



# Global Husaini: Identity Formation at Shrinescape

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## Abstract

*Imam Husain's martyrdom has regained its global importance thanks to Arbain walk, an annual inter-religious ziyarah event done by walking from Najaf to Karbala, along the route of which epic hospitality is being practiced for the comfort of Imam Husain's devotees that come from around the world. If Imam Husain's martyrdom previously existed in revolutionary and spiritual imaginary of world leaders and mystics, Arbain walk opens up a new path to convey Imam Husain's legacy, in the sense that Arbain walk reenacts non-Shi's involvements in the Karbala event thus making it an arena for interreligious encounters. Those non-Shi's participated in three days walking from Najaf to Karbala are comprised of what I call global Husaini, emerging as the result of dynamic encounters in the shrinescape of Imam Husain. Without such dynamic shrinescape, global Husaini would only be a scattered presence of non-Shi's in communal pockets of Shi'i adherents around the world that commemorate Imam Husain's martyrdom.*

*Keywords: Global Husaini, Arbain walk, Shrinescape*

## Introduction

More than fourteen centuries ago, Imam Husain's martyrdom took place on 10 October 680 AD in Karbala present day Iraq, and is the object of commemoration of his faithful devotees around the world. Shi'is mark their *asyura*, the name of this Karbala event, as not only an annually important event but also made it a personal and

communal anchor for evaluation for better engagement with Islamic values. Forty days after *asyura* comes *Arbain*, also an annual event commemorating Imam Husain's legacies, mainly done by walking from several points of departure (such as Imam Ali's shrine in Najaf, Imam Kadzim's shrine in Northern Baghdad) toward Imam Husain's shrine in Karbala.

After Saddam Husain's downfall

in 2003 due to the United States-led coalition invasion, *Arbain* as a solely Shi'i religious event gradually transformed to become the *Arbain* walk. Reflected from the name that comprises two distinct words, *Arbain* walk is *Arbain* but perceived and exercised by global participants for global audiences hence the walk has an English word fittingly attached to the word *Arbain*. *Arbain* walk is mainly done by Shi'is walking for three days approximately from Imam Ali's shrine in Najaf to Imam Husain's shrine in Karbala, annually around 20 Safar in the Islamic lunar calendar.

Small in number but important in role is the presence of Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox Christian, Presbyterian, Hindu, and *Kejawen* in the *Arbain* walk. Walking the route along with their co-lovers of Imam Husain, these call themselves as Husaini, meaning someone that has been touched and transformed by Imam Husain's martyrdom specifically and the Karbala event generally.

I call them global Husaini since they come from around the world but also more importantly, these non-Shi's that find Imam Husain's suffering is attractive as universal value enabling a presence physically in Karbala through the larger process of globalisation. Both in terms of material (such as transportation facilities from and to Iraq) and sociopolitical preconditions (such as downfall of Saddam Husain

and the rise & defeat of ISIS/ISIL) and ideo-theological preconditions (messianic tone of Imam Husain's martyrdom that grounded and disseminate through multilayers of textualities and networks of interpreters) are global in nature. From Charles Dickens to Mahatma Gandhi, from Soekarno to Nelson Mandela, the Karbala event and narrative in which Imam Husain's rise confronting tyranny plays an important role in inspiring multiple struggling, not only against colonialism but also against one's own internal Yazid.

### **Dispersed Testimonies: The Need for Global Stage**

An interesting element of global Husaini in walking its *Arbain* walk is the attachment to specific route, not only the attachment to Imam Husain shrine as the final destination of the walk itself. 53 miles distance separating Najaf from Karbala in Iraq is chosen by most global Husaini as their primary route to be walked. Starting in Imam Ali's shrine in Najaf and ending in Imam Husain's has been seen as the ultimate testimony of loyalty upon imam Husain's cause.[1]

