republic of Iran shifted to a policy of family planning and began one of the most successful family-planning programs in the developing world. This family planning campaign led to a drastic reduction in the average number of children per family, which was 7.2 before the Islamic Revolution and currently rests at approximately 2.0 (Kian-Theibaut 2005:47).

In this context, policy makers and Islamic scholars, as well as lay men and women, have continued to intensely deliberate on subjects as diverse as the exigencies of gender, family law, adoption, family size, and assisted reproductive technology. A major subject of these debates has been the fixity of gender, family roles, and descent in Islamic law and interpretation.

In Iran, gender (*jens, jensiyat*) is generally understood in the sense of gender identity, roles and relations, premised on the dual categories of man and woman (Torab 2007:13). Such gender distinction is an organizing feature of everyday life. Moreover, it is naturally fixed and God given; even in the case of hermaphrodites, the surgeon's role is to discover the "real" sex, not create it (Tremayne 2008). At least in part, this fixity has been naturalized in post-

Revolutionary Iran by the concept of "the law of nature" (*ein-e fitrat*), "a paradigmatic analogy" between humans and other animals that accounts for differences between the sexes and gendered family duties and obligations (Haeri 1989:27). This theory of the Islamic law of nature was first advanced by the renowned Shi'i philosopher, Allamah Tabataba'i in his Qur'anic commentary, *al-Mirzan*. However, it was the late Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari who developed these "natural laws" into a powerful and influential argument for the natural and Islamic organization of gender and family (Ziba-Hosseini 2004:6). He writes:

> Familial relations are quite different from other forms of association. By their very nature motherhood and fatherhood create duties and obligations which are anchored in natural laws. Given that men and women are biologically different and have different natures, so their familial duties and obligations too are different (quoted in Afshar 1998:143).[13]

In this and in other writings, Motahhari contests the thesis of more traditional Islamists who contend that women are created of and for men and instead argues that women are equal to men in creation, and do not depend on men for attaining perfection. At the same time, however, he argues that men and women are created differently (Mir-Hosseini 2004). For Motahhari, the distinction between male and female is due to the inherent biological and psychological differences described in the Qur'an, in which women are typified as emotional and men as rational – see for example the distinction between male reason (*'aql*) and female passion (*nafs*) -- a difference that is both given by God and "natural" (*fitri*) (Paidar 1995:175). Here, the most important duty for women is motherhood and woman's "natural activities" should ideally occupy her in the inside the home. For Motahhari, divine creation and "natural law" (*ein-e fitrat*) specify a particular kind of gendered family that is at once divinely ordained, biologically determined, and immutable.

[13] See also Motahhari's publication, "The Human Status of Women in the Qur'an ," Euben RL, Zaman MQ. 2009. *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden*: Princeton University Press.

Thus, although the paradigm for fixed family and gender roles is not unchallenged in the contemporary Islamic Republic – with Muslim feminists and reformists increasingly questioning issues such as gender complementarity – the views of Ayatollah Motahhari (1920-1979) were frequently advocated by my host family and friends. When talking about gender or kinship, they would often refer me to his work. Ahmad, my host father, in particular, described Motahhari as one of the most highly respected Islamist scholars on issues of gender and family in Iran (see also Paidar 1995:175).

Finally, new reproductive technologies have become another focal point of debate on the God-given shape of the family in post-Revolutionary Iran. Iran is currently the only Muslim country in which IVF using gametes, embryos, and surrogates has been legitimized by religious authority and passed into law (Abbasi-Shavazi et al. 2008). Yet while a fatwa by the current Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, has legitimized sperm, egg, and embryo donation, other Islamic jurists and scholars continue to differ on their allowance due to concerns about adultery and incest. For instance, the Islamic Republic's Guardian Council allows egg donation if accompanied by the arrangement of a temporary marriage to the egg donor but opposes sperm donation because of its associations with adultery. Surprisingly, they also allow embryo donation from one married couple to another – a move that confounds Islamic notions of male paternity vis-à-vis the donor couple (Ahmadi-Shavazi et al. 2008:4) – and find the resulting children legitimate.

Despite this allowance of such donations, however, Iranian courts interpreting Islamic inheritance law often stipulate that the resultant child can only receive inheritance from the sperm or egg donor (and not the new parents) because of what they increasingly describe as a

"lack of biological descent."[14] In other words, they ascribe paternity and maternity to the producers of sperm and egg: the child's "biological" kin. In this vein, many leading Islamic scholars in Iran argue that third party donation destroys a child's lineage (*nasab*), leading to an unwanted "mixture" of relations (Inhorn 2006). Similarly, it is reported that infertile families in Iran widely prefer "the continuity of the lineage" given by donation from relatives (Tremayne-Sheibani 2006). In addition, they reason that an unknown donor might not be a person of "good social status" or "good Muslim"; and further, that if a donor is of questionable person character, negative moral traits might be passed on to the donor child, possibly making the child "evil." I will return to this subject later in the chapter.

Kinship in Iran cannot be comprehended apart from the above Islamic scholarly debates – including a sense of fixed gender and family roles – and Islamic jurisprudence. At the same time, my research shows that understandings of kinship among Basiji families are always locally inflected and emergent. In the following, I draw from my experiences living in a Basiji Iranian household for nearly a year as well as from the daily conversations and stories about friends, relatives, neighbors, local descendants of the Prophet to explore how people describe and interpret their own families.

More than Substance

We were still living in the old house at the end of the alley, in the home of my host family's patrilateral kin, when I asked Fariba, a thirty-year-old married woman with a four year

[14] It is important to note that, although there are increasing similarities between Islamic notions of inheritable bodily substance and Western biogenetic models, Clarke (2009) – writing about Islamic kinship in Lebanon – cogently warns against any easy conflation of notions of filiation (*nasab*) with the "biogenetic relatedness" of Western scientific discourse (Clarke 2007). He argues that "full filiation" (and thus kinship) depends on Islamic legitimacy and contract rather than on substance alone. In many cases, (Islamic) legal propriety prevails over substance.

old son, to describe how the Iranian family is shaped. We sat kneeling in a semi-circle on the bright red Persian carpet with several other women from her extended family: Mona, Fariba's mother and my host father's sister in-law; Atefeh, Fariba's sister; and Farrin and Esma, my host mother's brother's daughters. Fariba led the conversation while the others nodded in agreement.

"We call it the *qom* as in the term you've probably heard of, *qom o khish* (relatives, kinsmen)," Fariba said. "We have a relationship of 'same blood' (*ham khuni*). It begins with the (male) grandparent, who we call the "ancestor" (*jadd*). From the grandparent, we count the grandchildren (*nave*), the great grandchildren (*natijeh*), the great great grandchildren (*nabire*), and the great, great, great grandchildren, or the 'unseen offspring' (*nadideh*), so called because the great great great grandparents will never meet this generation." She continued as Atefeh brought a piece of paper and pen from her room. "The family is like a tree (*shājereh*) with branches (*shākheh*). The mother's line is called the 'milk line' (*khat-e shir*)." She wrote this down for me. "The father's line is called the 'backbone' (*posht*)." I asked which line was more important, the mother's or father's. She responded, "The mother is a "foundation (*asli*)." But the father," she emphasized, "is the foundation of the foundation (*pedar asli-ye asli ast*)." I will return to this distinction shortly.

My host family and others in Fars-Abad imagine the extended family first in terms of a *qom o khish*, an active group of relatives who claim a common origin and relation through patrilateral and/or matrilateral ties (on *qom* see also Shahshahani 1990:245). They describe this intergenerational unit in terms of the six linear generations (*nasl*) (named above) stemming from the "ancestor or line of descent" (*jadd*), most often a grandfather. In daily conversation, people used the term *jadd* as a metonym for the totality of intergenerational, lineal relationships – roughly a line of descent or lineage. (The cognate *ajdad* refers to a person's collective ancestors).

These generations are primarily interconnected through inherited blood – or what people refer to as the "being of the same blood" (*ham khuni*) – but their relations can also be traced through male backbone (*posht*) and female breast milk (*shir*).

"Being of the same blood" is thus a central way of conceiving intergenerational relatedness in Iran and can refer both to a six generational model and to more distant patrilateral and/or matrilateral ascendants and descendants. As a middle-aged male Basseri acquaintance proudly explained, "We [the Basseri] are a society of the same blood." This kind of relation is also sometimes spoken of as being "of the same body," a configuration that appears in images and commemorations of the "five bodies" (*panjtan*) of the household of the Prophet. In Fars-Abad, Nushin referred to both her step and half sibilings by a different mother in these terms: e.g., she is my sister "not of the same body" (*natani*). Finally, two persons in Iran can become blood brothers or sisters by actively mixing their blood together.

Accordingly, the logic of "being of the same blood" (*ham khuni*) or "the same body" is a central way of conceiving both siblingship and lineal relatedness. Shared blood and body, however, express more than a relationship or linkage. In the Qur'an and the hadiths, blood stands for a wide range of qualities: nobility, origin, genealogy, honor, unity of purpose, affinity, virginity, love, and personality (Khuri 2001).

In Fars-Abad, the associations of blood that runs in the veins with the dual categories of fertility/virginity and purity (especially in the case of *sayyeds*) were particularly emphasized. For instance, the wife of a cousin explained, "virginal blood is still very important, even if we do not wait outside the bridal chamber the way we used to." She smiled and added as if in secret, "My mother keeps my marriage bed sheets." Similarly, bridal dresses in Iran often continue to be colored red, a sign of life and fertility. Blood from the veins, they say carries "spirit" (*ruh*)

"energy" (*energi*) and life (*jān*).[15] The lineage of the Prophet, in particular, epitomizes this capacity of blood and may be called on by non-*sayyeds* for its protective, fertile, and vital qualities.

Vital (Blood) Lineages

> A *sayyed* from the line of the Prophet's family was living here in Fars-Abad. A small baby, he was coming home with his mother from Shiraz in the car. His name was Sayyed Allah Al-din. Right here in Fars-Abad, his mother was holding him when the car crashed. Although his mother died, he fell into a bush in the desert. When he fell into the bush, nothing happened to him. They said that "his ancestral line" (*jaddesh*) protected him. His mother died, but he lived. We say that *sayyed*s, because they are in the doorway, at the threshold of God's presence, that they have a lot of *āberu* [the water of one's face, here meaning esteem and purity]. They are in God's threshold. We seek help from them the way we do from the other family members of the Prophet. We say, "Pray for us. You are *sayyed*s. Please request your ancestors' line to help us."[Nushin, 4/24/2010]

In this story, which was told to me on several occasions by different interlocutors in Fars-Abad, Iran, a *sayyed* infant was protected by his pure ancestry (*jadd*, *nasl*) and "proximity to God" in a tragic car crash that killed his own mother. The infant's purity, storytellers said, was inherited through his lineage and blood that he shared with the Prophet. As one neighbor related, a *sayyed* is a person who is "of the same blood" (*ham khuni*) as the Prophet, "who can trace their ancestry to Hazrat-e Imam Husayn, to Hezara-te Ali."

On the "prophetic genealogy" of the *sayyed*s Enseng Ho writes, "genealogy provided a sublime form of identity that could hold both pure Prophetic essence and create human substance without contradiction" (2006:187). Thus, prophetic genealogies do not oppose spirit and matter, light or blood. Rather, they flow together between generations. According to the influential

[15] In contrast, menstrual blood, for instance, is impure and can be defiling. For this reason, female family members carefully avoid touching the Qur'an or visiting in the inner sanctuaries of the Imams and their descendants when they are menstruating. Haleh, for instance, avoided the inner sanctuary at the shrine of Massoomeh in Qom when she was menstruating. At home, she and others instructed me to use the end of a pencil to flip through the pages of the Qur'an and pray during my menstrual cycle to prevent defiling the holy book.

Islamic philosopher, Ibn-al-Arabi, the Prophet was the first being created out of this divine light (Ho 2006). Such light is elsewhere referred to as divine grace (*barakat*). In Iran, this special divine light is depicted in murals and other votive art. It emanates from the faces of the family of the Prophet and their descendants (see also Aghaie 2005) and is further understood as a vital, life-giving essence that animates the world and its creatures.

In Fars-Abad, people frequently emphasized the purity (*pāki*), simplicity (*sādegi*), and particular esteem (*āberu*) of *sayyeds*, or descendants of the family of the Prophet. Recalling examples of *sayyeds* in Fars Abad, one woman indicated: "Some of them can't sin. They are so pure that they don't know how" [Atefeh 6/2/2010]. Another explained: "God doesn't give them the knowledge (*'aql*) to hurt others or sin… some of them… They are so pure/simple (*sadeh*) that they don't even know how to do bad things." These assessments resonate with the Qur'an, which similarly mentions purity as a quality of the *sayyeds* (Khuri 2001:34).

In addition, and as Nushin indicates (above), many *sayyed*s have particularly copious amounts of esteem (*āberu*), which they inherit. According to Ahmad,

> Those who are *sayyed*s have traced from their "ancestry"(*nasl*) and have figured out which Imam they come from. Sometimes they frame this [on their wall]. Some of them are called Mousavi, others Hosseini, some of them have names that indicate *sayyed*hood in other ways, but some of them don't. In Fars Abad, the Friday Imam claims to be a *sayyed*, Mohammad Hosseini. Our leader is also a *sayyed*. *Sayyed* Ali Khomeini. Many of those who are spiritual leaders are *sayyed*s. [10/1/2010]

According to members of my extended host family, the descendants of the Prophet can trace their lineage through a patriline (*sayyed*), a matriline (*sayyeda*), or both. When a person can claim that both of their lineages link to the Prophet, he or she is considered "even more pure" and is conceived of as "closer" to the family of the Prophet (*ahl-e al beyt*) than a person who can claim *sayyed* status through a patriline alone. Similarly, albeit controversially, they recognize persons who trace *sayyed* status through one or more female links.

The logic of the purity and esteem of *sayyed* lineage has implications in everyday life and ritual, life cycle rituals for both *sayyeds* and non-*sayyeds*. Following names such as "mir," indicative of *sayyed* status, or other listed honorifics, my extended host family members in Fars-Abad and Tehran chose *sayyed* medical doctors to treat their medical conditions. *Sayyed*s, they said, might have a special perception into illness because of their trustworthiness and purity. Extended family members also completed local pilgrimages to the tombs of town *sayyed*s. For instance, on our almost regular Thursday trip to the local cemetery, Nushin would always walk to the lone *sayyed* grave at the top of the hill where she prayed to retain the esteem of her family. The grave itself was covered by wind-swept green parchment held in place by tiny rocks. She read a verse from the Qur'an, a Fath, and gently knocked on the grave as she would for her own deceased kin.

It was also afrequent practice to donate sacrificial meat to poor *sayyed*s in town. During the summer of 2010, I helped distribute meat from a sacrificed sheep to local *sayyed*s with members of my host family. We drove around the narrow alleys of the old neighborhood knocking on doors that made up the locally known geography of *sayyed* homes, many of which were still built with clay walls. They gave meat to *sayyed*s who had "roots" of particularly "good standing" (*mo'tabar*). "They are closer to God," Nushin remarked as she returned to the car. "Did you see how simple the woman was?" According to Nushin, some *sayyeds*, in action, deed, and visible simplicity show themselves to be more directly connected the Prophet than others. She often spoke about the lineages of local *sayyed*s in this manner, assessing and valuing certain local families of *sayyeds* as particularly good and pure.

In addition to their protective and life-giving qualities, the lineage of *sayyed*s is also thought to offer fertility. During my research, aunts, wives, mothers, grandmothers, and even

young brides told me that they make supplications to the line of the (local) *sayyed*s specifically to protect and bless their marriages and give them children. One woman explained, "We sometimes make a vow for a problem of my child….We bring them [the *sayyed*s] money and ask them to pray because of their ancestral line." Her sister disagreed, "They don't always take money. They are so good and pure." Relatedly, it is general knowledge that female *sayyed*s are more fertile than non-*sayyed*s, having more children and reaching menopause in their 60s – while the normal age for menopause is thought to be between 47 and 50 years. Later menopause, Nushin and a teacher friend at the local school agreed, is a good thing. "Menstruation is cleansing and problems like high blood pressure and blood sugar begin when it stops. When I asked why, I was told that this was "because God wants the line of the Prophet to multiply." The associations of the *sayyed*s and fertility may have been more pronounced in the past. As one elderly aunt recalled, "In the past, they danced for three days at weddings. During that time, the bride and groom would go to the cemetery to change their clothes because the *sayyed*s were there. They would do this so that the lineal ancestry (*jadd*) of the *sayyed*s could help them" [Nistdar 7/6/2010].

The immediate family of the Prophet and his near descendants are an even more potent source of fertility. On the sixth day of the month of Muharram, the month that commemorates the martyrdom of the pure Imam Husayn and his family at the hands of the corrupt Yazid, several of my female host family members participated in a ceremony, locally called "milk-suckling" (*shir khor*). The ceremony centers on Ali Asghar, the youngest child of the Imam Husayn, a milk-suckling, six-month-old infant, who was martyred with his father at the Battle of Karbala. In this ceremony, mothers bring their young babies and toddlers to the local Islamic meeting house.

They dress them in bright green, black, or white cloth and wrap bands, inscribed with the words: "Ya Hossein, Ya Abol-fazl, or Ya Hazaret-e Zahra," around their foreheads. Alternatively, they cover their small infants' heads with a white shroud, a cloth normally reserved for the deceased. One participant explained, "The Imam Husayn took Ali Asghar in his hand on the sixth day of the battle. He said to his enemies, 'Have mercy on this six-month-old, even if you do not have mercy on us.' But he [the tyrannical Yazid] did not have mercy on him and did not give him water.[16] Without water, without milk, they pierced his throat and sent him to martyrdom." In the meeting house for the Imam Husayn, the ceremony's participants listen to speeches and eulogies about the battle of Karbala and the martyrdom of the tiny infant, Ali Asghar, who was still suckling from his mother's breast (*shir khor*). They mourn, crying and beating their chests. They sing, for example:

Oh, my [dear] Asghar,
(*Ay Asghar-e man*)

Oh, my faultless infant,
(*Ay tefli bitaqsir-e man*)

The calm of my soul, lay lay,

[16] For more details on the Shi'i understandings of the desecration of the sacred Islamic order and life at the Battle of Karbala see Fisher 1982.

(*Aram-e janam lay lay*),

The sweet of my tongue, lay lay
(*Shirin zabanam lay lay*).

(my translation, see a similar rendition in Fischer 1982:19)

At the ceremony, some women specifically made a vow with Hazrat-e Ali Asghar: e.g., "If I become pregnant, I will cook and distribute 1,000 kilos of votive rice." By making this vow and attending the ceremony, my host mother later explained, "They believe that Ali Asghar can intercede with God (*Khodāvand*) and help with pregnancy." Nushin continued, offering me proof of this potency:

> One year, there was a woman who had not been able to get pregnant for 14 years. Another came who had not been able to get pregnant for 12 years. The doctor told them there is nothing else she can do: "You will never conceive." But they had sought help (or intercession, *motevasel shodan*) from Hazrat-e Imam Husayn and Hazrat-e Ali Asghar [his son]. Because of this spiritual turning, their wishes for pregnancy were granted. Hazrat-e Ali Asghar received their wishes to become pregnant. One of the women picked up her child, and showed it to the women. She said that after 12 years of infertility she had become pregnant. [Nushin 12/2010]

In this and other examples, the potency, fertility, and purity of the descendants of the Prophet can transform the fertility of women through prayer and vow making. More than a matter of substantial relations, kinship is spiritual, emerging from and contoured by concepts of the divine.

However, it is not only the lineages of *sayyed*s that are hierarchically valued for their spiritual qualities, although they are considered the closest to God and the most vital. During research, I noted that host family members fashioned differential evaluations of the lineages (*jadd*) of non-*sayyed*s. In particular, they regarded qualities such as goodness, purity, temperament, or evilness to be a property of particular lineages and the flow of blood between non-*sayyed* descendants. Unlike the *sayyeds*, however, within whom purity is innate (the quality

of which is dependent on the directness of their link to the Prophet), they said that these qualities stem from the acts of ancestors. Parvin, a Tehrani aunt, explained: "We don't have any descendants of the Prophet (*sayyeds*) in our family, but our roots/ancestors (*rishteh*), my father's ancestral line (*jadd*), accepted Islam. It is now our family religion. I am happy that I have Islam because it provides me with inner peace." In this example, Parvin implicitly acknowledges that her ability to be a good Muslim stems –in part – from the inheritance of her father's lineage's acceptance of the faith. Importantly, she argues that she is a (good) Muslim because she was born one and not because she learned to be one (although it is, of course, also possible to convert).

The families of martyrs also exemplify this dynamic. As I will address in more detail in Chapter 4, for my Basiji interlocutors, martyr's blood is holy, life giving, and purifying. It is associated both with the martyrdom of the Shi'i Imams, especially the Imam Husayn, and with the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War. Indeed, in popular martyr iconography, spilt red blood is associated with the growth of red tulips and with regeneration. My interlocutors regard the families, and even the lineages, of martyrs, who have sacrificed their blood for Islam and the nation, as inherently more pure or good than others. Through the act of spilling blood on the battlefield, these martyrs receive the power to intercede with God on behalf of their loved ones. They give their descendants a connection to the divine, a connection which, as several women told me, may be passed on to the martyr's descendants, "if they also act with piety and faith" [Atefeh 5/22/10].

Finally, and perhaps most surprising, my Basiji interlocutors frequently distinguished the lineages of kings (*khans*) from those of others as especially worthy of respect and esteem. For example, my host mother's patrilateral kin were khans and had a lot of influence in village life in

the past. Today, when townspeople speak of her family, they often mention its "good root" (*rishteh*), "ancestry" (*jadd*), and "descendants" (*nasl*). In the same way, Ahmad, my host father, and Nushin admitted that their now son-in-law's royal ancestry had played an important role in their decision to allow him to marry their eldest daughter, Fatimeh. They considered the marriage mutually beneficial, even though the son-in-law was not well off monetarily. (He had taken a large loan from Ahmad in order to work selling ice cream from a truck to neighboring towns, a job of relatively low pay). The neighbors talked about Ehsan, in the apartment next door, in the same way. Even though he was addicted to opium, unemployed, and was having trouble with his wife (she had recently left their home and had returned to the household of her parents (*qahr kard*)) – he was consistently given the benefit of the doubt because of his "good" and kingly family lineage.

Even more broadly, people in Fars-Abad regularly attended to whether a given person descended from a man or woman of good character. Multiple times every day, other families were assessed in this manner.

Gendered Substances: Milk and Backbone

According to Fariba and Atefeh, kinship can also be reckoned through gender according to "male backbone" (*posht*) and "female milk" (*shir*). In this configuration, the father's line or lineage (*posht*) is the main foundation (*asli-ye asli*) of intergenerational relationships and is hierarchically valued over female links. For Fariba, Atefeh, and their relatives, the father's line is imagined as the figurative or literal inheritance of backbone or vertebrae. "To be of someone's backbone" (*az poshteh kesi budan*), for instance, implies a patrilineal relationship, most likely the relationship between father and son or between grandfather or great grandfather and a son.

Similarly, the phrase "the backbone of the father took in the womb" indicates that a woman has become pregnant or that backbone is transferred in procreation. In everyday conversation, however, it is more often indicative of an emotive tie. The connection evoked by having shared backbone recalls the love and mutual support of lineal male descendants. People refer to how the back (*posht*) may be filled or emptied as an expression of grief or joy. When my host father recalled his grief at the time of his father's death, for example, he said, "It was as though my backbone had been emptied." In other contexts, the phrase can more generally describe the feeling of having lost a family member, although most often it refers to a father. More than inherited family identity, then, the concept of inherited backbone provides a sense of familial love and support.

Yet despite the focus on inherited male blood and bone as the main foundation or essence (*asli-ye asli*) of the intergenerational family, Fariba and others also recognized "the milk line," or the mother's descent line, as another, secondary "foundation" through which one can trace ancestry. Thus although male descent lines are privileged, ancestry is also frequently reckoned through female links, and both males and females transfer blood and identity to the fetus.[17] In Fars-Abad, such matrilateral links are recognized by male and female family members. A son might trace the ancestry (*jadd*) of his mother's father and other matrilateral kin and link it to himself. Similarly, a grandmother is recognized as "another ancestor" (*jadd digar*) and is linked to her descendants, even if she, herself, is formally part of her father's family tree. Family members also regarded these relationships as more relaxed and "closer" than relationships with their patrilateral kin. In addition, they spoke of the characteristics they had inherited from their

[17] Coulson, a scholar of Islamic law, thus argues that what sets Shi'i law apart "is its refusal to afford any special place or privileged position to agnate relatives as such" (1971:108). This dictum is expressed by the Shi'i imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq: "As for the *'asaba* [agnates], dust in their teeth" (Coulson 1971:108).

mother's father and said that they were related to these ancestors by blood. Correspondingly, they saw qualities of these ancestors in themselves. "Like my mother's father, I am giving and care about others," explained Reza on numerous occasions. He and others attended to a range of physical, emotional, and spiritual characteristics they held in common with these ancestors.

The particular gloss, mother's milk, for matrilateral descent is also critical to understandings of the intergenerational family. It is not only female blood that is transferred to children across generations, but also breast milk. Scholars have previously addressed the power of shared milk in Islam to create a sexual taboo between a male and his wet nurse's lineal kin, leading to a series of marriage prohibitions (Qur'an 4:27). This kin relation, described in both Arabic and Farsi as *rida* has been referred to in the literature as "foster parentage," yet does not confer the inheritance of property (Parkes 2005; Clarke 2007). Today, it is stipulated in Shi'i law that a child must be breast-fed at least fifteen times by one woman before foster parentage is created. However, in addition to forming a marriage exclusion, a person is thought to inherit personal characteristics, as well as harm or benefit, from the women who nursed them, whether this person is their mother or not.

According to anthropologist of Iran, Anne Betteridge (personal communication 2008), this is not necessarily a generationally deep tie, but can be if one is nursed by one's own mother, who was nursed by his or her mother, etc. In this latter case, they say that the power of milk to make kin or shape kin is strengthened generation after generation. For example, in conversation, someone might say that "Of course X is a good person, s/he drank milk from Y who is of known personal "esteem" (*āberu*). My own research confirms this assessment, especially in Fars-Abad where people paid close attention to breastfeeding and regarded it as far superior to bottled dry milk. Some even confessed that they believe that a baby who consumes the breast milk of a

female descendant of the Prophet, or *sayyeda*, will become a *sayyed*, although they admitted that their husbands disagreed.[18]

It is important to note that despite the recognition of matrilateral kinship, by blood or milk, patrilineal descent was emphasized in self-drawn kinship maps people gave me. In these diagrams, family members often did not at first include any of the wives, or any of the daughters of their family. Atefeh, for instance asked me: "Do you want me to include the daughters?" as an afterthought when she had already filled in the chart with men. At first this perplexed me, why had Atefeh, a twenty-one-year-old Fars-Abad woman now working at a local school outside the home, neglected the daughters of her own family, including herself? However, when I looked more closely, I noticed that the family members she included were precisely those who would pass on their last names to their children. With the daughters, the line stops. After all, a mother's children take their father's name and not their mother's father's name. Identification cards and licenses similarly privilege patrilineal descent, typically listing the father's first name and last name rather than the mother's.

There is thus a clear hierarchy of male over female contributions to procreation and descent among my interlocutors. Yet the intergenerational blood associated with lineal descent may be male or female. In addition to the gendered qualities, however, bodily substances such as blood and breast milk have the capacity to transmit or accrue qualities such as purity, emotion, faith, or corruption across generations. In the following, I move to an analysis of how my interlocutors understand the bodily substances of procreation and the mutability of substance, a subject I take up in greater detail in Chapter 3.

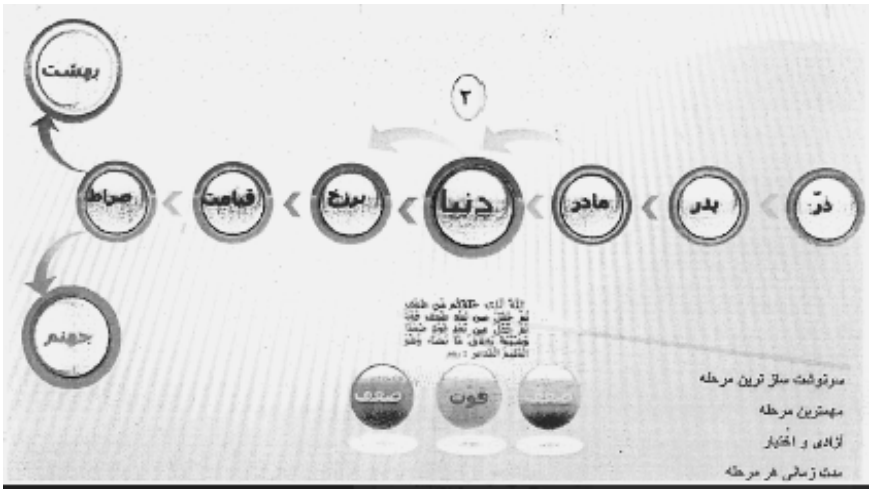
[18] Interestingly, in Beliefs and Customs of the Persians (1890), Masse describes the Persian belief that nursing a Christian child might bring a woman harm. In contrast, nursing a *seyyid* is highly beneficial and ensures a woman's breasts will be spared the fires of hell.

Creation, Procreation, and the Mutability of Substance

> Recite in the name of your Lord who created - Created man from a clinging substance (Q 96:1) [from the Arabic Sura al-Alaq (The Blood Clot), quoted by Nushin 7/10).

The family – Ahmad, Ali, Reza, and I – sat on bright orange armchairs listening to Mr. Hosseini, a teacher of Shi'i Islam. A friend of Ahmad, Mr. Hosseini had come to Farsi-Abad to teach the family and myself about Islam. "God (*khodā*) is limitless," he began. "Relative to God, we are but a glass in his ocean. We are limited, limited with respect to understanding (*dark*) and wisdom (*'aql*)….God created this world for us and he created us for worship." He argued that it is ultimately God's command that causes a creature to be born (see also Sachedina 2009:102). Mr. Hosseini then turned to a page in a spiral bound course packet he had developed for his students. On it, he had charted the course of a human life from before birth to after death. "Humans are made of two parts: "spirit" (*ruh*) and flesh or body (*jesm*)," he said. He then continued: "To understand Islam, you must first understand three questions: 1) where were you (*kojā budid*)?, 2) where are you (*kojā hastid*)?, and 3) where are you going (*kojā miravid*)?"

The chart below provides Mr. Hosseini's answers to these questions, which he teaches to students across Shiraz and Fars-Abad. The material he provides is not developed from classical training at Islamic seminaries, although he had apparently attended some University classes on Islam. Rather, it is collected from scholarly speeches on Iranian radio and television. Nevertheless, Mr. Hosseini was held in high esteem by my host family, their neighbors and friends for his ability to answer questions and general scholarship.



From right to left Mr. Hosseini's chart depicts the course of human existence. It reads: "particle" (*zar*), a word also associated with the Qur'anic concept of "the world before creation" (*alam-e zar*); "father" (*pedar*), "mother" (*madar*), "world" (*donya*), "limbo" (*barzakh*), "Judgment Day" (*qiyamat*), "path" (*sarat*), and finally, "heaven" (*behesht*) or "hell" (*jahanam*). Mr. Hosseini explained the diagram in the following terms: "We were a fetus in the womb (stomach) of our mother. Before that, we were in the existence of our father. Before that, we were in nature, in the earth. We were in foods. Every person was in a piece of food, apple, or bread. This food – such as apples or bread – is from plants and earth. This builds (makes) blood and this blood makes a "male seed, sperm (*notfe*)." He continued, "If you ask a ten-year-old ten and a half years ago what he/she was, he/she would say, I was a fetus (*jenin*) in my mother. If you ask that same child what they were eleven years ago, he/she would say that I was blood in my father's backbone (*posht-e pedar budam*)." He explained, "This means that I was in the existence of my father (*tu vojud-e pedaram budam*)." Ahmad who had been paying close attention to all this, interrupted him, looking over at me: "Of course it comes from the mother too. This is recognized!" Mr. Hosseini continued, now beginning a discussion on Islamic virtue, as if he hadn't heard Ahmad's

comment. After Mr. Hosseini had left, Reza, too, shared his disagreement with some of Mr. Hosseini's statements. He said that although Mr. Hosseini is a scholar and knows many things, "this is not our [the family's] Islam."

Indeed, there are multiple and seemingly paradoxical ways to understand procreation in Fars-Abad. In the first, an Islamic conceptual framework underlies all human life. Here, it is ultimately God, who confers life and soul to all living things. People in Fars-Abad theorize that God is genderless. As a married male neighbor explained: "Those who give God a gender are mistaken. God does not have a body (*jesm*). 'He/she' (*on*, a genderless he/she pronoun) is not limited by the capacities of man or woman. We can't fathom God. God is something beyond." Others described God and "spirit" (*ruh*) or "energy" (*energi*) [Mehdi 2/26/10], holding that God breathes spirit into the fetus approximately 40 days after conception. God is thus the ultimate Creator and Sustainer, the provider of human conception and procreation. The following verse from the Qur'an was widely referred to by Fars-Abad friends and family:

> Surely we created you of dust, then of sperm-drop (*nutfa*), then a blood clot (*'alaqa*), then of a morsel of tissue (*mudgha*), formed and unformed, so that we may make clear to you [the creation and development of the child in the womb]. We establish in the wombs what we will, till stated term, then we deliver you as infants, then that you may come of age; and some of you die, and some of you are kept back unto vilest state of life, that after knowing somewhat, they may know nothing. (Qur'an 22:5 quoted in Sachedina 2009:102)

This passage makes an analogy between human procreation and God's creation (*khalq*). When I asked women family members in Fars-Abad to describe the process of conception and pregnancy, they similarly began with the "sperm or semen" (*notfeh*), transitioning to the *alaqeh*, or "blood that has not yet formed into a shape, not hands, not feet, hardly anything" (Atefeh 7/1/10). "It is something" one cousin explained, "that is coming into being." The next part of the process is the forming and thickening, with the "faintest shape apparent." This phase is described

as the *mudgha* (Arabic) and denotes the more clear formation of the blood package (*khun basteh*) or "meat." "In the *azam* stage," the same cousin continued, "the bones are formed and in *lahm*, the flesh. Finally, God gives spirit to the fetus (*damidan-e ruh*)."

In the second conceptual framework, Shi'i interviewees of varying ages, but mostly those under fifty and high school educated, use English language concepts such as DNA, chromosomes, and sperm. (They use the Farsi term *tokhmak* for egg, the word *tokhmadān* for ovaries). These interviewees – both men and women – explain gender in terms of the chromosomes "XX" and "XY" and further argue that the mother and father contribute equally to procreation. They further describe procreation as the "mixing" of the "water" (*āb*) of a woman and man during sex, a description that corresponds to particular Iranian understandings of body and person. Semen, for instance, is regularly referred to as "water" (*āb*, as in *āb mani*). Similarly the ovaries are themselves sometimes described as female water. Yet although these substances and spiritual states are innate, and God given, they are also malleable.

In Iran, the person is understood in terms of three states of being – gas, liquid, and matter – whose combinations and mixing have significant consequences for the temperament (*tab*), character, and the state (*hāl*) of persons and families. For example, one way to indicate discomposure and upset is to say "my state (*hāl*) is [literally] poured together (*halam ba ham rikht*). The person's soul is also discussed in a liquid fashion: for example, "when I don't pray my soul pours together (*ruham be ham mirizeh*)." Similarly, the expression "they came out well from water" (*khub az āb dar āmadand*) implies that children grew up were formed or shaped in the right way and that they will have be "good" and have a good future. Here, there is a sense that people begin unformed and liquid and become shaped or cooked (or wise) in their homes and by their families. On the other hand, they say, if water is stagnant, it is deadly.

Similarly, and as I will further describe in Chapter Three, Islamo-Galenic conceptualizations inflect understandings of fertility, pregnancy, and birth. People and families are characterized by "hot" or "cold" temperaments that can be altered by the consumption of "hot" or "cold" foods. These temperaments are both linked to a particular person's stage in the life cycle and gender. While females are considered colder than males, the young are relatively hotter than the old, whose innate body heat has gradually cooled. Moreover, post-partum mothers of baby boys are thought to have hotter bodies, milk, and temperament than post-partum mothers of baby girls (Harbottle 2000:51; Good 1980:148). As a result, midwives and female friends often offer "hot" and "cold" principles to couples who hope to get pregnant or even to influence the sex of the baby (hot foods are believed to encourage the development of a boy and cold ones to increase the chances of carrying a girl).

This paradigm is corroborated in countless self-help pregnancy books. One such popular book in Farsi, entitled "Care during Pregnancy and Birth" (Akbarzadeh 2010), for example, provides verses and feeding advice to ensure the gender of the child. Using the science of PH and sex chromosomes, the authors argue that a woman is more likely to have a boy if the blood PH is low because XY chromosomes are lighter than XX. This leads to the following instructions: "For a girl, abstain from salty food, mushrooms, artichokes, and bananas that have potassium one month before pregnancy. For a boy, eat salty foods and mulberries, one hour before pregnancy" (Akbarzadeh 2010:53). The book also details the physical and spiritual effects of the consumption of particular foods and the direct relation between the mother's food consumption and the beauty and character of her baby. They further provide specific verses from the Qur'an for alleviating pain during birth, for fertility, and for the sex of the baby.

This section has shown that acts of prayer, devotion, and sacrifice – alone or in conjunction with feeding the right foods – can influence the material substances and spiritual qualities that constitute gender, procreation, or lineage. In so doing, I do not contest a certain degree of biological determinism and fixity in Iranian, Islamic notions of kinship, reckoned through inherited and/or procreative substance and fixed essences. However, I suggest that inheritable substances are more than substance. They channel particular qualities, some of which are innate (purity via descent from the Prophet) and some of which may be created through acts (*amalat*). Here, inheritable substance can be acted upon, created, influenced, or corrupted with very real consequences for the pure inner core of the family and its descendants. Good deeds, prayer, and life acts can all alter offspring, both physically and spiritually. I will return to this subject in Chapter 3.

How "Shared Blood" Plays Out: Making the Moral Family

Although Islamic understandings of inheritable bodily substances – and increasingly understandings of bio-genetic substance— determine who counts as kin, I argue that they do not necessarily predict, for Basiji families, how relations unfold or get actively demarcated. Rather, what is salient in the unfolding of relations is the contingent and changing location of kin on a continuum between inner family purity and outside corruption. Here, interesting tensions emerge between Islamic kin obligations and prohibitions based on bodily substance and the imperative to protect the family from outside, immoral kin and in-laws. Interlocutors demarcate inner circles of moral and trustworthy kin relations through acts of coming and going (*raft o amad*) and index those who are external to these relations through tactics of kin avoidance.

Becoming Mahram?

Hajji Mahmad, my host mother's brother, was a jokester. He loved showing his young nieces and nephews the round bump on his thumb, which he said was a bit of food that he had swallowed whole and that had traveled directly from his mouth to form a ball at the end of his finger. I had only lived in Fars-Abad for one month when Hajji, who was also a pious man, came to visit the new house of his sister with his wife, Zahra, and his daughters. His expression was serious as he sipped the tea Nushin had given him. He sat on the floor, leaning against the bottom of the rim of the couch. "Have you heard the sugar cube riddle?" he asked.

Hajji started placing sugar cubes and matchsticks from his pocket on the glass table and instructed me to come over to watch. "You have six women, the sugar cubes. They have to get to the other side of the river on a boat, but they can only travel with a man who has a 'permitted relationship to them' (*mahram*), one of these three matchsticks. How do they get across?" We began going through scenarios, moving the pieces around, "what if two women go together," I asked? "Not allowed" he said. Although I tried, I never did resolve Hajji Mahmad's puzzle. But an impression lingered: had Hajji chosen this particular riddle about "the rules of permitted relating" (*mahramiat*) to comment on my situation in the house of his sister, where I was living with his brother-in-law and two nephews, three non-kin males?

As I noted in the beginning of this chapter, the word *mahram* refers to persons for whom marriage is prohibited by Islamic law. One might say, for instance, X is *mahram* to Y, he is her uncle. A *mahram* relationship can be formed through blood (*khuni*), affinity (*sababi*), or milk (*shiri*), with kin prohibited by blood and milk falling in the same categories. Blood and milk suckling *mahrams* consist of the father and mother, the grandparents, and great grandparents etc.; the brothers and sisters; and the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, etc. *Mahrams*

through affinity include the father and mother-in-laws, the son or daughter-in-laws, and the step father (the mother's husband), step mother (the father's wife) and the step children (see also Haeri 1989). Any relationship with a person of the opposite gender who is outside of these categories is unlawful. It has been well documented that the concept of *mahram* is fundamental to everyday Iranian social relations and segregation policies (Haeri 1989; Torab 2005; Milani 2011). Indeed, the rules for permitted relating (*mahramiat*) configure the separation of potential marriage partners through gender avoidance and veiling and further shape the rules for making eye contact, posture (relaxed or rigid), volume of speech or prayer, subject of conversation, seriousness of talk (women in particular should be serious when speaking with men), as well as the proximity of bodies.

When I first arrived in Fars-Abad, however, an American foreigner, I was seen as somehow outside the boundaries of *mahram*. When eighteen year old Amir, my host father's nephew asked me to try riding his motorcycle in 2008 during my first visit to Fars-Abad, his female kin urged me to go ahead. *Mahram* doesn't mean anything for you," they said. Similarly, in 2010 when cousins and parents stuffed into a single car to drive across town, Haleh's mother pushed me into the backseat ahead of her daughter so that I would form a buffer between her and her cousin, a potential marriage partner. "*You* can sit in the middle," she affirmed, laughing.

Yet as I slowly became more integrated into my host family, my social position as a foreigner, partially exempt from *mahram* regulations, began to change. Ahmad, my Basiji host father, had at first allowed me to remain without headscarf, but modestly dressed, in the confines of the house. He did not see my veiling as an obligatory act. However, as my presence became increasingly known in the wider community, he began to ask me to keep a headscarf ready in case of guests arrived unexpectedly. As a result, I participated in hiding and quick veiling with

the female members of my host family whenever a stranger or *particular type* of kinsman – usually one who the family regarded as untrustworthy – entered, signified by the familiar warning, "Yallah." We would duck behind the kitchen counter or run into one of the bedrooms– often laughing – and reach for the scarves we wore around our necks to cover our heads. If none presented themselves, we would hurry past apologetically or even use a kitchen cloth or garment to cover our heads. It was not uncommon to find that, in the commotion, headscarves had been switched, mistakenly.

Similarly, Ahmad and Nushin began to tell me that I was no different than their nineteen-year-old daughter, Maryam, and that, as such, I should also wear the black chador as she did, in addition to the very modest head scarf and coat that I already wore outside the home. I began using the wide sleeved, Arab-style chador a friend had given me in Tehran whenever I went out, to the park, on a shopping trip, or even to walk the short distance to the home of Fatima, Nushin's oldest daughter. I also tried Iranian style chadors but found the sleeveless versions almost impossible to keep on my head. Reza began joking that I had "become chadored." "What will your family say?" he would add. I learned also to laugh and smile a little less in front of male relatives and guests and was told to sit in the presence of male neighbors in a kneeling or cross-legged position. On a few occasions, my host brothers even warned me: do not act so friendly with so and so. He might misinterpret your intentions.

Yet although my host father once referred to me as "almost *mahram*" (*taqriban mahram*) – in part because of the food and salt we had shared at the "dining spread" (*sofreh*) (see Chapter Three), we also maintained a certain distance. Ahmad only shook my hand once during my entire time in his house – when I first arrived – and explicitly never allowed our bodies or hands to touch unless by accident at the edge of the dining cloth. At the same time, however, I noted that,

failing a position between his wife or daughter, he felt it better that I sit next to him while eating rather than next to a male stranger or distant kinsman. Indeed, people often helped me negotiate such situations by telling me where to sit whenever more than the immediate, small family (*khanevadeh*) was present. Similarly, after consulting with an Islamic scholar, Ahmad learned a complicated Arabic greeting for a Christian and stopped using the usual phrase, "*Salaam al-e kom*." This lasted only a few days.

My eldest host brother was similarly careful although he lost his reserve in moments and would slap me five, questioningly saying "that has no sin, right?" Those who had met me and who were close kin or neighbors of my host family began to understand the ambiguity of my situation and accept my unusual position. However, there were still rumors. For instance, a rumor circulated in Fars-Abad that I had married into the family, which from outward appearances was the only way people could understand my long stay in their household.

But I was not the only person to transgress concepts of appropriate and permitted cross gender relationships. I noted that my host mother's nieces, Afareen and Mona, for instance, would make a point of shaking hands with my host brothers, Ali and Reza, whenever they visited. They would let their scarves fall to their shoulders (a medial position where it may be quickly put back on) and proceed as if nothing had happened. Similarly, Nushin's sister would let her scarf fall to her shoulders around Ahmad, Nushin's husband, who was not *mahram* to her. He would not react or judge her. Sometimes she commented, "It doesn't matter. He won't look at me." She said that she trusted him and saw him as a pious person, who prayed regularly, etc.

These examples provide an illustration of the ways that *mahram* relationships are additionally configured according to trust, closeness, and the perceived piety. Almost paradoxically, the more devout a person seemed to be, and the more they were trusted, the fewer

restrictions on permitted relationships seemed to apply, but only in the privacy of the home. In other words, the immediate family considered themselves to be pure and trustworthy enough to allow me to live with them. They did not expect distant relatives, neighbors, or strangers to make the same assumptions, however. Outside, and in front of strangers or distant kin, *mahram* relations were always carefully maintained.

The above example provides an illustration of the work and vigilance that goes into maintaining permitted relations. These relations, who can also be thought of as *halal* or lawful, keep untrusted strangers at a social distance. Yet the example of my own inclusion and even ability to live with a pious Basiji family for an extended period of time attests to the flexibility of these Islamic codes in interactions between trusted and pure kin. It further attests to the necessity of conforming to outward opinion and maintaining family "face" or "esteem" (*āberu*). In the following, I continue to highlight the ambivalences and tensions that surround Islamic kinship obligations as well as illustrate important distinctions people make between the evaluation of their own family's trustworthiness and inner purity and the external perceptions of others.

Ambivalences: Islamic Kinship Obligations and Moral Families

The Prophet's nephew, Ali, said, "Have a 'relationship' (*peyvand*) of 'coming and going' (*raft o amad*) with your relatives, even when they have cut 'relations' (*rābeteh*)" [Nushin 10/20/2010]

Nushin sat in contemplation on the new sofa, the bright orange cover contrasting with her subdued home clothes. She held her one-year-old granddaughter in her lap as the child pulled at a notebook, but she herself was distracted. I sat down next to her, offering to make us some tea on the gas stove, a morning event that had become an almost daily ritual for the two of us. This time Nushin stopped me before I could light the stove, "Do you know about *saleh rahm*? About

the significance of having a coming and going relationship with close relatives?" I shook my head. She spelled out the Arabic letters "Sad, Lam…" and waited while I jotted it down. "'*Saleh rahm*' or '*saleh arham*,' plural, means having a good relationship with your extended family. Why? Because they are the same root (*rishteh*), the same origin (*asl*). Even the television talks about this. The Imams and Islamic scholars. We [Iranians] don't like the act of willfully ignoring relatives or 'avoidance' (*qahr kardan*)." On another occasion, a Tehrani graduate student concurred, "*saleh rahm* means visiting your relatives and elders. It means 'coming and going' (*raft o amad*)" (Haleh 3/1/2010).

The concept of *saleh rahm* occurs and reoccurs in the Qur'an and the hadiths, denoting a bond of kinship that does not break or that opposes breaking. In Iran, *rahm* is similarly used to denote "those who are close" (*nazdikān*) or "those who are related" (*bastegān*). As a general expression for kin, the word literally means womb or shared womb and is a linguistic cognate of Allah, Al-Rahim, The Merciful. In Islamic jurisprudence, however, *rahm* further denotes a vow (a promise word) that refers to lineal, descent relations – not relations of marriage – whether male or female, "permitted relations" (*mahram*) or "illegal" (*namahram*), Muslim or heretic, or from the mother's side or the father's side. *Saleh*, in contrast, is a word that means a gift or a favor, implying a relation accompanied by love and kindness that opposes "distancing" (*dori kardan*) and the breaking of relationships.[19] Yet while the concept of *saleh rahm* means the maintenance of relations with kin – defined variously as descent relations alone or both descent and affinal relations – it simultaneously evidences the parallel ways that acts of doing, of coming and going, greeting, or exchanging (re)generate kinship in everyday life. On the one hand, *saleh*

[19] It is said that one of the Shi'i asked the Imam Sadeq: "Some of my relatives do not have the same views as me. Do they have title/right on me? The Imam said: "Yes, the right of 'closeness' (*qorbat*) and 'relationship' (*khishavandi*) cannot be broken (*qath*). Even further, if relations lead to human harm, humans still do not have the right to sever the link (*peyvand*). They should endeavor to reciprocate with kindness مجلسی، محمد باقر، بحارالانوار، ج ۷۱، ص

rahm is premised on the notion that acts of visiting or greeting are good and bring religious merit (*savab*) to the visitors. On the other, it implies that relations depend on reciprocal visiting. In other words, relations may be severed by an (immoral) and un-Islamic avoidance of kin, lack of visiting, greeting, or exchanging.

After many months of living with Nushin, helping her cook, and accompanying her on house visits, I knew that she had brought up the concept of *saleh rahm* because she was troubled. Nushin, almost always calm, diligent and methodically pious, was having difficulty with her husband's sister-in-law. She worried that their Aunt Farah was taunting her own children and "prayer taking" to harm them. She also worried about the problems of her matrilateral kin. Her brother's grandson, her great nephew, was being raised by his grandparents due to his father's recent divorce. The family had recently lost another son to opium addiction, which people agreed was ultimately due to the incursion of opium from Afghanistan – an onslaught from the U.S. More than anything, she was concerned about the influence of particular family members on her teenage children. Looking up from her tea, she said, "Especially, when people belittle each other, this is very ugly. You have to be very good so that you can change yourself or someone else for the better. It's very difficult, with your own good behavior, to change the bad behavior of others into good behavior" [11/2/14].

The concept of the unbreakability of kinship was thus a point of tension for Nushin and others. In her daily life, she distinguishes those kin she considers pure (*pāk*) or virtuous (*ba taqva*) from those who are morally corrupt. She and her husband vigilantly control her family's contact with the immoral sort. Yet, as she indicates above, according to the principle of *saleh rahm*, she and her family must honor both kinds of relationships through visiting. In so doing, she hopes that she will be able to alter her immoral kin through her good behavior. At the same

time, however, she concedes that this is extremely difficult. More than anything, she fears that spending time with immoral relatives and eating their food will corrupt her children, a subject I will address in more detail in Chapter 3.

Many of those with whom I became close in Tehran, Qazvin, Shiraz and elsewhere expressed the difficulties stemming from this tension, seemingly based on kinship obligations founded on blood and Shi'i exegesis on the imperative to protect the family. Interestingly, they concurred that kin relationships are not only unbreakable because people are linked by blood. They are unbreakable, they said, because kindness toward kin is central to Islam.

Degrees of Kinship

Similarly, friends and family in Fars-Abad also recognized varying degrees of kinship. As Fariba's kinship analysis makes visible (above), people referred to kin as *qom o khish*, denoting a generalized sense of relationship (*ertebat*) with matrilateral and patrilateral family members, including grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, second cousins, and so on, as well as their affines. This more generalized relationality, however, is additionally organized by overlapping degrees of kinship.

Family of "degree one" or *darajehh yek*, they say, are those deemed to be immediate kin. This group was also described to me as "the small household" (*khanevadeh-ye koochik*) and is necessarily composed of intimate persons for whom marriage is prohibited (*mahram*) to each other. As one Tehrani woman explained, "*khanevadeh* are those people who were with me from the beginning and still with me and who are my relations… when we leave [the house], we leave together and when we come back, we come back together. We share our lives." This family usually consists of parents, a husband and wife, and children and often additionally includes

grandparents. In Chapter Three, I describe the numerous ways that shared food and blessing at the dining spread (*sofreh*), contribute to the spiritual core of this small household.

"Degree two" kin (*darajeh do*), in contrast, include the wider circle of uncles, aunts, cousins, and their affines, some for whom are *mahram* to each other (persons for whom marriage is prohibited because of lineal kinship such as parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts) and some of whom are persons who are allowed to marry (e.g., cousins). Depending on mutual trust and perceived family purity, degree two kin often have what is called a relationship of reciprocal visiting or "coming and going" (*raft o amad*). Together, these two degrees of kinship form what in practice is the main circle of intimate extended family, entailing reciprocal kinship obligations such as visiting and wedding attendance. Finally, still more distant kin are recognized simply by the term *qom o khish* and their relations may either not be precisely known or are not further specified. In the following, I show how degrees of kinship are understood and enacted in a lived example of a death in the family.

Nushin and Ahmad spoke in hurried whispers. They had just received the news of Ehsan's death. They told us to go back upstairs and get ready as Ahmad and the boys hurried on ahead. We were going to his family home where his mother and father were waiting. Nushin was in shock as Maryam, Fatimeh, and I slowly followed her along the dusty path between the alleys and across a street to the gated door of her brother's home. Passing through a group of men sitting outside, we entered the living area, its walls lined with chadored women, whispering tearful prayers. I held the baby, Setayesh, as we entered while her mother, Fatimeh, adjusted her scarf. Nushin's nieces, and Ehsan's sisters, Marjan and Farrin's eyes were full of tears. Marjan, the elder sister of Ehsan was rocking back and forth: "My brother, my brother, my brother… the

love of my father, my father." Her mother wailed next to her, sometimes being hushed by the other women. Nushin went over to hold her hand, a firm calming grip.

Ehsan was only in his twenties when his body was found, bloated from the sun, in a field outside of town. He died on the Holy Night of Power during Ramadan, they said, of a drug overdose, probably opium. When news of his death spread in the town, neighbors, close friends, and kin filled the house of his parents offering their condolences: "May God have Mercy on Him" (*khodā rahmatesh koneh, khodā biamorzadesh koneh*)," they said. Ehsan was buried on the seventh day after his death (his burial had been delayed due to ongoing investigations into his unnatural cause of death). Nearly one thousand people attended the burial and the subsequent funeral (*khatm*). Degree one kin, males and females both, formed the first circle of mourners around the still dirt covered grave. Ehsan's sisters and mother cried and prayed, and they and some cousins distributed dates, fruit, and sweet wheat paste (*halva*) to the attendees. Then, the mourners, in a chain of cars, followed the sound of the Qur'an broadcast from a truck, decorated with a picture of the deceased wreathed in flowers, to the Shi'i meeting house. Inside the gigantic, carpeted hall, divided by gender with a large curtain, the local Imam spoke of the Day of Judgment on the loud speakers. Sitting in circles, female mourners around me hardly listened. Instead, they chatted about Ehsan, about what had happened, about the difficulty of his sudden death for his family. Relatives passed out lemon drink and dates. On a Thursday, a week after the funeral, degree one family met again in the Ehsan's house and traveled together to his gravesite. They spread a carpet on the dirt put a tray of dates mixed with fried wheat and walnuts on its soft surface along with containers of pastries and fruit. (They had coordinated the previous night, preparing the food and splitting the costs.)

Distinctions of degrees of kinship emerge during such funerals. According to Nushin , "visitors show up at the house before the funeral. They visit afterwards. But close family, 'degree one' kin (*darajeh yek*), don't fix their eyebrows, and they continue visiting every day. Sometimes for hours and hours." Indeed, neither Nushin, nor I, nor her elder daughter got a haircut for forty days after Ehsan's death. Furthermore, at the end of Ramadan, we mourned by not celebrating the festival of Iftar that breaks the fast. We also did not attend several weddings that we had been invited to following the month of Ramadan. This, host family members said, was their obligation to degree one kin.

Extending Outward, Family Esteem

The concept of esteem (*āberu*), literally "the water of one's face," is particularly salient to the way Iranians configure the ideally pious and moral family lineage. Similar in some ways to the linguistic analytic term "face," *āberu* in Farsi is often said to be garnered or lost by the family as a whole, rather than the individual. It is described as a kind of fluid that can be exchanged, poured, or mixed between persons or lost entirely: *āberu* can be spilt (*rikht*), carried away (*bord*), or made unclean (*ghand zad*). It can be brought into hand (*āberu be dast avardan*) or it can be protected (*āberu hefz kardan*). And, like liquid, the tiniest drop of soil can contaminate it, and the tiniest hole can empty it. *Āberu* is precarious.

As the spiritual and moral integrity of a person or family, *āberu* can be attained (or lost) through actions. However, it can also be inherited as in the case of the descendants of the Prophet. With regard to *āberu* as something that is forged through everyday actions, Ahmad, my host father, explained: "My wife and I have worked very hard to bring *āberu* to our family over many years. We have not bothered others unnecessarily and we have worked in this town as

teachers and directors of the local school. We have helped others when we can and have been good neighbors and kinsmen." But this patiently garnered *āberu* can be spilt or carried away very easily. When a son becomes an opium addict, like Ehsan, for example, or when a daughter becomes pregnant before marriage, the immediate family's *āberu* can be lost. Ahmad explained: "Because we are in a small city, if someone has a good job, we are happy. But if someone is an addict, like a cousin, this is bad for us. It is difficult" [11/5/13]. Similarly, brother and sister and parent and child relationships were shaped by the need to protect each other from losing *āberu* and thus from losing the esteem of the larger family. The concept legitimizes a brother's watchful and potentially disciplinary "protection" of his sisters and a sister's "protection" of her brother, the latter manifest in acts such as bringing her sibling's inappropriate behaviors to the attention of parents. Parents, similarly, are constantly reminding their children to retain the family's esteem.

My interlocutors, however, were very conscious of the fact that *āberu* is relative to their community's conventions and explained that these expectations are "imposed by society" from without. My host father philosophized that although *āberu* is a kind of regulatory agent that "created" limits on actions, it was still necessary to abide by them. He explained to his teenage children that every society has boundaries and that they must follow the boundaries of Fars-Abad. Yet these boundaries were not uncontested by other members of the family. My host mother, for example, often lamented the watchfulness and carefulness necessitated by the "small environment" of Fars-Abad that contrasted with bigger cities such as Shiraz or Tehran.

Āberu and Inner Purity

During my stay in her home, Nushin prayed for the protection of the *āberu* of her family every night. Yet, importantly, her desire to protect her family's esteem, was by no means separate from her equivalent desire to attain and preserve her family's inner Islamic spirituality and purity.

In the Introduction, I argued that the contrast between inside and outside is pervasive in Iranian concepts of person and household (Beeman 2001, 2005; Khosravi 2009; Bateson 1979). It distinguishes between the inner passion, intimacy, and enclosure of the inner rooms of the home, on the one hand, and the outer controlled expression, public appearances, and the outer reception areas of the home on the other. In some respects, the concept of esteem is akin to this understanding of outer controlled expression and public appearances. Yet, as I will argue throughout this dissertation, the ideal for Nushin and others I spoke with is making the outside the same as the pure inside, a state that is seen as akin to being faithful or close to God. Here, both the outer esteem (*āberu*) and inner purity of the family and lineage are maintained through acts of praying and incorporating the right substances overtime.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the material and spiritual foundations of kinship for Basiji families living in Fars-Abad, Shiraz, and Tehran. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, debates concerning the shape of the Iranian family and its protection have been central to the Islamic Republic (Osanloo 2009; Iranian Constitution 1989). Yet although continuing deliberation surrounds subjects such as family law, adoption, bio-genetics, and assisted reproductive technology, most scholars agree that contemporary Iranian kinship depends on shared blood – both patrilineal and matrilineal, marriage, and very occasionally on breast-milk, as is set forth in Shi'i law (*sharia*)(Torab 2007; Hegland 2008). Understandings of kinship in Fars-Abad cannot

be comprehended apart from these larger Islamic scholarly debates and jurisprudence. However, they are often also locally constituted and inflected. As I show, people in Fars-Abad argue that "same blood," male backbone, and female milk are the "foundations" of kinship: a configuration with important consequences for their characterization of family relationships and procreation.

Yet this chapter also makes the argument that kinship in Fars-Abad is more than a matter of substantial relations: it is also spiritual, emerging from and contoured by concepts of the divine. Here, Qur'anic understandings of the utimate divine creation and natural law (*ein-e fetri*) underlie notions such as descent, gender, and marriage. And further, in a powerful convergence of spirit and matter, inheritable bodily substances are known to transmit spiritual qualities such as "closeness to God," purity, and esteem between generations (see for example the inheritance of spiritual light by descendants of the Prophet). Here, the material transfer of substance between generations does not by itself configure kinship. Rather, kinship emerges through and is contoured by divine and inherited qualities.

Finally, this chapter suggests that concepts of biology or Islamic law must be understood in the context of dynamic and shifting spiritual and moral claims about inner family purity and esteem and the imperative to contain outside corruption. In the resulting continuum of inside and outside, immediate lineal kin ideally tend toward purity while in-laws and strangers are potentially dangerous to the family. While blood is given by God and nature, particular qualities traced through blood, milk, and backbone are mutable with regard to future generations and can be inherited. Acts such as good deeds and prayer, and as we will continue to see in Chapter Three, feeding in particular, can all alter offspring and fertility, both physically and spiritually.

Chapter 3

FEEDING THE MORAL FAMILY
THE "SPIRIT" OF FOOD IN IRAN

We began the ritual prayer and votive meal held in honor of the martyr Imam Husayn (*ziarat-e* ʿAshuraʾ) with a list of invitees, a list of foods, and a clear intention (*niyyat*): to rid the house of evil and spiritually heal the family. The prayer gathering was my twenty-year-old host brother's idea. He had convinced his parents that this was what the household needed: "Having the prayer at the house," he said, "will make it clean (*pak*) and fill it with angels." The mother, father, sisters, and brothers agreed: the inner purity of the household had been breached and the evil eye had struck. The person responsible, they said, was a jealous aunt who had cast the evil eye and had engaged in harmful "prayer taking" over tea that one or more of us had consumed, a kind of negative prayer form. This had resulted in an unusual escalation of tensions between parents and children and between siblings. For the family, such discord was more than unpleasant. It was sinful; starkly contrasting with Islamic ideals of respectful (and thus moral) relations between kin. The prayer and its accompanying votive meal, the family hoped, would reverse this negative trend by protecting the "kindred Islamic spirit" (*ruh*) of the family. It would "clean our spirits" and "empty our souls of sadness."

This chapter investigates how Shi'i Iranians constitute moral and spiritually pure families through a range of ritual and everyday food practices. As Ahmad, a forty-year-old father of four and retired teacher reflected: "Maybe in America it is not this way. But we Iranians have to make it such that both our children's souls and bodies are 'right' and 'complete.' We say that food makes our children happy. Food changes the soul. It affects it" (Ahmad, Fars-Abad, 2010).

Ahmad spoke these words as he and his family prepared to eat at the *sofreh*, the Iranian dining spread and center of the household. The meal he referred to had been prepared by his wife, Nushin, and had been shaped by her ability as a cook, her mindfulness of Allah, and her pure intention to nourish her family. The meal had further been carefully vetted for certain interrelated moral qualities, significant both to spiritual and bodily nourishment. These included blessing (*ne'mat*), spiritual purity (*pāki*), lawfulness (*halal*), humeral balance (*tab'*), localness (*mahali*), strength (*moqavi*), and overall rightness (*dorosti*). As material and immaterial form, the food worked in tandem with other spiritual acts to shape and protect the family.

The idea that shared food constitutes not only the shared substances of kin but also the "right" kind of kindred Islamic spirit is not unusual for my Shi'i interlocutors. From before a child is born until the Day of Judgment (*ruz-e qiyamat*), they say, pure, trusted, and halal foods are critical to nourishing both the body and soul.[20] More than nutrition, food is an agent of transformation and a means of channeling divine blessing (*ne'mat*) – whether inward, to the pure family core (*safā-ye baten*) that is embodied by the lunch *sofreh*, or outward, for the spiritual nourishment of extended kin. Yet while food is understood both explicitly and implicitly to "change the soul" and shape ideal qualities for both individual kinsmen and the family as a whole, this "right" sense of kindred spirit (*ruh*) is precarious. Certain foods, in particular, have the potential to harm the family via their consumption at the *sofreh*. Consequently, important distinctions are made between halal, home-cooked, and local foods – which are relatively pure and trusted; and unlawful foods (*harām*), "outside" foods, and "foreign" foods – which have the known potential to corrupt the family, spreading spiritual illness in the form of family in-

[20] In the popular Iranian book on pregnancy, "مراقبت های حاملگی و زایمان" the authors, Marzieh Akbarzadeh and Nasrin Sharifi (2009), similarly write that the mother in particular must attend to "lawful" (*halal*) and "spiritual" (*ruhani*) food during pregnancy for the creation of a *halal* fetus. A sin during pregnancy, they argue, will affect both the mother and the baby.

fighting, sinning, and sickness. As a result, the Shi'i Iranians in this study require vigilance and attention in all aspects of food procurement, preparation, and feeding – especially when foods originate in the corrupting, dangerous outside (*birun*) and are brought in to be incorporated into daily family meals.

In the following, I first situate my ethnographic research in the literature on food and kinship. I then explore how acts of feeding and eating can help establish (or destroy) Islamic moral relations in three key contexts: 1) everyday food practices, 2) fasting, and 3) the ritual and votive meals that frequently overlap with the life-cycle, seasonal, and Islamic calendars of kin. Finally, I relate how the *ziarat-e* ʿAshuraʾ prayer, briefly discussed above, was successful in cleaning the family home of spiritual corruption.

Theoretical Directions

A particularly fruitful vein of kinship analysis in recent years has been the study of how everyday acts of feeding and living together may influence which persons count as kin (Janowski 2007; Carsten 2004; Weismantel 1995). This chapter draws from the local context in Iran in which "the spiritual, cultural, nutritional and aesthetic elements of feeding are not regarded as separate concerns" (Harbottle 2000:151). Indeed, what is central is not the transmission of physical food substance itself, but rather its ability to build the "right" kind of substance, channeling a pure kindred Islamic spirit (*ruh*) to the core of the household and simultaneously maintaining moral household relations.

While there is much research by scholars of food and religion on the religious and moral significance of food (Bynum 1997), this literature has largely focused on rituals such as food charity and fasting to the neglect of everyday (religious) acts of feeding in the home. Although

these studies importantly emphasizes the ways that holy food and food ritual brings one closer to God (see Bynum 1997; Hoffman 1995) or to other religious constituents, for the most part, they neglect to explore the possible ways that holy food may shape the moral or spiritual dimensions of kinship. I will show that women's (and sometimes men's) acts of feeding create a particular kind of spiritual kinship within the household. In particular, I follow Sered's (1988:131) work on Middle Eastern Jewish women to argue that food can be a critical aspect of what she terms "relationship oriented religiosity," or the spiritual act of caring for relatives through acts such as feeding and blessing.[21] According to Sered, Jewish women "participated in the holy by caring for their kin; they care for their kin through participating in the holy" (1988:130). I here ask: how can feeding others in "the proper way" or building the "right" substance (Janowski 2007) help strengthen and maintain not only the self, but also the "kindred spirit" of the household? And further, I explore the implications of such "right" substance and spirit for the maintenance of everyday moral relations between family members.

The Moral Family Household

As I describe in detail in the Introduction, Iranians conceive of the person in terms of a pure, moral inside (*baten*) and a corruptible, appetite-driven outside (*zaher*). The ideal "right" or "complete" person (*ādam-e dorost*), however, is someone whose exterior (*zaher*) expresses their interior virtue (*safā-ye baten*): such persons have attained a sameness of inside and outside and stand in explicit contrast to those persons negatively deemed two faced or hypocritical (*dowrou*)

[21] As Appadurai relates on the subject of the biomoral cosmos in India, "food, along with blood and semen, is a particularly powerful medium of contact between persons and groups. In a cultural universe that sets considerable store by a host of heterogeneous persons, groups, forces, and powers, food (whether "hot" or "cold," raw or cooked, sacred or sullied) always raises the possibility of homogenizing the actors linked by it, whether they are husband or wife, servant or master, worshiper or deity" (1981:507).

(see Bateson 1989:126). Similarly, the Iranian family and household are modeled on the distinction between a morally pure, protected interior (*darun*) and a dangerous, corruptible exterior (*birun*). For pious Muslims in Iran, the maintenance of a pure core spirit (*safā-ye baten*) is a matter of constant vigilance, both for individual and the entire family. Not only must the inside space of the household and its thresholds be protected from possible outside harm (such as the evil eye) through the use of amulets, for example, but individual family members must strive toward Islamic purity in all acts, prayers, and speech both within and without the home. Indeed, harmonious and religiously permissible (*halal*) family relationships are the center of the Shi'i household. While a level of association with immoral kin or untrustworthy strangers is sometimes maintained, such persons are seen as outside the center, itself marked by the inner and immediate household. Rather than a set of rigid distinctions, however, inside and outside interrelate through a dynamism and tension: outside qualities consistently penetrate the inner core and inside qualities are subject both to outside contamination and redefinition. Persons, qualities, and acts operate in a gradient spectrum in which some more closely exhibit pure core values than others (Beeman 2001).

The opposite of the moral family is thus one that is internally corrupt. This is evident in a range of problems as diverse as children who are addicts or trouble-makers or girls who are deemed immodest. An immoral family is also one that is fraught with "family schism" (*qahr kardan*): specifically, infighting between siblings or between parents and children. Indeed, many Muslim Iranians firmly believe – as per their interpretation of the Qur'an – that if parents and children have a very strong disagreement, all of their prayers and good deeds will lose meaning and become useless (*batel*). And further, it is said that even if a Muslim child has a parent who is a heretic (*kafer*) – the ultimate sin – he or she should respect and obey that parent before any

other divine obligation. In short, the burden of maintaining moral, halal family relations is paramount.

Who Counts as Kin? Sharing Food at the *Sofreh*

Early in my stay in Fars-Abad, Nushin, her son Reza, and I visited the home of Nushin's brother, Uncle Mahmad, who lived across the street. Although we had come to visit Nushin's mother, Goli-Mehreboon, who lived in a tiny apartment across their courtyard, Uncle Mahmad's wife unexpectedly invited us to lunch, which she had almost finished cooking. As I would soon learn, our acceptance of her invitation was highly unusual and very much for my benefit. We took off our shoes and entered her house. Her two daughters and daughter-in-law were helping in her preparations: they chopped vegetables and laid out the plates, knives, spoons, glasses, eggplant dishes, bread, salads, and herbs on the plastic dining cloth (*sofreh*) that someone had spread on the living room floor. When the food was organized (and presented in a symmetric array of colorful foods and plates), we sat – men and women both – around the square plastic cloth and began eating, some sitting cross legged and some kneeling. After lunch, the women sat comfortably on the kitchen floor while the men remained in the main living area. I posed a question to Uncle Mahmad's wife: "Who do you count as family?" The response echoed answers I had often received to the same question: "Family," Uncle Mahmad's wife explained, "includes those people who sit around the *sofreh* together."

In Iran, the phrase "spread the *sofreh*" (*sofreh ro pahn kon*) means something like "set the table." However, the term *sofreh* can also stand for the entire meal or even the "votive offering

of a meal" (*sofreh-ye nazri*) to family, neighbors, or the poor.[22] The *sofreh* is also a metonym for intimacy. A *sofreh-ye del* translates to "a dining spread of the heart," and entails confiding one's innermost thoughts and feelings to another (Shirazi 2005). Here, the *sofreh* is explicitly linked to the *del*, "the heart, stomach, belly, patience, or mind" and is associated with the ability of the *del* to contain emotions, desires, thoughts, memories, and passions. In other contexts, including the everyday, the term *sofreh* evokes a feeling of blessing (*ne'mat*). As a Tehrani cousin once explained to me, "When people look at each other and sit in a circle at the *sofreh*, they receive blessing and it brings more pleasure" (*Barakat migirand. Bishtar lezat mibarand*). Accordingly, I now illustrate how those who sit together at the *sofreh* correspond with and delimit those who share blessing, intimacy, and trust, but also distinguish those who are untrusted and outside. I argue that the daily meal *sofreh*, in particular, is linked to the permeable, yet distinct, intimacy of the immediate family, or what my interlocutors often termed, "the small family" (*khanevadeh-e koochik*). More than a symbol of intimacy, it is a means of (re)constituting and demarcating family.

I first noted the interrelationship of the daily meal *sofreh* and family on the 13th day of the Iranian New Year (*Sizdar Bedar*), which I spent with my host family beside a small, tree-lined river near Fars-Abad. On this celebratory day, all the members of either the husband or wife's extended family (*qom o khish*) join each other outside at a park or river bank to cook kebab and a votive soup dish (*ash*), play games, dance, and sing. In 2010, the family I was staying with had elected to spend the day with Nushin's side of the family – their matrilateral kin – a group that numbered more than one hundred individuals (Nushin has eight brothers and sisters). People arrived together crammed into cars or on motorcycles. However, what was striking about the

[22] Scholars of Iran elaborate three kinds of *sofreh*: the "presentational," the "votive," and the "gratulatory." The most common forms of presentational *sofreh*s are those of New Year *haft sin*, and the wedding *sofreh* (Jamzadeh and Mills 1986). The concern of the following section, however, is the everyday eating *sofreh*.

gathering was that each smaller family unit (usually a mother, a father, their children, and potentially, their grandparents), created their own small area in the grass and spread their own rectangular *sofreh*, creating an array of small units that stretched out around trees and up the grassy hill. At lunch time, each small family sat around their own specific *sofreh* to eat the lunch food stuffs (rice, chicken, etc.) and tea provided by their own mother/wife, food which had been previously cooked at home. The only food substance that crossed the lunch *sofreh*s of these small units was the grilled kebab that had been cooked by collectives of what Farsi speaking Iranians call "degree one" (*darajeh yek*) male relatives.[23] As this kebab was passed around, it demarcated a secondary tier of intimacy: the "degree one" circle moral kin relationships (first cousins, aunts, and uncles who were also deemed trustworthy and "right") – those who were neither the smaller family, nor the very extended network, but those who were close (*nazdik*). Importantly, my host mother's half-sisters were excluded from this circulation.

Yet the lunch *sofreh*s on the 13th day of the New Year not only made visible a spectrum of kinship, inclusions and exclusions, but interrelatedly, it displayed who shared kindred Islamic spirit (*ruh*), trust, and blessing. In other words, the circulation of home-cooked food demarcated those persons whom the family deemed to rank as moral and good kin from those deemed to lack such qualities. After lunch had been eaten, family members invited each other for tea at their *sofreh*s and shared sweets in the exact same way that family home visits are conducted throughout the year. As they strolled through the sea of spread *sofreh*s, they employed the Iranian conventional polite speech (*ta'arof*) in the same way as they would at other times of the year to invite passing friends or relatives into their family homes. For example, as I walked with Maryam, Nushin's daughter, among the spread of *sofreh*s, people would say: "Welcome (*khosh*

[23] As mentioned in the previous chapter "degree one" kin extend beyond the small family to include first cousins, aunts, and uncles.

amadid). Please join us inside (*befarmayid tu*)." To which we replied: "Thank you very much. We won't bother you," only to be invited for a second time and third time, as is customary: "Please sit with us. Have just one glass of tea, just one. We have just poured it. Come in." When we accepted, which we did on only two occasions and only with "degree one" kin, our hosts followed the same pattern of serving tea as is common at most home visits. The act of food sharing, in other words, brought us within the threshold of the temporary house, here the *sofreh,* and required that we act as guests.

Although I did not realize it at the time, I learned later that family members took great care only to share tea at the *sofreh*s of those they considered to be good and moral kin: those whom they trusted. The acceptance of tea at a family's *sofreh* indicated a positive moral evaluation of that family and the existence of a relationship. Refusal, in contrast, had the potential to either signal or create a schism of relations. Indeed many women, in particular, carefully tracked the movement of people and tea through the gathering, making mental notes of each encounter. Moreover, the care taken in such movements and acts of tea commensality stemmed in part from the potency of tea, itself, and its two opposing uses. As Bloch (2005) notes on the subject of commensality, "the better food is as a conducter that creates bodily closeness, the better it is as a medium of poison." On one hand, in daily life – and among intimates, neighbors and friends – the sharing of tea, brewed by a mother or daughter, signifies and constitutes hospitality, reciprocity, and trust. On the other hand, and although this is rare, tea may also be used for ill purposes. Specifically, tea over which prayers are taken (*do'a gereftan*) – a kind of negative prayer form derived from esoteric knowledge of the Qur'an – can cause persons to be injured, to sin, or to act immorally. Interestingly, when night fell, the pattern shifted dramatically. The entire group gathered together to eat out of a single vat of votive soup (known

as *ash*), supervised by Gol-tab, one of oldest – and most respected of Nushin's sisters, thus sharing blessing (*barakat*) as an extended family. (I will return to this type of votive soup shortly). It is therefore incumbent upon tea drinkers to carefully evaluate tea brewers and their kin and to avoid consuming suspect tea when possible.

The relationship between the daily meal *sofreh* and the immediate family is further visible in everyday processes of feeding and eating in the home.

Feeding and Eating at Home: How Food is (In)corporated into the *Sofreh*

In Fars-Abad, three *sofreh*s organize the daily comings and goings of family members: breakfast, usually eaten between 6:00 and 9:00am; lunch, between 2:00 and 3:30pm; and dinner between 8:00 and 10:00pm. Each is linked to a different kind of intimacy and thus has different import for the kindred spirit of the family. As a well-known proverb relates: "Eat breakfast alone, eat lunch with loved ones, and eat dinner with enemies" (*sobhkhaneh tanha bokhor, nahar ba dustan, va shām bā doshman*). In Iran, lunch is the most important and the most intimate meal of the day. Breakfast, in contrast, may be eaten alone and is a time of personal sustenance. Dinner, however, while normally shared with immediate family, is relatively open to visitors such as neighbors or distant relations; and as the proverb indicates, it may be shared with "enemies."[24]

In the framework of these three key meals, there are several overlapping axes by which Shi'i Iranians evaluate how food at the *sofreh* affects persons and families. In particular, those I

[24] The first saying competes with a second that provides a sense of the ideal portions of daily meals: "Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, and dinner like a poor person." I first heard this latter phrase in an IRIB television series that aired in the morning in the summer of 2010. Breakfast, the health-oriented commentators argued, should be the biggest meal of the day (fit for a king), while lunch should be princely – bountiful yet relatively less. Dinner, they said, should be simple and small – befitting of the poor. However, the latter "healthful" expression contradicts what actually occurs in Iranian eating schedules: small, simple breakfasts, incredibly large and ornate lunches, and small dinners.

interviewed judge all foods according to their "quality" or "virtue" (*khasiyat*). For example, someone might say: "We made the saffron rice because of its particular virtue" (*sholeh zard ra dorost kardim bekhater-e khasiyatesh*). The qualities here referred to are multiple. While the most valued foods are blessed (*ne'mat* or *barakat darand*), trusted (*qabel-e e'temād*), lawful (*halal*), pure (*pak*), and local (*mahali*) or homegrown (*khānegi*), other foods may be valued for their qualities of potency (*moqavi*), healthfulness (*salāmati*), or Galenic humoral balance (*tab*). Such foods provide both physical and bodily nourishment. Additional evaluations determine whether given foods are "sound" (*salem*) or unsound (*nāsālem*), tasty (*khoshmazeh*) or disgusting (*badmazeh*), whole (*kāmel*) or packaged (*basteh-bandi*) as well as whether they are natural (*tabi'i*) or unnatural (*shimiāyi*). Yet certain foods must be completely avoided: food that is untrustworthy (*bi-ehtemād*), either because of its ingredients or because it has been touched by an untrustworthy person; food that is religiously impermissible (*harām*); and food that is impure (*najes*). These three types of food, people know, can cause both spiritual and bodily illness. As a Tehrani law student told me as we walked in Imam Khomeini Square, Tehran: "Impermissible foods can affect a person's character. They can cause a moral person to sin."

In the following, I explore the daily preparing and feeding of the breakfast, lunch, and dinner *sofreh*s in Fars-Abad. I also analyze the almost nightly practice of family hosting, or literally "night sitting" (*shab neshin*). In addition to considering the particular kinds of relationships associated with each daily meal, I aim to trace how the people of Fars-Abad strategically bring certain valued foodstuffs in from outside to become a part of the dining *sofreh*. In particular, I show that the entire family participates in a vetting process through which certain foods become a valued part of the *sofreh*, thereby spreading divine blessing to the family, while others are rejected for family protection.

The Breakfast Sofreh

Fed by the national media and its "correct eating guidelines," the significance of breakfast for overall "wellness" (*salamati*) and spiritual health was catching on in Fars-Abad when I arrived. Dissimilar to the Euro-American call for a breakfast of whole grains and fruits, however, the emphasis was on energy (*energi*), power (*moqavi*), and relatedly, spiritual zeal (*gheyrat*). Breakfast, people in Fars-Abad said, was the first step to readiness – not only for work and school, but also for daily prayer and control of inner passions (*nafs*) throughout the day.

I often witnessed Nushin, my host mother, struggling to enlighten the rest of her family on the virtues of breakfast. She warned her children almost daily of the ill-effects of not eating a substantial breakfast and argued that they would be sick and lack-luster without it. Having noted that I always ate breakfast, she asked me on several occasions to convince her children of its benefits. Yet whereas I replied with "health" facts, Nushin had an additional set of worries. She argued that without "good" food in the morning, Reza and Ali would more likely be caught up in bad activities such as flirting with girls, smoking the hookah – or, the ultimate worry, become opium addicts (*mo'tad-e tariyaki*). Yet her remonstrations were to little avail. Two of her three teenage children barely touched food in the morning, drinking only hot black tea with copious amounts of sugar cubes (*chai ba qand*).

In Fars-Abad and Tehran, breakfast is the least ornate meal of the day, especially when there are no guests or events. The immediate family eats breakfast quickly and quietly as they wake from sleep in groups of twos or threes. The first person awake in the family – usually the mother – spreads the *sofreh*, either on the kitchen table or the living room floor. She has likely already read her predawn prayers (*namāz-e sobh*) and has tidied the house. Breakfast, however,

differs from other meals because the mother rarely needs to cook or otherwise serve dishes to her family.[25] Yet even if the mother prepares more elaborate breakfast foods, the entire family need not be present and food is largely obtained via self-service. Dishes and plates are minimal and bread is employed instead. As I was told on several occasions, to honor God, bread should be torn off by hand and not carved with a knife. Indeed, the Prophet is known to have said: "Do not cut bread with a knife, but give it due honor by breaking it with the hands, for Allah has honored it."

Bread and Blessing

The key ingredient of breakfast, and often dinner, is fresh bread from a local bakery – brought home either the previous evening or hot and fresh the same morning by the father, a brother, or the mother. For Muslims, including Shi'i Iranians, bread may also be called "blessing" (*barakat*). Bread, they say, is God's gift and bounty for which Muslims should be thankful. At the same time, however, they value bread for its pure simplicity (*sadegi*). One extended family member explained that bread is associated with Hazrat-e Ali, the nephew of the Prophet. "Hazrat-e Ali was a bread and salt eater," she said. "We have a feeling of "religiosity" (*dini* and *mazhabi*) when we eat bread and salt. It is not that Hazrat-e Ali was poor and could not afford anything else. Rather, "he wanted to build his character" (*mikhast khod sazi koneh*) by eating simple foods. This was the type of person he was" (*shakhsiatish intor bud*). Here, bread is prized not only because it is God's blessing (*barakat*), but also because it is simple and pure (*sadeh*). Eating bread and other simple foods is thought to build character and bring one closer to

[25] There are key exceptions: sometimes a mother will cook a soup of milk and hot rosewater (*ferni*), boiled eggs, lentil soup, or sheep's brain (*kale pache*) (the heaviest and most powerful breakfast food).

the moral strength and purity of Imam ʿAli, the nephew of the Prophet and a key source of Shi'i emulation.