When examining this perception, I find that previously the *Arbain* walk was done from several starting points, including Najaf but also Baghdad and Samarra even some pilgrims would walk several weeks from their respective homes (such as from

southern Arabia and western Iran) in order to reach Imam Husain's shrine in Karbala. It is not only because the importance of the two shrines being made as the pathway of the walk that made the change appear, but also because the strategic decision made by Iraqi security apparatus to get maximum effectiveness in protecting the pilgrims from any dangers.[2]

Focal point and route of walking for this globally anticipated interreligious event for Iraqis especially and the region generally would be easy to control and focus the global gaze toward specific features of the walk, namely the enormous and generous hospitality lavished upon Imam Husain's visiting devotees. The main provider of that hospitality is the general public of Iraq.

When all men of his camp had already been killed thus Imam Husain was really alone and unprotected, Imam Husain rose his hand to the sky, and said, "Oh Allah, after all this suffering, what makes me have comfort is that you witness all of this", and then, almost immediately after that, he is calling loudly, "Is there anybody to help me?" It is very strange at the moment that the Imam would ask some mercy toward his merciless enemy. That is not the case at all. Imam Husain, after speaks in prayer to Allah, addressing anybody as anyone from future generations to come and defend the truth. Therefore it is incumbent for everybody to say,

"*Labbayka Yaa Husain*", meaning, here I come forward for You O Husain, when they come to visit the Imam's shrine.

This chanting, *Labbayka Yaa Husain*, never ceased since the day of Karbala in 61 H. Generation after generation has come forward to fulfill Imam Husain's calling. This calling is precisely what the contemporary Husaini answered. Even though it is understandable to answer Imam Husain's call in the form of lesser jihad in militarily battle, the greater jihad against one's selfish ego is seen as the most prominent form for answering Imam Husain's call. In Henry Corbin's term, Karbala of the heart,[3] denotes inner constant war between internal Husain against internal Yazid taking place, is the ultimate depiction of Imam Husain's actual Karbala being translated into the contemporary situation.

The moment one liberates one's Imam Husain from being slain by one's Yazid, is the moment one safeguards one's heart for Allah alone. One's heart becomes a throne for nothing other than Allah to occupy it. This is the moment when one is embraced by a luminous light body of Imam Husain when one is visiting the grave, or, being visited by Imam Husain in one's home, both in wake or sleep state. One cannot answer a call that one does not hear. Only hearing, seeing, embracing Imam Husain's call, is there anybody to help me, that one is capable for answering, here I am coming forward for You O

Husain, *Labbayka Yaa Husain!*

As significant as it is in a spiritual way, it is also very important to trace back historically the beginning of Husaini subjectivities, as subjectivities emerge in order to answer a specific call from Imam Husain. In order for us to better locate them in the contemporary discourse and practice of sharing shrine *ziyarah* and its relation to ritual based identity formation. If global Husaini is a semantics that occurred in specific conversation between specifically placed conversants about Imam Husain's martyrdom, then we have at least two vocabularies with which global Husaini today recollects and remembers themselves and world around them. These two vocabularies are core elements in active and creative conversation between global Husaini themselves and between global Husaini and another cross identities promulgators.

### **Kernel of Husaini: Christian Priest**

The first vocabulary is a very known account that after the beheading in Karbala, Imam Husain's head was stuck upon a lance and marched from Karbala to Damascus by his killer, along with Imam Husain's captive family members. On the route, the caravan eventually stopped to make night rest. The place for this resting, according to several accounts, is a Christian chapel. The unnamed priest of the chapel saw

the caravan from afar and noticed that specific cloud move in accord with the caravan.

"Could you please tell me, who are you people?" enquired the priest curiously. "Why do you ask, we are only resting here for tonight" answered the soldier of Yazid's army. "There must be a prophet or a prophet's legatee among you since only such people are protected from the heat of the sun by a specific cloud, which appears upon you right now" said the priest. "no prophet among us, but the head on the lance here, is Prophet Muhammad's grandson". "Curse upon you and your kin," replied the Priest. "Why do you kill your prophet's progeny. If Jesus has had progeny, then their sandals will be put in throne by us, Christians."