The pre-Revolution generation of people in Fars-Abad (those over 50) also associate the *process* of making bread with building good character. They and others describe those with good character as complete persons (*kamel*) and as "cooked" (*pokhteh*), the opposite of which is a person who is still "dough" (*khamir*) or "uncooked" (*kham*). Before the revolution, they say, bread was more important than rice. Hajj Bibi, an 80-year-old grandmother, recalls: "We had to bring wheat from the fields to the flour mill up the hill. I spent five hours making home-made bread (*nun-e tunakeh*) for my family every fourth morning." Few still carry out this process. She vividly recalled other details, describing how she and the other women in the then walled town mixed flour, water, and salt to make the dough by hand, pressing it with their fists. They then used a giant metal pan (*lagan*) to mix and roll the dough, a stick to thin and roll it (*tir*), and another concave metal pan (*toheh*) to heat the bread over a fire or gas flame.[26] The process was arduous and time consuming. They believed that in making bread, they were helping to imbue their families with blessing.

Processes of Vetting Food

In contrast to when bread was made by hand in Fars-Abad, in 2010 bread was purchased at local bakeries. The main breads used for breakfast in Fars-Abad were of three types: a local variety of round flat bread known as "Fars-Abadi bread"; a rectangular, nationally available flat

[26] In 2010, however, most of these implements could be found only in basement storage or in the rafters of courtyards. The bakery had supplanted the practice of making bread by hand (except in outlying villages). When I lived in Fars-Abad, five small bakeries – all of which were subsidized by the government – dotted the streets. People said that another shift in their bread-ways was at hand. "We won't be able to afford bread this way anymore," they said. "They are making factories for bread – there's one in Tehran." "Bread will come in packages, like it does in America." This process resembles the gradual mechanization of the corn tortilla in Mexico described by Pilcher (1998).

white bread known as *barbari*; and another rectangular brown bread cooked on stoneware, called *sangak*. Yet despite the ease with which bread is now purchased, it is still an object of great vigilance; perhaps because of its centrality to the *sofreh* and its association with blessing. Specifically, the people of Fars-Abad prefer to purchase bread from the bakeries they trust. In the privacy of their homes, they discuss the personal and pious qualities of the bakers, their life histories, as well as those qualities of the bakery staff and facility. It was not uncommon for Nushin immediately to ask the person who had purchased the bread: "Who did you buy this from?" "How much did you pay?" "Who did you talk to?" "Who else was there?" Often, the bread buyer met with critique, "Why did you buy from there?" At the beginning of my stay, when I asked family members why it mattered, they responded cautiously: "We just don't like to buy from that one. It is too far." As time went on, other details became clear: they did not trust certain bakers or they did not consider certain bakers to be good people (*ādam-e khub*). In these cases, everything from the purity of the dough to the purity of the bakers was in question. For example, family members explained that they buy from one particular bakery that happened to be farther away from some others, not only because the owner was an acquaintance, but also because he had fought in the Iran-Iraq War and was known as a faithful Muslim (*mo'men*).[27]

Other additional positive qualities are sought out in breakfast foodways. In particular, common subjects of conversation at breakfast were the localness (*mahali*) of fare, the extent to which it was natural (*tabi'i*), and the extent to which it was powerful (*qavi*). One morning, as we sat at the *sofreh* discussing the local Fars-Abadi butter, made from sheep's milk. Nushin had mixed it with honey and was attempting to offer it to me and to one of her teenage sons. She told us that the butter was from the animals of local nomads and that it is potent and strengthening.

[27] In part because of all the negotiations surrounding the act of buying bread, it is a despised chore, especially for the teenage boys. They complain about the length of the lines and the meddling of those they meet there; and especially about the vastly complicated social etiquette required for standing in line with distant kin and acquaintances.

When her son leaned over to smell the concoction, making a face and refusing it, Nushin was surprised: "We buy this wonderful butter for you and you don't eat it." In an attempt, in part, to convince her son to eat, she explained to me that this butter is natural, local, and that it is therefore more powerful (*moqavi*) and "more beneficial" (*khāsiyatesh bishtar ast*). Although she admitted that doctors tell her that she should only eat small amounts of this type of fat, sounding out the English cho-les-tor-al in Farsi, she argued that it is very good for health. She added that the purchased jam we ate at the same *sofreh* was not nearly as good as her homemade jam. Similarly, she compared the packaged yoghurt drink (*dugh*) that was in the fridge to the home-made, "traditional" (*sonati*) variety available now from settled nomads.

Throughout my stay in Fars-Abad, and with the important exception of bread from a trusted local baker, very few store bought, factory made products met Nushin's standards for the "right" foods at the breakfast *sofreh*. Although she accepted jars of jam, factory boxed milk, butter, and cheese as a matter of necessity; she frequently critiqued such packaged products – both for their lack of taste and nutrition and for their lack of power and virtue. In contrast, her teenage children eagerly ate these products, a subject I will return to in Chapter Five. Indeed, whenever homemade, local varieties were available, she strategically placed them on the breakfast *sofreh* for her family's nourishment (e.g., local walnuts or almonds picked from the family gardens, local fruits such as grapes, or milk products from the nearby settled nomads). For Nushin and other wives and mothers of Fars-Abad, however, the qualities and origins of lunch foods were an even greater focus of attention.

The Lunch Sofreh

"The effort (*zahmat*) involved in the lunch meal is of fundamental importance to the wellness and kindred Islamic spirit (*ruh*) of the family" (Sami, Fars-Abad, 2010). On a daily basis, parents and children, occasionally accompanied by grandparents, return from their outside jobs, school, or farming to have lunch in the house. Lunch is also the most intimate meal of the day. It both constitutes and demarcates the "family who live together in the house" (*khanevadeh*).[28] Made from the freshest ingredients and with the most laborious feeding work, the preparation of the lunch *sofreh* is a daily accomplishment for women, consuming much of their time and effort (four hours every morning). On more than one occasion, people wryly reflected on the obvious exorbitant personal investment they placed in their food. As one woman said to me as her husband nodded in agreement: "All we do is cook and eat. That is what life is."

The lunch *sofreh* also demarcates the immediate family who share blessing. During my time in Fars-Abad, as an intriguing American visitor, I literally received hundreds of polite invitations for lunch and other meals – from the first day of my visit to the last.[29] At first, I refused these offers because I was too involved in helping to prepare, cut, or wash foods for my host family's lunch meal or had dinner plans in the family household. There was no reason for me to leave the house and accept an invitation elsewhere when I was already a part of the everyday cooking process. However, I soon noted that family members almost never shared the lunch *sofreh* with others – whether in the homes of their acquaintances or even their "degree one" relatives. Lone children, in particular, never seemed to eat lunch at another person's house without their parents. Although teenage boys sometimes bought fast food sandwiches from shops

[28] In Tehran, this is very different. With more people working, including young women, lunch is often ordered out to the office. Some Tehranis lament the change but others call it more efficient.

[29] These offers stemmed from widespread polite Iranian hospitality conventions, consisting of a polite offer to lunch followed by a polite refusal. However, in my case, offers were both more frequent and more genuine. People hoped to meet the only American in town in 40 years and imagined that their normal strategies of sharing lunch did not apply to me in the same way as they would for an Iranian daughter.

on the main street, they either ate these sandwiches in public places or brought them home. Further, while girls sometimes invited their female study partners to the house during lunch, I never saw these invitees eat with the rest of the family. Rather, they would take snacks upstairs or to a separate room. Indeed, this apartness was the correct moral action for such a visitor who should not come into contact with her study friend's brothers at the family *sofreh*.

There were only four exceptions to this implicit family-only lunch meal during the extent of my stay. For example, there was the occasion when my host father ate with Nushin's brother (his brother-in-law) and wife after their son had died of a drug overdose; or when we all (myself, Nushin, her son, her daughter, and her husband) went as a family to the house of another aunt to eat; or when the entire family visited Ahmad's old high school friend in a neighboring town. Yet critically, in almost all of these cases, the entire family was invited (*davat*) to lunch and the normal lunch *sofreh* would not be served in their own home. As for myself, despite the vast number of lunch invitations I received, I only ate lunch at another person's house on a few occasions – and for one of these instances I had little choice (a nice older couple whom I had interviewed, trapped me in their home with their polite hospitality and refused to take me home!)

Several questions emerge from the implicit but obvious importance of eating lunch together as a family at home. Why only eat at the home of another as a family group – and that only occasionally? And finally, what is the general logic behind the avoidance of eating lunch elsewhere? As I gradually, learned, the lunch *sofreh* maps and demarcates the intimate inner family in multiple ways. The first and most obvious is the effort that must go into hosting in Iranian hospitality – a burden that people do not normally want to place on others. The conventions of hospitality dictate that guests must be provided with huge piles of fresh fruit and vegetables, tea, as well as a two or three dish meal. Second, particularly during lunch, food

served by the mother at the *sofreh* is the product of careful moral evaluation, and possibly, weeks or months of preparatory labor, even before the daily meal. In other words, the moral quality of food cooked and shared within the household is known and ensured by the collective family. The ingredients have been vetted by the husband and children for their moral qualities, and they have been cooked in the family kitchen by the mother, and with pure intentions. In contrast, the people in Fars-Abad hold that the lunch *sofreh*s of others have an *unknown* moral quality. Not only might such food be a product of witchcraft, literally " prayer taking" (*do'a gereftan*), but it may also be unclean (*najes*), unlawful (*harām*), or otherwise suspect.

This wariness contrasts with a certain idealism and nostalgia for past foodways: specifically, the wish that contemporary people could eat "out of the same tray" (*sini*) together as they did in the past. Today, they say, "people have much less trust, honesty, loyalty, and sincerity for each other" (*sādeqat nadarand*). In the following, I explore the careful orchestration by which foods with good quality (*khāsiyat*) are brought to the lunch *sofreh*, a critical feature of the *sofreh's* implicit significance for the immediate family.

Sacrifice for Family Protection

The process of gathering food stuffs for the daily lunch meal often begins weeks in advance with the selection of a lamb or goat for slaughter and sacrifice for benefit of the family. The father takes a son or cousin to a nearby semi-nomadic village to find an appropriate animal. He chooses a herder with whom he has an acquaintance and whom he trusts and brings the sheep back to the home in the truck of yet another extended kinsman. Generally, the family will coordinate the day of sacrifice with some special day on the calendar such as the Day of Sacrifice (*Eid-e Qorban),* or with a family member's return from a pilgrimage. (It is also

common to sacrifice a lamb when a baby is born.) In Fars-Abad, family members bring the animal into the courtyard or into the parking garage of the home where the mother puts henna on its forehead to bless it. The halal sacrifice takes place just outside the home – a skilled and pious layman/member of the family usually performs this task: he first cuts the throat to bleed the animal correctly, and then utters, "In the Name of God the Merciful and the Compassionate." After the sacrifice, the wife or husband cleans and cuts up the meat. It is also the wife's responsibility to divide it and give a portion to the poor – particularly to the families of "descendants of the Prophets" (*sayyeds*) or to close family members in other houses (a grandmother, an uncle, a sister). The people of Fars-Abad carry out this distribution with great attention to fairness, as unequal portions are a sign of differential treatment and can provoke family arguments. The general philosophy is that both the givers and the receivers of such food charity are filled with blessing.

Such sacrifice is also a way of protecting the immediate family (*khanevadeh*) from harm. When my host family bought a new car, for example, they sacrificed a lamb. Ahmad and Ali, his son, smeared the blood on all four wheels, again invoking God: "In the Name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate." In doing so, the family increased blessing and the "security" (*amniyat*) of the car. As Nushin put it: "the blood of the lamb is given so that the car's occupants [the family] will not spill their own blood."

Bringing Food from the Market

Also of significance for the moral evaluation of food is the process by which food ingredients become a part of the *sofreh*. When food grown in the garden is not available, those who bring food from outside into the home research whether the outside fare is halal,

trustworthy, and/or local and present these details to the mother when they return home. She questions returning shoppers: Where did you buy that and for how much? Whose relative was the store owner? Why didn't you buy it at such and such location?" This kind of questioning occurs on a daily basis and largely emphasizes whether the origin of the food is trusted or not, trust that must be present to ensure food's moral quality.

The first significant moral evaluation for those bringing food to the *sofreh* are the distinctions between recommended, halal, suspected or doubtful (*masbuh*), and forbidden (*harām*) foods. In Islam, certain foods are highly recommended for their health promoting effects (e.g., dates, honey, and pomegranate). Forbidden items include pork, animals improperly slaughtered, alcoholic drinks, and other intoxicants; carnivorous animals, birds of prey, and any food contaminated with any of these products. According to anthropologist Diane Tober, "The focus of all of these prescriptions and proscriptions is to attain physical, emotional and spiritual health and well-being" (2007:6). She argues that unlike the Cartesian dualistic perceptions found in Euro-American contexts that distinguish mind and body, "Islamic traditions emphasize mind-body-spirit unity" (Tober 2007:6): a unity critical to special power of food to shape kindred spirit in Iran.

When I first arrived in Fars-Abad, I was often questioned in front of various collections of extended family about my pork consumption and that of my family members: "Do you eat pork in America? Does your grandmother eat pork? Your mother and father?" I replied, quite truthfully, that when I am in the United States I don't eat much meat. However, people were amazed that I knew people who ate pork regularly. They seemed concerned to justify the actions of my pork consuming kin. For example, when I admitted that my grandmother likes pork, my host mother rationalized: "Your grandmother is a Christian and good woman. I have heard that if

pork is cooked over a certain extremely high temperature, I think they say 2,000 degrees, it will not affect her and the microbes are destroyed." But my host father added, "You should tell her not to, in any case." Several of my interlocutors, however, expressed controversial opinions on this matter. Some said that eating wild boar – available for hunters in the hills around Fars-Abad – is okay because it is different from pig (*khuk*). Others confided that they would try pork if they could, but since it was unavailable, they never had. However, for the most part, people seemed to think that pork was dirty (*kasif*) and impure (*najes*). Consumption of pork, they said, might make moral persons sin. Like the consumption of alcohol, they described it as the antithesis of being Muslim. It is heretical and can bring one closer to hell.

In everyday post-Revolutionary Iran, however, people are less concerned with the presence of forbidden (*harām*) ingredients in food (after all, Iranian restaurants, markets, slaughter houses, and bazaars must operate under halal standards) than with evaluating whether the entire process of food procurement and preparation is religiously permissible or not.[30] For this reason, emphasis is always placed on procuring food – whether it is a lamb to be slaughtered, vegetables, fruit, bread, or restaurant fare – from a trusted vendor. Also of importance with regard to halal food is the pious character of the seller or outside cook. Indeed both restaurant food and other items are purchased based on the perceived purity of the seller. "I like to buy from Hammed," my host father explained, "*ādam ast*," meaning he is a complete, cultured, and pious person.

Another matter of evaluation is the extent to which food brought in for the lunch *sofreh* is local or not. Local foods – from the local town or surrounding villages – are much more highly

[30] One exception to this rule was the small number of food items that I had brought with me from the U.S. (in this case, a few granola bars, some cough drops etc.). Before trying these foods – an endeavor that very much interested some family cousins and younger interlocutors – my American food recipients would press me for a complete list of ingredients and my personal assurances as to the "sound" (*sālem*) nature of the food. Indeed, my own food habits were a matter of great curiosity.

valued than foreign foods – produced in another city, province, or nation. Iranian rice-ways provide a clear example of this continuum. "Inside," local rice from nearby farms is of the utmost value and is the most powerful, nutritional, and tasty: even if it does come with lots of stones that must be cleaned out. If local rice is unattainable, rice grown in Iran is settled for. However, there is a hierarchy of rice grown outside the Islamic Republic: Pakistani rice is okay; Chinese rice is terrible. Interestingly, the positive evaluation of local Iranian rice, grown in nearby fields, is not only one of taste, but one of purity and ability to positively nourish the family.

Home Cooking: Preparing "Right" and Balanced Foods through Intention and Ability

The most critical requirement for the daily lunch meal, however, is that it be home-cooked. Even more than its ingredients, food affects kin because of the way it has been prepared, cooked, and served. As such, home-cooked foods find their immoral opposite in fast foods – including pizza or sandwiches – which are not only associated with the Western spiritual corruption (*gharbzadegi*), but also with an impotent mother. Indeed, on the few occasions when we did order out, my host mother Nushin worried that people would question her ability to care for the family. The value placed on home cooking, however, is not limited to Fars-Abad. As a Qazvini grandmother informed me: "If a person's cooking is not good, they are not good. A person whose cooking is really good, they say that they are very good" (Qazvin 2008). A Tehrani mother similarly highlighted the relationship between the quality of the cook and their food: "Food is worthless" (*be dard nemikhoreh*) if it is not made with love and pure intention."[31]

[31] Lynn Harbottle notes a similar positive valuing of home cooked food among Iranian immigrants in Britain : "The kind of work that Iranian women engage in, to ensure the regular (although not necessarily daily) consumption of Iranian cooked meals, involves an investment of time, energy and love. The food produced in this way appears to

In Iran, "pure intention" (*khulus-e niyyat*) is the will or resolve to act with mindfulness of God from the pure internal core (*baten*). Indeed, it is through intention that the inner core may be brought out or corrupted – particularly certain kinds of intentional cooking and feeding. Mr. Hosseini, a forty-year-old, self-taught scholar of Islam, drove the two hours from Shiraz to teach me the importance of intention (*niyyat*) – a point that has been little developed in scholarly literature on Islam (Torab 1997). As we drank tea with the immediate family present, he explained to that: "Religion must be profound (*amiq*). It must be innate (*fetri*) and internal (*darun*)." Most importantly, however, "It must be goal driven (*hadafmand*) and have intention (*niyyat*)." When I asked him what this meant, he replied, "If you simply say or do something, it means nothing. But if you do something because you love Allah, this is intention. Religion is the path that Allah has spoken."

Shi'i Iranians see a direct correspondence between intention and both the embodiment of spiritual purity and religiosity (*dini*). Acts (*amalat*) as diverse as praying, fasting, ablutions, or cooking mean nothing without intention or resolve that incorporates love and assent to the will of Allah. One cool night during Ramadan, Goli-Mehreboon, an 80 year old grandmother explained this concept in her own terms by reiterating a proverb passed down to her through generations: "Don't be entangled in evening prayers, and don't put water in milk" (*Na namaz-e shab gir kon, na aub tuye shir kon*). In other words, prayer and fasting are useless without sincerity. We should not cheat ourselves or others by watering down milk. She added, "We have to fix our behavior toward others." Further, such pure intention must be firmly located in the inner self (*baten* or *del*): "the heart, the soul, and the stomach" (e.g., Torab 1997). When describing a person's pure intention, for example, a person might argue: "he spoke from his inside (*baten*)." The verb "to

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carry an affective potency that commercially prepared food and other meals consumed outside the home seem generally to lack" (Harbottle 2000:6).

intend" (*niyyat kardan*) may be more accurately translated as "to specify one's intention in one's heart." As many pious Shi'i I spoke with insisted: "if you truly pray to Allah from your interior self (*baten or del*) your prayer will be received." This contrasts explicitly both with acts that are unintended (e.g., accidental good deeds, or acts completed without awareness of Allah) as well as with those that are ill intended (e.g., sins such as gossiping or purposefully trying to inflict harm on another), both of which stem from the outer self (*zāher*). In contrast, pure and moral acts stem from deep within a person, from the inside, a heart and soul which is above all else in tune with love of and for Allah.

Despite its idealization, the combination of pure intention and action is widely recognized to be a rare phenomenon, occurring at the deepest level only occasionally in a regular person's life. However, those I interviewed hold that a select few had overcome this difficulty in all acts of daily life. While some cite famous poets, such as Hafez or Rumi, many of my host family members and their kin believe that the late Ayatollah Khomeini, "the father of Iranian revolution" is the epitome of pure intent and action, and thus of morality. In the following sections, I consider the way that intention in food preparation, cooking, and eating creates and passes on divine blessing both to individual family members and to the whole household.

At the lunch *sofreh*, in particular, home-cooked food is valued precisely because it is made with the pure intentions of the wife/mother. Just as the mother creates amazing tastes, so does she build her own pure intentions for the family into her food. In kitchen practice, this entails actively being pious (*mo'men):* for example, coordinating cooking with obligatory (and purifying) daily prayers, avoiding gossip while cooking, and cooking with continual mindfulness of Allah and the family of the Prophet. In this framework, acts such as washing, dicing, stirring, heating, and cooling – as acts that alter food – transform not only its texture, shape, and taste but

also the moral quality of both the food and, reciprocally, the mother. In sum, the food served at the *sofreh* can in no way be severed from the (pure) intentions, awareness of God, and piety with which it is cooked. Furthermore, when such pure intentions become a part of food, they also shape the family. In contrast to fast foods or foods eaten in other homes, foods cooked and served at the home *sofreh* "have positive affect" (*asar-e khub darand*) on kin, imbuing the family with shared blessing and contentment.

When Nushin sets the *sofreh*, she attends to the symmetry and color of the dishes laid out for consumption, particularly the centrally featured silver tray of white or saffron rice. She additionally follows orderly arrangements of table setting so that each person has their own personal plate, spoon and fork, and makes it so that every two persons share a food/meat/stew platter. At a typical meal those who are family (e.g., brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers) sit comfortably but hierarchically: the father/husband usually takes the place of honor farthest from the door; the mother sits closer to the kitchen for easy access; and the brothers and sisters sit so that the youngest brother can easily get up to answer the door bell or phone at any given moment. Manners of leg placement while sitting further reflect these hierarchies and Iranian emphasis on inter-family respect. For some more traditional families, those sitting at the *sofreh* should kneel rather than sit cross legged on the floor before respected male elders. Especially when guest or strangers are present, girls and women are expected to kneel or sit with their legs neatly tucked together under their monteau or chador while men can adopt more relaxed postures. If sitting near a male stranger, women should sit with enough composure and spacing so as to never touch or come within inches of the person – often this is insured by having women sit on one end of the *sofreh* while men sit at the other, the border controlled by those who are can touch in a religiously permissible manner due to the rules of marriage exclusions (*mahram*).

This positive affect may also be achieved through bringing food to the point of ideal food quality and consistency through cooking, mixing, and other means of preparation – a daily achievement that is similarly the responsibility of the mother. Critically, such foods – e.g., soup, rice, or fruit drinks – are most positively evaluated when the wife/mother has "prepared them to the appropriate thickness/good quality" (*be qavam amadan*) (Khajeh and Abdullah 2012: 79). In Farsi, the expression *be qavam amadan* has a variety of connotations and may be used to describe both the appropriate formation of nourishment (*qut*) and the formation of an idea in human thought. As such, *qavam* denotes "temperance" (*etadel*), "consistency" (*sabat*), "firmness or permanence" (*paidar*), "order" (*monazam*), "correct substance" (*maye'e dorosti*), or "the foundation of something" (*asl-e chizi*) (Dehkhoda Persian Dictionary). Yet the evaluation of whether something has attained an appropriate state of thickness and good quality is not merely a physical concern. In both Farsi and Arabic, *qavam* also implies "rightness" (*rasti*) and "virtue" (*taqva*), and it is employed in the Qur'an to that effect (67/25).

My own ethnography indicates that "rightly" cooked food and the formation of moral or spiritual virtue are linked. In other words, the cooking that can best shape kin is that which has reached an ideal form (*nemuneh*). This is evaluated both by the perceived qualities of thickness, order, and consistency of the final product and by its effect on consumers. In Iran, this means that the rice is perfectly puffed and separated, that the soup is perfectly mixed together and neither too underdone or overdone, or that the sugar and fruit syrup – measured in just the right amounts – are fully dissolved into the cool summer day "beverage." When such food is has reached this state, it is described as "beautiful" (*qashang*) and "tasty" (*khoshmazeh*). The wife is praised for her "skilled hand at cooking" (*dast-e pokhtash ali ast*). People say that such food "sticks better" (*behtar michasbeh*) to the body and that it positively affects the mental/spiritual

state of a person (*hal mideh*). In Farsi, the term *hal* conveys a sense of natural condition or predisposition of the body – for example, "my health is not good" (*hal-am khub nist*) – as well as a more generalized sense of the state or condition – for example, the state of a family situation, of politics, or economics. It can refer both to the abstract and the physical.

Similarly, the term *hal* can refer to the body's humoral health or balance. A crucial aspect of creating a lawful, harmonious family is ensuring that foods instill family members with the appropriate balance of hotness and coldness (*sardi/garmi*). This balance of hot and cold food corresponds with and is constitutive of a person's "natural predisposition" (*tab'*) (Loeffler 2008). More than a humoral issue, such balance is a moral concern because certain foods may bring contentment and happiness while others may lead people to general upset, depression, or fighting, which is highly undesirable and sometimes sinful. For example, whereas people said that saffron is good for the inner disposition, thought process, or nerves (*a'sab*) and brings "happiness" (*shādi*), food that is pickled (*torshi*) or spicy (*tond*) is often thought to make a person easily upset, or literally, "make them boil" (*jush biyāreh*). Other foods, however, are considered "cool" (*khonak*), neither hot or cold. As noted in the Introduction, Iranian anthropologist Shahshahani (2008) cogently argues that the notion of a person in Iran is dynamically associated with three states of being – gas, liquid, and matter – whose combinations and mixing are greatly affected by having either "hot" or "cold" temperament. People are actively influenced by the consumption of either "hot and cold" or "wet or dry" foods (Loeffler 2008).[32] As such, certain people are known to have a particular temperamental disposition: one

[32] Everyone agreed, for example that because I have pale skin, I "become cold quickly" (*zud sard mishi*). To remedy this, my host mother and others would tell me to stay away from fish and chicken and cold salads, and would feed me warm (*garm*) or spicy (*tond*) foods such as dates, cinnamon, or crystallized sugar candy (*nabat*) melted in hot tea.

can be cold or hot in general, but one can also be hot in accordance to the life cycle. During pregnancy, they say, women are hot, but in old age, they are cold.

Temperament is also a trait of a family as a whole. One might say that a certain family tends to be warm or that another family tends to be cold. In the daily lunch meal, in particular, it is the mother's responsibility to balance hot and cold ingredients as is appropriate (*monaseb*) for her family. Indeed, in Fars-Abad, everyday meals were a balance of warm and cold fare. For example, I noted that if lunch was composed of something "cold" such as cabbage and rice, Nushin would tell us not to worry because she had added pepper to balance it. If the lunch meal included a lot of "cold" potatoes, she might recommend countering it with "hot" crystalline sugar and tea afterwards. Part of her "food work" (Carrington 2012) was thus the work of considering and balancing the temperaments of her family against the cuisine she served, a task she carried out both in the kitchen and with reminders at the *sofreh* to her children about how much to eat of a given item and what to eat next.

To conclude, the lunch *sofreh* – and all of its discontents – represents a mother's power to (re)substantiate her family's pure inner core every day. Marked by its relative exclusivity, the daily lunch *sofreh*, is characterized by symmetry of layout, "rightness" of cooked fare, and by the (pure) intention of the mother/wife. It is also consciously purified and blessed: meat is sacrificed and prayers to Allah are interwoven with eating and preparation. Similarly, products bought from outside the home are carefully evaluated for their lawfulness and purity as well as for the intentions, faith, and motivations of their sellers. But the sofreh is also a gendered orchestration. It is a mother or wife's work, work that includes a tedious and careful process of selecting, heating, stirring, dicing, and mixing foods. The *sofreh* incorporates the pure intentions, love,

blessing, and faith of the mother into the rest of the family. It denotes the immediate family circle, ideally tending toward spiritual purity and morality.

The Dinner Sofreh and "Night Visiting"

Although the norm is for dinner to be a small family affair (with neither friends, nor neighbors, nor enemies present), the dinner *sofreh* contrasts with lunch because it is simple (often leftovers from lunch), does not require home cooking, and is comparatively open to visitors, extended kin, or neighbors. Children, for instance, are much more likely to eat dinner outside with their friends than they are to eat lunch outside the home. On hot summer nights, the dinner *sofreh* may be shared with next door neighbors in the liminal space of the alley; and, throughout the year, although this is rarer, neighbors or relatives may be invited inside the home to share food.

Night visiting, or literally "night sitting" (*shab neshin*), occurs after dinner at around 9:00 or 10:00pm and is extremely common, occurring every two nights. The practice literally entails traveling together as a family to the home of another extended family member. For example, the mother, the father and the children may all walk to the house of the father's brother. There, they sit for an hour or two, enjoying the tea, fruit, snacks and conversation provided by extended kin. The visitors enter the courtyard of the house and are quickly and enthusiastically invited to enter the home with the polite expression "come inside" (*befarmāid tu*). These visits map out kin with whom a family has a "coming and going relationship" (*raft o amad*) and are usually reciprocal (e.g., if one family visits a house, the other family visits the next week).

Yet precisely because dinner and night visiting are more open than lunch, they are also more dangerous for a family's spiritual well being. While at first I wondered why my host family

visited certain homes and not others at night, it soon became clear that they considered certain kin – those they visited more frequently – to be more moral and trustworthy. They distinguished this moral circle from other kin by strategically practicing "coming and going" (*raft o amad*) with such trusted family, while avoiding the homes of kin, however "close," who they deemed immoral.[33] The reason for this avoidance was twofold. First they did not wish to create reciprocal visiting obligations with certain kin who might negatively influence their own family members; and second, they did not wish to share the tea or snacks of immoral family members, a ritualized necessity of night visiting. For example, Ali, a pious and vigilant older son would warn his parents: "You can eat with such and such person, but not with so and so. Don't go to their house. Don't drink their tea." As a member of the household, I, too was swept up in this. One day, having consumed the food of a particular extended family member, I returned to the house feeling unwell. When I told immediate family members, they warned, "When you go there in the future, don't eat anything."[34]

I later gathered that my family was worried that the food I had consumed was cursed and that it would affect not only myself but the entire family – causing fighting or disrespect between parents and children. While several people I spoke with in northern parts of Iran rejected such "folk beliefs," the belief (*eteqad*) of my Fars-Abadi family was not unique. Many of my Tehrani and Shirazi interlocutors similarly emphasized this type of food avoidance at certain homes and linked it to the practice of casting the "evil eye" and to the processes of "prayer taking" over tea or edibles. On several occasions they further sought to purify their bodies (insisting that the whole family participate) by consuming protective verses of the Qur'an written on paper with

[33] As I show in Chapter 2, this effort to form a moral circle of coming and going (*raft-o-amad*) to protect the family from immorality of certain other families, competes with a moral ideal of having a strong relationship with your blood family as is emphasized in several Shi'i texts.
[34] As Bloch (2005) argues, sharing food is a way of establishing closeness, but conversely, the refusal to share food can be a clear marker of distance and enmity.

saffron ink mixed with water. On one such occasion Ahmad completed this process for several members of the family, including myself. He referred to a printed book on his shelf entitled "[Divine] Healing and Remedy with the Qur'an" and turned to a chapter on the healing benefits of the Fatah. Here, the writer Mojtabi Rezai draws on comments by the Imam Sadeq to recommend writing a specific piece of the sura on paper. He completed three steps: 1) sending a formulaic greeting to God and his descendants (*salavāt*); 2) writing the special prayer with saffron ink and pure intention; and finally 3) mixing the prayer with water and drinking it. When we consumed the mixture we internalized the word (and thus protection) of God. Another version of this ritual involves performing ablutions with the prayer imbued saffron water.

The practice of consuming special water for spiritual or bodily healing (*do'a darmāni*) is not limited to the use of sacred saffron water. Water is a means of incorporation of many similar intangible blessings. For example, water provided to pilgrims at mosques and tombs of saints is similarly seen as spiritually cleansing and healing for body and soul. Further, people in Farsi-Abad, Tehran, and Shiraz sometimes confided that they had sought out mystics (*dervish*) who were known to have the capacity to channel energy from God for healing purposes by means of water. Nushin explained: "during five minutes of prayer and concentration – or 'attention to God' (*tavakol kardan be khodā*) – the energy of Allah is channeled into a glass of water which is then consumed for healing (*shafā*)." This practice evokes the image of Zaynab and her work as a caregiver and healer. (Zaynab is the granddaughter of the Prophet and sister to the martyred Imam Husayn). The facet of water to channel prayer is further visible in techniques that Shi'i mothers employ to sooth their young children: specifically, feeding anxious children with water that each corner of the Qur'an has been dipped in. In all of the above cases, divinity and blessing

are embodied through consumption, explicitly linking the process of eating and (in)corporation with spiritual shaping of family members.

A Counterpoint: Strangers in the Home

The idea that relationships can be constructed or destroyed through feeding is paradoxically also apparent in the nuanced back and forth by which strangers or acquaintances are invited into the home to share "salt," a metonym for food. For example, it is customary to practice "polite speech" (*ta'arof*) when a stranger (*qaribā*) or distant acquaintance passes by to invite them into the home. The usual invitation is: "Please, come in and have lunch with us" (*befarmāid nahar*). It is then customary for the invitee to decline: "Thank you, but I am on my way." However, if the host sincerely wishes the other person to enter the home, he or she may insist: "Come in, really, our salt won't get you!" (*namak gir nemishi*). This expression is built on the convention that the sharing food (salt) is an act of mutual trust that creates a bond between persons. As one middle-aged family friend explained, the expression means: "Don't be afraid. We have eaten salt together before, and we can do so again" (*natars, qablan namak khordim ba ham*). Again, the invitee politely declines with the following ritualized expression: "No, we have (already) been nourished by your kindness" (*na, ma namak parvardeh hastim*). As a family friend interpreted: "When you say this, it means that we didn't have anything and you nourished us. It means that if we have good breeding or civility, it is because of your existence. It is because you gave us salt." While this kind of polite self-lowering in Iranian speech interaction has been carefully addressed (see Beeman 2001), few have explored what this expression and

others like it say about Iranian foodways. My research points to the implicit mutual trust that is required by and enacted in commensality.

In Iran, when two parties are willing to share "salt," they signify a willingness to either begin or to continue a friendship. Such a relationship is positively referred to in the expression: "You have become stuck in our salt" (*namak gir shodi*). In other words, "You have eaten with us and can no longer betray us." Sharing of food, they say, establishes a bond of mutual trust and commitment, almost equal to that between immediate family members. Yet even a "salt friendship" is fragile. If the same visitor enters the home and creates a problem or betrays the hosts, one might exclaim: "But we had eaten bread and salt with you!" (*ma ba shoma nun o namak khordeh budim*) or "You ate salt, but you broke the salt shaker" (*namak khordi, namak dune shekasti*). Both exclamations signify a betrayal of a relationship previously established and maintained through commensality. In Islam, betrayal of any kind is a most grievous sin and is directly associated with immoral character.

Although the idea of the "salt friendship" is not explicitly about understandings of family, it reveals the complex associations between commensality, trust, and intimacy.[35] Sharing food in everyday contexts creates a *moral* bond of trust and friendship.

This section has explored daily practices of cooking and feeding at the *sofreh* as a means of constituting and protecting the inner moral family. While home-cooked, local, and religiously permissible foods are pure and trusted, foods cooked at restaurants, "foreign" foods, and foods made with religiously impermissible ingredients have the potential to corrupt the family's bodies

[35] Indeed, when hosts tell their guests: "Our salt won't get you," they are being told not to be afraid to share food. But why should they be fearful in the first place? One reason is that the sharing of food in another person's home is dangerous and can cause spiritual illness. Correspondingly, when people do share home-cooked food in FARS-ABAD, they are signifying that the trust is *almost* equivalent to the trust shared by the immediate family.

and souls. Therefore, vigilance is imperative in all aspects of food procurement, preparation, and feeding; and, a significant moral concern surrounds the ability and intention of the cook (most often the mother) to feed spiritually nourishing fare to family members. The lunch *sofreh*, in particular, (re)constitutes the pure inner core of the household (*safā-ye baten*) on a daily basis and distinguishes who is counted as moral and immediate kin (*khānevādeh*). It is the center of the house and the family, and delimits a permeable, but distinct, circle of intimates who share its blessing.

Kindred Spirit and Fasting

In contrast to the above daily processes of cooking and feeding that channel divine blessing to kin, fasting (*sawm* in Arabic or *ruzeh* in Farsi) inverts the daily pattern by which a family is spiritually and physically nourished. Fasting in Shi'i Islam is abstinence from food, drink, sexual intercourse, and smoking from the complete darkness before sunrise to after sunset. What is normally allowed (*halal*) and recommended becomes forbidden (*harām*) – at least during daylight hours. During the holy month of Ramadan, in particular, much of regular home life – particularly processes of cooking and feeding – are reversed. The central lunch meal is made invisible – if to some extent partially available for non-fasters – and is shifted to the darkness of the predawn meal (*sahari*). Sleeping patterns also shift as people tend to remain awake late into the night and sleep more during the day, even as they continue working. Yet although fasting seemingly opposes "normal" daily practices of feeding and eating; it, too, is fundamentally about channeling divine blessing to kin. Further, it similarly depends on moral action with pure intention (*niyyat*). Indeed, fasting and its surrounding rites reveal the nuanced

relationship between process of eating (or explicitly not eating) and the "kindred spirit" of the family.

In the following, I show that fasting in Iran – particularly during Ramadan – is centrally about "gaining proximity to God" (*qorbat va rābeteh ba khodā*) by refining the spirit. Yet although many scholars have focused on fasting as spiritual refinement for the individual, I show that the act of fasting and many of its surrounding rituals also transfer beyond those who keep the fast to their immediate kin. Indeed, for many I spoke with during fieldwork, this was the central intention of keeping a fast. Further, I will address the specific practices of almsgiving on the last day of Ramadan, which revolves around the immediate family household and specifically around the categories of food providers and food eaters. This section focuses mainly on the daily the predawn meal (*sahari*) and the nightly "opening" of the fast (*eftāri*), as well as on picnics and family gatherings that I attended during the holy month. Several interviews on the subject of voluntary fasting have also been included.

Refining the Spirit

"Most people fast because they fear hell and because it is written in the Qur'an. But some people, a very few, fast because they want to be close to God" (Uncle Sami, Ramadan, September 2010)**.** Fasting is a major part of both Sunni and Shi'i "jurisprudence" (*figh*) and is mentioned several times in the Qur'an. For those I interviewed, fasting can alternately provide a means of supplication to the will of God, worship of divinity, purification, or penitence for transgressions against particular Qur'anic codes. Fasting is a way to mourn for the deceased and is obligatory during the month of Ramadan (Qur'an S:183 and S:187). Yet although fasting is considered obligatory during Ramadan, people I spoke with in Fars-Abad were frequently

critical of those who keep the fast solely to avoid the threat of hell on the Day of Judgment. They argued that fasting is a kind of spiritual refinement that brings one closer to God.

The significance of Ramadan derives from its link to the Qur'an and the prophecy of the Prophet. It was during this time that the first revelations came to the Prophet via the Angel Gabriel on the specific night known as the Nights of Qadr – based on a short chapter in the Qur'an called "al-Qadr" (S: 97). Because fasting during Ramadan allows for such exceptional proximity to God and God's blessings, Iranians often refer to the month as the "blessed month" (*mah-e mobarrak*), the "month of compassion" (*mah-e rahmat*), the "month of Allah," (*mah-e khodā*), or the "month of worship" (*mah-e ebādat*). While those who are able to fast are lucky and blessed, fasting is completely forbidden (*harām*) for unhealthy persons, women who were menstruating, breast-feeding, or those experiencing post-partum bleeding. Abstinence from food, drink, sex, and smoking is paralleled by abstinence from making false statements to Allah, the Prophet, and the Imams and from other sinful behavior such as backbiting or slander (*gheybat*). Additionally, those keeping the fast are prohibited from being in a state of major ritual impurity (*janaba*) during the hours of fasting. Indeed, those I spoke with firmly held that even unintentionally being in such a state during Ramadan invalidates the fast (see also Khomeini 2003:282). Polite conventions also surround fasting. In particular, it is incumbent upon non-fasters to refrain from eating in the presence of those who are keeping the fast. Anyone who does so is derisively called a *ruzeh khor*, a term that roughly means a person who eats before someone keeping the fast. In the home of my host family, this meant that food consumption and activity was surreptitious and bounded to the kitchen area during daylight hours. It also meant that people attended more closely to idle chitchat, reminding fasters and non-fasters alike not to gossip or curse. It also meant that people took even greater care to avoid loud voices, anger, or other

tensions between family members. In short, Ramadan intensified the will to maintain and create moral family relations.

According to the Imam Khomeini (2003:22), whose words and sayings were frequently on the lips of my interlocutors,

> The meaning of fasting is not merely refraining from eating and drinking; one must keep oneself from sin. In this noble month, in which you have been invited to the divine banquet, if you do not gain insight about God the Almighty nor insight into yourself, it means that you have not properly participated in the feast of Allah.

Here, fasting means not only refraining from food and drink but also replacing such worldly appetites with "God's divine banquet" – a spiritual banquet that, if properly "consumed," should lead to self-refinement and "proximity to God" (*qorbat va rabeteh ba khodā*). Yet not only do "spiritual foods" replace tangible food substance, but fasting brings spiritual insight to the fore, and sublimates the body and its "passions" (*nafs, tahzib-e nafs*) (Torab 2007:226). When I asked two Tehrani student acquaintances to explain this concept, they related that the objective of fasting is twofold: holding back from sin and bodily desires or appetites; and lifting up toward divine spirit. In an interview, an elderly Fars-Abadi grandfather similarly explained: "by holding back the "inner passions" (*nafs*), self-perception deepens and spirit awakens." In this framework, the focus draws away from the subjugation of the bodily passions incurred by fasting, and points toward a refinement of the soul (*tazkiyeh-e ruh*).

Scholars of the Middle East and Islam have often explored Ramadan specifically as a site for understanding how socially proscribed forms of behavior, such as fasting, constitute the conditions for the emergence of the self (whether as pious, modest, or some other) (Mahmood 2005; Schielke 2009). In her work on Muslims in Egypt, in particular, Saba Mahmood (2005:149) explores how the (pious) self emerges through embodied practice. She relates: "Bodily form in this view does not simply represent the interiority, but serves as the

"developable means" (Asad 1993) through which certain kinds of ethical and moral capacities are attained" (Mahmood 2005:148). Here, socially prescribed forms of conduct are understood as potentialities through which the self is realized, not an external constraint (Mahmood 2005:148). Focusing on Ramadan in particular, Schielke, who conducted a study of young men in northern Egypt, describes the month as a time of "exceptional morality," but criticizes the idea that acts such as fasting should be understood as a perfectionist project of self-discipline. Rather, he adeptly explores the contradictory views and experiences of Muslim youth during the fast. He further notes that the exceptional moralism of Ramadan – when religious obligations and prayers "must be fulfilled" – necessarily contrasts implicitly with the more flexible nature of norms and ethics for the rest of year (2009:28).

However, although these scholars have focused on the above practices with regard to the emerging moral self or even civic disciplinary strategies, I here show how fasting for those in Fars-Abad was very often stretched beyond individual moral action to encompass the spiritual refinement of the immediate family unit. The fasting, praying, cooking, votive meals, and alms paying associated with Ramadan are all directed, in some manner, toward blessing and purifying the immediate family who live together.

Fasting and Family Spirit

The family orientation of fasting in Fars-Abad is visible in the two meals that surround the fast: the predawn meal (*sahari*), and the meal that "opens" the fast (*eftāri*). The pre-fast breakfast is for close family members, specifically those who are an active part of the daily household. Often it consists of a large breakfast including a possible leftover meal, flat bread, feta cheese, eggs, bread and jam served with tea. Dates are always served and are a source of

blessing. The first such meal on the first day of 2010 Ramadan in Fars-Abad was a lamb and lentil stew served with rice. The family rose, bleary eyed, at four in the morning. By the time I arose, Nushin had laid out the *sofreh*, and I helped her bring cutlery and dishes from the kitchen. When everything was ready, we waited for Ahmad to finish his predawn prayer and join us. As was his custom, he prayed and we began to eat. Even those in the family who were not fasting participated in this ritual rising.

Similarly, on most days of Ramadan, all immediate family and often extended family, too, share the Iftar meal, which breaks the fast. As the sister-in-law of Nushin told me as we walked around the park up the hill one Ramadan evening: "Even if you are sick and do not have the luck of fasting during the month of God, you still can't help but be drawn to the *sofreh* of Iftar. All of the family "gathers around" (*doreh ham*) the *sofreh* and with a short prayer of Iftar, with a few dates and a sip of hot water, those that have fasted sit and feast." Typical Iftar foods include tea, bread, cheese, fresh herbs from the garden, dates, halva, and specialty sweets. Another common Iftar food is zoolbia and bamieh, a sweet made of starch, yoghurt, sugar, oil and rosewater that is purchased from confectionary stores. At the family *sofreh*, hot water, dates, fresh bread and cheese were served before a more proper meal: but not before the fast is "opened" through prayer.

Many pious Muslims such as Ahmad begin meals, irrespective of fasting, with the first line of the Qur'an: "In the name of the God the merciful, and the Compassionate." During the month of Ramadan, this phrase of devotion takes on special significance as a device of breaking the fast and is the precursor to prayers said before the meal. Indeed, people in Fars-Abad say that those who fast with pure intention will be granted three prayers at the moment of Iftar. For Ahmad these prayers were always for the protection and care of his family. On the first day of

Ramadan, he broke the fast and said the following prayer: "Oh God, forgive our sins and help us" (*khodā ya, gonahān-e mā bebakhsh va be ma komak kon*). Although many who sat around the sofreh had not fasted with him, he employed the "we" pronoun, quietly listing the names of his family members, "help Maryam, help Reza, help Ali, help Nushin." In Tehran, several highly educated women confirmed the family orientation of Ramadan prayers. One woman explained, "I do it for my children." They described a variety of prayers to mark the breaking of the fast such as the reading of Qur'anic verse, the Sura Qadr, which speaks of the revealing of the Qur'an in the Night of Qadr. Another devotional prayer, recommended by the Imam Sadeq and entitled "Alhoma rab-e al-nor al-azim" is frequently read during Ramadan. They say that for those who say this prayer, God "forgives them their sins" "takes away sadness" and helps the supplicant "arrive at his destination." Yet regardless of the prayer spoken at Iftar, the self is not the only subject of potential transformation or spiritual protection: prayers are frequently turned outward to family members.

The principle of Fetriyeh makes this concept visible. Fetriyeh denotes alms (*zakat*) given specifically at the Festival of Fetri (*eid-e fetri*) at the end of Ramadan. In Iran, the Islamic Republic high school texts books, laymen, and Ulama all agree that the "bread-provider" *(nun-avar*) must give alms "for each person who eats food in the house" (*kesi ke gazā mikhoreh tu khāne-ye shun*). These people are called the "bread-eaters" (*nunkhor-ha*). The rule thus has the secondary effect of distinguishing all who live in the house from all who do not live in the house. For example, as Nushin's daughter explained, Ahmad would give a Fetriyeh for me this year as I was a "bread-eater" in his house, which he did. She elaborated: " My father gives Fetriyeh for us. He does not have to give it for himself. The person, the "bread-provider," who gives the alms of Fetr "must be near God" (*be qas qorbat, nazdiki be khodā*). In contrast, Nushin's husband would

not give one for his eldest daughter Fati who lived just down the street "because she eats with her husband." The money collected at the Festival of Fetriyeh is given to the poor.

The principle of Fetriyeh reveals the implicit structure of the household and it maps the family in terms of those who eat together, those who provide food – as per the distinction between bread-providers and bread-eaters – and those who are not active members of the household. In so doing, it reveals the spiritual connection of the family members who live together and sit at the everyday *sofreh* together. The principle guides the "bread-provider" (*nun-āvar*) to ensure the spiritual well being of the family as a whole, again drawing a clear association between "those who eat together" and the family who share kindred spirit.[36]

This research shows that there are key convergences between Shi'i fasting in Iran and the creation of kindred spirit in the household. Not only do the ceremonial meals of *eftār*, *sahar*, and the *eid-e fetri* demarcate a ceremonial *sofreh* shared by family and intimates, but fasting is frequently conducted for spiritual health of other family members.

Blessing the Family through Vow-Making and Food Charity

The link between kindred Islamic spirit and food is further visible in processes of ritual food distribution. In Fars-Abad, Tehran, and elsewhere in Iran, such votive offerings are extremely frequent. They mark the life cycle, the Islamic calendar (in particular the birth days and death days of the 12 Imams), and pilgrimages to the shrines of Shi'i saints, funerals, and mourning rites.

In the following, I explore how such votive offerings create, shape, or otherwise purify

[36] The Iranian Islamic Broadcasting Network corroborates this view on a wider scale. In an extremely popular show called *ā*shpazbashi, or the Chef, such home-cooked food made with love and pure intentions embodies the inner moral core of the family. In particular, in the show's final episode, a large, "traditional" meal of kebab prevents family fragmentation and divorce. It is for the immediate family (*khanevadeh*).

the kindred spirit of families through spreading divine blessing, both inward – toward the core of the family – and outward, to extended kin and even strangers.

"Cooking votive soup is an act of prayer" (Iran (a name), Fars-Abad, 2010). The most potent way to alter whether food is nourishing or dangerous is thus through the combination of food substance, intentional action (such as stirring or heating), and spoken prayer or verse uttered over food during preparation. Food that has been blessed by those that cook it, eat it, stir it, or come into contact with it is more nourishing both to body and soul than any other type of food. Such food becomes "blessed" (*tabarrok*). Additionally, for the pious Muslims I spoke with in Shiraz, Tehran, and elsewhere, meals are not truly nourishing unless "In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim*) has been uttered by the eater. As a placard in the famous sacred kitchen within the shrine of Shi'i Imam Abdul Azim in Tehran: the Imam ʿAli notes: "Food eaten without invoking the name of God is not blessed and may cause suffering!" Indeed, a whole category of religious prayer in Iran centers on the creation and distribution of votive food to create blessing and fulfill personal vows to God or the Shi'i saints. It is called vow-making (*nazr kardan*). As Parvin, mother and accountant, explained: "I myself cook votive food (make vows) for the health of my children. Food is full of blessing. On the night of Imam Husayn, I cook saffron sweet rice. I believe in this very strongly. "

While the previous sections described everyday *sofreh*s at home and processes of fasting, I now turn to the subject of marked ritual vow making in which blessed foods are distributed outward for the benefit of both the family and those receiving the blessed fare. As Sered has written in her analysis of Middle Eastern Jewish Women's charitable deeds, "a major aim of such ritual is to involve God in networks of interpersonal and interdependent relationships" (1988:131). In Iran, women similarly attest both to the proximity to God gained through votive

feeding and to the effectiveness of such feeding for the welfare of their families. They see their acts of ritual feeding as reciprocal: votive food is provided to others to care for all human beings, and critically, it is provided so that God will grant favors for their own kin.

I here briefly relate three diverse examples of votive offerings that are strategically employed to protect of family members from childhood to beyond death. In these contexts, family members, usually women, distribute blessing by providing a votive *sofreh* in their home, or by performing the labor of cooking ritual foods such as *halva* and *halim* (sweet fermented wheat dishes): labor that they see as a sacrifice of their effort and wealth. Each votive offering described below highlights the "relationship oriented religiosity" of Iranian women: namely, the centrality of interpersonal relationships in their vow-making. In the examples below, women perform and sacralize feeding work to provide an immediate means of protecting kin from physical or spiritual injury/pain, to ensure and initiate a happy and prosperous marriage, or for healing discord and family strife – both of which are immoral. While votive feeding is but one aspect of women's efforts to protect and nourish their families' physical and spiritual health (other religious efforts may include prayers, pilgrimage, and even education), it crosscuts many other spiritual and ritual acts of care for kin.

The Votive Sofreh

The most obvious examples of votive feeding is the votive *sofreh* (*sofreh-e nazri*). This type of meal preparation is often the consequence of having made a vow to a supernatural agent or saint to intercede with God for a favor. In return, the supplicant cooks a "votive offering" (*nazri*) that has been specified in advance (Torab 2007:118). For example, a vow-maker might sponsor three meals, two of which must be held before the fulfillment of the vow, while the last

is held in "abeyance" (*gerow*) until after the appeal is granted (Torab 2007:120). While such votive *sofreh*s are normally carried out and participated in by women, men often help sponsor them and ask their wives or sisters to make a votive offering to a saint on their behalf. *Sofreh*s are most often offered to female Shi'i saints, including Bibi Seshambe who was born and died on a Tuesday, Bibi Nur and Bibi Hur, who are said to be two of the Prophet's daughters. The one exception is Abu'l Faz'l, a youthful Shi'i martyr. In addition, many ethnographers have shown that no adult males can attend the votive *sofreh* ceremony or partake of the food because misfortune will befall them (Shirazi 2005; Jamzadeh and Mills 1986). [37]

Reasons for giving votive *sofreh*s that came up in my fieldwork in 2010 include: moving to a bigger house where the children will be more comfortable, ensuring the successful surgery of a sick daughter, getting accepted into university, and helping a daughter or son find a husband. In most – but not all – of these examples, *sofrehs* are "thrown" for the spiritual and physical health of kin.

Votive Soup for Teething

In Fars-Abad, every mother whose child is just beginning to teeth cooks a large vat of "votive soup" (*āsh*) made of vegetables, beans, and wheat noodles.[38] Hamideh, the wife of Jamal, for example, cooked *āsh* for her eight-month-old baby, Ghazal, who had recently gotten her first tooth. She explained that the soup was a prayer that her daughter's other teeth would come in easily. Members of her husband's family, who lived next door and shared a courtyard

[37] Remarkable similarities in objects and foodstuffs placed on the Muslim and Zoroastrian *sofreh*s have been observed. Yet despite these convergences, the process and participation rules differ significantly among these groups (Jamzadeh and Mills 1986).

[38] *āsh* may be formed from various combinations of vegetables, rice, pasta, grains, peas and beans, meat, fruits, spices, and tart flavorings such as lime juice, tamarind, sumac, yogurt, or vinegar. Interestingly, the word *āsh* forms a compound with several other Farsi culinary terms, suggesting that it is and has been a fundamental component of Iranian/Farsi understandings of cuisine (e.g., *āshpaz* "cook," *āshpazi or* "cooking," and *āshpaz-khane, or* "kitchen").

with her, helped her cook the soup in the courtyard over a gas flame where she make use of a pot too large for the inside stove. She began by adding the water with the greens, then the beans, and finally, a special kind of Iranian noodle (*rishteh*). When the soup had cooked, she gave a small amount of the soup to an extended family member who had visited, but portioned the rest into small plastic containers to give to neighbors and extended kin. Once so portioned, she decorated it with a traditional Iranian cheese (*kashk*), fried onions (*piaz-e dagh*), and fried mint leaves. I walked with her as she distributed the soup to everyone in the alley as well as to some people just outside: neighbors and relatives of her husband. Only after making a round of the neighborhood did we eat some of the soup ourselves. Hamideh explained that she did not expect anything in return. She said that she gave out without expecting compensation. It was "charity" (*kheyrat*), she said.

When Fati's baby, Seti (Fati is an older, married daughter of Nushin), got her first tooth, the family again made *āsh*. This time we cooked it across the street in a garden over a fire, with the help of Fati's matrilateral kin. She invited more than 40 women and a few men over for the occasion. We spread out *sofreh*s on the ground under a walnut tree so that people could eat comfortably, men and women sitting in two adjacent patches on the grass. When the women cooked the soup, they stirred it clockwise reading prayers. The lead chefs in this joint effort included Fati's mother, Nushin; Nushin's brother's wife, Eran, and Nushin's sister, Goltab. They said that stirring the soup gave them religious merit (*savab*). Younger women such as Fati's twenty-year-old sister helped distribute the food, the bowls, and spoons to the guests. All the women and men were given a healthy serving. While they ate, people talked about all sorts of things: Fati's baby, the troubles of mothering, the quality of the soup, and school. Grandmother

Goli-Mehreboon, from her place at the *sofreh*, made sure that everyone got a full serving of soup, including those that were helping to serve and cook the thick, greenish liquid.

Tooth soup, however, is only one type of votive soup. Women cooked *āsh* in many other contexts to spread blessing or give thanks to God. Eran, the wife of Nushin's brother, for example, made *āsh* on one occasion to thank God for protecting her son who had survived a near fatal car accident relatively unscathed. She explained: "God took mercy on him" (*khodā rahmesh karde*).[39] As Nushin, Nushin's sister, and I helped her combine the ingredients in the walled garage, Eran explained: "We stir the *āsh* clockwise not because it will cook better, but because it is a prayer." Similarly, a Tehrani woman in her fifties told me that she makes the soup on the first Saturday of every month to help her daughter find an appropriate suitor. On occasion, she audaciously brings the same soup to the mother of the prospective groom as a hint of her daughter's interest.[40]

Other small votive food distributions for the blessing of family occur on a weekly basis (every Thursday) at the Fars-Abad graveyard. At dusk, people arrive with their immediate families to pay their respects to the dead and begin distributing little candies, sweets, or pastries to other visitors (*pāksh kardan*), acquaintances, extended kin, or strangers. The intention is that those who receive a sweet will reciprocate by reading the "Fatr," the first verse of the Qur'an for the soul of the sweet-giver's deceased relative and share condolences saying, "May God have mercy on him/her." On most occasions family members, including Nushin and Ahmad, brought

[39] The word *rahm*, interestingly, also means "womb" in Farsi. In addition, it translates as compassion, uterus, and pity.

[40] The *Encyclopedia Iranica* notes several additional kinds of *āsh* prepared as votive offerings, often for family welfare. These include: *āsh-e mash*, prepared on the tenth day after childbirth and served in the public bath; *āsh-e reshte-ye posht-e pa*, prepared on the third or fifth day after the departure of a loved one and served to neighbors in hopes of shortening the duration of the journey (this type of *āsh* placed on a tray with a Qur'an and a mirror and is not eaten by the traveler but is rather sprinkled upon him); and finally, *āsh-e shola qalamkar*, an *āsh* made with meat and legumes prepared on one of the holy days for the survival of children in the family or a thanksgiving for recovery from sickness.

their own sweets, which they asked me, their daughter, or son to give out for the same reason. They carefully attended to the graves of their grandparents, tapping the stone surface of the tombs and reading the Fatr so that, as one Muslim college student told me, "their soul will come up and they will understand that we came." Such prayers, they say, will help the kinsman enter heaven when the Day of Judgment arrives. In addition to buying pastries and candies from local shops, many people cook a particular food for the deceased known as *halva*. As one mother explained in an interview, "We cook it because of the dead, because it has a scent – the scent of flower water and saffron. We bring it outside to the graveyard so that the dead (our ancestors) become happy. It is also strong (*qavi*). This is because it is wheat flour, and also because it has oil."

Finally, the "Aqiqeh Prayer" provides a clear example of votive offering for the blessing of the family. This well-known prayer, which is specifically "for the blessing of children" (*behājat-e farzand*), is prescribed in the key Shi'i text, the Mafatih, and was described to me by interlocutors both in Tehran and Fars-Abad. In Tehran, Islamic law student acquaintances described the prayer as "divine insurance for the baby" and explained that most people kill a male sheep for a boy and a female sheep for a girl on the seventh day after birth. One woman related: "We ask Allah to accept the blood of the sheep in order to protect our child. The blood of the sheep protects the bones and the meat of the sheep protects the flesh of the child." They said that they then invite relations, guests, and/or the poor to take part in the meat. In Tehran, some also provide meat to the doctor who oversaw the child's birth or pay an organization to sacrifice a sheep on their behalf. In contrast, people in Fars-Abad said that the sheep's gender is not important. They emphasize the slaughter of an *unblemished* and *pure* lamb in front of the house where they wash the sheep and its meat completely, cutting it into small pieces. They then make

a "meat soup" (*āb gusht*), which they similarly distribute this soup to extended family, neighbors, or the poor. Importantly, they said, the parents should not consume even one drop of the soup. At the same time, they hold that no part of the animal or soup can be wasted. When the main ceremony is complete, the parents bury the bones of the lamb in the backyard – a blessing for the continual protection and health of children. The ritual is accompanied by protective supplications (*do'a*) collectively decided upon as effective in preventing misfortune by the women participants.

In sum, the women who take part in votive rituals and food charities are very often seeking to protect, bless, and otherwise help their family members. They strategically use food to spread divine blessing simultaneously outward (to strangers or distant kin) and inward (to the core of the family). In so doing, they constitute a blessed immediate family and ensure moral household relations. For example, over the three years that I knew her, most of Parvin's prayers involved the distribution of votive foods and were carried out for her family: for her son's university money and for her daughter's degree. She provided votive soup to neighbors monthly and weekly, as she believed was auspicious and paid over 200 dollars for the breakfast of other women in her community on more than one occasion "so that her daughter would find an *appropriate* fiancé." Note her use of the word appropriate (*monaseb*). For Parvin, it means more than age, class, and occupation – it means that he come from a "good" family, a "moral" family. She and many other interviewees link votive food dialogically to blessing the family and to the foundation of an ideal moral household. In choosing a groom, Parvin will be extending her family and allying it with another, a decision that is strategic and is based not only on economics and societal position, but also on the positive evaluation of the other family's morality.

Returning to the Beginning: Why the *Ziarat-e* ʿAshuraʾ "Saved Us"

In contrast to the above pure and intentioned "prayer giving" over food, which makes it blessed, ill-wishers and those with the right knowledge of Qur'anic number symbology can engage in "prayer taking" (*do'a gereftan*) over food, often tea. Here, the prayer "taker" shares the detrimental food with others whom they wish to come to harm, usually because of jealousy. The most dangerous foods are those made by people who know how to do this themselves or who have access to a *seer*, a kind of expert of mystical knowledge. Indeed, I now return to the *ziarat-e* ʿAshuraʾ prayer gathering previously mentioned to show how my host family sought to combat such a threat. Very possibly, they said, one or more of us had drunk tea or consumed food that had been prayed over for ill by a jealous aunt.

Approximately one hundred women came to the house on the day of the prayer: maternal and paternal female family members. Critically, no female family member was excluded from the invitation; even the aunt whom the family suspected of being the main cause of harm to the household was invited. The *ziarat-e* ʿAshuraʾ, my interlocutors explained, is "for cleansing sins," not only those of the host, but also for "the souls of others."

The prayer began with the strong voice of the woman prayer giver (*mado'a*). She sang the prayer's verses melodically through her microphone: a declaration of allegiance to the compassionate Imam Husayn, peace be upon him, and a rejection of his "hostile" enemies, those who took his life at the Battle of Karbala. The guests, cloaked in black chadors sobbed in solidarity with Imam Husayn's plight. Some rocked back and forth in agony, viscerally remembering his suffering at the hands of the evil Yazid. At the end ten minute prayer, the women stood, facing Mecca with their arms and hands palm up in supplication for the blessing

of the Imam-e Zaman, the final Imam still in occultation. As one woman told me, we open our palms so that his energy and blessing may enter us.

Yet the *ziarat-e ʿAshuraʾ*'s power lay not only in its evocation of sacred Qur'anic verse or even on its message of love and support for the Imam Husayn and simultaneous rejection of his enemies. Rather, the ritual's ability to bless and purify occurred to a large extent through the parallel preparation and distribution of votive, blessed food.

The night before the *ziarat-e ʿashuraʾ*, we had stayed up late preparing. We tied 100 packets of nuts and candies with red ribbons, symbolizing the spilt blood of the Imam Husayn on the fields of Karbala. In addition, we washed and prepared several large crates of fruit. In the morning, we began to cook the main part of our votive food offering: a huge vat of "saffron sweet rice" (*sholeh zard*). As the rice "pudding" cooked, several of the women who were helping – a maternal aunt and some others – took turns stirring it clockwise while reciting prayers and verses of the Qur'an under their breath. They debated the ingredients as they stirred: had we include enough saffron? Enough sugar? Sometimes we tasted the pudding straight from the ladle, assessing its readiness. As the guests arrived, and during the prayer, the large vat of saffron rice stood steaming in the next room.

After the ceremony, a crowd of expectant women lined up to take some of saffron rice home. Each family took home a small plastic container of the food blessed by the prayer that had been recited over it, food that they considered especially nourishing in its blessedness. As Nushin's sister told me, "Food that is blessed in this manner has a special effect. It's completely different from normal food."

After the women's *ziarat-e ʿashuraʾ*, and the subsequent men's version a month later, the family agreed that the votive meal and prayer gathering had been successful. We had spread

forgiveness of the sins of those suspected of ill-intentions, and had reconstituted our bodies – as well as the inner spaces of the house – with prayer and pure "blessed food" (*tabarrok*). The aunt's attempt to cause discord had been averted and her prayer taking – the "dangerous" combination of food and prayer that was believed to be the source of our current household's difficulties – had been nullified. "The *ziarat-e ʿashuraʾ* saved us," they said. At least temporarily, relationships between family members had been healed.

Conclusion

For my Fars-Abad friends and family as well as in other parts of Iran, the maintenance of an Islamic moral kinship is a matter of constant vigilance. Not only must the inside space of the household and its thresholds be protected from possible outside harm (such as the evil eye), but individual family members must strive toward Islamic purity in all acts, prayers and talk. Indeed, harmonious and halal family relationships are the heart (*del*) of the household.

I have argued that Shi'i Iranian understandings of "correct" and "complete" kinship depend – in both daily and ritual contexts – on a complex orchestration of appropriate and moral foodways. Not only can food be strategically wielded to incorporate the "right" qualities of purity and goodness into kin, but depending on who is involved, it can also provide a unique means to manipulate or destroy the pure inner moral core of the family, embodied by the *sofreh*.

This chapter has also explored how food is nourishing – not only with regard to nutrition but also with regard to the spiritual and moral health of the family. I suggest that, for many Shi'i Iranians, the feeding and eating of food substance is explicitly linked to the creation – or destruction – of moral bodies and souls. In both their daily food practices and in ritual votive meals, the people of Fars-Abad demonstrate that practices of feeding and cooking shape the kindred Islamic spirit of the family. As anthropologist Jane Fajans has noted, "Food is not just a

symbol or metaphor for social and cultural processes (e.g., in its transformation from raw to cooked) nor simply a signifier that reflects or embodies aspects of culture. Food is not only transformed, it is transformative" (1988:143). Food in Iran has this capacity to transform. However, the potential that people in Fars-Abad see in food stems both from its substance and from its very ability to be transformed in the first place: through gardening, cooking, mixing, or praying. For them, food seems to mediate somatic and spiritual worlds that stand not in opposition but in dialogue. It is a means of (in)corporation, shaping the qualities of "rightness" (*dorosti*) and "purity" (*pāki*) into both bodies (*jesm*) and the spirit (*ruh*) of kin. It further provides a unique means to channel divine blessing into the heart of the family, the *sofreh*. Food is thus not merely transformative of individual family members, it (re)constitutes and demarcates (and can also destroy) the moral family as a whole.

Chapter 4

REGENERATING THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC
THE MAGIC OF MARTYR'S BLOOD

The martyr is "the heart of history and the blood of each martyr is like a bell which awakens the thousands." (The Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran Times November 16, 1982, pp.12)

It was only a week after the burial of the two unknown martyrs (*shahid*) from the Iran-Iraq border in Fars–Abad on top of the dusty hill near my host family's home, when I asked my host brother, Reza, to escort me up the steep path for some exercise in the cool autumn air. In minutes, we had walked up the dirt path that started just outside the front door and entered the park, which was called by locals the "water store," or *āb-anbar-u*.[41] Today, Reza, usually quick to joke and smile, was serious as we approached the almost empty park where a lone pair of women dressed in black chadors were walking around the manmade pond on a cement path, framed by an outer road and a terraced garden. Instead of making our way to the pond, as was our habit, we followed the path taken by the commemorative procession a few days before, up the hill and to the right, which ended at a rounded gravel circle on an outcrop that overlooked the town. This was the site of the unknown martyrs' burial, freshly covered graves still visible.

A simple tent structure formed a canopy over the deceased: a banner of red, white, and green – the colors of the Iranian flag. Nearby, a few flowers that had been strewn on the earth lay wilted amidst the lingering scent of rose water. "What memories I have in this place!" Reza exclaimed as we approached the gravesite. He took out his smartphone and showed me a pixilated video of a fire and some shadowy figures. "Last year, before you came," he continued, "we [he and some of his male friends] made a bonfire on this very spot for the New Year

[41] The pronunciation "*-u*" is a feature of the local Farsi dialect, placed at the end of sentence objects and often laughingly disparaged by its own non-Tehrani dialect speakers.

celebration of Chahr Shambe Souri. There was music and dancing. It was unbelievable (*kef kardim*)." But the eighteen-year-old recognized that a substantial change in the park had occurred at this site. "These martyrs sacrificed their lives for God and for Iran. They are truly honorable. They are great, greater than you or I." He continued, "This is now a place of respect." Still standing next to the graves, he began talking about his own personal desires to do important things and be taken seriously in this wider world. As we left, we both said a prayer (*fath*) for the dead, for the young unknown war heroes and their sacrifice.

Before the arrival of the unknown martyrs, the town park on the hill had been unambiguously a site of festivity, picnics, and even small rebellions of hookah smoking and gossip. Sometimes, a little shop sold tickets for a ride on a plastic swan, which could be steered and peddled about the shallow water. Nearby, a bright orange metal playground and exercise unit, reminiscent of hundreds of such sets in Iran's parks, drew the attention of children, teenagers, and exercisers. On summer nights, the entire family, including uncles, aunts, and cousins, had often hiked up the same short steep path or around on the vehicle route to sit on raised squares of cement or in the irrigated grass with picnic accoutrements: tea, sugar, sweets, blankets, and fresh bread. Young men, as many as two or three on board, regularly motorcycled around the pond, music blasting from their phones.

The interment of the martyrs' bodies had marked a new chapter in the history of town. The Foundation for the Preservation of the Heritage and Distribution of Sacred Defense had literally delivered a new overseer to town life: two unknown martyrs. Their very anonymity as brothers, fathers, and as sacred defenders of Iran made them accessible to all. For many people I spoke with, the fresh gravesite on the dusty hill constituted a great honor. It not only exemplified

the influence and connections of the local Imam and other town officials, but also the piety of the townspeople. The arrival of the martyrs, their sacred corpses (bones and frayed garments), together with the associated official posters depicting spilled blood and wounded soldiers, had transformed the town park into a place of commemoration, memory, and mourning – sacralizing the landscape. It had also made it a place of healing and pilgrimage, a place for resolving family difficulties through prayer. And, although certain persons I spoke with sometimes critiqued the increasing religiosity of the town – such as the recent addition of a men's Islamic seminary – these individuals were mostly silent on the subject of the martyrs: they understood that having the martyrs interred in the park might mean more government benefits and subsidies for the town such as new roads, parks, and schools. They also knew that any criticism of the interment of martyrs would be interpreted locally as a critique of the regime, a position rarely taken by locals due to the town's ever-present and watchful religious hierarchy – the Friday Imam(s).

Bodily substances such as blood play a strong symbolic role in post-Revolutionary Iranian nation making. Scholars and laymen who support the regime expound the purity of the Islamic nation through concepts of shared patrilineal blood and through a continuing emphasis on the bloody sacrifice of citizen martyrs. Yet, while patrilineal blood is the determining factor for legal Iranian citizenship, the sacrificial spilled blood of martyrs has even greater potency. Spilled through the pure intentioned "act" (*amal*) of the martyr, such martyrs' blood – which is on striking display in a range of national contexts – is considered purifying, healing, and spiritually nourishing to the Islamic Republic. It is regenerative and is said to fill the "veins" (*ragha*) of Muslim citizens. Indeed, for Basiji supporters of Khomeini, it is the blood of martyrs

and martyrs' bodies that have become integral to the (re)generation and spiritual defense of the Islamic Republic.

This chapter draws from local models of (national) kinship, blood and martyrdom to show how bodily substances – whether directly or indirectly related to ideas of kinship – figure in efforts of *religious* nation-making. By addressing locally salient links between kinship, martyrdom, and Islam, I will argue that, in the case of Iran, an emphasis on blood and unburied bodies helps to both naturalize and sanctify the "right" kind of nation: a nation premised on both the "natural law" (*ein-e fetri*) model of the (Shi'i) Iranian family and on pious acts of (Shi'i) Islam. Even further, I show how the emphasis on blood is part of a variously successful state endeavor to construct a spiritual relationship – both between and among national Shi'i "brother and sister" citizens, and between these same citizens, the land/soil (*khāk*) of Iran, and God. Indeed, the unknown martyr is the ultimate example of the making of this spiritual relationship. The martyrs' pure spilled blood connects both Iranian land/soil and citizens to God, creating a pure "inner" core of the nation. As such, the unknown martyr, in particular, epitomizes a larger aspirational framework by which Shi'i citizens simultaneously relate to the divine and oppose key (and often monolithic) Others described as non-Muslim, self-serving "oppressors," who are very likely Western or Western influenced.

Theoretical Directions

To explore the particular potency of blood and other bodily substances for Iranian (religious) nation making, I engage emerging anthropological scholarship on blood's special quality as a substance, material, and metaphor (Carsten 2013). Scholars highlight the powerful involvement of blood in concepts of life, death, nurturance and violence, connection and

exclusion, as well as in kinship and sacrifice (Cannell 2013; Copeman 2013; Feeley-Harnik 1981). They illuminate the capacity of blood to participate in and flow between domains that are often presumed to be distinct in most scholarly analysis (such as of kinship and nation). Yet as anthropologist Kath Weston underscores, substances such as blood should not be explored only as material transferable objects; they must be investigated as a history of social struggle (2001:169-170; see also Cannell 2013). She and Janet Carsten similarly argue that there is no "single register of blood in any given context" (Carsten 2013:590). These insights are applicable to the intense cultural elaboration of (inheritable) bodily substances such as blood in processes of Iranian nation-making: in particular, blood's associations with 1) the "natural laws" of kinship and descent; and 2) the sacralizing efficacy of Sh'i martyrology.

In addition, this chapter necessarily engages a rich literature on the relationship between nation-making, commemorative rituals, and collective memory. Scholars such as Halbwachs (1992) and Connerton (1990), for instance, have developed a theory of "collective" or "social" memory to explore how extraordinary events are collectively recalled. In particular, they explore how memories are valorized, memorialized, and/or incorporated into bodies through "incorporating practices," or patterns of body use that become ingrained through our interactions with objects (Connerton 1990:94). The cultural monument, such as an unknown martyr's tomb, patterns the movements of bodies around it to engage memory and ultimately places not only the individual social actor (a citizen), but also the "effaced 'I' of recollection" (Lass 1994:101) within a (national) history. This chapter explores the power of practices of incorporation to engage collective memory, not only of more recent events such as the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), but also of the Battle of Karbala (680).

Interestingly, these scholars further suggest that the desire to memorialize is often precipitated by the fear or threat of "cultural amnesia" (2009:27). Indeed, for many supporters of the Islamic Republic, such as my host family, remembering and memorialization of the Islamic Revolution (1979) and of the Iran-Iraq War are both explicitly and implicitly a defense against cultural amnesia, an amnesia that would mean the incursion of Western immorality and intervention. The commemorations, un-burials, and reburials of martyrs are strategic religious and ethical practices that organize the bodies of subjects around key reference points (the pure blood of martyrs etc.) while simultaneously eliding or "forgetting" others such as ancient Zoroastrian temples or more recent "Western-influenced" Pahlavi palaces (Lambek 1996). They are thus a key part of the effort to moralize and sacralize the Iranian national landscape.

Finally, this chapter speaks to a rich literature on Iranian martyrology. Although previous scholars of Iran have investigated the power of the state to sacralize and (un)make martyrs (Kaur 2010) as well as the stunning material iconography, shrines, and museums that surround contemporary Iran-Iraq War commemorations (Flaskerud 2012; Gruber 2012; Shirazi 2012), they have yet to fully address how martyrs' blood and bodies are wielded by state leaders and laymen in processes of nation-making. Following Janet Carsten (1994), I argue that such bodily substances are a powerful tool of memory in their ability to resemble and typify those of one's self and one's kin, and in the case of Iran, to resemble and typify religious prophets, heroes, and martyrs. I suggest that it is both the associations of bones and blood with kinship and with a continuously re-enacted and re-imagined religious past that make the exhumation of martyrs and their reburial such a potent force. In the following section, I begin by exploring the shifting relationships between gender, citizenship, kinship, and blood in Iran since the Constitutional Revolution (1906-11).

Patrilineal Blood and Iranian Citizenship

Several key events stand out as historical turning points in the negotiation of (gendered) citizenship in Iran. Most notably, these include the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), the reign of the Pahlavis (1925-1979), the Islamic Revolution (1979), and the Iran-Iraq War (1981-88) (Mirsepassi 2000:56). During the Constitutional Revolution the Iranian family, and particularly the Iranian woman, became (re)contextualized as the foundation of the nation (*mellat*) with a homeland (*vaṭan*) that was alternately configured as a female beloved or as a mother. State elite argued that, with education, women could better contribute to the upbringing of sons as both citizens of the collective masculine nation and as the protectors of the feminine homeland (Najmabadi 1998:103). To this end, a new scientific motherhood emerged in which women were taught, among other things, how to move and wash during pregnancy, how to control temperament, and how to breastfeed correctly for the benefit of educated (male) citizens (Najmabadi 1998:107). However, in a simultaneous move, Iranian women began to constitute themselves as newly emancipated citizens of the same nation-state. They formed girls' schools and women's associations, many of which met in private homes, and thus transformed the household into a social space of citizenship (*vatani*) (Najmabadi 1998:107).

During the Pahlavi reign (1925-79), Reza Shah, an admirer of Ataturk's reforms in Turkey, further constructed the male Iranian citizen more generally as a servant of this nation-state. He attempted to revive the pre-Islamic past and compared his reign to that of a sacred kingship. The territorial term "Iran," associated with "Aryan," replaced "Persia" and the national language became "Farsi" (Moallem 1992:27). According to Moallem, this (now) motherland (*mam-e vaṭan*) was married to and premised on obedience to the father/king. Here, the preservation of what she terms "filial piety" within the family was analogized to the loyalty of

the people for the king. At the same time, however, women leaders and activists continued to give voice to concerns and formed the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI), a vast network of grassroots organizations, through which they mobilized "converted" men and clerics in the government to meet their demands. Largely as a result of these efforts, women's suffrage became one of this Shah's six modernization reforms in his 1963 White Revolution (Ettehadieh 2004:103). Women were also somewhat successful in mobilizing the Shah to increase women's workforce participation and higher education opportunities, and were able to improve policies surrounding early marriage and child custody through the 1967 Family Protection Law (Ettehadieh 2004:103; Nashat 2004:30).

Many of Reza Shah's reforms only affected upper and middle class urban Iranians. The majority of lower-class Iranians, who had not benefited from the Shah's modernization programs, and who had in fact suffered during the 1929 ban on *Muharram* ceremonies and the 1936 ban on veiling, began to position themselves on the side of populist religious clerics in opposition to the Shah's government (Dabashi 1993:43). These issues were further exacerbated during the 1950s and 60s when the autocratic, Western supported, Mohammad-Reza Shah initiated state-sponsored modernization programs, including land reform in 1963, that greatly affected the economic relations and social institutions and spurred among other things, a huge migration of the rural population to urban centers (Mirsepassi 2000:73). By the 1960s, the answer to the Shah's empty modernization policies for key social critics such as Ali Shari'ati, was a return to the authentic Islamic self. In particular, Ali Shari'ati argued that the answer for the Muslim woman was to "return" to what he termed the revolutionary role model and martyrdom of Fatimeh, the daughter of the Prophet (Shari'ati 1981:16).

As a result, many women supported the Islamic Republic in the early days of the revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). They marched in the streets dressed in full length black coverings known as chador, an image that soon became a symbol of the revolution itself. During the Iran-Iraq War, many of their sons (mostly from lower-class families) were martyred for the nation.

Today, in practical terms, patrilineal descent is the primary basis of Iranian citizenship. Iranian Civil Law confers citizenship to those persons whose fathers are Iranian, regardless of birthplace. Children cannot acquire citizenship from their mothers (Article 976, Iranian Civil Code). Accordingly, a designation of citizenship depends on what my interlocutors describe as a "natural" (*tabi'i*) "blood relationship" that extends via patrilineal descent. (This framework presumes that any child born to a married woman, or within a set time after termination of the marriage, is the child of her husband). In limited ways, Iranian civil law additionally grants citizenship to persons based on land and time spent in Iran. Here, persons can become citizens if 1) they are born in Iran of unknown parents as orphans; 2) if they are born of a foreign father but have resided at least one more year in Iran immediately after reaching the age of eighteen; or 3) if their parents are not Iranian nationals but if one was born in Iran. In addition, any non-Iranian woman who marries an Iranian national can gain Iranian citizenship and her children will be citizens (Article 976, Iranian Civil Code). According to Article 1060 of Civil Law, however, the marriage of an Iranian woman to a foreign national is allowed only if the Government issues special permission. And further, the marriage of a female Muslim to a non-Muslim is not allowed (Article 1059), although a potential husband may convert. A male Muslim, on the other hand, may marry a non-Muslim woman, provided that she is "of the book" (Christian or Jewish) and chaste.

According to Suad Joseph (2005:149), most countries in the Middle East – including Iran – organize citizenship by means of a "kin contract" in which political practices and legal realities subordinate the citizen subject to the family. In other words, citizenship is mediated by membership in a family. In such contexts, while lip service may be paid to the idea of citizenship as a contractual relationship between the individual and the state, persons are seen to belong first to families and only secondarily to the nation-state. Drawing from research focusing specifically on Lebanon, Joseph points out that in many cases such citizenship is relational and dependent on a male link: a woman's legal status is acquired by her relationship to male kin, first her father then her husband. In Iran, citizenship is similarly largely dependent either on patrilineal descent or marriage to an Iranian husband and a woman must request her husband's permission to leave the country (2005:160). The local logic for this privileging of men as the link to citizenship is that the husband, as the breadwinner, provides care and protection for his wife (Bodaghi 2004:3). The system is further enforced through national identity cards, which are issued to all Iranians at the age of 15. These cards specify a person's name, family name, and the full name of their father, echoing male-centric "official" genealogies often generated by my interlocutors in interviews (see Chapter Two). However, as Altorki (2000) and Joseph (2000) elsewhere point out, it is not only women who are not seen as "individuals" by the state; male relationships with the state are also often mediated by kinship.

Finally, status as a descendant of the Prophet is often included and made official in writing under the category of father's name, with the title *sayyed,* or *sayyeda* if the descendant is female. This demarcation provides an honored status and can be used to legitimize descent from the Prophet and thus claim innate closeness with the divine.

For Basiji children and families in Fars-Abad as well as for the families of martyrs, kinship mediates citizenship with even greater intensity. In particular, (token) membership as a Basij can often depend on links of kinship, thus marking a privileged relationship with the state and its leaders such as "the Imam" (the late Ayatollah Khomeini). For instance, two of the families I visited most frequently in Fars-Abad had attained affiliation with the Basij through their fathers who had served in the Islamic Revolution or Iran-Iraq War. Their teenage children, male and female both, showed me their Basij cards, explaining that they are not the same as the (often bearded) Basij – the Police Force or Sepah – who are so negatively portrayed in American media. Yet despite these important claims to a particular Basiji identity, for these children, it is the patrilineal blood and descent from Basiji fathers that confers a privileged status in relation to the Islamic Republic. This includes extra points on their college entrance exams, connections with local and government officials that can aid in gaining employment, and contacts within prestigious local companies. Wives of Basiji husbands also receive a privileged status for the same reasons.

However, it is the families of martyrs (whether Basiji or not) who receive the most privileged and even "honored" citizenry status – at least according to the state officials – in post Iran-Iraq War Iran. Having literally sacrificed their blood, such families accrue government benefits, loans, and funding from the Martyrs Foundation (*bonyad-e shahid*) and other associated organizations, a subject which has been widely documented (Saeidi 2009).