After this narrative exchange, the priest tried to buy Imam Husain's head in order to make proper burial. The killer refused because out of fear of Yazid in Damascus but also because greedy upon fame and a larger sum of money. The priest insistently wanted to perform adequate proper burial toward Imam Husain as long as he was in the priest's territorial responsibility. "If so, can I rent the head for tonight only. Tomorrow I will bring it back to you," proposed the priest. The point of agreement was reached and Imam Husain's head eventually took rest on behalf of a Syrian Christian church. The priest washed the head of Imam Husain with rose water, showered it with

qualified perfume, kissed, cried upon, honored, and rested him in his *mihrab* for one night.

According to popular belief, a specific stone used by the priest for Imam Husain's head resting place, today not only still exists but also attracts pilgrims to visit it in the mosque, believed to be a Syrian church before. Every *Asyura*, 10 Muharram, the stone will be bleeding, a form of cosmic mourning on Imam Husain's martyrdom. Believed to have belonged to a Priest, the stone and the relic & moment it contains marks the interreligious nature of Imam Husain's martyrdom.

I imagine, only if I may, is there any exchange of conversation taking place between Zainab and the Christian Priest? What words would be exchanged between them? Of course the two would be a reminder of popular believe of Jesus' crucifixion and how Imam Husain's fate resembles Jesus. Another liminal point for the two mourning subjects is the holy status conveyed in their respective religions of Mary (Jesus's mother and a supremely divine person in Catholicism) and Fathimah (Imam Husain and Zainab's mother, but also Prophet Muhammad's spiritual mother, as his *Umm Abiha*, meaning the mother of her father, is one of the most common titles for Fatimah).

I can only imagine, if I may, that the priest made the last salutation toward Imam Husain and his captive

family, both in avenging anger toward the killers and solemn humbleness toward Imam Husain, who after all, spoke a language everybody understood; a language of solitary suffering.

### **Kernel of Husaini: Husaini Brahmin**

The second crucial vocabulary build up global Husaini grammar is what is known as Husaini Brahmin. This refers to a specific Hindu Brahmin group (numbered around 1400 people) who lived in Iraq during the Karbala event and took the side of Imam Husain's cause. Historical accounts denote that before the Karbala event took place, these Hindus were closely related to Imam Ali in terms of administrative and commercial activities. Imam Ali, the beloved father of Imam Husain, gave these Hindu adherents some areas to stay. The remnant of this land can be found in today's Najaf, and is known as *Daar al-Hindiyya* (the Land of the Hindi). Some accounts narrate that these Hindus fought alongside Imam Husain in Karbala. They usually live in Lahore and Pune, where they migrated after being targeted by the Umayyad purge in Iraq. The remaining populations of them such as the Dutt families, live in India. Heavily connected to Husaini Brahmin historicity is the Mohyal Brahmin group who admire deeply Imam Husain and several Sufi holy figures. In modern

India, Husaini Brahmin usually lived in Delhi, Lahore and Pune, but they were forced to leave after Separation in 1948. Now they become more and more estranged from their cross faith core identity but efforts are already in progress by the younger generation of Husaini Brahmin to preserve, record and display their legacies.

Legendary accounts told us that certain Sind or Rahab, a childless Brahmin from the Dutt family, visited Imam Husain and asked the Imam to pray to Allah to grant him a child. Imam Husain answered that he already prayed to God and oversaw that Rahab/Sind Dutt would be childless forever. Sind so frustrated in despair and was in humble insistence to Imam Husain to make another prayer. After this second prayer, Imam Husain told Sind that he will be have one child. Sind Dutt was very happy to hear this. Someone else observed this conversation and raised doubts against Imam Husain, accusing him of challenging Allah's decision. Imam Husain's reaction is surprising since he stated that Sind will be have another child. The state of discussion continued, until Imam Husain claimed that Sind Dutt eventually would have seven children.