Yet as anthropologist of Iran, Shirin Saeidi, relates, the status given by a male family members' spilled blood remains a subject of contestation. She writes that, for many critical of the status quo, the families of war martyrs are "the indisputable economic and political winners of the Iran-Iraq War, endowed with statuses and benefits they have not rightly earned…"

(2009:115). Similarly, in Fars-Abad, even Basiji interlocutors who support the regime and call the families of martyrs "pure" and "good," sometimes deplore the "unfairness" of the elevated scores on college exams received by the children of martyrs because of their family status. At the same time, martyrs' families themselves often report increased and sometimes difficult scrutiny by the state as well as by neighbors and townspeople as a result of their special citizenship (Saeidi 2009).

Blood Everywhere: The Symbolic Force of (Martyrs') Blood

Regardless, there is a clear connection between the patrilineal blood of the family and (privileged)/(gendered) citizenship in Iran in which relations between citizens are organized in roughly the same way as relations between kin (see also Chapter 2). Yet while this analogy has relevance for people in their daily lives, it does not explain the significance of "natural" bodily substances such as blood in post-Revolutionary Iran. As I noted in the introduction, the most potent, prolific, and displayed kind of blood in contemporary Iran is that of the martyrs who spilled their blood either on the battlefield of the Iran-Iraq War or in the streets during the Islamic Revolution. This blood, which doubly evokes the annual rites of *Muharram* with its symbolic self-flagellation, is apparent across Iran in the form of real blood encrusted scarves and (un)buried bodies of martyrs and in the form of symbolic red paint on street posters or even red ribbons. While this blood implicitly draws on the patrilineal blood of citizenship, its symbolic efficacy derives more centrally from the cult of Shi'i martyrdom. It recalls the martyrdom of the family of the Prophet and the eleven Imams (the final Imam is in occultation), as well as the Battle of Karbala. For a new generation born after the revolution and war, this blood literally makes material or tangible the martyrs of the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. Indeed,

practices of mourning and visiting the martyred dead are a significant "incorporating" practice for my young Basiji friends and family. Actively replacing and/or modeling pilgrimage to Shi'i holy sites both in and outside of Iran, such practices are bursting with nationalistic overtones.

The following excerpt from my field notes provides a typical example of the sheer amount of blood on display and the explicit use of blood by supporters of the Republic to legitimize and sanctify their Islamic state. As I have discussed in previous chapters, blood in Iran can neither be explored as mere material nor concept/metaphor (Weston 2012). As Laqueur argues, blood is "relentlessly material" even as it is overburdened by meaning. Similarly Kath Weston argues blood has a kind of "meta-materiality" by which it extends beyond metaphor and material even as it simultaneously relies on both the material and the metaphorical to generate further resonances and naturalizations (Weston 2001).

> In March of 2010, I walk through an indoor museum display at the Martyrs' Section of Zahra's Paradise with members of my Tehrani extended host family: Mehdi, Ali, Parvin, and Mahmud. On entering a small museum next to the martyrs' graves, we are surrounded by images of the bloodied, wounded, and fallen of the Iran-Iraq War. We stop at each one, whispering in hushed voices, reading the placards and identifying the dead. In one poster, a white masked man holds up a tiny, premature newborn in his white-gloved hands. A bright light shines on the fetus and a camera films the event. From the photo, it is not entirely clear whether the fetus lives or dies, but one guesses the latter – that it too is a war martyr. Parvin, standing beside me is saying a prayer under her breath. I can see her lips moving but cannot make out exactly what she is saying. She grasps her chador to her face. Nearby a white, lit, display case surrounded by Qur'anic verse holds the photo of a chadored woman in a position of mourning with a red tulip. Below her sit a pair of boots and a photo of a young man, probably her martyred son. To the right, on the wall, a collage of photographs stands out: a man prostrating to God next to a motorcycle; a disembodied, bloodied hand; a red and festering burn victim; a man with a leg blown off and blood on the ground; a disemboweled individual; below are a real pair of his shoes, and in the middle a dead mother and child lying in a grass field…

I noted this scene in a martyrs' museum in Zahra's Paradise, Tehran's largest graveyard.[42] Portraying mourning and resistance, the displays emphasize large swathes of red color: photographs of the wounded, actual encrusted blood on shoes or clothes, or red bordering or cloth. They also feature the families of martyrs, particularly their mothers. The grouping of the displays evokes familial relationships. For example, a mother, her son, and his shoes are collectively displayed in the same case in one part of the museum. In contrast, the lone fetus described above is intriguing for its apparent lack of family and its anonymity, held in the medical gaze as a tiny victim of the war. Photographs of mourning mothers and sisters abound. Even further, our visit, like many others, is experienced in family groups: Parvin, for instance, experienced the displays accompanied by her veteran husband and her sons, an experience that connects the sacrifice of these identified martyrs to her own family and their faith.

Even further, during the war, key graveyards in Iran developed martyr sections, called for example, "Paradise of the Martyrs" or "Martyrs' Flower Garden." Most graves are white marble and contain basic information about the deceased. In Tehran's graveyard, small window boxes contain personal effects of the deceased, left by family members.

Outside of these martyrs graveyards and museums, still further images of bloody martyrs appear in the form of murals on walls (Grueber 2012) and street posters across Tehran and Shiraz. They appear in small towns and cities alike. For instance, one street in the town of Marvdasht had a gigantic color poster of each and every local martyr from the town, each a block apart along the main street: serene and often youthful men. In general, posters alternate between the heroic faces of martyrs and images of their wounded bodies. Often, they are accompanied by

[42] One section of the graveyard houses the bodies of the National Front leaders, Islamic liberal intellectuals who opposed the Shah and joined forces with Khomeini. Another area is set aside for the victims of the Shah's secret police and military during the revolution. There is also a section for officials killed in the terrorist bombing of the headquarters of the revolution's Islamic Republic Party in 1981. The largest section is devoted to Iran-Iraq War martyrs.

tulips, also depicted on Iranian flag as a symbol of the martyrs and their regenerative power. Indeed, where the blood of the martyrs fall, they say, tulips grow. For many, the blood of martyrs is literally thought to bring life. Bloody soil from the Iran-Iraq War border is collected by pilgrims and planted in gardens to nourish and purify the bodies and souls of their kin.

In Iran, blood thus denotes, resembles, typifies and/or is constitutive of qualities as diverse as life, death, kinship, animal sacrifice, regeneration, fertility, purity, and impurity. With respect to color, the vivid redness of blood is a frequent object of cultural elaboration and is strongly associated with (divine) power and energy: for instance, a Sufi who radiates power is called "red-mantled" (*sorkhpush*) and a martyr is imaged wearing a bloodstained cloak. Traditional bridal dresses are sometimes blood red, too, denoting life and fertility. Whether the color red derives from spilled blood itself, or is mimetically reproduced through paint or dye, it is striking because of its iconicity and resemblance to blood that flows in the veins or spills from a wound.

The liquidity and fluidity of blood is another site of symbolic elaboration. In its most powerful form, blood is known to run or flow through the veins and spill to the earth. Interestingly, Iran also has a long history of bloodletting practices for illness and spiritual health. (These practices are in the living memory of people in Fars-Abad.) As a token of the same liquidity, it is further seen as sharable, and as generative, not only of kinship but of life itself. Here, it denotes patrilineal and matrilineal relations, carrying with it "marriage exclusions" (*mahramiat*). Blood also has other material qualities such as lightness or heaviness, thinness or thickness, and hotness or coldness that are the object of elaboration. As I noted in Chapter Two, these signify age, gender, family, and temperament. Finally, in post-Revolutionary Iran, both blood and the act of spilling blood have a range of other salient associations including:

martyrdom, (animal) sacrifice, the Imam Husayn (the third grandson of the Prophet), the family of the Prophet, the eleven Martyred Imams, the Revolution, and the Iran-Iraq War.

In these and other contexts, while the value and meaning of blood relies on convention, it is not arbitrarily linked to many of its meanings and associations. Rather, as a ritual and multivocalic symbol, blood often resembles or recalls that which it signifies (Turner 1967:20). In this sense, blood is an icon in the Peircian sense. And although it is a non-arbitrary sign that possesses the character which renders it significant, this resemblance is not natural and would not exist without an interpretant or convention (Lyons 1977:102). In the following, I move from the relationship between patrilineal blood and Iranian citizenship to the intense sacralizing potency of martyrs' blood in contemporary Iran. I show that it is the martyrs' pure intentioned "act" (*amal*) of spilling his own blood that not only connects him to the divine but that sanctifies the nation.

Past Acts of Blood Spilling in the Present: The Sacralizing Efficacy of Martyrs' Blood

A great fanfare had accompanied the war heroes' arrival on the anniversary of the martyrdom of the sixth Imam, the Imam Sadeq, during the Week of the Sacred Defense that commemorates the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88). More than a thousand people filled the street at the outskirts of town to welcome the martyrs to their new burial site. A significant number of revolutionary guard and Fars Province soldiers were also present, including a government band, complete with brass instruments and percussion. The music droned to the rhythmic beating of a Yamaha base drum with the words *Ya Hossein* inscribed on its head. Next to the band stood a table covered in the bloodied black and white scarves (*chafiye*) worn by Revolutionary Guardsmen during the War. Two framed portraits of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, or "the

Imam," and the Supreme Leader, the Ayatollah Khamenei, rested on the blood stained cloth. On the side of the table, several photocopied black and white photos of wounded martyrs complemented a quote from Imam Khomeini. It read: "the Basij is a school of love and witness to the nameless martyrs."[43]

It was nearing dusk when the trailer carrying the bodies of the unknown martyrs finally arrived to the streets of Fars-Abad, heralded by the town "loudspeaker" (*bolandgu*). The truck, like many lorries in the region, had the words *Ya Hossein* written over the engine but was painted red, the color of blood. A cameraman filmed the caravan's arrival for a local news agency and behind him, dozens of young man snapped amateur photos and footage with digital cameras and phones. The trailer stopped briefly as some officials stepped out of the trailer to greet the town leaders, one in a simple suit and one bearded soldier in military uniform. Each greeted and kissed the local Friday Imam and several other town officials.

When the trailer began to move again, its valued cargo became visible: two wooden caskets in succession on a long flat bed, one for each martyr. Each casket was raised on a bed of Iranian flags and was covered in red, green, and white cloth. Each also had two uniformed soldiers standing on either side. Other Iranian flags and inscriptions made a canopy over trailer and parchments on the sides of the vehicle read, *Ya sahebeh al-zamān*, a call to the Twelth and Hidden Imam and an elegy for the dead.

As the procession passed the crowded streets, hundreds of men, and then women, poured behind the trailer on "Imam Khomeini," Fars-Abad's main street that had been recently lined with flags and signs for the occasion. Soldiers and veterans riding on the trailer threw rose water and petals into the crowd. Men and then women rushed in succession to the sides of the vehicle to touch the float or to have a garment or other object rubbed on the martyrs' caskets, thus

[43] "بسیج مدرسه ی عشق و مکتب شاهدان و شهیدان گمنامی است" امام خمینی

imbuing their possessions with the power of the soldiers' blood and sacrifice. In the dusky light, I participated in this act with Nushin, holding on to her arm so as not to lose her and watching as she reached toward the side of the vehicle and touched it with her hand. Periodically, the crowd chanted, "Peace be upon him the Prophet of Muhammad and his descendants." The procession finally ended ten blocks away at the central Islamic meetinghouse. Soldiers unloaded the casket and the Friday Imam addressed a now much smaller crowd. He declared as he would so frequently during several different commemorations of the same martyrs: "Because this martyr is unknown, we the people are his brother, his sister, his mother."

The next day, a Friday, at noon, thousands of townspeople and people from other parts of the Fars Province and the city of Shiraz again came out of their homes in the hot sun to carry the martyrs to their final burial site. They streamed up the hill to the park's overlook and prepared graves, again men came first carrying the actual caskets – then the women. On the top of the hill, women moved to the right and men to the left, surrounding the already prepared flag covered canopy. Under the canopy seven mothers sat with photos of their own martyred sons on plastic folding chairs next to approximately seven uniformed soldiers. Positioned as such, they drew the attention of hundreds of other mourners, their expressions making tangible the emotion of the loss of family – and in this case of the unknown martyrs – the sacrifice of (male) national family members.

A nearby brightly colored sign read: across its ten foot girth "The martyrs (*shahidān*) of the Islamic revolution protected the "face/reputation" (*āberu*) of Islam and of the Qur'an with the price of their blood." Another read, "The martyrs, on this day of nostalgia, rose in defense of the values of Islam." Still more proclaimed: "Peace be upon the martyrs path of virtue and freedom," and "Behold! The blood shrouded tulips in the cradle of martyrs." Other signs depicted the martyrs themselves. In one, the entire sky was the color red and soldiers smiled. Below them a dead martyr lay on the ground, divine light shining on his face. He wore a simple jacket. This imagery, perhaps standard signage from the Preservation of the Heritage and Distribution of Sacred Defense, similarly displayed large amounts of blood and bodies. It encircled the burial sites, making an explicit link between the bloody sacrifice of the martyrs in the Iran-Iraq War and the current commemoration.

After a brief introduction and acknowledgement to the people of Fars-Abad and the commemoration's organizers, the Friday Imam led a standing prayer for the dead (*namaz-e meyeat*), a prayer that includes five repetitions of "God is Great" (Allah u Akbar). Speakers, including the local Friday Imam, thanked the crowd for waiting in the heat, for coming to pay their respects to the martyrs. He said: "The first drop of blood spilt from a martyr purifies sins.

Because their blood is spilled, they are pure. They then go straight to heaven. If you have a problem in your life, it is possible that your problem will be solved [by these martyrs], because of their purity and because they are near to God." His statement thus attested to the special position of these martyrs vis-à-vis God. Indeed, the martyrs were "pure." They had conquered all corruption (both personal and societal) and had found union with the divine.

Historical Context

The commemoration described above occurred during "The Sacred Week of Defense" or the anniversary of the Iran-Iraq War, and in particular, Saddam Hossein's attack on the Iranian border in Bushar. Created by the late founder of the Islamic Revolution, the Imam Khomeini, the week is made salient to people in Fars-Abad through specific prayer gatherings in the local meetinghouse and through national commemorative televised IRIB broadcasts of Iran-Iraq War footage: soldiers marching, gun specs, men in the dirt and trenches, young male soldiers in uniform leaving their mothers, the resounding call, "God is Great," and the fighting or wounded, covered in blood. Biographies and images of the more famous martyrs also fill televised broadcast: Saeed Mostefa Avini, for instance, the martyr they call "Shahid-e Aql Qalam;" or Hosseini Fahmide, a thirteen-year-old boy who sacrificed his life before an Iraqi tank to defend Iran.

Although the commemoration of martyrs and war heroes has long been part of Iran's cultural landscape both in *Muharram* ceremonies and in re-enactments of the Battle of Karbala (Khosronejad 2013), these practices were intensified and increasingly politicized during and immediately after the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. [44] On September 22, 1980, Iraq

[44] While the precise notion of martyrdom in post-Revolutionary Iran stems from the founders of the Revolution, it is important to note that concepts of blood, martyrdom, and sacrifice have had a long history of cultural salience with

attacked Iran, leaving approximately 300,000 dead and 500,000 wounded. Among those fighting were several members of my extended host family. These include my host father, Ahmad and his younger brother Mahmud – now living in Tehran and suffering from a constant reminder of his sacrifice, a chemical warfare related lung condition.

While historians and political scientists argue that geopolitical and territorial issues were the original causes of the war, particularly the boundaries of the Arvand river (Khosronejad 2013: 3; Donovan 2011; King 2007), the focus of the war for Iranians gradually shifted from a fight over territory to one of sacred defense. A famous billboard quoting Khomeini, for example, proclaimed: "Our war is an ideological war which doesn't recognize any geographical or frontier limitations…." He and other influential members of the Islamic regime argued that fighting in the war meant protecting the values (*arzesh-ha*) and beliefs (*bāvar-ha*) of the Imam Husayn in the Battle of Karbala. They positioned the conflict as a struggle between the oppressed and outside, Western-led corrupt, oppressors (Khosronejad 2013:3). Similarly my Basiji interlocutors refer to the Iran-Iraq War as the "Sacred Defense and Imposed War."

Ahmad, my host father, for instance, relates his spiritual and mystical experience of the war:

> The generals were worried. But the Imam [Khomeini] said "go!" And what a victory! I was in the war. There was an old man with me, one hundred and nine of us. Only five hundred meters over there [he pointed] was the other side. The younger ones were afraid. But the old man had a dream. He said don't have any fear. Another soldier said, "why not fear?" The old man responded, "I dreamed that this valley was full of soldiers ready for war. They came from the Imam-e Zaman [the Imam Mahdi, the final and Hidden Imam]. They came to defend us. Because of this, Iran was always victorious in the war. The Hidden Imam sent us power.

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differing interpretations. In the Book of Kings (Shahnameh), written in Siavesh, for instance, is a central figure in the Book of Kings by Ferdowsi. Innocent and chaste, he is ultimately slain for making purported advances on his step mother. When he wrongly dies, it is said that three drops of blood fell on the ground, from which grew a red plant, an anemone. In Iran, this flower is often called "the blood of Seyavash." The phrase, moreover stands for innocence and virtue betrayed. The epic resonates with later martyrdom of the innocent Imam Husayn in 680 and the corresponding attention to his regenerative blood.

Here, Ahmad remembers how he and his surrounding unit overcame their fear and great numbers by attending to the mystical powers of the Hidden Imam, and therefore of God, in the name of Iran's sacred defense. For him, the call for war by the Imam Khomeini was utterly supported by high powers as a spiritual necessity. Indeed, he recalls another occasion during the fighting: "One time we were on the frontline (*sar-e jabheh*) behind a rock and the enemies came not ten feet away. . .[he pauses] They walked right past, Thanks to God. My comrades and I were not even seen." Here, divine intervention is seen as proof of the rightness of the sacred defense and the sacrifice of the martyrs. Indeed, Ahmad remembers friends who passed away as exalted martyrs and smiles at the memory.

The concept of the martyr and its symbolic force in contemporary Iranian politics developed in and through these political-historic events.[45] In the 1960s and 70s, in particular, several key intellectuals (e.g., Morteza Motahhari, Saleh Najafabadi and Ali Shari'ati) drew vivid parallels between Imam Husayn's uprising at the Battle of Karbala and protest against the unjust rule of the Shah, Reza Pahlavi (Flaskerud 2013:25). The Ayatollah Taleqani and the Ayatollah Khomeini furthered this link during the build up to the Revolution, framing their discontent with the Shah in terms of events at the Battle of Karbala. Indeed, in 1979, they and others adapted the already strong cultural salience of the re-enactments (*taziyeh*) and mourning (*azadari*) of Hossein's sacrifice during the month of *Muharram* to help mobilize revolutionary forces. ʿAshuraʾ, the tenth day of *Muharram*, occurred on December 11, 1978 and more than a million people responded to the call to participate in the demonstrations throughout the country

[45] In early Islam, a variety of deaths were seen as a path to martyrdom for Muslims. These included death due to plague, drowning, defense of one's property, childbirth, accidental death while engaged in *jihad*, as well as falling off the mountaintop.

(Flaskerud 2013:25). Khomeini encouraged women and children to march at the head of processions:

> Our brave women, embrace their children and face the machine guns and tanks of the executioners of this regime....Sisters and Brothers be resolute, do not show weakness and lack of courage. You are following the path of the Almighty and his prophets. Your blood is poured on the same road as that of the (martyred) prophets, Imams, and their followers. You join them. This is not an occasion to mourn but to rejoice (quoted in Chelkowski and Dabashi 1979:83).

Speaking to protestors of the regime, Khomeini here makes reference both to an Islamic brother and sisterhood and to the courageous spilling of blood "on the same road as that of the Prophets, Imams, and their followers." In so doing, he links the present day act of spilling of blood in protest of the Shah to a prophetic lineage of religious Muslim belonging and to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn. This message of analogy is reinforced by people in Fars-Abad and elsewhere in Iran via the common slogan: "Everywhere is Karbala, every month is *Muharram*, and every day is ʿAshuraʾ, " a phrase first coined by the intellectual, Ali Shariʾati and adopted later by Khomeini.

Yet the association between spilled blood and the sacrifice of the Imam Husayn is more than a mere analogy, it is a material and transformative act. According to the Ayatollah Motahhari, the blood of the martyr is never wasted. Rather, it "infuses fresh blood into the veins of society" (Dorraj 2001: 511). In addition, the efficacy of spilled blood is exponential: "Every drop [of blood] is turned into hundreds of thousands of drops," a transfusion for a society "suffering from anemia." [Ayatollah Motahhari quoted in Abedi and Legenhausen 1986:136). These statements make a direct link between the blood of the martyrs and the regeneration of (Islamic) society. They imagine the Islamic nation as a single body, wounded or sick, and in need of a transfusion.

But what are the particular traits of martyrs? The late Ayatollah Taleqani (1911-1979) argued that, as a witness (*shahed*), the martyr (*shahid*) sacrifices his life with full consciousness. Similarly, the late Ayatollah Motahhari (1920-1979) defined *shahid* as the individual who sacrifices himself/herself consciously for a cause. Accordingly, martyrdom was so noble an act in Islam that the corpse required no ritual bath and the martyr was also under no obligation to give an account of himself on the Day of Judgment. Similarly, for Shari'ati, martyrdom was a free pass straight to heaven. Martyrdom, intellectuals and theologians argued, was only made possible by inner sincerity, perfection of the soul, and spiritual awareness (*kamal-e ruhi va ma'anavi*). It was thus premised on the idea of spiritual perfection, which has long been theorized by Muslim philosophers. For example, the philosopher Al-Ghazali held that only in a stage of total negation of this world (*fana*) and surrender of the self can one dedicate all his heart, soul and love to God and become capable of seeking reunion with him. Hardship and deprivation, Al-Ghazali argued, are gifts from God that strengthen the spiritual and moral convictions of mankind. Worldly pursuits, in contrast, are worthless compared to the glory that awaits the pious in reunion with God (Dorraj 2001:500).

Martyrdom, as the Revolutionary Guard and Basiji families continue to see it, is thus the ultimate negation of self. Death is not the same as annihilation. Rather, it is a progression toward unity with the divine (*vahdā al-vojud*) (Dorraj 2001:501). And although martyrdom is an act, it is not a matter of choice, but of divine selection (Abedi and Legenhausen 1986). The volunteer soldiers who would become martyrs were described as fighting with their soul and exalted spirit. As one man said: the martyrs "charge the air with courage and zeal, reviving the spirit of valor among those who have lost it." Regardless, to be a martyr is to turn away from all corruption

(and ultimately hell) and to attain unity with the divine. It is to make one's inside and outside the same and have ultimate pure intentions in this life for the more important next.

Sitting in her Ekbatan apartment in Tehran in March of 2010, my tape recorder running, and tea at hand, Parvin, the mother of five children and wife of an injured Iran-Iraq War veteran relates:

> We are indebted to the martyrs. If they had not existed, we would not be. When America occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, if there had not been any martyrs, they would have occupied us. They went [to fight] because of the nation and because of Islam. They chose to be martyrs themselves. It is not a problem. In other words, I don't become sad. Families don't become sad that they gave martyrs. They say that it is because of Islam. They say that it is because of our religion. They say that religion needs martyrs to protect it. War is because of Islam, because of religion, because of the Qur'an. For example, Imam Husayn became a martyr because of Islam. [Parvin, Tehran, 3/23/10]

For Parvin, martyrdom is a choice and a sacrifice "for both the nation and Islam." Moreover, rather than a reason for mourning, the martyrdom of a loved one is necessary for the protection of Islam, in the same way as it had been for the Imam Husayn. Here, the spilling of blood is an ongoing "defense of Islam" that has continued through the American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.

For Parvin, this sacrifice and the martyrs' rank near God is, moreover, sensorial and embodied. On a visit to Tehran's Paradise of Zahra cemetery, Parvin hurried me over to a grave where twenty or so women had gathered,

some men standing behind them. She said, along with the others, "Flower water arises!" (*golāb miyad*!), meaning that the scent of rose water was wafting from the grave. They repeated this as a kind of incantation, crying, and bending over the grave to touch it and pray. Parvin said that the smell of rose water was coming from the grave on its own. She said that someone had washed it with regular water and it had started. They say that the bodies of martyrs do not putrefy in the same way as the bodies of others, that they are corporeally and spiritually whole. Martyrdom, for my interlocutors, is thus confined to the pure of soul.

The Drive to Exhume Buried Martyrs' Bodies Today

Iranian military institutions contend that more than 50,000 bodies of soldiers remain in the former battlefields of Iraq and Iran. During the Iran-Iraq War, a section of the Army of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution called the Martyrs' Evacuation Brigade was created to exhume and collect the bodies of the dead. Some soldiers had "dog tags" made of metal while others went to war, especially early on, without any specific form of identification. Khosronejad (2013:11) relates:

> Volunteer soldiers who went to the fronts to sacrifice their lives had no intention of their bodies being identified after death. When they left their homes and families for the fronts, they had no desire to return, and wished to be martyred. Many of them, like the daughter of the Prophet Mohammad, Fatimeh Zahra, wanted to die as unknown persons, without recognition or even tombs, many also wished for their bodies and remains not to be found but to rest in the battlefields.

The project of finding martyrs who had been left behind began in earnest in 1989 when Col. S.M. Mirbagherzadeh proposed the idea to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei. A committee was formed: the Committee for Finding the Missing Solders (CFMS). In the first expedition, the Committee found 300 unknown martyrs and a public funeral

ceremony was held (Khosronejad 2013:14). But the making of martyrs is also an uncanny and magical process. Khosronejad reports that the Revolutionary Guard's process of finding bodies is itself interwoven with the divine. It involves rituals, appeals and supplications, dreams, and other miracles. Regardless, the exhumation of new martyrs bodies has been central to the making of a sacred (national) landscape (Khosronejad 2013: Material Religion, Durham, UK).

The politics of the making of martyrs is a sensitive subject for researchers who continue to do research in Iran. However, it is clear that although many of the families of martyrs experienced shared bereavement for the eight consecutive years of warfare, government institutions and organizations endeavored to celebrate rather than mourn important martyrs, attacks, and victories. Kaur (2010), for instance, argues that since the Iran-Iraq War, the state has claimed the power to make and unmake martyrs out of corpses. He argues that it has done so in strategic ways, with state officials literally collecting the bodies of unknown martyrs in order to create sainthood for a new generation of Iranian youth. Some reformists and liberals in Iran hold that state officials put the sacred bones of martyrs on the map through the creation of sacred gravesites for the explicit purpose of destabilizing political uprisings in key centers. They argue that unknown martyrs' bodies have been positioned at strategic sites in cities such as Tehran at locations such as universities and public squares, often where Green Movement uprisings have historically occurred, to curb protest and sacralize the landscape. Only secondarily have the bodies of martyrs been positioned at the periphery, in small towns and villages.[46]

[46] In *Unburied Memories* (2013), Khosronejad cautions that interpretations of the war have myriad perspectives, enactments, and responses, some of which benefit religious scholars and state leaders and some of which do not. And further, since the onset of the war, the popularity of martyr "veneration" has ebbed and flowed. Fromenger (2013), for example, reports that, in the 1990s, martyr "worship" significantly declined in popularity and began to disappear from wall paints and other murals. She notes that the era was shaped by a dis-enchantment with the Revolution. According to her, President Ahmadinejad successfully campaigned to make martyr veneration popular again with his campaign to bury martyrs in Tehran and elsewhere.

To conclude this section, the unknown martyrs commemoration in Fars-Abad described above reveals the state's investment in the reburial of martyrs from the Iran-Iraq border. It also reveals the local passion by which the two unknown martyrs were welcomed to their burial ground in Fars-Abad. The sheer numbers of people who attended the ceremony is itself informative. It shows that, for many, the martyrs are not only a political but a sacralizing force. By spilling their blood in a pure intentioned and divinely ordained act (*amal*), they create a connection to the divine. Moreover, acts of exhumation and reburial and prayer surrounding martyrs' bodies similarly bring participants closer to God.

This account is the first example of a town scale martyrs' commemoration and interment to be documented by an ethnographer in Iran. Although other scholars have researched the exhumation of bodies from the border of Iran and Iraq war and their not uncontested re-burial in the key squares and universities in cities such as Tehran and Shiraz (Khosronejad 2013), my research shows how unknown martyrs are increasingly being buried in the smaller towns and counties of Iran to further sacralize the national landscape. Indeed, during my travels throughout several small towns in Fars, I noted not only the existence of frequent "known" martyrs' cemeteries, but an increasing compendium of "unknown" martyrs' tombs, many of which were also placed on hills or overlooks. The unknown martyrs brought to Fars-Abad were brought under the auspices of the same organization that buries martyrs in Tehran: the Foundation for the Preservation of the Heritage and Distribution of Sacred Defense. In the following, I draw from the above commemoration and other conversations with members of my extended host family to explore how martyrdom is not only made meaningful through its sacralizing power, but also in reference to kinship.

Martyrs as (National) Kin in Fars-Abad

"Because the martyr is unknown, we are his brother, his sister, his mother." Repeated again here, the words of the Friday Imam at the commemoration of unknown martyrs explicitly called on townspeople to relate to unknown martyrs as they would their own kin. Indeed, in his speech, the local Imam made repeated claims that the two martyrs to be buried were unknown. This classification was a political act: after all, as "unknown," the two martyrs, would have unique potency for current and future town commemorations. By means of their very unknown-ness, their bodies, blood, and sacrifices would be made available to all. Townspeople I spoke with said, "What if he were my son?" "What if he were my father?": questions that were viscerally real to those who had actually lost kin and made imaginable to those who had not.

In Fars-Abad, most argued that kinship with a martyr is a blessing. Nushin, for instance, told me with pride that she did not prevent her husband, Ahmad, from going to war; although others had sought to prevent their husbands, an immoral act of selfishness. On another occasion, as we walked past the town mosque, now under construction, she told me how a local *sayyed*, or descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, had almost – but not quite – been prevented from becoming a martyr by his sister. "His sister didn't want him to go to war," Nushin said. "She [the sister] said, 'you will become a martyr (*shahid*). You don't yet have any kids.' But the *sayyed* went to the local mosque and while he was there, he saw the Imam Mahdi (in occultation) who told him that he should go. He went and became a martyr." Nushin's tone was full of awe at the *sayyed's* encounter with the Imam Mahdi, so near to her home and at the local mosque she had grown up attending. She also respected the self-sacrifice of the *sayyed*, explaining that he had somehow overcome his sister's mundane desires and even her concern for his prophetic progeny to sacrifice his life in defense of Islam.

Indeed, Nushin and other women I spoke with in Fars-Abad contended that "right" and "faithful" mothers and sisters urged their male kin to take part in the defense of the sacred motherland. They cast those who did not want to part with their husbands or brothers during the Iran-Iraq war as morally inferior. Very often, and especially during the Week of Sacred Defense, the subject of the "pure" and "good" martyrs would come up in conversation – such as after prayer or during food preparation. Sometimes, these iterations were evoked by something on the television. Sometimes they followed prayer or a particular birth or mourning day of an Imam. For members of my host family, however, they were recalled more commonly by town places, the local mosque, for instance or a tombstone of a loved martyr.

Many women I spoke with further claimed a spiritual connection with their martyred fathers or husbands. As one Tehrani mother explained, "I sense his [my brothers'] presence and often dream of him. One night, I dreamed he brought me water, and said drink!" Her dream, as she explained when I asked, evokes the thirst of the Imam Husayn in the Battle of Karbala. Nushin said that those who have such dreams are pure of heart. Nevertheless, these stories reveal the ongoing spiritual ties experienced by many women to their deceased martyred kin.

In contrast, drawing on fieldwork in Tehran, Saeidi found that many of her interlocutors were skeptical about state depictions and the "use" of their martyred kin as propaganda (2009:116). Some of the women she interviewed had begun foundations to publically memorialize martyrs in their own way, rather than employ the frame guided by the state. Most female interviewees in Fars-Abad, however, did not outwardly exhibit this skepticism. Indeed, it seemed that many strategically embraced the moral regulations expected of martyrs' families to become exemplary citizens, made visible in acts such as always donning the black chador,

wearing simple dress, giving to the poor, cooking votive meals for townspeople, going on pilgrimage, and wearing very little make up.

It is important to note that, with concern to the subject of martyrdom, my Basiji family only guided me to interviews with select individuals. For instance, when one family member suggested that I meet a certain local mother of a martyr, my host father said with concern: "You don't want to speak with her; she will give you a wrong impression." He also carefully went over my questions concerning martyrs, finally approving them. Needless to say, I never interviewed that particular woman. This censorship limited whom I was able to talk to and what I was able to ask them, but it is also revealing. It shows my host father's concern that I would put not only myself, but his family in danger with the state if I asked certain questions of certain people. Yet, even this points to the possibility of more critical perspectives within Fars-Abad.

During the multi-part commemoration of the unknown soldiers in Fars-Abad described above, a rumor began. At first it seemed benign: had one of the "unknown" martyrs actually been identified? A mother, people said, had claimed that one of the "unknown" martyrs was indeed her "known" son. There was some talk of DNA evidence. When the burial ceremony came, the women I stood with pointed to a mother in the crowd. "She is here!" they whispered, although I never spotted her. Afterwards, some people said that the official had ignored the mother's claims in their efforts to keep the martyr's status "unknown." Others said that the identity of the martyr had not been proven. But why did officials attempt to maintain the martyrs' unknown status so diligently? The Friday Imam's continued talk of the martyr as a common kinsman provides a hint. If a martyr is truly unknown, he can be kin of all citizens and his burial is somehow more important and more representative. In contrast, if a martyr is known, the rights to mourn or praise him belong most centrally to only his own family.

Female Martyrs? Commemorating the Martyrdom of Fatimeh Al-Zahra in Fars-Abad

Thus far, we have seen that concepts of citizenship, fighting and martyrdom are largely gendered male in Iran. While men give their lives and blood to protect Islam and nation, women sacrifice their loved ones (Aghaie 2004:120). The same theme appears in early narratives and depictions of the Battle of Karbala: while men are the actual ones being martyred, women embody the tragedy by becoming mourners or spokespersons of the Imam Husayn's message, (Aghaie 2004:121).

During the Islamic Revolution, this paradigm was re-enacted when "exemplary" women contributed to the Revolution by donning the black chador (Moallem 1992:29); and, as I have shown above, by willingly sacrificing their sons and husbands for the war effort. Indeed, a popular slogan from that era decried: "My sister your veil is more contentious than my blood" (quoted in Moallem 1992:31). Here, although many women fought alongside the Revolutionary Guard and trained in military camps (Neshat 2004:31; Reeves 1989:132) during the Iran-Iraq War, blood did not come to symbolize the female contribution during the Iran-Iraq War in the same way that it did for men. The pure and (re)generative blood of martyrs was instead associated with the image of the martyred son or husband citizen.

Despite the emphasis on male blood, female martyrs are increasingly important in contemporary Iran and cannot be entirely discounted. The most important female martyr in Shi'ism is Fatimeh Zahra (al Zahra or "the radiant one"). Fatimeh Zahra is the only daughter of the Prophet and the sole link between the Prophet and the Twelve Imams. As such, she is frequently called the "mother of the Imams" and both she and her descendants are said to be immaculate and sinless (*ma'sum*). She is also depicted in the famous five-fingered hand of the family of the Prophet (*ahl-e beyt*), known literally as the "five bodies" (*panjtan*).

According to most Shi'i exegesis, Fatimeh's martyrdom occurred amidst the struggle over the succession of the Prophet. Umar, angry because Ali had publicly refused to swear him allegiance to him, pushed open the door to Fatimeh's home violently, pushing it into Fatima's side and breaking her ribs (Fischer 1980: 14). Fatimeh, who was pregnant, subsequently delivered a stillborn, a (martyred) son called Ehsan. She is thought to have died later of the injuries she had sustained and is recognized to have died of these injuries as a martyr. She spent her last days mourning the death of her father, the Prophet: and she is said to eternally weep for the death of her two sons, the Imams Hossein and Hassan.

In his influential revolutionary text, "Fatimeh is Fatimeh," published in the 1960s intellectual Ali Shari'ati argued that Fatimeh is more than the link between the Prophet and Ali and the inheritor of the mission that is passed down from Adam through the imams. Rather, she was willing, he argued, to take on the struggle of justice against the oppression and corruption.[47] Here, the answer for the Muslim woman is to "return" to what he termed the revolutionary role model of Fatimeh (Shari'ati 1981:16).

Actual practices of mourning Fatimeh's martyrdom in small town Iran resemble those for her son the Imam Husayn and similarly emphasize her spilled blood. In Fars-Abad, for instance, on the anniversary of Fatimeh's martyrdom, Maryam and I met Nushin, Fatimeh, and her infant daughter Seti at their paternal aunt's house. Having spent the evening shopping, we walked together to the building called locally, "the Qur'an," a religious educational center in the middle of town. The enclosed outdoor grounds in front of the main building and stage were packed, with nearly 400 women and 200 men in attendance. As we searched for seats, women walked around

[47] She, along with her daughter, and Hoseyn's sister Zeynab or the "Lioness of Karbala," he and others argued, are role models for everyone, especially women. Since the Revolution, Zeynab is revered not only for her simple living and piety in faith, but also for her courage, generosity and selflessness as well as her work as a scholar and educator (see Eshtehardi (1997) *Hezrat-e Zeynab, payam resan-e shahidan-e Karbala*).

handing out candies, tea, and cupcakes as vows (*nazri*). Nushin gave me some recently purchased toffee to hand out with Maryam, which we distributed until our plastic bags were nearly empty.

When Maryam and I finally sat down, a prayer leader began to lead constituents in lamentation, repeating the word "mother" (*mādar*) in reference to Fatimeh and to the large number of women in attendance. Behind him, black parchments (*siyapoosh*) were inscribed with verses of the Qur'an: "*Ya Fatimeh*" in blood red ink. These parchments framed the space as a site of mourning. The stage itself was designed to resemble Fatimeh's home: the place where Omar had intruded upon her, broken her rib, and slain her unborn child. Most strikingly, a wooden door stood at the center of the stage, spattered with blood red paint that included garbled letters, the tail end of which read "killed" (I could not make out the rest). From the men's side of the courtyard, the prayer leader called sadly: "I saw him [Omar] come in the middle of night… I saw what happened, the baby was killed, sent to martyrdom. [Fatimeh] Zahra, how she suffered… Zahra, poor Zahra, Zahra, my dear. " His expression, "I saw," is typical for these kinds of commemorations. They position the prayer leader as an onlooker at the (timeless) event and therefore increase its re-enacted and viscerally remembered intensity for those gathered. As he spoke, Nushin, sitting beside me cried, rocking back and forth. Many women around us moved back and forth, tears in their eyes, some sobbing loudly. Along with the prayer leader, they repeated the *salavat: "*Peace be upon Mohammad and his descendants." At the end of the ceremony, the men stood in a circle, beating their chests to the rhythms of the prayer leader. The

women also beat their chests but stayed seated.

After the commemoration, Nushin, and her two daughters, Maryam and Fatimeh, began discussing female martyrs in Iran. They both emphatically emphasized the presence of female martyrs and wanted me to recognize that during the Iran-Iraq War many women had *also* joined the war effort both as nurses and auxiliaries.

Moreover, blood is emphasized in such commemorations of Fatimeh's martyrdom. Decorations and parchments are marked with red paint and people partake in similar exercises of rhythmic chest beating (although in general mourning ceremonies for her are much smaller, rare involving street processions).

Very recently, attention to female martyrdom and female sacrificial blood more generally has increased in Iran. In 2003, for instance, World Islamic Head Quarters for Remembering Martyrs was founded. The organization is based on the heroic model of Palestinian women martyrs. In 2008, a critical article in the Iranian women's magazine, *Zanān*, entitled "They die in order to kill" (*koshte mishavand ta bokooshand*), which resulted in the closure of the magazine,

the female Secretary General of the organization said that the number of the female martyrdom seekers in Iran is about one third of the total martyrdom seekers in the country. The Secretary General also argued that, "After the U.S. invasion of Najaf and Karbala and their mistreatment of the holy Shi'i sites, we decided to recruit and enroll (female) volunteers for martyrdom to show the discontent of the Iranian people against those who threaten material and spiritual sources of the Islamic world." The women associated with the organization proclaim their willingness to walk in the footsteps of Palestinian female martyrs and such as Vafa Idris, one of the first and most famous Palestinian female suicide bombers (Fazaeli 2009).[48]

The gendering of martyrs' blood is thus dynamic and shifting in contemporary Iran. While it certainly has a masculine tone, it no longer is solely male. Moreover, more than mourners or spokespersons of tragedy, pro-Regime female martyrs have been – at least to some degree – legitimized by the state.

Epilogue: Alternate Discourses through Blood

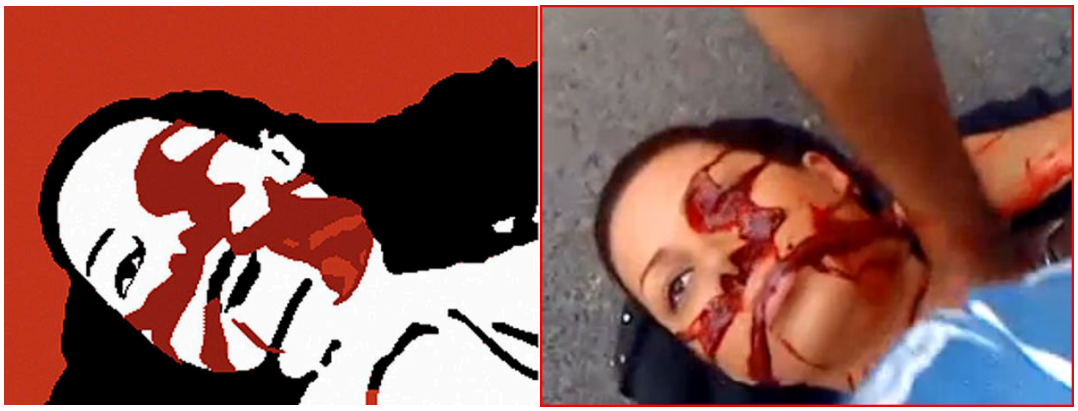
> It's the month, the month of blood (*mah, mah-e khun ast*)
> *Sayyed* Ali (Khamenei) will be toppled. (*sayyed ali dar negun ast*).
> (a slogan chanted in Qom during the funeral marches for the Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri 12/21/2009 quoted in Fischer 2010)

It is not only the supporters of the Islamic Republic that have called on the spilled blood of martyrs and the Battle of Karbala. According to Dorraj (2001), the Mujahadin-e Khalq organization, who were being executed by the Shah's regime, sang the song "from our blood carnations will grow" in the spirit of the myth of Siavaesh in their efforts to overthrow the Pahlavis. Siavaesh, importantly, is a central figure in the Book of Kings, a long epic poem

[48] For more information, see Iranian scholar Roja Fazaeli's talk "Humiliated Men and Martyred Women: The War on Terror's Implication on Redefining Middle-Eastern Masculinities" at Emory University. Available online @ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ES33sVoG_KM.

written between c. 977 and 110AD by Ferdowsi. Innocent and chaste, he is ultimately slain for making purported advances on his stepmother. When he wrongly dies, it is said that three drops of blood fell on the ground, from which grew a red plant, an anemone. In Iran, this flower is often called "the blood of Siavash." The phrase, moreover, continues to stand for innocence and virtue betrayed. The epic resonates with the martyrdom of the innocent Imam Husayn in c. 680 AD and the corresponding attention to his regenerative blood. The Mujahadin saw the deaths of their group as a necessary drop in a flood that would ultimately cleanse the moral filth by washing away the Shah's regime (Dorraj 2001: 512).

More recently, others have appropriated the symbolic power of martyrs' blood. The prolific images of the slain Nedda Agha-Soltan, the innocent bystander killed during a Green Movement election protest in June of 2009, provide one salient example. In the widely circulated photos and videos, her blood pours onto the street.



Other more recent examples include blood covered protest t-shirts of former Islamic government protesters and symbolic blood handprints on protesters' signs, digital and paper, indexing those who died in 2009 Green Movement protests.

When the Ayatollah Montazeri[49] died on December 20, 2009, the third day of the month of Muharram, the month when the Imam Husayn was killed in the Battle of Karbala, the seventh day anniversary of his death (*ruz-e seven*) fell suggestively on Sunday, the 10th of ʿAshuraʾ, the same day that Hossein was killed. At his funeral, protesters called Montazeri by Hossein's title, "the wronged one, the oppressed one" (*mazlum*). According to Fischer, when Montazeri was later buried inside the shrine of Fatimeh, the sister of the eighth Imam Reza (*Hazrat-e Masoomeh*), the crowd chanted "*Ya Hazrat-e Masoomeh*!, *Ya Montazeri Massomeh*!" an epithet denoting a pure soul and usually reserved for the Imams (and Fatimeh Zahra). They thus evoked

[49] Montazeri was both a critic and a supporter of the Islamic Republic. He helped develop the idea of *velayat-e figh* and was a student in Khomeini's classes on Gnostic ethics. However, he was also critical of the imprisonment and persecution of leftists and in a speech in 1997, he pointed out that the Supreme Leader of Iran, Khamenei was not even a "guide for imitation" (*marja'e taqlid*) whose knowledge of the law was secure enough for him to be followed by ordinary Muslims. He mocked him as a mere child (*bache*). Following these comments Montazeri was put under house arrest between 1997-2003 but was known to his supporters for his honesty.

the memory of the Imam Husayn's martyrdom and construed Montazeri as a pure soul who had been wronged.

Such debates reveal conflicted opinions in Iran concerning the right path to closeness with God. Indeed, there is tremendous diversity among pious Muslims with this regard. Yet despite their differences, many powerful groups in Iranian history have drawn in similar ways from the story of the Battle of Karbala and the sacrificial power of martyrs' blood as against what they consider to be outside corruption or oppression.

Conclusion

As Schneider (1969) has argued in relation to the U.S., the same cultural understandings that underlie kinship can similarly underlie the nation. By exploring how martyrs bodies and blood are conceived by Basiji families in Fars-Abad, this chapter has described a situation in which the substances and processes of kinship-making (e.g., agnatic blood) form a basis for nation making. In particular, I have shown how the patrilineal family (and its basis of agnatic blood) is mapped onto the model of Iranian citizenship. However, I have also argued that what is occurring in the Islamic Republic extends beyond mere nation making in the traditional sense. Rather, the state and its supporters explicitly endeavor to make a *religious* (Islamic) nation, oriented toward the divine. Here, bodily substances such as blood evoke, not only kinship, but also God. Spilled martyrs' blood in particular has the power to sanctify national territory, persons, and communities by purifying them and connecting them with Allah. Specifically, the blood of martyrs helps purify and inner national core, both with respect to its citizens and its soil.

This chapter has thus extended Schneider's argument concerning the interrelation of kinship and nation to the realm of religion by exploring how naturalized, biogenetic substances

such as blood can organize hierarchies of spiritual relationships between Muslim citizens and between citizens and the divine. Here, citizenship is not only gendered but is dependent on religious affiliation and status, with the Shi'i *sayyed,* martyr, and war veteran having particularly privileged ranks. The martyr (who spills his blood for God and nation), however, is placed at the pinnacle of a scale of closeness to God through his pure intentioned act (*amal*) of self-sacrifice. His blood constitutes purity: both as material and metaphor. Finally, this chapter provides a glimpse at the increasing potency of female sacrificial blood in contemporary Iran.

Chapter 5

A RETURN TO A SHI'I BROTHER AND SISTERHOOD CREATING AN ISLAMIC NATION THROUGH MORAL FOOD PRACTICES

On the anniversary of the martyrdom of the sixth Imam, Imam Sadeq, two unknown martyrs (*shahid*) from the Iran-Iraq border were brought to Fars Abad, the small Iranian town where I was conducting research, to be buried and memorialized. For town officials and for many locals, the arrival of these soldiers marked a great honor in the history of the town, which had itself given the exact number of 42 martyrs to the Iran-Iraq War. More than a thousand townspeople arrived to welcome the martyrs to their new home and to participate in several prayers that were held at their dusty burial site on a hill. At dusk the next Friday, the local Imam introduced a prayer giver (*mado'a*) who completed the entire fifteen minutes of "The Supplication of Komeyl" (*do'a komeyl*) with a crowd of several hundred men and women in attendance. Separated by gender, we sat on mats on the ground and recited the supplication for "the protection against the evil of enemies and for the forgiveness of sins" [Nushin 9/6/2010]. The local Friday Imam concluded the prayer by asking participants to recall the Battle of Karbala and the struggle between the Imam Husayn – whose martyrdom is symbolic of inner Shi'i Islamic purity and faith – and the corrupting forces of outside enemies, whether in the form of the evil Yazid or as contemporary (Western) imperialist, colonial powers.

After the recitation of the prayer and the accompanying speeches by town representatives, uniformed male soldiers in attendance distributed disposable plates of blessed lentil rice, cups of yogurt, and drink boxes to all in attendance from large metal vats they had set up on the outskirts of the gathering. The food, which each participant consumed, was paid for by

a para-government Martyrs Foundation. Later, the group of women friends and family I sat with discussed the offerings. The lentil rice, they said, was "simple/pure" (*sādeh*), "traditional" (*sonati*), and "blessed" (*tabarrok*). They explained that the choice of food was motivated by the purity and simplicity of the family of the Prophet. But they were not alone in drawing an analogy between the prayer gathering and the family of the Prophet or to a wider sense of national family. Indeed, as we ate, the Friday Imam declared: "Because this martyr is unknown, we the people are his brother, his sister, his mother." In so doing, he drew on the commensal power of holy food and prayer to bond the participants as kindred citizens: as pure brothers and sisters of Islam actively confronting outside corruption.

The current chapter explores how Iranians employ food to help articulate, shape, and contest the making of an Islamic nation (*mellat*). In Chapter Three, I argued that the channeling and obstruction of certain foods is a matter of vigilance in ensuring the inner purity of the household and the moral family. I now show that the nation is similarly shaped by the imperative to create and contain inner purity within its borders. Indeed, as an *Islamic* Republic, the Iranian nation-state depends on the continual regeneration of a pure, Islamic interior composed of the right kind of "virtuous" (*ba taqva*) brother and sister citizenry. This chapter foregrounds an analysis of food and food ritual not only because of its unique ability to forge, circulate, and internalize these "right" virtues and qualities into and within the nation, but also because of the powerful analogy between food sharing at home and food sharing for the nation. I suggest that, for my interlocutors, food sharing works in tandem with other means of making (national) religious kinship in Iran, such as prayer and martyrs' sacrifice, to relate Muslim citizens both to each other and to the divine.

This chapter has two parts. In the first, I examine broadly how food provides a technology of spirituality and nation-making, helping to forge a particular kind of Islamic nation/ Muslim Community. As I note in the introduction, the concept of "lawfulness" or "religious permissibility" is particularly salient in making a distinction between the pure national interior and the corrupt outside other. This chapter therefore attends to the channeling, feeding, and eating of such halal food, within and across national borders as a project of nation building. Halal*,* however*,* has application far beyond the religious or legal sanctioning of particular foods. Indeed, an entire range of acts may be classified as halal or its conceptual opposite, *harām* or "unlawful." These include: diet, sexual relations, daily habits and customs, marriage and divorce, family relations, public morality, occupation and income, and types of entertainment.[50] Extending this further, my Shi'i family and friends held that halal acts are akin to correct spiritual "sustenance" (*ruzi*). They linked the understandings and debates surrounding the notion of halal to Islamic purity, morality, and to life itself.

This chapter thus explores how the feeding and eating of food intersects with this broader sense of halal as both an Islamic legal code and as a national sensibility for "correct" (*dorost*) spiritual sustenance.[51] In addition, I examine how the interrelated halal concepts of "correct" eating or acting intersect with other valued food categories such as "Iranian cuisine," "local food, "traditional food," or "holy food" (*gazā-ye moqaddas*). In particular, I address the ever-present

[50]According to scholar of Islamic legal theory Schacht (1966), there are two categories that divide human acts and transactions. The first is a set of declaratory rules that refers to the validity or nullity of an act of transaction. The second represents five categories through which human acts are evaluated with reference to their spiritual effects (e.g., reward or punishment). In Arabic, these include 1) "obligatory acts which in their omission incur a divine punishment" (*wājeb*); 2) "recommended acts which earn reward" (*mandub*); "neutral acts with neither sanction nor reward" (*mobāh*); disapproved acts which earn divine reward when omitted but are not punished; and 5) "forbidden acts which incur punishment" (*mahzur*).

[51] Here, not only does the idea of a *halal* nation, guided and forged by Islam, help distinguish Iran from outside others; it is also a key element in distinguishing the "spiritually vacant" pre-Revolutionary era (e.g., as manifest in the Shah's Western modernization policies) from post-Revolutionary Iran.

incursion of "unlawful" (*harām*), "foreign" (*khāreji*), or "fast food" and its association with the *harām*: incorrect, bad behavior, and sinning – symptoms of national moral decay.

The second part of the chapter specifically attends to the national/ritual acts of feeding and cooking that circulate the right kind of halal, holy or blessed, food substance among citizens. In these rituals, which are variously performed by families in towns, para-government foundations, or the state itself, Shi'i Iranian participants pray, attend speeches, and share vast quantities of votive food, channeling religious merit (*savab*) and blessing toward fellow brother and sister Muslims. Here, acts of food sharing bring citizens closer to the divine and forge kindred citizenship. They also often explicitly interweave the spiritual shaping of the Muslim community and the state. The opening vignette provides one example of a town organized ritual in which the state literally sponsors the sharing of votive food. Yet in other national/ritual commemorations of the birth and death days of Shi'i Imams, Iranian men and women dedicate votive soup, lemon drink, and rice to Shi'i saints and distribute these offerings from kiosks, cars, or giant vats in graveyards, public squares, private homes, sidewalks and mosques to passersby whom they call Islamic "brothers and sisters" for very different reasons. This chapter examines why, for whom, and with what resources such distribution of votive food is accomplished by different types of participants (e.g., families, townspeople, and the state). It further seeks to address how such rituals determine who is included within or excluded from the pure, divine, national interior.

Although this chapter makes use of discourses and debates in Iranian popular media, websites, and blogs, it draws mainly from research among the conservative Basiji Iranians who composed my extended host friends and family living in the town of Farsi-Abad and in Tehran. I further employ research conducted on national Islamic public rituals such as martyrs'

commemorations, national graveyards, local pilgrimage to the tombs of Shi'i Saints, the birthdays and death days of Imams, Ramadan, and Muharram – as these Islamic national events occurred both in Farsi-Abad in the cities of Shiraz and Tehran. I argue that Islamic/national food practices make visible the hierarchical superiority of halal inside qualities over outside, *harām* ones, as well as the tangible force of these concepts in the daily lives of my interviewees

Theoretical Directions

According to anthropologist David Sutton, "Food does not simply symbolize social bonds and divisions; it participates in their creation and re-creation" (Sutton 2001:102). Scholars of the anthropology of food have addressed how "foodways" – or behaviors and beliefs surrounding the production, distribution, and consumption of food – are linked to personal and group identity, hierarchy, and inclusion and exclusion (Counihan 1999; Goody 1982; Douglas 1972; Appadurai 1989). They have further usefully illustrated the role of food in nation-making (Mintz and Dubois 2002; Wilk 2006; Mintz 1996; Appadurai 1988) and have explored how the nation is created through the invention, standardization, and valorization of a "national cuisine" (Hobsbawm 1988; Anderson 1983; Allison 1997; Holtzman 2006). The current chapter builds on these theoretical insights by exploring how food practices intersect with Iranian concepts of nation making and citizenship. It departs from these analyses, however, in its attendance to the making of a specifically religious nation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, a project that blurs the making of a religious community and a nation-state. As a result, I newly address how spiritually oriented Islamic and "lawful" (*halal*) aesthetics of feeding and eating are linked to the creation of moral Iranian citizens.

In addition, this chapter builds on studies of broad scale community making, kinship, food, and spirituality (Khare 1992; Sered 1988; Ohnuki-Tierney 1994; Dodson and Gilkes 1995). Dodson and Gilkes (1995), for instance, describe how particular Baptist African American church members seek to shape a Church nation of brothers and sisters through the sharing of divine food. Church members, they say, mail blessed cabbages to constituents, cook and share large communal church meals, and emphasize "gospel chicken" as a particularly spiritual meat. Similarly, Sered (1988) briefly notes how Sephardic Jews differentiate Jews from non-Jews (Arabs), through their use of kosher food practices (*kashrut*). The first part of this chapter similarly explores how halal food practices help distinguish the Muslim community (umma) and Islamic nation of Iran from outside others. However, I extend these analyses by exploring how food can also contribute to the formation of (national) religious kinship. I argue that food sanctioned by Islam not only builds the right kind of substance and spiritual qualities in Iranian citizens, but also carries divine blessing to Muslim brother and sister citizen, forging national, spiritual affinities between citizens.

Finally, this chapter engages research on feasting and fasting in Islam. Studies of public and pious feeding and fasting in the Muslim world have shown that food is critical to the establishment of hierarchy on feast days (Meneley 1996), to the performance of Islamic piety (Torab 2007), and to the enactment/development of morality and social responsibility in the form of food charity (Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2005). Other studies show that food is crucial to the ritual transformation of people in contexts such as Ramadan, life cycle rituals, or charity (Tapper and Tapper 1986; Bonte et al. 1999; Bowen 1993). Yet although researchers have noted the strong link between such food practices and Islamic ritual, they have not yet fully addressed how public and pious food sharing may shape national ritual contexts, forging a particular kind of (Shi'i

Muslim) citizen or religious kinship. My research indicates that the ceremonial inter-layering of blessed, halal food, war martyrs, food sharing, and state representation is critical for fashioning Iranian citizens. It further investigates how the shared blessing (in)corporated through votive food offerings, prayer, and pilgrimage to the tombs of specifically Shi'i Imams helps to demarcate Shi'i Iranian citizens from non-Shi'i Muslims and foreigners.

Making a Moral Nation

In his book, *Gharbzadegi* [Westernstruckness], Iranian sociologist Jalal Al-e Ahmad critiques the increasing moral fragmentation of 1960s Iranian society as one aspect of what he calls Westernstruckness – a disease of the West symptomized by the influx of the machine, economic dependence on the West, rampant urbanization, and "empty" or "soulless" Western mimicry. In one part of his book, he writes:

> Such a chronically starved individual [meaning a Westernized Iranian], who's eaten bread and *dugh* [an Iranian yogurt drink] all his life in the village, once he's filled his stomach with a sandwich in the city, will go to barber and the tailor, then for a shoe shine, and then to whorehouse…Mosques and alters have been forgotten…an entire city can't be fed on donated American powdered milk or Australian wheat (Al-e Ahmad 1962:76).

It is no coincidence that Al-e Ahmad brings up the Western style sandwich "from the city" as one catalyst of Iranian moral decay. The *sandvich-e kalbas*, in particular, an imported sandwich not unlike the American "sub" or "grinder" became a favored lunch for a whole generation of teenagers in the 1960s and continues to be popular today among young people: an easy form of *fast food*, as they call it in conversational Farsi. For Al-e Ahmad, the consumption of such processed, Western sandwiches signaled the first soulless stage of moral corruption and was a harbinger of the whorehouse.

Al-e Ahmad's negative assessment of Western hegemony and its disease-like qualities is representative of an entire generation of pre-revolution nativist intellectuals who critiqued the economic power imbalance of East and West and who sought an Islamic solution to the Western puppet, Mohammad-Reza Shah's "superficial" modernization programs in the 1960s and 70s (Gheissari 1998). As a remedy for Western hegemony, he and other nativist scholars such as Ali Shari'ati, Daryush Sahyegan, and Ehsan Naraghi argued for a return to "purity" and to the "authentic" (*esalat*) Shi'i Islamic spirituality that they saw as particular to Iran (see Boroujerdi 1996).[52] Many of these scholars further argued that this Iranian citizenry should specifically be modeled on the lives, relationships, and virtues of the family of the Prophet (Shari'ati 1981; Moallem 2005). The Ayatollah Khomeini built on this framing of a pure Islamic Iranian self against a corrupt outside in his seminal text *Islamic Government* (1971)[53]: "Even if they [the imperialist countries] go to Mars or to the Milky Way…they will not experience happiness (*sa'adat*), moral virtue (*fazayel-e akhlaq*), and spiritual exaltation (*ta'laye-ruhani*)" (Persian edition, my translation 1971).

Khomeini joins other leading clerics and revolutionaries here and elsewhere in clearly distinguishing the spiritual and "moral virtue" (*fazayel-e akhlaq*) of the revolution – and later the Islamic Republic of Iran – from the perceived materialism and spiritual vacancy of "outside" imperialist countries, which he compares to the Westernized Shah and ultimately to the evil Yazid in the Battle of Karbala.

In earlier chapters, I addressed the distinction Iranians make between the inner space (*andaruni*) of the household (the location of inner purity) and the outside of the household

[52] In some senses, these thinkers can be described as nativists who attempted to delegitimize and decenter Western modes of knowledge and thus counter Eurocentrism (Williams and Chrisman 1994:14).
[53] Incidentally, this is also the text in which he makes his public case for the "guardianship of the jurist" (*vilāyat-i faqīh*), the founding principle of the Islamic Republic.

(*biruni*) (the location of possible corruption) (see also Khosravi 2009:46). I further suggested that this understanding of struggle between inner purity and outer corruption frames the nation in the post-Revolutionary Islamic Republic.[54] In addition, I related that purity (*pāki*) is seen to contrast with impurity (*najesiat*) and is associated with the idea of "correct Islam" (*rast-dini*) as well as with order and morality (*'aql*), water, light, spirituality, the right hand, and male agnatic blood. Impurity, in contrast, is linked to un-Islamic novelty (*bed'at*), uncontrolled passion (*nafs*), female menstruation, the left, dirt, materiality, and darkness (see also Torab 2006: 14). I now emphasize that the struggle between such pure forces of the inside and the impure, corruption of the outside is central to how many diverse contemporary Shi'i Iranians – whether reformist, feminist, or conservative – conceptualize the history of their civilization. The Battle of Karbala, in particular, in which the pure Imam Husayn and grandson of the Prophet was martyred at the hands of the evil (outside force) Yazid, is widely regarded as a meta-historical paradigm for and of the post-Revolutionary Islamic Republic (Khosronejad 2013; Beeman 2005; Aghaie 2004); and both critics and supporters of the current regime have made use of its popular efficacy as a source of social mobilization.

National debate continues to revolve around the imperative to purify the Islamic Republic or what ethno-historian of Iran Afsaneh Najmabadi has termed "the moral purification of a corrupt society" (1987:203). Today, this imperative is manifest as a continual "reshaping of morals" (Khosravi 2008): a directive to "engineer goodness" by helping the country achieve an "inner purity" (*safā-ye baten*). This endeavor further requires the vigilant warding off of satanic, Western temptations and impurities of many types and forms (Khosravi 2009:23). Similarly, in the political climate of Fars-Abad, the local Friday Imam produces his own version of this

[54] The "Iranian nation," or *mellat-e Iran*, in Farsi does not distinguish between the nation and the nation's people, nor is it a secular term as English speakers might expect. Indeed, *mellat* can interchange with the words "umma or ummat" to convey a community of Muslim believers (e.g., the phrase "*mellat*-e *musalman*") (Ludwig 1999: 192).

imperative for moral purification. At the "Shi'i gathering house," he regularly warns townspeople to fear hell even as they are to take faith in Allah's bounty – and, in particular, to love the Imam ʿAli whose spiritual light will guide them. He then frames acceptance of this spiritual guidance in the context of the explicit defense of state and Islam. For example, in one sermon he related: "Many times, over the last thirty years this Islamic people/nation (*mellat*) have shown willingness to defend the worth of the revolution and army and to take protection in the leader and in the blood of its martyrs. [In so doing they] have respected the great ones of their religion" (6-1-2010). His speeches are framed by contemporary political events and circumstances. In the same speech, for instance, he criticized the actions of the Americans, French, English, and Israelis for shooting at the humanitarian ships near Gaza as well as for their efforts to control Iran through sanctions. He then asked prayer participants to help make the nation as independent from foreign powers as possible.

Finally, the imperative for national moral purification is inflected by the discourse of Iran as a motherland in need of defense by her brother and sister children.[55] As an Iran-Iraq War veteran – now a gardener – said to me in Fars-Abad, "Iran is like a mother. It is our Iran" (*Iran ein-e madar ast. Iran-e ma ast*). In the concluding chapter, I will address how this imperative is linked to the image of a moral Shi'i Muslim family and to the effort to link citizenship with the protocols of Muslim brother and sisterhood.

It is important to note that the majority of women and men discussed in this chapter, as supporters of the Imam Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution (1979), and as family members of

[55] A diverse collection of scholarship has tackled the intersection of gender, nation, and Islam (Mernissi, Kandyoti, Moallem. Lughod, Hoodfar, Tavakoli). These scholars point to the significance of framing a nation as a "motherland" and have addressed the implications of gendered citizenship. As Moallem asserts, "the narrative of an Islamic Ummat [as a nation state] relies heavily on the bodies of women and their mediation between the "we-ness" of the Islamic Ummat and the "other."[55] Here, the "pure bodies" of Muslim Iranian women provide a coherent "We" against which to situate the "Other": an emphasis that is also visible in laws of veiling (*hijab*), public regulation of moral conduct, gender separation, and restriction of movement (Milani 2012).

veterans of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), articulate the need to defend the Islamic spirituality and moral virtue of Iran: what they term a "holy defense" (*daf-i moqaddas*) of state (Iran), faith (Shi'ism), and motherland (*vaṭan*, *mihan*, *mamlakat*). Yet even as they take up such positions, many inflect and adapt Khomeini's words in accordance to their life experiences, contemporary events, shifting local allegiances, and local politics. In addition, even within individual households, there is a clear spectrum of affinity for such views. As a result, the way that the pure inside of the nation is seen to rest against the corrupt outside is multiply inflected and shifting depending on context and on the positions of those interviewed.[56] My aim in the chapter is thus not to prove the extent to which the moral construction of a pure Islamic state/community pervades Iranian social life. Rather, I hope to show how the Basiji families I lived with aspired to and reached for this moral construction of a pure nation-state or community, even as these aspirations co-existed with constant real force and coercion from other families, townspeople, and the state.

Feeding Shi'i Citizens: Halal Sustenance

Since the founding of the Islamic Republic and the inception of the 1979 Constitution (Mir-Hosseini 2010), Islamic laws (*sharia*) concerning halal food, drink, and culinary etiquette have been emphasized by state policy makers. For instance, immediately following the Islamic Revolution, companies such as Kentucky Fried Chicken and MacDonald's were outlawed and replaced with locally owned, more "Islamically" friendly versions such as "McMashallah" (Chehabi 2003). Similarly, Western style sandwiches were renamed to obscure their previous

[56] As the anthropologist Shaery-Eisenlohr (2007) has argued, in Iran, and in other parts of the Shi'i Muslim world, the making of religious authenticity and the production of national differences are often part of the same process (2007:35). My research suggests continuous slippage between efforts to legitimize an "authentic" Shi'i Islamic Republic and efforts to fundamentally purify and reshape the nation (*mellat*).

status as the food of infidels. Kalbas, a type of processed cold cut, for example, became "Islamic kalbas" (*kalbās-e islami*) and fake ham made with cured chicken became "Islamic ham" (*zhambun-e islami*) (Chehabi 2003).[57] Iranian corporations have similarly taken up a model of Islamification. The Islamic coca cola company, Zam Zam Cola, for instance, takes its name from the sacred spring in Mecca that provides spiritual healing to all who drink it and is marketed as an Islamic alternative to Pepsi or American Coca Cola. In 2010, Zam Zam Cola took up about half the market share of soft drinks in Iran. Although the precise interplay between such corporate Islamification, the moral purification of the nation, and para-government foundations is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that the Zam Zam soft drink company is owned by the Foundation for the Oppressed and Disabled, one of Iran's most powerful foundations and sponsors Islamic/nation martyrs commemorations and charities across the country. It is further the same foundation that helped to fund the distribution of blessed food at the martyrs' ceremony in Fars-Abad.

In addition, the fight against the "influx of Western spiritual vacancy" is visible in the control of national imports and exports of halal goods. Today, government organizations such as the Halal Supreme Council are responsible for patrolling all imports and exports, restaurant menus, and bazaars for pork, alcohol, and other fare outlawed by Islam.[58] This work overlaps with global halal markets, expos, and the development of halal standards via international organizations such as World Halal. Similar to the Kosher label on food goods, standardization of halal foods and halal labeling is an incredibly complicated process and ranges from the details of

[57] Despite these state campaigns, however, most Iranians do not employ this particular Islamic nomenclature in everyday conversations, preferring, for instance, the simpler "kalbas sandwich" (*sandwich-e kalbās*) – although they are aware of these designations and may joke about them.

[58] This also includes banking transactions and the provision of other kinds of lawful (*halal*) industries. In 2011, for example, the government announced its intention to develop a *halal* version of the internet that conforms to Islamic principles. http://stream.aljazeera.com/story/*halal*-internet

ingredients as diverse as tiny amounts of unlawful pig fat to the assurance of a standard, correct slaughter of animals for import and export. Even more recently, halal branding as a kind of Muslim aesthetic has been used in Iran and elsewhere to attract Muslim customers to hotels and resorts.

At the same time, the particularities of what constitutes a halal food item or process in Iranian food discourse are frequently the subject of debate. Religious leaders, for example, originally classified Caspian Sea caviar as impermissible due to the apparent lack of scales on sturgeon. They further regarded the fish with suspicion because of its association with Western cuisine (Chehabi 2007). However, when scales were supposedly found near the sturgeon's tail several high ranking clerics met with fishing experts, including the Imam Khomeini, and reversed the traditional ruling. Skeptics of this shift argued that these clerics simply saw that Caspian Sea caviar had become a superb money making industry – a complaint that Khomeini himself vehemently denied. In the end, the sturgeon was then declared halal (permitted). There are several other cases in which the halal-ness of particular foods has been contested.[59]

Regardless, for many Iranians, the absence of items such as pork and alcohol in restaurants and markets is taken for granted and is assumed to be both a national and religious project. For example, Mamanjun, a grandmother from Qazvin, a city north of Tehran, told me: "Religiously impermissible food does not exist [within Iran's borders]. Even the thought of such food does not exist. Meat does not enter. If it does, it comes from an Islamic place such as Mecca or Saudi Arabia. American meat does not enter Iran" (Mamanjun 8/4/2008, Qazvin, Iran). For

[59] The matter of interpretation of the Qur'an and hadiths is one of differences in center and periphery, class, hierarchy, religious authority and claim to religious knowledge (Bowen 1993; Fischer and Abedi 1990; Lambek 1990:23). Shi'i Islam allows for the possibility of "systematic original thinking" (*ijtihād*) and thus a diversity of ruling and opinions. However, while some believe that only the clerics such as the Imam Khomeini, who have achieved the highest level of religious authority, that of a "source of emulation" (*marja-e taqlid*), can offer interpretations, others hold that the question of who has authority to interpret is a debatable matter.

Mamanjun, not only is the consumption of unlawful (*harām*) food within the Islamic Republic of Iran almost unthinkable, but food broadly designated as "American" is almost conceptually the same as food that is unlawful in Islam. Similarly, a Tehrani woman named Parvin who had traveled with her family to Malaysia to trade international goods described the ambiguity of the religious permissibility of foreign cuisine: "In Malaysia it was a little hard for us. There was both *harām* food and halal. In Iran, it is halal." Thus, for both Parvin and Mamanjun, the halal-ness of food products is mapped onto *both* the nation and Islam. It is therefore linked to a sense of trust for the state patrol of halal products at national borders.

Yet for Mamanjun and many of my other Shi'i friends and host family – as well as in Islamic law theory – what is deemed halal is much more than the ingredients or processes of preparing food. As I have previously mentioned, some of the other acts which are classified as halal or *harām* include: diet, sexual relations, daily habits and customs, marriage and divorce (who you can and cannot marry, including restrictions on interfaith marriage), family relations (name calling or disobeying one's parents), public morality (gossiping, cheating, lying slandering, eaves dropping, arrogance), occupation and income, and types of entertainment.[60] Note that many of these concepts can and do map on to what I mean by the notion of "correct" citizenship in the Islamic Republic. Indeed, my interlocutors consistently associated halal acts – including but not limited to eating the right foods – with becoming "good" (*dorost*) and developing "character" (*shakhsiat*). Yet they more than a moral framework; they said that such acts are a means of becoming spiritually complete. Halal, interviewees said, is the critical to

[60] According to scholar of Islamic legal theory Joseph Schacht (1966), there are two categories that divide human acts and transactions. The first is a set of declaratory rules that refers to the validity or nullity of an act of transaction. The second represents five categories through which human acts are evaluated with reference to their spiritual effects (e.g., reward or punishment). In Arabic, these include 1) "obligatory acts which in their omission incur a divine punishment" (*wajeb*); 2) "recommended acts which earn reward" (*mandub*); "neutral acts with neither sanction nor reward" (*mobah*); "disapproved acts which earn divine reward when omitted but are not punished"; and 5) "forbidden acts which incur punishment" (*mahzur*).

spiritual "sustenance" (*ruzi*). They regarded acting and living in a halal manner as spiritual nourishment and associated it with other processes of perfecting and refining the spirit such as fasting or praying regularly. This logic is evidenced on a broad scale in everyday family life and in books, magazines, and television shows, such as a popular book entitled "Halal Sustenance" (*ruzi-ye halal*).

The conceptual logic of *harām*, in contrast, provides a framework for actions to be avoided. Not limited to the possible spiritual corruption of an individual or even a family, *harām* acts have far reaching consequences for society, whether conceived as a specific locality, or the wider Islamic community/nation. For example, before Nushin, Reza, and I entered the shrine of the Imamzadeh Hamza, located only 50 kilometers from Fars-Abad, Nushin stopped us at the gate of mausoleum: "Pristine water once flowed here," she explained, pointing beyond the gate at the dry canals. "It flowed in the intricate channels around the shrine that houses the sacred tomb. This water was 'pure' (*pāk*) and carried 'divine healing' (*shafa midad*). It spread 'blessing' (*barakat*) to the pilgrims who consumed it." We walked a little further into the complex to stand in the shadow of a giant tree that grew between the stone tiles of the courtyard. She continued, "But one night some male youth who were 'without proper nature/self-control' (*bijanbeh*) gathered and partied overnight in the shrine complex. They consumed alcohol and engaged in other illicit activities. Their unlawful acts led to the drying up of the spring that had flowed for centuries."

According to Nushin, who told this story in part to benefit her teenage son who stood listening, the *harām* actions of these youth had corrupted the spiritual power of the shrine and its ability to benefit others. She explained that this story had been told to her by other pilgrims to the shrine and she believed it absolutely. For her, it was a warning against the negative effects of

alcohol consumption and other "illicit activities." But the story also emphasized that *harām* actions harm not only the self but the wider community of believers. As Nushin explained, the youths' actions had dried up a desert spring, where pure running water is highly respected and life giving. Worse, this water, which had been healing and blessed, had been corrupted by the illicit activities and could no longer benefit the local community or traveling pilgrims. Here, the emphasis on water is important because of its special ability to carry divine blessing. For Nushin and Reza, the drying up of the spring obstructs the life giving capacity of the shrine, even as it evokes the collective thirst of the Imam Husayn and his family and their martyrdom during the Battle of Karbala. Indeed, Nushin's story points to how notions of halal and *harām* are important beyond their consequences for individuals or families. Instead, small actions can alter public morality, ways of relating, and extend to the spiritual health of the Muslim community/nation.

Nushin's story similarly takes up the figure of corrupt male youth (*bidard*), a "deceived hedonist" who is "free from family ties and norms" (*gheyd va bandhay-e khanevadegi*) (Khosravi 2009:24) and implicitly juxtaposes his opposite, the ideal Iranian Muslim youth. This latter youth, as portrayed on television in film, is a zealous "guardian of values," both of family and state. He/she (usually he) is depicted as a "conscious" (*āgāh*) "warrior" (*mobārez*), who is willing to perform "self-sacrifice," like the Imam Husayn (Khosravi 2009:10). Such a youth does not engage in unlawful activities such as consuming alcohol, and what is more, he prevents others from doing so.[61] As I noted in the introduction, this is a guiding principle of Islamic

[61] In general, Iran's youth population (those born just after the Revolution, called the "third generation") have become a central battleground in the fight against "Western cultural invasion" and have been described as "the weak point of the *ummat*" (2009: 20). Indeed, a significant number of young people consume alcoholic beverages, drugs, and other substances illicit in Islamic law to the disapproval of those who claim religious authority and knowledge. These youth are the same ones, my Shi'i friends said, as those who go to gardens to smoke the hookah and dance or who drive around with the parents' cars, blasting Iranian pop or rap music. Worse, they are said to enter into pre-marital relationships with immodest Iranian girls. The Iranian media derisively labels these youth as *bidard*, a term that can be roughly translated as "deceived hedonists" and implies a population "free from family ties and norms" (*gheyd va bandhay-e khanevadegi*) (Khosravi 2009:24). In addition, national discourse portrays such youth as

Republic in the wake of Western spiritual corruption: "the promotion of virtue and the rejection of vice" (*amr-e be ma'arouf va nahi az monker*).

In Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China, Judith Farquhar (2002) explores how "appetites" for food and sex embodied the shift from Maoist ideology – visible in what was then an emphasis on food simplicity, comradeship, and austerity – to 1990's post-socialist consumerism – evidenced by pleasure/banquet eating. Importantly, in Iran, "appetites" for food and sex have similarly shifted. For example, the reign of the Pahlavis embodied a national aesthetic of modernization and Westernization that was made visible in part by the "civilizing" introduction of foreign cuisine, tables, chairs, ingredients, utensils to homes and restaurants. In contrast, contemporary Iranians have witnessed a backlash against such Western "appetites," which are associated with "moral decay" and Al-e Ahmad's scourge of sandwiches "from the city." This chapter thus adapts Farquhar's notion of "appetites" as a way of understanding post-Revolutionary insurgence of halal practices of eating and relating. Specifically, I have made the argument that Iranians link particular "appetites" for halal or *harām* foods and actions to the qualities of citizens and religious constituents, whether they are halal and virtue-producing or *harām* and corrupting. Further, I have shown that these qualities extend beyond the bodies and spirits of individual actors to influence the wider integrity of the community, town, religious community, or nation. In the following, I explore how these "appetites" map on to other types of food categorizations (e.g., traditional food versus fast food; local versus foreign food).

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unduly free from the responsibilities of Islamic/national citizenship: they are corruptive – not only of themselves but of society. Yet despite their bad reputation, many of my conservative Shi'i friends also were proud of these (male) youth for their cleverness, humor, and willingness to skirt norms. For instance, members of my host family told me that they had inherent trust in their children, even when they exhibited these behaviors.

Halal Appetites, Fast Food Ambivalences, and Public Eating

In an editorial for a cooking magazine widely available in newsstands in Iran, contributor Sara Ebrahami relates a striking dilemma:

> The same pizza that many young people like more than their own mother and father is so controversial that calling someone a "Pizza eater" (*pitza khor*) is a bad swear. When they [a mother of a bride] wants to give their answer to a suitor, they say "The boy is a pizza eater! He isn't even embarrassed"…. At the same time, if a suitor has not eaten pizza, it's likely that everyone will look at him as if he has horns on his back and a tail on his head! This is a bad thingggg! (my translation, Ebrahami, *Green Family Cooking* 2010)

According to Ebrahami, being a "pizza eater" is a fraught position in contemporary Iran. Extending far beyond pizza to encompass a plethora of values and qualities, the designation implies Westernstruckness, the neglect of religious values, and even poor upbringing. Yet, as Ebrahami also notes, it is so weird not to have eaten "pizza" in contemporary Iran that the very idea is almost unthinkable. The pizza non-eater, as she implies, would have to be secluded, unworldly and/or entirely too pious. Ebrahami's 2010 article on this subject was written for a particular class of educated elite Tehranis. Yet my own interviews with Fars-Abad and Tehrani friends on the subject of fast food were similarly ambivalent. One the one hand, they said, pizza is not real food. They associated the regular consumption of pizza with lazy, immoral, and spiritually lacking families and mothers. On the other hand, they, too, implicitly endeavored to find suitors for their children with a certain, albeit acceptable and appealing, amount of foreign savvy – whether in the form of knowledge of foreign films, a bit of English, or yes, (fancy) pizza – from the right restaurant!

But "pizza eater" has an important conceptual opposite in Iranian discourse: the "soup eater" (*āsh khor*). "Soup eaters," people often explained with a glint of humor, are young and poor Iranian soldiers who are forced to eat "traditional" soup and other austere foods while in service. The quintessential "soup eater" works as a uniformed guard or laborer, possibly carrying

out his service in barracks far from home. He is ready to defend the nation and Islam. The two poles of "pizza eater" and "soup eater," however, are neither mutually exclusive nor static. They shift with the life cycle: for young men, the designation changes according to military service, marriage, and family life. For my Basiji interlocutors, the key is to be just the right amount of "pizza eater" – and in doing so, to prioritize moral and spiritual values such as Islamic purity without entirely neglecting foreign savvy.

In Tehran, up-scale shopping malls and squares such as Golestan and Tajrish are speckled with Western style pizza, pasta, fried chicken, and sandwich restaurants that are well-attended by fashion conscious young people, mostly from the middle and upper classes. These venues, popular because of their association with the foreign (*kharej*), double as venues for self-presentation, and as meeting places for unwed couples. They are regularly patrolled by the "morality police." Other neighborhoods, in contrast, have very different configurations and expectations for the correct Islamic movements of bodies in streets and alleys. In the South of Tehran, for example, and near the major market in Iran, there are far fewer foreign style restaurants and more "traditional" restaurants (*restauran-e sonati*). These include: "coffee houses" (*qaveh khune*) which serve drinks and other refreshments; "kebab shops," which serve simple Iranian style beef and chicken kebab, bread, and roasted tomatoes and cater to male workers or travelers; and restaurants that specialize in certain dishes such as "brain soup" (*kale pache*) or "thick meat broth soup" (*dizi*). Moreover, in cities such as Tehran and Shiraz "traditional restaurants" have become increasingly frequented by upper class clientele. These restaurants, which play on notions of authenticity and tradition, often combine rustic décor, "traditional" foods, and music. Finally, a newer variety of generic restaurant which I term "Iranian" is increasingly widespread. These restaurants, which cater to family groups or

travelers, serve a common national menu on plastic cutlery. They are composed of foods that can be found in Iranian cookbooks – e.g., "king kebab" (*sultan kebab*) with saffron rice and roasted tomatoes, "fenugreek stew with rice" (*gormez sabzi*), "barberry rice" (*zereshk polo*), and "lentil rice" (*addas polo*) – and combine "sweet-sour" and "sweet-savory" flavors (Harbottle 2000).