The difference on behalf of narrative accounts emerge when examining the specific relation of Sind Dutt, his seven children and the event of Karbala. On the one hand, we find that Dutts arrive with Imam Husain in

Karbala, fight alongside and sacrificed his seven sons on behalf of Imam Husain's cause. Another account tells a slightly different story. The Dutts were not present in Karbala, but marched with Mukhtar al-Saqafi to seize Kufa in the year eighty three Islamic lunar year as an attempt to avenge Imam Husain.

It is not only because of these two vocabularies enabling the *Arbain* walk to become a global site and stage for trans-border symbol for justice and freedom,[4] but also because Imam Husain spoke a language that everybody understands; a language of suffering, pronounced by a lonely and unprotected victim of predatory power. *Arbain* walk marks suffering, a man abandoned and unprotected simply because he denounces power and its predatory nature.

### **Imam Husain's Martyrdom in Testimonies**

If Husaini Brahmin and a Christian Priest could be seen as the historical and narrative seeds of global Husaini, these parades of testimony as one form of answering the call of Imam Husain, "*Labbayka Yaa Husain*", could be seen as points of active reference to Imam Husain's cause which speaks universal language. Imam Husain's martyrdom in Karbala 1400 years ago still freshly speaks to wake up minds who love justice, dignity, freedom, anti-humiliation and care. It is a fountain that never dries offering abundant

insights of fighting oneself tirelessly and fighting injustice justly and elegantly.

Below I capture some of world leaders and dignitaries' testimonies of Imam Husain. These testimonies are fruit and further cultivation of a century's long presence of global Husaini, at least in its earlier stage before transformed into a clear and consolidated formation that takes momentum in the *Arbain* walk.

#### *Mahatma Gandhi*

"I learn from Husain how to achieve victory while being oppressed"

"There is a universal appeal in this martyrdom. Imam Husain sacrificed his all, but he refused to submit to a tyrannical government. He never gave any weight to the fact that his material force was far less in comparison with that of the enemy. The power of faith to him is the greatest force which regards all material force as nothing. This sacrifice is a beacon light of guidance for every community and every nation."

"Everyone knows dying after death, but you (Husain) taught us how to live after death."

"My Faith is that the progress of Islam does not depend on the use of sword by its believers, but the result of the supreme sacrifice of Husain"

#### *Nelson Mandela*

"I have spent more than 20 years in prison, then on one night I decided to surrender by signing all the terms and conditions of government. But suddenly I thought about Imam Husain and the Karbala movement and Imam Husain gave me strength to stand for right of freedom and liberation and I did"

#### *Mohammad Ali Jinnah*

"My admiration for the noble sacrifice of Imam Husain as a martyr abounds because he accepted death and the torture of thirst for himself for his sons and for his whole family, but did not submit to unjust authorities."

#### *Jawaharlal Nehru*

"The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Karbala is that Husain and his followers were the rigid believers of God. They illustrated that numerical superiority does not count when it comes to truth and falsehood."

The victory of Husain despite his minority marvels me."

#### *Thomas Carlyle*

##### Hero and Hero-worship

"In the history of Islam, especially the life of Imam Husain stands unique, unapproached and unapproachable by anyone. Without his martyrdom, Islam would have extinguished long ago. He was the savior of Islam and it was due to his martyrdom that Islam took such a deep root, which it is neither possible nor even imaginable to destroy now."

#### *Edward Gibbon*

##### Decline and fall of the Roman Empire

"It was possible for Husain to save his life by submitting himself to the will of Yazid, But his responsibility as a reformer did not allow him to accept Yazid's Caliphate, He therefore prepared to embrace all sorts of discomfort and inconvenience in order to deliver Islam from the hands of Omayyad's, Under the blazing sun, on the parched land and against the stifling heat of Arabia, stood the immortal Husain."