Restaurant Vignette 1

When I first arrived in Iran in 2010, a friend and I visited a western-style fast food restaurant in an upscale mall in the Northern Tehran neighborhood of Tajrish. Haleh, who was at that time an unmarried twenty-six-year-old university graduate student, suggested the location and venue to shop for New Year presents for her kin as well as for a long cotton coat (*manto*) for me. (Such a coat, if it approximates knee length, is acceptable as a form of *hijab* in most parts of Tehran). Haleh had dressed for the outing by wearing a colorful headscarf under her black chador, nice blue jeans, low shiny heels, and a hint of fancy perfume. We traveled to the shopping area by way of mixed gender taxi (*savori*), packed subways, and finally by bus, reaching the bustling shopping square filled with women and men approximately an hour and a half later. Tired and hungry, we decided to stop and eat out. Haleh said she knew a good place to eat across the street – a small but busy multi-storied restaurant that served Western food. From an array of Western options such as pizza and burgers displayed with photographs on a menu over the counter, we both chose a meal of lasagna, Coca Cola, and Iranian plain yoghurt, which we paid for and carried upstairs on red plastic trays. The colors of the establishment were blue and red solids, resembling fast food restaurants and chains in the U.S. The men behind the counter wore standardized uniforms and served our food cafeteria style. We ate on the restaurant's second floor, a small room with crowded tables with picnic style benches, and a

window overlooking the square. The customers, for the most part, were young: couples with small children, some young men, and even a few couples who seemed to be courting. They spoke loudly with each other, often laughing and talking or checking phone messages. The women around us wore chic clothes and designer shoes and jeans. There were few chadors in sight.

Restaurant Vignette 2

Only a few days after our trip to the fast food lasagna restaurant, I traveled with Haleh's father, older brother, younger brothers and mother in Haleh's father's green Tehran taxi to a very different kind of establishment. In the car, Haleh explained that this restaurant catered to "religious people" (*adamha-ye mazhabi*). On our way to the restaurant, we tried to stop at a nearby mosque to perform local pilgrimage only to find it closed. Unfazed, we made our way to the walled courtyard of the restaurant, which was called "*Sofreh* House of the Garden of Ferdoos." Haleh's father and oldest brother fetched the traditional Iranian beef and chicken kebab, flat bread, Iranian brand sodas, and yoghurt for the family, while the younger brother and mother accompanied us to one of many cordoned off family gazebo-like picnic areas in an outdoor colorful but softly lit park. Other female customers in this establishment were similarly dressed in chadors. Female customers wandered in pairs among the small canals and gardens that speckled the distinct dining gazebos, returning quickly to the company of their families. When the steaming food arrived, it came in individual portions in plastic Styrofoam. Later I asked Haleh why she likes this particular venue. She explained: "I really like it there because it is easy to wear the *chador* there but other places make *chador* wearing difficult." Here, Haleh referenced the overall sense of religiosity of the place (its proximity to the mosque, religious

placards), the architectural orientation of separate family sized picnic areas, and the manner of ordering food such that women do not need to directly interact with "unlawful persons" (*na-mahram*). As we were leaving, my hosts joked that I was lucky to have gotten into the restaurant at all as an American.

In addition to highlighting the ambivalent appetites for American food and fast food by some members of my Basiji friends and family, the above examples make visible how modalities of eating reflect and shape the appetites of contemporary Iranian families and citizens. Certain restaurants make it easy to model an appropriate halal family and/or to navigate the premises and eat while wearing a chador, for instance. Such restaurants are configured through the motif of enclosure. There is a walled separation between the religiously oriented dining space and the possibly corrupt outside. Within, there is enough room to wear a chador comfortably, another form of enclosure. Each tables has its own gazebo roof and picnic bench and is spaced out such that each family need not hear the other family's voices, see them, or otherwise interact. This makes it more comfortable for pious Shi'i women, who say that they normally refrain from laughing or praying aloud in the company of strangers. In contrast, other restaurants, such as the fast food places in the North of Tehran, make wearing a chador difficult in the close proximity required for ordering and seating. These venues encourage more casual social relations and contact with unrelated "passersby" by forcing customers to self-serve and walk past each other in narrow corridors or sit nearby at tables. They shape movements within and outside them, coding for specific ways of relating. The specifically halal, Islamic restaurants, however, are different in one key way. They make "correct" relating and eating possible. They allow families to better model the family of the Prophet – and for my Basiji interlocutors – this modeling is of moral importance.

The Street: Vignettes 3 and 4

Reza and his teenage sister Maryam were sitting at home answering my questions about the concept of Islamic brother and sisterhood when they veered to the subject of eating "outside" (*birun*):

> Reza: "We know it to be ugly (*zesht*) to eat [fresh bread from the breadlines] in front of strangers [in the street]. Some other things you can eat outside – ice cream or chips."
> Maryam: "Eating sandwiches outside is ugly/obscene (*zesht*)."
> Reza: "No, you can eat sandwiches. Especially, if I go so far away, if I am a traveler and I don't know anyone, it is okay. In Fars-Abad, it is obscene (*zesht*). People know who I am.… It is ugly."

According to Maryam and Reza, certain kinds of public eating are *zesht*: a word that is used to describe something "ugly," "obscene," or "unbecoming." While the consumption of chips or ice cream outside is tolerated, certain acts of public eating are very negatively regarded and are linked to bad manners, uncouth behavior and public immorality, what they might also call *harām* behavior. This includes eating bread in breadlines or eating meal-like foods in the street. Yet while Reza says that eating sandwiches in public is okay, Maryam knows that it is not becoming for her as a young unmarried woman. This assessment is linked to Maryam's understanding of her ability as a female to move through streets and alleys in Fars-Abad. In the street, as I quickly learned, Maryam is present, but rarely alone. When she is with others, she walks rigidly and seriously, avoiding eye contact with strangers.[62] Boys like Reza, in contrast, can have relaxed postures and move unfettered in the streets; and as I related in Chapter 3, they are also much more likely to eat snacks or even sandwiches outside of the home.[63] Such

[62] See also Shashahani (2008) for gendered movement outside (*birun*).
[63] Maryam and Reza further linked the idea of "ugliness" (*zeshti*) to the immoral hosting practices of big city dwellers, who, they explained, do not invite guests – "even their own uncles" – into their homes. In Fars-Abad, Reza said as Maryam nodded, "we are 'warm/friendly' (*garm*) and love guests. People are purer/simpler in small towns [like Fars-Abad]. In Tehran, they are not warm at all." They both agreed: "They [Tehranis] have lost their humanity."

gendered understandings of public eating and morality reflect the strong connection halal, "correct" comportment and the maintenance of moral social relations.

Importantly, the public consumption of votive food in the street, graveyard, or mosque is evaluated very differently. As Maryam remarked: "In the graveyard, you read a Fatr [a verse from the Qur'an], you eat, it is not *zesht."* On such occasions, participants call each other "brothers and sisters of Islam," or use other epithets such as "mother," "grandfather," or "Hajji." They share food to gain religious merit (*savab*), protecting themselves on the Day of Judgment, and to share blessing. In so doing, they are divinely sanctioned to share and eat food in public.

I stood sipping a bottle of water on Imam Reza Boulevard in Shiraz. Cars honked at the busy intersection as pedestrians tried to cross. Many more walked on the sidewalk on their way to work: a man wearing a blue workman's jumper; two women ushering a child; several others in business attire. It was mid-Ramadan and I was anxious to renew my research visa. I was with my research assistant, who had just begun crossing the busy street, leading the way through the traffic, when someone on the other side yelled at me for drinking in public. I was startled; the stranger clearly had no idea whether we were traveling or not, a category of activity that exempts a person from the fast according to Islamic law. Why had he reacted so vehemently? When I asked my research assistant, he explained: "It's bad to eat when others are fasting. You don't want to make it harder for them. If you eat in public, even if you yourself are not fasting, you lose face."

The call for public morality, and with it, halal "appetites," is intensified during Ramadan. In Chapter 3, I discussed how depriving the body of food is a means of gaining control of bodily passions (*nafs*) and of spiritual refinement. In *Islam, Leadership and the Islamic Revolution*, for instance, former reformist President Mohammad Khatami alludes to practices of fasting and

piety during Ramadan as a means of gaining control over the self. Here, he explicitly argues that the human reason and consciousness given by "God's hand" should be mediated by a disciplinary attitude to the body or what he calls "appetites" (*hava-e nafs*). In the Islamic Republic, there is a clear public dimension to the control of appetites that extends beyond the self to the interactions with others – a sense of public morality. Just as it is inappropriate to eat in front of fasting friends and relatives, it is inappropriate to eat in front of complete strangers during the holy month. Such halal public eating and acting is intensely enforced by the state whose officers patrol parks and streets watching for illicit activity

During my travels to Shiraz in Ramadan, I found only one sandwich shop, a fast food establishment in a tourist district, open regularly. This seemingly lone shop masked its business by placing large dark curtains on all windows, literally blocking out the sight of eating. Indeed, most restaurants and small sandwich shops were closed both in Fars-Abad and in Shiraz during daylight hours. Additionally, normal offerings of tea and biscuits in workplaces and universities were suspended. Even drinking water publically or chewing gum was highly derided, evoking catcalls from strangers.

During Ramadan, public and state vigilance limits "appetites" – both public eating and "illicit" behavior – thus contributing to a national halal aesthetic that cultivates virtuous relations among citizens. But this is only one part of a broader disciplining of the body and its appetites. In short, configurations of restaurants and the peculiarities of public eating in Iran make visible a technology of spirituality that shapes moral social relations on a national level.

A Matter of Trust: Food Origins

In 2010, an increasingly fixed "national menu" dominated home *sofrehs* in Fars-Abad. My host family, for instance, regularly ate eggplant stew with rice, lentil rice, kebab, celery stew, pomegranate stew, plain yoghurt, as well as greens from the garden – a compendium of taste combinations that can be found across Iran kitchens, cookbooks, and cooking shows. They further rarely consumed either foreign or fast food. This section explores the emphasis on local food and food origins more generally in Fars-Abad. The mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and grandmothers I spoke with frequently emphasized that "local foods" (*gaza-ye mahali*) were best for daily cooking and eating. Local food, they said, is compatible with "us" because it comes from nearby "water and air" (*aub*-o *hava*) as well as from regional farms and lands. For the most part, they associated it with fresh, whole foods and distinguished it from food from other regions or countries. They also contrasted local foods with fast foods and foreign processed foods increasingly available at bazaars, grocers, and restaurants. However, in contrast to local food movements in the U.S., they argued that local food was not only more "healthy," "tasty," or "trustworthy" than food from elsewhere, but also more "powerful," "pure," and more certainly halal.

As I mentioned in detail in the Introduction small scale farming, gardening, and animal husbandry is central to Fars-Abad's local economy. Agricultural land surrounds the town and is irrigated by wells drilled into underground water tables as well as by a few key rivers that cross the dry desert landscape. A diversity of crops are raised: wheat, barley, corn, sunflowers, green cucumbers, tomatoes, peas, beans, lentils, beets, eggplants, and potatoes. In addition, tree grove garden products are a regional mainstay. These products include apples, plums, black plums, yellow plums, dark red peaches, apricots, quince, grapes, walnuts, and almonds.

Currently, people in Fars-Abad mostly prepare and cook whole fruits and greens bought from trucks or markets that link to local and regional farms. Fruits and vegetables, in particular, are valued for their seasonal freshness and availability and many families own their own gardens. Additionally, although some industrial style meat is increasingly available in parts of Iran, most people in Fars-Abad do not buy (or cannot afford) the nationally available brands of meat. Rather, they purchase an entire lamb or goat from nearby herders, which they ritually sacrifice and carefully chop up, separating the meat into plastic freezer bags for future consumption. Every part is used including the brain, the stomach, and the tongue. Where nationally sold brands do exist, such as "Motherland" (*Mihan*), a dairy brand that is sold and purchased in the scores of tiny town convenience stores, my extended family and friends tended to devalue their quality when compared to that of fresh, local milk, cheese, and yoghurt.[64]

"The Factory Stuff is Worthless": Making Quince Lemon Syrup and Pomegranate Sauce

Nushin, my host mother, has been making quince lemon syrup (*beh limoo*) and pomegranate sauce (*rob*-e *anar*) every summer for her entire life. Despite the easy availability of store bought varieties, her husband and sons spend hours in the hot summer sun gathering fuzzy yellow quince from nearby trees. They bring it inside the main living space of the house or into the parking garage in large sacks full to the brim. Wives and daughters carefully scrape the fur off and quarter each fruit. They boil it until it is soft (*leh*) and press it through a type of colander to separate the liquid from the pulp. Finally, they boil the quince juice with sugar until it thickens into syrup in a 50 kilogram vat heated by a gas flame in the parking garage and add large quantities of homemade lemon juice. As they work, Nushin discusses the famous long lasting

[64] Finally, it was local common knowledge that the local dairy and meat items raised by nearby settled nomads were of the absolute best quality. Sheep, goat, milk, butter, and kashk are known specialties. Finally, they valued "natural" (*tabi'i*) desert mountain herbs and plants such as juniper berries and wild dill for their spiritual and health benefits.

qualities and medicinal value of quince: “A quince hung out in the fall will last until spring” she remarks at one point; “its seeds are good for colds.” Nushin told me that one cold remedy is to boil the quince and drink the water. This is because it is a rare “warm” (*garm*) fruit, especially when cooked. She mixes the quince lemon syrup that she makes with ice water and serves it to family and guest in the summer.

Pomegranate sauce (*rob-e anar*) involves similar effort (*zahmat*). When the pomegranates ripen, my host family travels to a local town famous for its pomegranates (about an hour’s drive away).

Figure 1 - A town pomegranate statue in Fars

They inspect and choose the fruit, arriving home with burlap sacks filled to the brim with hundreds of pomegranates. Nushin and Ahmad, her husband, the neighbors, and I worked together the following day separating each seed from the rind by hand into a giant 4 gallon bucket. In 2010, Ahmad brought the fruit to a juicer who – with a machine – was able to separate the seeds from the juice. Nushin then boiled the product and added sugar: making a thick sauce that is good for making walnut pomegranate stew or cool summer drinks.

For Nushin and Ahmad, the process of making pomegranate paste as an act of spirituality and pure intention for the family. The pomegranate is mentioned in the Qur'an as a heavenly fruit. According to Nushin, "The way that the pieces of the pomegranate fit together, their shape… [she points to the pockets of juxtaposed ruby seeds] is a sign of God. The fruit needs to be respected. Every piece needs to be eaten." They say that if you manage to eat every jewel of the pomegranate without a single one dropping, especially on Friday, it is as though you have eaten a jewel from heaven. There is great religious merit (*savab*) in doing so. "Pomegranate," Nushin explained one evening, "is full of benefits." It makes the blood "even" (*saf*) and "ordered" (*rafiq*). "It is a blood builder" (*khun saz e*).

When I asked Nushin why she devotes so much effort to making quince lemon syrup and pomegranate sauce, though they are easily available for purchase in nearby stores, she explained, "Compared to the factory made stuff, the taste (*maze*) is so much better. We know that the factory made stuff is worthless (*be dard nemikhoreh*). The quince syrup doesn't even have quince in it! Making quince lime syrup or pomegranate sauce at home takes a lot of time and energy, but the product is delicious and the quality (*kefiyat*) is so much better" (Nushin, 11-7-2010). Here, she built the spiritual quality of purity and good intention into the food that she asked her family to consume.

In a similar manner, Nushin consistently placed a hot dish of Iranian saffron rice at the center of the meal spread – a food combination that she believed critical to the daily physical and spiritual sustenance of sustenance of her family. She and her husband preferred rice from the nearby region of Camfirooz – 60 kilometers from Fars-Abad in Marvdasht – over other regional and international varieties. This rice, often purchased in bulk quantities, is valued not because it is clean (indeed in comes full of little stones that must be sorted out) or cheap (its cost is mid-range), but because it from a nearby location and a known farmer, and therefore is pure and trusted.

Yet, for people in Fars-Abad, "local food" not only designates fresh food; it is also used to reference processed canned goods produced in local town factories, particularly the main town industry, a canning and pickling factory.[65] Fars-Abad's town website lauds the factory as a major "pole" of the regional economy: "One-and-One has worldwide fame and produces a number of goods that, in addition to being available "inside [the nation]" (*dākheli*) are also sold in world markets. The products of this factory include lemon syrup, tomato paste, pickles, eggplant khaviar, jam, and a number of conserves, pickled goods, etc." (my translation). In addition, products from One-and-One are valued because they are sold in national and international markets. One-and-One bottled lemon juice, tomato paste, or pickles extend the name of the local factory outward, a movement that also circulates the name of Fars-Abad and transforms its value for locals.[66] In daily shopping and eating, locals of Fars-Abad represent company products as unusually pure and trustworthy – for factory food. The company's website explicitly advertises

[65] Here, the quality of local products is interwoven with understandings of local land ownership and the character of land owners. In my travels throughout the Fars province, I often heard both people from Fars-Abad and outside remark on the "good" piety and civility of the town as well as on its Islamicness. "Oh you're a lad from Fars-Abad," a taxi drive would say to my host brother "Fars-Abad has good lads" (*bachehaye Fars-Abad khuband*). As such, the notion of being from the same city or *hamshahr* implies a certain degree of trust

[66] One-and-One products were modeled at a Food Show in Tehran that I attended in 2010.

the extra-nutritional quality of its products: "Our honey is strengthening… [and] our rose water is healthy for body and soul." Overall, those I spoke with expressed that buying or eating the local company's products was better than foreign or even other regional products. They explained that the products can form a basis for a home-cooked meal or could be appropriately used as a convenient yet pure form of quick meals for a light dinner (particularly the beans and eggplant khaviar most often eaten with fresh bread). Importantly, much of the halal foods manufactured at the company were ingredients for "Iranian" or "traditional" cuisine rather than foreign or fast food.

Of importance, however, was not only the halal-ness of ingredients, but also the spiritual and pious character of factory managers and workers – all of which were crucial to ensuring the pure quality (*kefiyat*) of factory products. Indeed, the jobs of many employees are dependent on their apparent religiosity. When two of my host brothers gained temporary employment in the factory, for instance, Ahmad, their father, advised them to show religiosity by regularly praying and performing ablutions while they were working. "You must be aware of this (*havāset jam kon*)," he warned on several occasions. Similarly, employees are expected to dress in a halal manner (e.g., long shirt sleeves, long pants) and females in workers' families must dress in the full chador (a sign of Islam and nation) – rather than any other possibility (e.g., an equally bulky simple coat and head covering). Fars-Abad friends and family also reported cases in which factory employees had been fired because they had been caught engaging in *harām* conduct outside of work (e.g., wearing a t-shirt, drinking alcohol). In other words, there were very real local consequences for not following a code of halal conduct, piety, and spirituality. The canning factory, public comportment, expressed religiosity, and more generalized local employment opportunity were multiply entangled.

Processed Iranian Food and Outside, Foreign Foods

Both types of local food are positively compared to what the people in Fars-Abad call processed food (*basteh bandi*). Processed food never seems to deliver a positive state in its consumers (*hāl*). During my research, I visited a Food Show in Tehran designed to create interest in the best in canned foods, sauces, and microwavable, ready-made meals available in Iran. At the crowded show, international companies like "Grandmother" (*mādar bozorg*) advertised their "hand cooked" (*dast pokhteh*) packaged foods.

Figure 2 - Food Show in Tehran, 2/2010

This particular sign advertises Grandmother's "natural honey," "tuna," and "pickles," drawing on the image of a grandmother's cooking – a theme that also evokes the category of "traditional food." Other food items displayed at the show included pre-made/frozen Iranian style meals, nuts, chips, instant coffee, packaged and pre-cleaned lentils and beans, and candies. The pre-made frozen meals were almost always claimed to be handmade or natural. However, fast food items such as "Zargarchi" hamburgers were also on display, making visible the increasing inundation of foreign-like, packaged foods in Iranian households. Yet although the audience of the food show was highly receptive to these products, the not so subtle invocation of

grandmothers, hand cooking, as well as categories of Iranian and traditional fare reveals the general public's concerns about the innate quality difference between processed foods and homemade foods. Indeed, although people sell processed foods through the idioms of home and mother, and although the best processed foods mimetically reproduce foods that are traditional, Iranian, or handmade, these food never quite compare to the real thing.[67]

In contrast, many people I spoke with described foreign food in explicitly negative terms. "Foreign food does not stick to my body," explained one recent pilgrim from Mecca, in Saudia Arabia. "They gave us chicken and rice at the hotel" she said, "but it wasn't cooked well. I was forced to eat yogurt, bread, and onion. Simple things. Their food made me feel unwell." When I asked another traveler if she liked Malaysian food, she responded: "It's spicy. Our family eats and buys Iranian food. Iranian food is traditional (*sonati*). It is not very spicy. It is normal." Finally, the neighbors who had been to Thailand explained that when they traveled they would search for Iranian restaurants in the country because they couldn't even stomach Asian food. The complicated ways that foreign and local foods are valued and by whom was further made apparent in my many attempts to cook for members of my host family. For instance, on one occasion, Hamideh, the cousin-in-law daughter of a Basseri Nomadic Khan, asked me to make foreign food for her extended family. I decided to make Chinese food and was surprised when Hamideh was able to find soy sauce in the Shiraz bazaar. Although several young people seemed to like the food, middle-aged family members and elders ate very little and with obvious caution. They served and ate leftover Iranian food from the previous night.

This section has explored the processes by which certain foods of local, national, and/or sacred origin are marked as inside, halal, or spiritually nourishing for a moral Muslim citizenry

[67] For instance, people often remarked that local butter is better than Kareh Jameh [a brand of factory processed butter available in stores across Iran]. They talk of making butter as children, its taste, and its soothing quality.

while others are marked as outside, *harām*, or corrupting. I have argued that my interviewees evaluate food's nutritional and spiritual nourishment according to a spectrum of foods' origins from inside, local, and pure to outside, foreign, and suspect. Specifically, while inside, local food is trustworthy (*qābel-e ehtemad*) and spiritually nutritious, food with outside origins is suspect. The designation "pizza eater" is one example of the ambivalence surrounding such outside fare, revealing that although being a "pizza eater" is not always bad, it has clear associations with Western corruption and immorality. In contrast, locally farmed, hand-made foods, cooked in an Iranian style are almost always regarded positively and are viewed as spiritually nourishing to body and soul.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn to the different but interrelated practice of making and sharing specifically blessed foods in national contexts.

Circulating Divine Blessing: Food Distribution on a National Scale

This section makes the argument that blessed food, or votive food (*nazri*), is a unique technology of citizenship in Iran where lines of nation and Islam are blurred. The distribution of votive food not only demarcates and makes visible a particular cohort of blessed Muslim citizenry, but it also helps imbue participants – corporeally and spiritually – with combinations of divine and national qualities, such as Islamic purity and patriotism, a kind of halal citizenship. The food, importantly, is shared and distributed in vast quantities by a range of participants (families, towns, para-government foundations, and the state) and for numerous reasons. It is shared both with participants and with non-participating passersby and is often a feature of national/Islamic calendric rituals. It is also notable both because for the sheer quantity of votive food that is regularly distributed and because of the peculiar appearance of blessed food in

national ritual conducted and sponsored by the post-Revolutionary state. I begin by examining how votive food is shared and sponsored by Fars-Abadi families and townspeople according to a religious and national calendar marking the birth and death days of the Imams (the descendants of the Prophet).

Vow Making and Food Distribution in Honor of the Imams

As has been discussed in previous chapters, the birth and death days of Imams and their descendants are widely commemorated in Iran both as key events in the Muslim calendar and as national holidays. In Chapter Three, I considered how these special days shape the life cycles of families and individuals: certain such days are auspicious days for marriage, for giving birth, for buying a house, moving, or traveling. I now add to the rich scholarship on Shi'i Iranian devotion, which has examined the creation of votive wall hangings and mourning banners (Flaskerud 2012), the rites of Muharram (Aghaie 2004), Shi'i passion plays (*taziyeh*) (Beeman 2003; Chelowski 1979), local pilgrimage to Shi'i saints (Betteridge 1992), and finally, the devotional celebrations on the birthdays of Imams (*mowludi*) (Torab 2005; Kalinock 2003). In particular, I hope to investigate Shi'i Iranian practices of making votive or vowed food such as soup, lemon drink, and rice for distribution in national contexts – practices which are often entirely passed over in scholarly literature.

This food, also known as "blessed food" or *tabarrok*, is served from giant vats (*digh*) in range of public locations including: graveyards, shrines of Imams and their descendants, public squares, sidewalks, mosques, and Shi'i commemorative congregation halls as part of a dedication to Shi'i Saints – most often descendants of the Prophet. In addition to the halal sacrifice of sheep, cows, and animals as food offerings, ritual food offerings include: thick

noodle soup (*āsh*), saffron rice (*sholeh zard*), sweet wheat paste (*halva*), split pea soup for the Imam Husayn (*gheymeh-e* Imam Husayn), as well as "meat, lentil, wheat porridge" (*halim*), which is associated specifically with Muharram. Most Iranians regard these dishes both as "traditional" and "holy." In contrast to smaller scale versions of votive food sharing among neighbors and relations in and from homes, the recipients on these occasions are passersby of any variety – fellow townsmen (*ham shahr*), citizens (*sharvand*), mourners (*azadara*), and pilgrims.

Hajji Mahmad's Muharram Vow: "Muharram is everything to us" and the Town of Fars-Abad

> "During Muharram, you can't find a single house that has not received votive food inside its walls. My brother has a 350 kilos vow of rice. On ʿAshuraʾ, more than 2,000 people come to eat vowed food [at his house] and go. Many do the same thing. Many have a 'heavy vow' (*nazri-ye sangin)*." (Nushin 10/31/10)

While public offerings frequently occur on birthdays and death days of all the Imams and their descendants, townspeople I spoke with regularly performed the most significant portion of their public votive food distribution during the month of Muharram, the beginning of the Islamic calendar year and one of two successive months of mourning for the tragic events that transpired leading up to the Battle of Karbala. This public votive food distribution occurs in tandem with the more closely analyzed street processions and symbolic self-flagellation that mark the holy month. Anthropologists of Iran and Islam have long recognized the simultaneous religious and political force of Muharram rituals. As Hegland writes, such rituals "have been instrumental in Iran both in the preservation of the political status quo and in the complete overthrow of the political, economic, and social order" (1983:96).

The great metal vats that cook the rice in the home of Hajji Mahmad, brother of Nushin, my host mother, read "Ya Hossein" in red Farsi script. Hajji Mahmad made a secret vow several years ago in which he promised to provide 350 kilos of rice every year to all who wanted it during the month of Muharram. In 2010, Hajji Mahmad made a vegetable stew with rice called *gormez sabzi*. He pulled 20 metal vats out his basement along with gas burners, and he and other male kinsmen arranged and cooked the vast quantities of rice and greens in the courtyard. Female family members helped cook the stew, but left the rice to the men, moving from the outer courtyard to inside the house where they began arranging plastic serving plates for the multitude of people who would be served. Townspeople sat around the *sofreh* in the tiled outdoor courtyard, separated by gender. Alternatively, they received take-away votive dishes in plastic containers for their families.

Although the cooking and distribution of votive food is prevalent throughout the Islamic month of Muharram that marks the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn and the Battle of Karbala, it is especially emphasized on the ninth and tenth day of the month and the specific day when

Imam Husayn was martyred. Nushin and her husband estimated that several tons of rice are cooked on ʿAshuraʾ yearly in Fars-Abad. They and others gave various reasons for this outpouring of food, which they described as a critical aspect of Muharram mourning: "to keep the name of the Imam Husayn alive" (Ahmad 6 M, 2010), "to mourn the family of Imam Husayn," "to gain merit of the afterlife" (a male neighbor), "to solve big problems," or "to receive a divine favor." Indeed, many such votive offerings have multiple levels of meaning. As with all such votive meals, they reveal a family's piety and commitment to the welfare of the community. In addition, they turn the family resources (money) and hard physical labor of cooking large quantities of food into blessing – cast both inward toward the family and outward to the community. Rather than a single event, such votive offerings often take place sequentially: whether yearly, on every ʿAshuraʾ, for example; or for ten days in a row, from the first of Muharram to the tenth. There are two ways to share votive meals publically: from a temporary kiosk set up on the street or in the form of a *sofreh-e nazri* (a votive meal) in the courtyard of the home, the garage, or front outdoor alley. The latter form was more common in Fars-Abad.

Although scholars have recognized the power of Muharram to alternatively preserve or change Iranian citizenship, they have not theorized the social implications of this mass distribution of food that co-occurs with the more famous street processions. I argue that the sharing of blessed food is an integral – if overlooked aspect – of Muharram rituals. The effort expended in the processes of making and sharing votive food generates religious merit and creates social capital for both the community of believers and the local political organizations: towns, provinces, and the state. It serves to purify and thus incorporate citizens into the project of making a halal nation.

Who is Being Served?

Depending on the context, recipients of such holy food are greeted with respect – madame" (*khānom*) for women and "sir" (*āghāe*) for men. Alternatively, Shi'i Islamic community may be emphasized through terms such as "brother" or "sister," indexing the post-Revolutionary usage of "Islamic brother and sisters" (*baradar o khokhar Islami*) to address national citizens. On occasion, I also heard the usage of terms such as "mother" (*mādar*) and "father" (*pedar*) during votive food distribution, similarly referencing a sense of Islamic/national kinship. The logic of such public votive food distribution is the same as that of votive food prepared by women at home on a smaller scale to protect and bless the family: blessing derives from the food's dedication to a Shi'i Imam, a descendant of an Imam, or saint, who acts as an intercessor for requests or favors. Both the giver and the receiver of food are imbued with Islamic blessing by their respective acts of laboring over (buying or growing ingredients, selecting sacrificial lamb, stirring, cooking, heating, praying in concert with, distributing, and consuming votive fare. Such votive food distribution occurred both in the streets of Shiraz and Tehran with complete strangers and with fellow towns people in Fars-Abad.

When I asked Nushin whether there was any exclusivity to this ritual distribution, she was adamant: "No, it is for everyone. Anyone who wants to can participate. It is not such that only "extended family" (*qom* o *khish*) can come, for example, and others cannot. This is the same for the *nazri* of Hajji Mahmad. Anyone who wants can come. There is no problem. In Fars-Abad, we have Sunnis, Afghanis. They also come. I've seen them at the *sofreh* of my brother. They eat. It's not just for Shi'i or even just for Muslims….Everyone [in Iran] respects Muharram" Nushin's perspective of inclusivity, however, although genuine, was not shared by everyone and was very likely partly elicited so emphatically because of my positionality as her host daughter and as a non-Muslim American. Although she and her family took care to treat

local Afghani workers with respect, many I spoke with held negative stereotypes about Afghani workers, the Arab population of Fars-Abad, and of Sunni Muslims in general. I never saw such a worker being explicitly invited to sit a votive meal spread. Adjectives such as "dirty" (*kasif*), "impure" (*najes*) and "dangerous" (*khaternok*) were not uncommon when describing members of these communities, although people reported that intermarriage was increasing.

"Because Iran is an Islamic country and a Shi'i country and from the first of Muharram to the tenth of ʿAshuraʾ, many people give a *sofreh* every afternoon [during this time period]." (Ahmad, 6th of Muharram 2010). In contrast to Nushin, Ahmad did not mention the participation of diverse communities when I asked him about votive meals during Muharram. Instead, he emphasized that people give votive food precisely *because* Iran is a "Shi'i country and a Muslim country." He and other supporters of the late Imam Khomeini whom I spoke with argued that although anyone can give and receive blessings by means of a votive *sofreh*, Iran is, at its foundation a Shi'i Muslim country. In Fars-Abad, for example, the local Friday Imam, who had a significant, although contested authority, frequently made divisions between the spiritual morality of the Great and little Satans (the U.S. and Great Britain) and the people of Iran, who were assumedly Shi'i Muslims. Thus, in practice, while all may ostensibly be invited to such occasions, and although the doors of the courtyard are certainly more open than at other times to such persons, those who frequented Hajji Mahmad's *nazri* consisted mainly of what my host family considered the "core" Fars-Abad community. They consisted of those who lived near Hajji Mahmad's home in the center of town (not its outlying partitions such as the Arab neighborhood or the settled nomad neighborhood) and those who attended Friday prayers in the same locale, with the notable exception of one or two Afghani workers who helped with farming work.

Pilgrimage and Votive Food Distribution

In addition to Mecca and Medina – sites that are holy to all Muslims – Shi'i Muslims frequently participate in pilgrimage to the tombs and shrines of successive Imams and their offspring. These sites form a critical location for the distribution of votive offerings to Shi'i Iranian stranger citizens and make visible how the national Islamic practice of sharing food with a transcendant religious community of brother and sister citizens extends beyond town confines. While some of these sites are found within Iran (particularly in Mashhad and Qom), others are located in countries such as Syria and Iraq. As anthropologist of Iranian pilgrimage, Anne Betteridge, has noted, Shi'i Muslim shrines are referred to as thresholds (*astan or atabat*) and are places where the conventional relations of cause and effect are suspended. This means that as one crosses into the interior of a shrine, one literally enters an enclosed sacred place, ultimately identified with the tomb of the Saint. Writing on pilgrimage to specifically these Shi'i sites in the nineteenth century, historian Morikawa argues: "The spiritual world of the Iranians who adhered to Shiite faith and devotion to the Imams – becomes visible in the pilgrimage to the 'Atabat – as opposed to the pilgrimage to Mecca, the duty of all Muslims" (2012:42). Today, Iranians continue to map out a particular Shi'i/Iranian identity through pilgrimage to the thresholds of Shi'i saints both within and outside of Iranian borders. In 2010, almost all of the adult members of my extended host family had visited most of the major Shi'i shrines both inside and outside Iran (e.g., Nafaj, where the first Imam ʿAli was buried; Karbala where the third Imam Husayn was martyred, etc.). Although my own research to date has focused on local pilgrimage within contemporary Iranian borders, it is clear that Shi'i Iranians continue to differentiate themselves as a community of Shi'i believers through these practices.

Local Pilgrimage

On October 22, 2010, the day of the Imam Reza's birth, I accompanied members of my host family on a local pilgrimage to the shrine of the Hamza, the Imam Reza's brother, and to the separate shrine of his little known sister, Bibi Khatun, located a short distance away. As we settled ourselves into the car for the journey, Nushin told me that she felt called to the shrines because of their kinship with the Imam Reza. We spent the one-hour trip in contemplation, listening to Iranian pop music and watching the desert landscape pass by – seemingly empty except for some small towns, a village of settled nomads and a crumbling palace of a pre-Revolution *khan*.

Situated in Bavānāt, the Imamzadeh Hamza's shrine has a beautiful portal, court, sanctuary, and an arcade with a round dome. According to the architectural historian, Mostawfawi (1964), the stucco above the portal was created in 1546 (510-513). Today several giant trees surround the shrine. As with other small shrines of Imamzadehs in Iran, pilgrims (alone or in family groups) sometimes stay the night in tents in the *harām*, hoping to receive healing and divine blessing. We arrived in late afternoon and were greeted by a woman and several female relatives who had just finished cooking a *nazri* of votive soup (*āsh*) in a big vessel. These women were publically celebrating the fulfillment of a favor apparently granted by the Imamzadeh Hamza.[68] Although she had never seen us before, she gave us a white plastic container of her soup, decorated with "dried whey" (*kashk*). On entering the shrine enclave itself, we further noted that someone had left a bowl of hard candies by the door. Nushin handed each

[68] While women usually coordinate and cook for these occasions, men also participate: either by buying ingredients, cooking, or by spooning food into plastic containers for fellow pilgrims. The choice to make a nazri at a particular tomb may depend on logistics of proximity to that site, travel, and money or it may reflect a feeling of shared intimacy with a particular saint (see also Betteridge 1985).

of us one of the holy sweets (*tabarrok*) and carefully stowed away an additional piece to bring home for each additional family member. We brought the soup home to the family.

The sharing of votive meals or candies is often a critical aspect of local pilgrimage to the tombs of Imams and their "descendants" (*imāmzadeh*). Indeed, many shrines include not only a portico and a mosque but also a place for cooking votive offerings (Varjavand 1987). The votive fare thus shared is similar to that which is shared from homes or street kiosks. It may be the product of a relatively "light vow" (*nazri-ye sabok*), such as a bag of chocolates or pastries purchased from a bakery; or a "heavier vow" (*nazri-ye sangin*), such as saffron rice or votive soup imbued with Qur'anic verse and prayer to the family of the Prophet. Moreover, as with other vows, such votive food distribution at shrines either represents a pilgrim's desire to forge an alliance with an Imam or Imamzadeh (thus compelling a future favorable response), or celebrates the granting of a favor such as the solving of a family problem.[69] Yet regardless of the type of vow made, food prepared in the sanctuary of an Imamzadeh is considered especially potent (*moqavi*) because of its proximity to the Imam descendant's body, a body that does not rot or putrefy, and from which is manifest his or her spiritual presence. The very air and water (*aub-o hava*) of such shrines is said to have a special quality. According to a Fars-Abad aunt, "By cooking and sharing food from such sacred locations, the blessing is multiplied" (Nahid 4/5/10).

While the sharing of votive food at shrines is in no way a requirement of local pilgrimage, it is so prevalent that pilgrims can almost always expect to receive at least a small quantity of holy food during each journey. Sometimes, they also receive spiritual food in dreams during overnight stays at the shrine. Nushin recounted:

[69] Members of my extended host family participated in the same votive offerings and local pilgrimage on a much smaller scale and almost on a weekly basis to the tombs of local *seyyid*s in the town graveyard.

> I once went to Shah Cheragh [the shrine of Musa Al-Kazem, brother of the eighth Imam Reza, located in Shiraz] and spent the night there with my husband. While I was sleeping I had a dream. I dreamed that I asked His Holiness Musa Al-Kazem, the brother of Imam Reza, to ask the Imam to help me. I had previously gone to the doctor. He had diagnosed me with a kidney stone. The doctor said that I would need to have some painful and difficult procedures. But I had a dream when I was there. I dreamed that all of the workers at Shah Cheragh were gathered around a *sofreh*. One of them was an old lady. I came to the *sofreh* and asked if I could have something. The lady gave me a glass of sherbet (a drink made of fruit syrup mixed with water). I drank it and woke up with a start. I knew immediately that I had been healed (*shafa dadan*). The Imam Reza had healed me. I was certain that I would not need to go to the doctor again for this problem. (interview with Nushin 6/10/2010).

On any night at important pilgrimage destinations such as Shah Cheragh, one might see hundreds of such families sleeping on carpets or in tents around the outskirts of the shrine. During research, I heard several similar stories of healing by means of ingesting holy food in dreams. Such food is a gift from the Imam and is a means for divine blessing to enter and heal the bodies of those with pure hearts (*del pāk*) and faith (*emān*).

The blessing of such votive offerings – whether consumed in dreams or in waking – works in tandem with other acts of prayer and veneration to purify the spirit and body. As one enters through multiple layers of the outer walls, the sanctuary, and tomb physical place, walls, floors, and objects denote increasing proximity to the Imam or "Imam born" (*imamzadeh*), thought to be a worldly manifestation of Allah's reflection.[70] At the point of entry, pilgrims kiss the door of the enclave and recite a prayer of supplication, specific to the Saint entombed. Having entered their gender partitioned section, they place their hands on the golden cage (*zarih*) enclosing the tomb and circumambulate, pausing at the corners. They deposit monetary gifts and notes of family troubles and other life difficulties between the rungs of the metal cage surrounding the tomb. On one occasion, for example, I helped a woman I was with angle to the front of the crowded tomb of the Imamzadeh Musa al-Kazem in Shah Cheragh so that she could

[70] As with larger tombs of Shi'i saints, women cannot enter the inner enclave while they are mensturating and all persons must peform ablutions before entering the sanctuary (*haram*) that houses the tomb.

deposit a piece of paper with a wish for auspicious marriage. On other occasions, I watched as pilgrims tied votive rags or cloths or kissed the golden cage, hoping for divine blessing, peace, and wish fulfillment. Inside the carpeted sanctuaries, sounds of mourning intermingle with the whispers of pilgrims as they read prayers (*do'a*) from Shi'i prayer books or from the Qur'an. In the outer portions of the sanctuaries, women sat chatting and catching up, perhaps even making a phone call.[71] Women pilgrims I traveled with almost always came back from their visits to shrines with beaming smiles and said that they felt calm and content.

Ramadan

Several publicly oriented ceremonial celebrations mark Ramadan and involve a large distribution of votive food to fellow Muslims and the poor. My host family did not celebrate the biggest of these, the Eid-e Iftar, or the breaking of the fast on the 30th day of the month because we were mourning the death of a family member. However, we did participate in the Night of Power (*Shab-e Qadr*), a night during Ramadan in which the first verses of the Qur'an are said to have been revealed to the Prophet and simultaneously the anniversary of the martyrdom of his nephew, the Imam ʿAli. In Fars-Abad, the Night of Power is commemorated in the local Shi'i gathering hall on the 19th, the 21st, and the 23th of the month of Ramadan. It is the most auspicious night of the year. According to one Fars-Abadi neighbor, "The act of staying awake and praying on the Night of Power has such a deep effect that it shapes the person until the next year or even until the end of life. It penetrates all thought, ethics (*akhlāq*), deeds (*kardār*), and behavior. It fulfills spiritual need." Accordingly, the night is critical to the development of Islamic morality, goodness, and spiritual refinement. It is a key night for the accumulation of religious merit and for partaking in blessing – whether through prayer, nourishment, or both.

[71] Shrines are often the meeting place for teenage boyfriends and girlfriends.

The commemoration in 2010 began at midnight and ended before sunrise (around 4 am). Approximately 1,500 women gathered in the women's partition of the great hall, while the men sat to the left, made invisible by a heavy curtain. We arrived as families and then entered the building through gender segregated doors. My host mother, sisters, and I joined female friends and family who kneeled or sat crossed legged on the carpet in rows. Children played raucously around the parameter, running between the black and flowered chadors. The night began with a speech that echoed (almost incoherently) out of loudspeakers about Hazrat-e Ali, the nephew of the Prophet. My counterparts remarked that it was difficult to hear the speaker or the prayers, although we did catch the typical sing song medley that ends every Friday prayer in Fars-Abad "Down with England, Down with Israel, Down with America." I noted that some participants attempted to concentrate on the distorted voices. Others took the opportunity to relax and talk about their lives, catching up on gossip or news about courtships.

Many women distributed votive food throughout the ceremony. In total, I counted more than 50 young girls (ages 6-15) offering various votive foods to scores of participants across the floor: tea, halva, dishes of saffron rice, stuffed dates, wrapped candies, "problem solving candy" (*moshkeli goshā*),[72] "Ramadan confectionary" (*zolbiā o bāmieh*), and pastries until everyone had had multiple servings. Following this first such round, adult women fulfilled still heavier vows by offering simple sandwiches of herbs and feta cheese around the floor. The sounds of Iranian polite offering (*ta'arof*) echoed in the hall further obscuring the sound of the loudspeaker. My host mother, sisters, and I ate everything that was offered, even putting some sandwiches in a purse for later because it was "blessed." For the final prayer of the night, all 1,500 women

[72] *Moshkeli goshā* is a mixture of diverse nuts typically served and shared during the Iranian New Year but that was served on other occasions in Fars-Abad such as picnics and commemorations as a means of solving the personal and family problems.

attempted to balance a copy of the Qur'an on their heads, "keeping our hands free to open to God," as the woman next to me explained.

As with other blessings distributed in tandem with prayer, the votive foods thus shared were recounted in the narratives and stories told about the night. My host mother later said that she had been frustrated by the poor sound system and quality of the sermon. She spoke positively, however, about the other women and the votive fare they had shared. She told me that while she had recognized many of those providing vows, most were fellow townspeople with whom she did not have previous direct acquaintance. She and her oldest daughter analyzed the quality of the sandwiches, the dates, and the tea.

Zamzam Water: A Case of Purification from Outside

According to tradition, Zamzam water sprung miraculously for Ismael, the son of Abraham, when he was thirsty as a small child. His mother, Hagar, went seeking water but could not find it, so she prayed to God, imploring for aid. God sent Gabriel, who carved out a place in the earth with his heel where water appeared. The first time I heard of Zamzam water, I was in Ekbatan, Tehran sitting at the computer with Haleh. As we talked, her mother, Parvin, explained that the water she brought back from the sacred zam zam well near the Kaʿba from the "house of God" (*khāne-ye khodā*) in Mecca never goes bad, that it is blessed (*tabarrok*), and that it takes away impurities and has curative power.

According to Abdul Mohsen Bin Hemaid, "the head of projects and studies at the Presidency of the Two Holy Mosques" [in Mecca]: Zamzam water is now available to visitors in all prayer spaces and corridors inside the mosque and in the exterior courtyards. "There are 17 thousand containers of Zamzam water in the Holy Mosque. They are equally distributed in all

prayer spaces and corridors inside the mosque and in the exterior courtyards" (Al-Zahrani 2012).[73]

Although Muslim tradition makes multiple references to the purifying potential of water in general (e.g., "ablution" (*vozu*)) and also to several known sacred springs, the water of Zamzam is particularly important because of its location in Mecca. Performance of pilgrimage rites at Mecca culminate in the drinking of Zamzam water, and the pilgrims have historically carried it home to give it to the sick (Poonwala ????). Like to other Muslims, Shi'i pilgrims from Iran travel to Mecca with the specific intention of bringing the blessed water back for their friends and family.

The topic of Zamzam water came up several times during the course of my research as an important gift (*soghat*) brought by pilgrims for relatives and friends at home. On one occasion, I sat in an Islamic school in Tehran with Sima and Soraya, discussing how food can be powerful, blessed, or curative. Soraya brought out a book and opened it on the floor. It was a text – translated to Farsi – called "The Hidden Messages in Water" by Dr. Masaru Emoto. She explained, "This Japanese researcher has shown that water molecules are more perfect and regular in Mecca. The molecules of food and water change to a more perfect shape when people pray devoutly. The scientist who said this was not religious." On other occasions, Nushin described how the water she had brought from the Zamzam well never putrefied in its plastic bottle. She further said that they had poured the water that her mother had brought some back from her last pilgrimage into the farming well. "The water was plentiful after that, Seriously!" In other words, water brought from the Zamzam well in Mecca replenished the farm well water in Fars-Abad, allowing for the family and community to prosper.

[73] Al-Arabiya News "Zamzam Water on Demand in Ramadan" by Khamis Al-Zahrani http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/08/17/232811.html

Kitchens of the "Houses" of Imams

> When we go to Mashhad, when we go to the "house of Imam Reza" (*khune-ye Imam Reza*),[74] we eat food. They have a kitchen. It is for blessing. They say that if you eat a little, the spirit of the Imam appears (*ruh-ye shun hozur peyda mikoneh*) and it brings blessing to your house. [Parvin, Tehran, 3/30/10]

Very little scholarship has addressed the sacred kitchens of Iran. These kitchens, located in the "*haram*s" or "houses" of certain key Shi'i Imams and their descendants, provide "holy food" (*gaza-ye moqaddas*) or "blessed food" (*tabarrok*) to pilgrims, students, and the poor in very large quantities on a daily basis. Such kitchens, while frequented mainly by Shi'i Iranians citizens, also form key stops on the pilgrimage routes of non-Iranian Shi'i Muslims. In the following, I draw from the pilgrimage narratives and reflections of my key Basiji informants in both Fars-Abad and Tehran in 2010 as well as from my own visit to such a kitchen with female pro-Khatami religious seminary students and teachers in Rey, Iran in 2008. I suggest that the kitchens and the huge quantities of food that these sites serve to pilgrims on a daily basis make visible the convergence of national/Islamic government institutions and foundations as well as a national religion (*din-e mellat*). They reveal a particular Iranian version of Shi'i Islam that emphasizes the incorporation of right spirit and purity into bodies and souls – not only of citizen families, but also of Shi'i Muslims. In addition, they make visible local understandings of how food is linked to divine – and more precisely, to the incorporation of the divine into bodies and families. The holy kitchens, I contend, are an embodiment of what is both a national and transnational spiritual practice.

[74] In Farsi, the concept of "holy tomb" or "shrine" (*haram*), too, is interchangable with the word "house" (*khune*). Iranian pilgrims refer to the sacred mosque in Mecca (*al-masjid al-haram* in Arabic) as the "house of God." Likewise, shrines of the 12 Imams and their descendents are similarly addressed: for example, the shrine of H. Imam Reza in Mashhad, Iran is frequently referred to as "the house of the Imam" (*khuneye- Imam*).

The kitchen of the Imam Reza, the eighth Shi'i Imam, is located in a beautiful shrine complex in Mashhad, and is the most well known sacred kitchen in Iran. Mashhad, an ancient hub on the Silk Road, constitutes the second largest city in Iran today and Shi'i Muslims all over the world recognize it as a holy city.[75] In addition to its holy reputation, the shrine of Imam Reza has been an important site in Iranian politics. In 1935, the *haram* was the site of protest against the "modernizing" and "anti-religious" policies of Reza Shah. Bazaaris and other protesters chanted slogans such as "The Shah is the New Yazid" (Bakhash 1984:22), referencing both the Battle of Karbala and the sacred site of the *haram* itself where Imam Reza was martyred. Despite the upheaval, the Pahlavis were ultimately instrumental in restoring shrine, which was further "perfected" after the Revolution. Today, approximately twelve million pilgrims journey there annually, and the Iranian government continues to provide both religious guardianship and monetary support to the complex (Shaery-Eisenlohr 2007:20). The Iranian government provides the same guardianship and funding to other key national and transnational Shi'i pilgrimage destinations such as the shrine of the Imam Husayn in Iraq and the tombs of the daughters of the Imam ʿAli in Damascus. This effort, according to Shaery-Eisenlor, is part of the Iranian religious elite's attempt to cultivate Iranian religious nationalism, both in and outside the country. She notes, however, that at least for many Lebanese Shi'i pilgrims and clerics, this effort has often met with resistance and critique (2007:20).

My focus in this section, however, is not pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Reza, a subject that has been addressed by several anthropologists (Betteridge 1992). Rather, I am interested in the practice of partaking in food at what is alternatively termed Imam Reza's "kitchen" (*āshpaz khāneh*) or "guest house." The structure of the kitchen consists of a four-floor building with more

[75] In Arabic, the name Mashhad means "the place of martyrdom" and is the location of the martrydom of the Imam Reza.

than 600 chairs and a large carpeted reception area. It is reported by Iranian media that 5,000 people receive services at the kitchen of Imam Reza daily. Thousands more (such as students affiliated with the local seminaries) participate in reception and catering at the kitchen during the birthday of the Imam ʿAli and the Imam Husayn respectively. The birthday of the Imam Reza himself, however, is the grandest affair, with an estimated 10,000 people in attendance both for a chance to eat the food of the Imam Reza and to participle in ritual sermons recounting and mourning the tragedy of Karbala (*rowzeh khāni*).

As Sima, an Esfahani woman lawyer and Islamic seminary student, related: "it [the food of Imam Reza] is the holiest food in all of Iran." Those who eat "the food of the Imam," as it is called, consider themselves fortunate. They describe how food from Reza's kitchen shares the "unique" taste of vowed foods cooked at home. Another woman in Fars-Abad similarly described this special taste: "it tastes better and is better. It has special potency and blessing." They believe that it has the power to heal "because the kitchen once belonged to him." In interviews, pilgrims to the Imam Reza's kitchen employed terms such as "healing" (*shafā dādan*), "sacred food" (*gazā-ye moqaddas*), and "blessed food" (*tabarrok*) to describe their experiences. Parvin, my host aunt explained on another occasion: "So many have been healed by eating the food of Imam Reza. There was one woman, the friend of my sister, she had cancer… She hadn't even eaten this much rice [she demonstrates the smallest pinch of rice with her hand], and her cancer left her on the spot" (Parvin, Tehran, 3/30/10). The potency of the blessing is such that even a small amount can be consumed for healing, health, and purification. Haleh, a twenty-nine year old woman, concurred: "You don't know how important this kitchen is. Many people from all over Iran, and maybe other Muslim countries, come and eat food there. Even if they can only have a little and even if it is just a tiny piece of bread" (interview on 6/5/2010). The

emphasis these women placed on the power of the food of Imam Reza and the incredible fortune of those who eat in the kitchen and are healed is directly linked to their daily and weekly efforts to make food that is spiritually healthy for their kin.

Nushin told me that she was lucky only once to get the rice from the kitchen of the Imam Reza and that she brought it home for her family. Most women pilgrims I spoke with emphasized how they employed this food to care for and bless their families, even those who had not made the journey. "Some people don't always eat the food there," Haleh explained. "Instead, they keep it in their freezers and anytime that they make their own rice, they pour a little rice from the kitchen. They say that it is blessing (*barakat*) and that it heals (*shafā mideh*) and *really, it does*" (Haleh 6/5/2010). In other words, they bring the food of the Imam Reza inside their homes to care for and protect their families. Indeed, while there are occasions when sick pilgrims travel to the Guest House of Imam Reza to heal personal sickness, often they are seeking to help other family members vicariously. As with the sacred Zamzam water of Mecca, many people take this food home to their families for gradual consumption, ensuring family health and blessing over time. Further, for many, the food substance itself has special, near magical qualities; qualities that mimic those of slain martyrs. Because of its divine origins and location in the inside, it does not rot, bloat, or mold. It does not putrefy in anyway.

Perhaps the second most famous such kitchen in Iran is that of the shrine of the Shah Abdul-Aziz in Rey, Iran just outside of Tehran and available by metro from the city center. In 2008, I accompanied Sima, the Esfahani Hozeh student and another foreign anthropologist to the shrine whose complex included an Islamic seminary school. We peeked into the old part of the kitchen. It was full of huge pots for cooking rice and dust and was probably only used for the yearly Muharram ceremonies to commemorate the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn. The newer

kitchen and restaurant area, however, was ornately set up like a restaurant with tables and chairs. Its stucco walls resembled the inside of a mosque, complete with columns and arches and was divided by gender. We noted that the male chefs stood over large tubs of food as we walked in. We paid for the food that we consumed: a simple American style fried chicken dish next to a small bowl of traditional ritual soup (*āsh*)! When I asked where our money would go, Sima said that it would feed the poor. Framed signs written in both Farsi and Arabic on the wall reminded all pilgrims to pray before eating. Later, we stopped by to visit Soraya, a friend of Sima's who worked in the women's seminary school somewhere near the shrine. "Why is the food holy?" I asked. "It is because of the place." Sima responded in English as Soraya nodded. "The kitchen belonged to the person in the tomb. The food comes from the money that is given to the tomb. This money is also given to needy people. It is by fortune that you can eat that food." She further explained that the type of food served doesn't matter. Rather, what matters are the prayers and blessings that accompany eating at the kitchen: "The food is holy because it is made in his kitchen. It is his gift to us. But we must pray for it." The type of food doesn't matter. Just that it is made there. It changes every day. And every day they choose several people to eat there for free" (Sima 8/08). In Fars-Abad in 2010, I recounted this experience to Nushin. She grasped my the hand and said in Farsi, "They say that any person that goes before Abdul-Azim, it is as if they have made a pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam Husayn. It is that important."

But the kitchens at the shrines of Imams are also not exactly all-inclusive. One woman explained that she only obtained tickets to the main ceremony because she and her husband were Islamic seminary students. If one does not have this privilege, full service at the kitchen occurs by chance. "The manager of this restaurant gives tickets out by chance to passersby," explained Eran, a neighbor in Fars-Abad. Another person said that women who work in the kitchen choose

from among the needy: "The ladies who work in *haram* have the ability to select a needy person" (8/5/2008). Internet blogs and the website on the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad are full of narratives of experiences surrounding the selection of visitors for the kitchen – both personal and hearsay. Some reoccurring themes in these accounts include: stories of needy, simple and good Muslims being selected to receive fare; the generosity of ticket holders who give up their tickets for the needy; experiences of encounters with saints/persons at the kitchen who offer or receive food and then mysteriously disappear. Bloggers emphasize and seek to emulate the generosity of the Prophet. Thus although many insist that they take part in such blessed food according to an ethic of egalitarianism, hierarchies of wealth, perceived morality, "face" (*āberu*), and religiosity (*mazhabi*) also emerge within and through these practices.

Food, Para-governmental Foundations, and the Islamic State

Mahmud, Haleh's father, two of his sons, and his wife, Parvin, and I left for the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum at seven in the morning, piling into the family's bright green Tehran taxi cab. Even at this early hour, we passed long lines of parked cars waiting for *benzin*, and finally turned onto the Persian Gulf highway south toward Qom. As always, Mahmud, pulled off the highway just outside the Tehran city limits to radio his taxi company and confirm his itinerary, a requirement for his service as a taxi driver. He sat back down in the driver's seat coughing. This was his daily chemical reminder of the Iran-Iraq War. Today, though, he seemed excited to visit the Mausoleum and the graves of his family members in the adjacent cemetery. In the rear seat, Parvin turned to me and confided that she felt energized, that she had belief (*aqideh*) in what we were about to do. Adjusting her black chador smartly against her headscarf, she said that we were going to the tomb of the Ayatollah Khomeini, "the Imam." "He was a good man," she

explained. “He didn’t become a leader for money or power. He lived simply.” Mahmud’s oldest son, Mehdi, sat in the front next to his father. He didn’t say anything but kept a serious expression. He had already provided me with some books and pamphlets on the family of the Prophet to help me, the American, understand his faith.

The spring air was already warming, as we pulled into the 20,000-car parking lot adjacent to the Mausoleum. The enormous gold dome and four minarets, still under construction, towered over us as we crossed the large square that led up to the building’s entrance. Bidding a temporary farewell to Mahmud and his sons, Parvin and I entered the women’s door and partition, taking off our shoes and putting them in the crinkly plastic bags that Haleh’s mother pulled out of her purse. Once inside, the Ayatollah’s visage appeared on billboards and posters throughout the complex. Parvin did not attend to these details, however. She immediately deposited one thousand toman (about one dollar) in a donation box in the shrine. She then walked up to the tomb and touched its metal grill, reciting a verse from the Qur’an as she kneeled on the floor. In a soft but clear voice, she prayed for her daughter – at home in bed – to find a good husband and

be happy. She asked me, conspiratorially, to pray for her daughter as well, handing me a plastic bag full of sweets. “It’s a votive offering,” she said. “Everyone does it.” Before she could return to her prayers, several women came up to us and offered their own sweets. “Please have some” (*befarmid*),” they said. Parvin responded simply, “May God bless (have mercy upon) your deceased (*khodā rahmatesh koneh*).”

The Imam Khomeini Mausoleum is both a national monument and a shrine. While its golden minarets are modeled after that of Imam Husayn’s shrine, recalling the battle of Karbala, the dome resembles that of the Fatima al-Ma'suma's shrine in nearby Qom, the location of important 1978 uprisings that led to the Revolution (Rizvi 2002). The site, which attracts both Iranians and foreigners, has been under construction since the Ayatollah Khomeini’s death in 1989 and is regularly widely attended by the Ayatollah Khomeini’s supporters, whether they are foreigners or Iranians. Yet although officials describe the premises as a meetinghouse of the Imam Husayn rather than a mosque of worship, the grounds and public participation on site resemble both mosque and pilgrimage. For instance, the complex (the dome and minaret) includes a *qibla* wall, indicating the direction of Mecca and orienting prayer. Moreover, Khomeini’s tomb has striking parallels to the shrines of the Imams and their descendants. Yet unlike the silver and gold plated grills that enclose many tombs of Shi'i imams and Sufi saints, the structure is made of plain metal strips. The four corners of the burial enclosure, which is covered by a green canopy, are embellished with bouquets of plastic flowers. Iranian scholar of architecture Rizivi writes that this cheap decoration is meant to convey an image of Khomeini as simple, unpretentious, and anti-elitist. Despite this simplicity, pilgrims such as Parvin give votive offerings at the complex. They pray and perform supplications. Indeed, for Parvin, Mahmud, and his sons, a visit to the shrine is at once a celebratory family outing and a pilgrimage. They pray

for their daughters, for their marriages, for health, and for divine blessing, all in a specifically state-owned and run center. Here, the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum, as an icon of the Islamic Revolution, the modern state, and its founder – helps to imbue what are often personal votive offerings with divine blessing. At the same time, the Mausoleum, in Khomeini's own words, asks its pilgrims to protect the Revolution (and thus the Islamic Republic) from its enemies: "Whether I am with you or without you," the placard hanging over the entrance reads, "I ask you not to allow the revolution to die in the hands of the enemies."

We continued our trip by visiting Zahra's Paradise, the nearby graveyard filled with thousands of graves and sectioned between martyrs and non-martyrs. After washing a family grave in the regular section, we arrived in the martyr's wing. Again, Parvin asked me to hand out votive candies she had in her purse. Nearby, a tent had been set up to hand out steamed milk.

The billboard over the kiosk read: "Today is the fifth day we are under siege. They have rationed the water. Thirst has killed all. All except the martyrs that are now lying beside one another at the final canal. Oh Lord, protect Fatimeh [the daughter of the Prophet] from the brink of thirst." The Farsi text was on black parchment and was accompanied by a graphic image of a pair of hands cupping flowing water. An anonymous soldier appeared next to the hands, dressed in military fatigues and a helmet. Tens of pictures of Iran-Iraq War martyrs framed tent. One Mahmud's sons brought me a cup. "It tastes good," he said.

The nearby Martyr's graveyard in Zahra's Paradise draws lines between the enemies of Islam and the visiting pilgrims. Again, votive offerings of food contribute in important ways to the ambiance. The sharing of "blessed" food is often sponsored by the state itself. For instance, the Islamic Republic provides both guardianship and funding for the formal and informal kitchens of the Imams described above, which are housed in their mausoleums. In addition, pious and public government food offerings are commonly a central feature of key national/Islamic events. On the birthday of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the government sponsored votive meals of kebab and fruit or other foods are distributed at the Imam Khomeini Mausoleum (*Maqbareh-ye Imam Khomeini*). (Votive food distribution also occurs in the streets, although this is sponsored by individual families or organizations).

At the national public/martyrs' cemetery in Tehran (Zahra's Paradise), Iranians take part in regular votive offerings (e.g., hot milk, tea, pastries candies) in the sacralized martyrs' section of the graveyard. In so doing, they honor the Iran-Iraq War martyrs, whether the martyrs are their own loved ones, or merely related to them only through common faith and citizenship – as fellow "brothers and sisters of Islam" (*baradar o khāhar-e Islami*). On a smaller scale, the same government sponsored food offerings are prevalent in the multiple Iran-Iraq martyrs' cemeteries,

universities, and street corners across the Fars province. This food distribution is often carried out and paid for by martyrs' foundations, explicitly combining blessing (*barakat*) and nation. The process of making, distributing, and eating this food is understood as an act of piety and as an act of citizenship.

In the beginning of this chapter, I described a commemorative distribution of votive food at an unknown martyrs' commemoration in Fars-Abad funded by a para-governmental martyrs' foundation. I argued that the commemoration explicitly combined understandings of Islamic blessing through food offerings with the making of an Islamic Republic. The speeches and prayer recalled the pure Imam Husayn's struggle against the evil Yazid in the Battle of Karbala and distinguished the participating and halal Shi'i Islamic "brother and sisters" from the enemies of both Islam and Republic. Its speakers, both religious and secular, not only praised those present for their attendance and public participation, but also for the luck which brought them to the site to partake in the martyrs' blessing, a blessing which earned through prayer and which was distributed by uniformed soldiers. Indeed, in tandem with the ritual burial, the blessed and "traditional" Iranian lentil rice meal and yoghurt served as a multivocal icon of government generosity, nationalism, and kindred spirit. It contributed, persuasively to the making of halal citizens, reckoned as national kin. This type of commemoration is not unusual in the Islamic Republic. During my visit, similar commemorations were repeated in Shiraz as well as in neighboring counties as martyrs were brought to be buried or died of residual Iran-Iraq War complications. In *Performing Islam*, Torab (2007) argues this kind of votive food distribution resonates in important ways with the act of martyrdom. In particular, she suggests that the

making, sponsorship, and sharing of food is a pure-intentioned sacrifice of labor that parallels the ultimate blood sacrifice of the Iranian war martyrs.

Conclusion: Returning to the Martyrs' Burial

The opening vignette of this chapter thus makes visible the complex ways that concepts about food, spirituality, and Islamic nationalism mutually constitute each other in the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, I have also aimed to show in this chapter – as well as in Chapter Three – that the same configuration occurs in the smaller and subtler scales of household kitchens, in everyday decisions about eating and shopping, and in seemingly irrelevant evaluations of the qualities of votive food, whether at home or at pilgrimage sites.

To conclude, this chapter has explored how a powerful cohort of conservative Shi'i Iranians, as citizens of the Islamic Republic, create distinctions between the moral inside and the corrupting outside through food categorization and practices. Specifically, while local, "inside" foods are valued because they are both halal and spiritually nourishing, processed, foreign, and fast foods from "outside" can cause sickness and spiritual infection (Al-e Ahmad 1962). Moreover, the distribution of specially blessed foods in Islamic national rituals, such as on the birth and death days of the Shi'i Imams, channels religious merit (*savāb*) between and among Iranian citizens. In such commemorations, men and women distribute votive soup, lemon drink and rice from kiosks in graveyards, public squares, private homes, side-walks and mosques to passersby whom they call Islamic national "brothers and sisters." This chapter makes the argument that such food practices create core kindred spirit and substantiate who and what is inside the nation and who or what is without.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

My dissertation, *Feeding Moral Relations: The Making of Kinship and Nation in Iran*, has examined how Islamic concepts of purity and morality are shaping social relations for both the family and the nation in Iran. I have focused, in particular, on the myriad ways by which Basiji families aspire to create and protect the pure kindred spirit and ethical relations of their households, their communities, and their nation-state. Key subjects of analysis have included prayer, the spilled blood of martyrs, claims to genealogical descent and prophetic lineage, and everyday and ritual acts of sharing food in homes, towns, mosques, and streets. I show that, for Basijis, the potential for sacred or ethical relations between constituents, citizens, and the state, and between these same constituents and the divine, is a driving force in family and nation life.

Specifically, this dissertation has examined an overarching logic of inner purity and outer corruption that similarly shapes Basiji Shi'i Iranian family and national sociality. In this logic, the pure inside is the location of vitality, sustenance, sweet smells (e.g., rose water), cleanliness, and closeness to God. It is further the location of ethical and religiously permissible relationships, characterized by mutual respect, obligation, and trust. The outside, in contrast, is the source of ever-encroaching decay, corruption, uncleanliness, and distance from God; and is composed of unethical, unlawful relations, characterized by discord and distrust. It is further the source of Western spiritual vacancy. In Iran, inside and outside qualities, persons, and acts exist in a hierarchical and interpenetrating spectrum, with valued inside qualities positioned at the top.

According to my Shi'i Basiji interlocutors, certain persons epitomize this inner purity and closeness to God. These persons include the Hidden Imam, the family Prophet, the twelve

Imams, and his descendants. They contend, along with other Shi'i Muslims, that the fourteen infallibles – the Prophet, his daughter Fatimeh and the Twelve Imams – are divinely bestowed with freedom from error and sin, a quality known as *esmat*. This God-given purity, often depicted as divine light, is channeled through flows of blood between generations and is evidenced in accounts of familial devotion, charity, piety, and martyrdom. Other persons, however, can also attain proximity to the divine through embodied practices: acts and experiences that link them to divinity. Martyrs, in particular, attain closeness to the divine through pure intentioned "acts" (*amalat*) of spilling their blood. In the contemporary Islamic Republic, the blood and remains of these martyrs acquire the capacity to purify, heal, and spiritually nourish the Shi'i Iranian citizens. For everyday Iranians, too, ritual acts such as prayer, charity, pious food sharing, and devotion to the Imams and/or buried martyrs can also create a relationship with the divine. Such acts accumulate "religious merit" (*savāb*) overtime and help ensure the avoidance of hellfire on the Day of Judgment – not only for the actor, but also for kin and non-kin others.

In contrast, Basiji friends and family regard those people who are not included in Prophetic genealogy, who do not become martyrs in defense of Islam and the Republic, and who do not perform pious acts of worship to the God and the Twelve Shi'i Imams, as less proximate to God. These persons include an array of persons characterized both by their birth and their actions. For instance, they include Iranians who are born Shi'i, but who are no longer practicing; Iranian Sunni Muslims – "Muslim brothers" and who accept the Prophet as the messenger of God, but who do not accept the "rightful" succession of the Imam ʿAli; and finally, Iranians who are "people of the book" – Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians – who share a belief in the one God, but who have not accepted the infallibility of the Qur'an. In this framework, heretics,

atheists, and foreigners (to varying degrees depending on their faith) are the least connected to the divine, and resultantly, are sometimes regarded – but only by the most conservative prayer leaders or Basiji officials – as a source of uncleanliness and spiritual contamination. This logic of inside and outside thus configures a shifting and dynamic hierarchical connection to divinity that extends from the ultimate connection with God (e.g., the family of the Prophet of their descendants) down to those who have complete disconnect from Shi'i Islam and from the divine (such as non-Muslim idolaters or "heretics").

Kinship and Nation

As I have shown in this dissertation, for pro-regime friends and family in Fars-Abad as well as in other parts of Iran, the maintenance of Islamic moral kinship is a matter of constant vigilance. Not only must the inside space of the household and its thresholds be protected from possible outside harm (such as the evil eye), but individual family members must strive toward Islamic purity in all acts, prayers, and talk. Indeed, harmonious and halal family relationships are the heart (*del*) of the household.

The family itself is conceived in a number of ways. As I have related, my interlocutors view "same blood," male lineage (figured through backbone), and female milk as the "foundations" of kinship. These bodily substances (and sometimes also biological substances such as DNA or genes) are evidenced in Islamic natural law and form the basis of descent and fixed gender and family roles. As I have highlighted, however, my host family and friends' concepts of bodily substances, biology, or Islamic law cannot be understood apart from their dynamic and shifting spiritual and moral claims about inner family purity and the ever-present imperative to circumvent outside corruption. They emphasize that qualities of purity or

corruption traced through blood, milk, and backbone are not only inheritable, but that they also are mutable. In the resulting continuum of inside and outside, immediate lineal kin whose spiritual constitutions are known and trusted tend toward purity, while in-laws, strangers, and foreigners are potentially dangerous to the family.

I have further demonstrated that acts such as cooking and feeding are key media for shaping a family's inner purity and resisting outer corruption. For Basijis in Fars-Abad, "correct" and "complete" kinship depends – in both daily and ritual contexts – on a complex orchestration of appropriate and moral foodways. Not only can food be strategically wielded to incorporate the "right" qualities of purity and goodness into the bodies and souls of kin, but depending on who is involved, food can also provide a unique means to manipulate or destroy the pure inner moral core of the family, embodied by the *sofreh*. Here, spiritual and other immaterial qualities of food (e.g., halal, blessed, hot, or cold) can transform the character, temperament, and Islamic quality of familial relationships. They can also transform the blood and bodies of persons with implications for future generations.

Iranian understandings of the nation bear close resemblance to the inner/outer dimensions of Iranian kinship. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a powerful cohort of religious scholars and everyday citizens has emphasized the need to (re)generate the authentically Islamic interior of the nation – a citizenry that is composed of virtuous Shi'i brothers and sisters – while resisting the immoral, "Westernstruck" exterior (Shari'ati 1979; Al-e Ahmad 1962).

Scholars in history, politics, and anthropology have written widely on the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Fischer 2003; Keddie 2006), the shaping of the Iranian nation (Vaziri 1993; Ansari 2007), and the "paradox" of sustaining an Islamic republic (Zubaida 2004). In these analyses, kinship is relegated to the domestic sphere and is not associated with the nation, its

politics, or religion (cf. Strathern 2005). In contrast, my dissertation shows that both kinship and religious paradigms are vital for understanding the Iranian nation. Here, Shi'i concepts of the family, with its roles and gender essences, conflict with a second set of notions of possessive individualism upon which the idea of the nation or republican state is based (Osanloo 2002: 47). Importantly, the possessive "individual" in Iran is neither pre-empted by nor modeled on the autonomous individual of the West. Instead, he or she is understood through the idiom of ethics, personal responsibility toward others (Osanloo 2002), and intentional actions (Torab 2005).

In this debate over the relationship between the family and individualism in Iran, one of the most respected Islamist scholars has been the Ayatollah Motahhari (Paidar 1995:175). He argued that "individual rights" is a matter of Western irrelevance and should be subsumed under both the family and the larger society. For example, the interest of society in defining women's appearance and sexuality takes precedence over women's individual choice (Motahhari 1978). Motahhari was further concerned with the corruption of the family in society, which he defined as adultery, homosexuality, drug abuse, alcohol consumption, gambling, music, and mixing of men and women wearing un-Islamic clothes (Yeganeh 1993:16). In part as a result of his influence, but also in large part because of the significance of the family in Shi'i Islam, today in Iran, according to the Constitution, it is the family that must be guarded as the fundamental unit of the nation.

As Schneider (1969) argued in relation to the U.S., the same cultural understandings that underlie kinship can similarly underlie the nation. I have illustrated how this occurs in Iran by exploring how the substances and processes of kinship-making (e.g., bodily substances, food, and prayer) form a basis for nation making. On one level, I have shown how the patrilineal family is mapped onto the model of Iranian citizenship – with notions of blood and descent

naturalizing a distinction between citizens and foreigners. Yet more than substance, the state and its supporters explicitly draw on bodily substances such as blood to create a *religious* (Islamic) nation, oriented toward the divine, and modeled on the family. Indeed, the unknown martyr is the ultimate example of the making of this spiritual relationship. The martyrs' pure spilled blood connects both Iranian land/soil and citizens to God, creating a pure "inner" core of the nation. This emphasis on blood, as I have argued – both that which runs in the veins and that which is spilled on the battlefield – is part of a variously successful state endeavor to construct a spiritual relationship – both between and among national Shi'i "brother and sister" citizens, and between these same citizens, the land/soil (*khāk*) of Iran, and God.

On another level, this dissertation moves beyond the boundaries of bodily substances and genealogy to query how other forms of kin making such as feeding or prayer may have relevance for the making of national social relations. In a manner similar to the making of the moral and pure family, my interlocutors make frequent use of food and prayer in national contexts to help create distinctions between the moral inside of the nation and Islamic community and the corrupting outside. While local, "inside" foods are valued because they are both halal and spiritually nourishing, processed, foreign, and fast foods from "outside" can cause spiritual sickness and infection, a disease of the West (Al-e Ahmad 1962). Even more explicitly, the distribution of specially blessed foods in Islamic national rituals, such as on the birth and death days of the Shi'i Imams, channels religious merit between and among Iranian citizens. In such commemorations, men and women distribute votive soup, lemon drink and rice from kiosks in graveyards, public squares, private homes, side-walks and mosques to passersby whom they call Islamic national "brothers and sisters." This dissertation therefore draws attention to a powerful analogy between food sharing at home and food sharing for the nation: pious acts of food sharing

and prayer contribute to the cultivation of ethical social relationships, not only between kin, but also between national (Muslim) citizens.

In sum, this work extends Schneider's argument concerning the interrelation of kinship and nation to the realm of religion. Indeed, according to my interlocutors, for both kinship and nation, an inside space and its thresholds must be protected from outside harm and inner constituents must strive toward Islamic purity, whether God-given in blood, or created through "acts" such as praying and sharing food. These acts, I argue, help constitute moral and halal relationships for both kin and national citizens.

A Caveat

Importantly, Basijis' efforts to attain and preserve pure and ethical (Shi'i) kinship and national relations do not go unopposed in the diversity of contemporary Iran. Previous scholars of Iran have made an in-depth investigation of opposition to the notion of morality and Islamic lifestyle. Anthropologist Pardis Mahdavi (2009:3), for instance, shows how youth embody their resistance to "the fabric of morality woven by the regime" by engaging in activities such as meeting friends, dating, drinking, and having sex. Similarly Iranian anthropologist Roxanna Varzi (2006) describes a sexual revolution enacted against a "repressive regime" that imposes harsh punishment on women and youth… and [that] "tries to enforce mandatory social and moral comportment in accordance with Islamic laws."

In contrast to this important work, however, the current dissertation focuses on the viewpoint of the Basiji citizenry who support the regime. In particular, I have described lived examples in which Basiji families intensely endeavor to attain and preserve pure and ethical national relations in the same way they generate kinship relations. In so doing, I seek to move

beyond the ethnographic exploration of resistance versus compliance (Abu-Lughod 1990) so common to ethnography of Islam and the Middle East. Rather, I focus on lived examples Basiji interlocutors striving for spiritual purity and morality.

Spirit and Matter: Why Bodily Substances and Food?

This dissertation has shown that *both* bodily substances and food are vital to understanding how divine blessing shapes the "inner" kinship group (*khanevadeh*) and (Islamic) nation (*mellat*). Across chapters, I have described a spiritual inter-layering of both of blood and food (whether blessed, halal, or votive) in the fashioning of Shi'i Iranian citizens. I have further shown that both blood and food are inextricably tied to understandings of family, household, nation and Islamic purity. I now posit, however, that although these substances work together to materialize inner Islamic purity and morality for both families and nation, they do so in different ways. In other words, I ask: how do bodily substances and food differently contribute to the making of "correct" social relations?

In emerging anthropological scholarship on blood's special quality as a substance, material, and metaphor (Carsten 2013), scholars highlight the powerful involvement of blood in concepts of life, death, nurturance and violence, connection and exclusion, as well as in kinship and sacrifice (Cannell 2013; Copeman 2013; Feeley-Harnik 1981). These scholars further illuminate the capacity of blood to participate in and flow between domains that are often presumed to be distinct in scholarly analysis (such as kinship and nation). In these accounts, scholars often aptly emphasize blood as a source of naturalization, power, and difference. Basij Shi'i understandings of blood, however, additionally make visible the spiritual dimensions of blood as a substance and metaphor and highlight the ways in which blood may be used as a force

of sacralization. As my ethnography has shown, in Iran, blood that runs in the veins is associated, not only with descent and lineage, but also with vitality, purity, and regeneration. These qualities are born within (*darunzad*) and are inherited along lines of descent (see the example of the *sayyed*s). In addition, blood is made particularly potent in its spillage (e.g., martyrdom) and its divine qualities can be transferred across materials, bodies, and persons through physical contact. As I have shown, however, other forms of blood are polluting. Menstrual blood, for instance, is spiritually contaminating and the Qur'an forbids consumption of the blood of sacrificed animals.

Nevertheless, despite the range and malleability of its qualities, blood remains central to depictions of family in the Qur'an and Islamic exegesis and has real implications for such things as the inheritance of property, adoption, and the rules for permitted relating. In the case of descendants of the Prophet Mohammad, moreover, flows of blood channel "fixed" connections to the divine. (If a *sayyed* sins, they will not undo their status as a *sayyed*).

This dissertation has shown that food, like blood, has a unique capacity to flow between domains usually kept distinct in scholarly analysis. In contrast to the relative fixity and natural/givenness of blood, however, scholars have always conceived food as a vehicle of transformation. As anthropologist Jane Fajans has noted, "Food is not just a symbol or metaphor for social and cultural processes (e.g., in its transformation from raw to cooked) nor simply a signifier that reflects or embodies aspects of culture. Food is not only transformed, it is transformative" (1988:143). Food in Iran has this capacity to transform. However, the potential that people in Fars-Abad see in food stems both from its substance and from its very ability to be transformed in the first place: through gardening, cooking, mixing, or praying. For them, food seems to mediate somatic and spiritual worlds that stand not in opposition but in dialogue. It is a means of (in)corporation, shaping the qualities of "rightness" (*dorosti*) and "purity" (*pāki*) into

both bodies (*jesm*) and the spirit (*ruh*) of kin or national citizens. Food is thus not merely transformative of individual family members or citizens; it (re)constitutes and demarcates the moral family or nation as a whole.

Yet despite food's powerful capacity to transform people, families, and national landscapes, however, except for milk kinship, food cannot reconfigure Islamic laws of descent, inheritance, or permitted relating. The eating of the Iranian food, although delicious and highly religious, cannot make a person an Iranian – although my interlocutors argue that it would help. Instead, food has the capacity to transmit and incorporate moral and spiritual properties with real consequences for the making of the "right" or halal family and nation – properties such as purity, goodness, properties which concern Basij Shi'i families just as much, if not more, than the lawful designation of kinship or citizenship.

Rethinking Spiritual Kinship

Finally, this dissertation has sought to push the boundaries of what we understand as spiritual kinship. In much scholarship, spiritual kinship has been classified as fictive or pseudo-kinship and has been opposed to real, natural, or biological relationships. As a result, spiritual kinship has remained a minor field of inquiry within kinship studies. Recent developments in feminist and kinship studies have, however, laid the groundwork for new comparative investigations of kinship forged through non-biological means (Schneider 1984; Carsten 2000; Franklin and McKinnon 2001). Yet although they have pointed to the ways people create "relatedness," these scholars have rarely focused on the spiritual dimensions of kinship across the formations of families, communities, and nations (Delaney 1995).

The Study of Spiritual Kinship in the Muslim World

To date, scholars of Islam have largely confined their research of spiritual kinship(s) to the examination of "adoptive institutions" such as milk kinship and temporary marriage that offer an "elective" contrast to Islamic "biogenetic" kinship (*nasab*) based on inheritable substances such as blood. Scholars tend to compare these institutions to Christian God-parenthood because of their similar legal formalization, marriage impediments, and their tactical uses in the creation of alliances, contracts, and client-patron relations. Research on such Islamic varieties of spiritual kinship have included, for instance, Shi'i Alevi practices of ritual co-parenthood through circumcision (Kaser 2008; Magnarella and Turkdogan 1973), religiously sanctioned temporary marriage in Iran (Haeri 1993), and most centrally, Islamic legal practices of milk kinship and fostering (Parkes 2003; Ensel 2002; Khatib-Chahidi 1992; Altorki 1980).

Of these examples, Islamic milk kinship has been most often explored as a version of Christian god-parenthood. Indeed, some scholars suggest that, despite significant divergences, both Christian God-parenthood and Islamic milk kinship originated in the same practices of foster-kinship of the ancient Mediterranean (Parkes 2003:749). And further, they suggest that, milk kinship, not unlike Christian god parenthood, specifically expresses and reinforces bonds of trust between families and clients of unequal status (Ensel 2002; Khatib Chahidi 1992).[76] Anthropologist of Morocco, Remco Ensel, for instance, relates: "In both [Christian and Islamic institutions], we deal with a fictitious kinship relationship between people of unequal status that is embedded in a long-term exchange of goods and services that we know as patronage" (2002:83). In his account, Islamic spiritual kinship, like Christian God-parenthood, is explored as

[76] Interestingly historian of early-modern Italy, Guido Alfani questions received accounts of Mediterranean Christian spiritual kinship as a relationship of unequals between godparents and fathers (*compare*) and notes that the practice became increasingly asymmetrical only after the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

a "fictitious" form of kinship and is understood in explicit analytical opposition to "bio-genetic" or "real" kinship based on somatic or physical incorporation.[77]

One major goal of this dissertation is to rethink presumed oppositions between "natural" kinship and spiritual kinship and between spirit and matter that have often also framed studies of kinship among Muslims in the Middle East and among Shi'a Muslims in Iran. Challenging kinship theory's secular orientation, I have asked: what can the lens of spiritual kinship, writ outside the confines of this distinction, newly reveal about how kinship is created and understood in contemporary Shi'i Iran? And further, how might spiritual notions of relationships operate in tandem with other means of understanding kinship (e.g., shared bodily substances, food, prayer, and ethical work)? This approach allows for an exploration of how the ideas and practices of kinship reckoned through substance can simultaneously be organized in relation to the divine.

Similarly, although scholars of religion and anthropology have investigated the changes in religious practices instigated by migration, globalization, and post-colonialism (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Robbins 2004), they have rarely fully explored how ideas and practices of kinship infuse religious relations, affiliations, and communities. In contrast, the current dissertation has explicitly attended to the significance of spiritual kinship, or kinship reckoned in relation to the divine, in the contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran. This dissertation has explored how understandings of spiritual and moral relations inform the production of family, town, and nation. This work rethinks the breadth of practices that we may understand through the lens of spiritual or sacred kinship and highlights how ideas and practices of kin making can naturalize and/or sacralize families, communities, and nation-states.

[77] For another example of this sort of analytical opposition between spirit as "fictitious" and matter as "real" see Frishkopf 2003.

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