“A reminder of the blood stained field of Karbala, where the grandson of the Apostle of God fell at length tortured by thirst and surrounded by the bodies of his murdered kinsmen, has been at any time since then sufficient to evoke, even in the most lukewarm and heedless, the deepest emotion, the most frantic grief and an exaltation of spirit before which pain, danger, and death shrink to unconsidered trifles.”

*Washington Irving*

“If Husain fought to quench his worldly desires, then I do not understand why his sisters, wives and children accompanied him. It stands to reason there that he sacrificed purely for Islam.”

*Charles Dickens*

“In a distant age and climate, the tragic scene of the death of Husain will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader.”

*E. G. Brownie*

A Literary History of Persia

“The scarifies that *Hazrat* Imam Husain gave us in the desert of Karbala thirteen hundred years ago is an example to us all, giving us impetus and intuition to do our bit when circumstance, oblige us to face evil against truth. Imam Husain with his 72 followers achieved everlasting victory in his defeat, which it is impossible for any great force to acquire at any cost. Imam Husain proved to the world for all times that numbers do not count when the real spirit is in action with a definite purpose and determination.”

*Sir Byramjee Jeejeebhoy*

“The Karbala tragedy is a historical event of human martyrdom of such importance that it can never be forgotten. It shall continue to influence the lives of billions of men

and women of the world throughout the ages.”

“The event is commemorated in India with complete reverence, not only Muslims participate in the rites, but the non-muslims show great interest therein equally well.”

*Dr. Rajandra Prasad*

The First President of India, Past President Congress Party

“No tragic event of human history can vie with the end of *Hazrat* Imam Husain in point of its heart – rendering pathos, in the field of Karbala.”

*Dr. Amar Nath Jha*

Past Vice Chancellor, Hindu University, Banaras India

“The sacrifices of Imam Husain was for the sake of the good of the whole mankind. There is no martyr in the whole history of the world who can compare with him in point of exalted excellence.”

*Prof. Radha Kumund Mukerje*

Chairperson-Dept. of History, Lucknow University, India

“*Hazrat* Imam Husain gave to the world some thirteen hundred years ago, a message and way of life, which was unique and perfect and of which we are celebrating the memory. I do not possess the words nor has any language of the world the eloquence and comprehension, which can serve as the vehicle of expression for the sentiment of reverence, which I entertain in my mind for this magnificent martyr. *Hazrat* Imam Husain does not belong only to the Muslims but he is a treasure, common to all the creatures of the Almighty God. I congratulate the Muslims that among them has been such a personality

who is acknowledged and revered equally by all communities of the world.”

Mrs. Sarojini Naido

The Nightingale of India

“My admiration for the noble sacrifice of Imam Husain as a martyr abides, because he accepted death and the torture of thirst for himself, his sons and for his whole family but did not submit to unjust authorities.”

Antoine Bara

Syrian-Christian Writer

“If Husain was Christian, we would have put up a flag and a minaret for him in every part of the earth and called the people to Christianity!”

These testimonies, along with muslim imaginary of Imam Husain’s martyrdom and legacies, ranging from Balkan to Bengal complex,[5] woven by creative and multi-layered interpretation in uncountable penetrating minds and souls for more than 14 centuries, presenting us with one of the most sublime and inviting sites of shared humanity. We stare at the Karbala event and it stares back at us in the eternal calling of the abandoned Imam, “is there anyone to help me?”, and predictably we answer back, *Labbayka Yaa Husain*.

Our answer, our *Labbayka Yaa Husain*, sometimes sounded in terrible silence, or in trembling unfinished gesture, could also maybe form in firm steadfastness toward Imam Husain. Whatever it is, internal Husain and external Husain, never ceased to

become our alter ego, toward which, determines the quality of our self, society and world.

The “we” here is global Husaini.

## Global Husaini at Shrinescape

Not only is its character embedded in global and international origins but also global Husaini’s attend and participate in the *Arbain* walk is best understood as an effort for identity construction that happens at shrinescape. Developing Jo-Ann Gross’s understanding of the term, shrinescape used to be understood as a culmination of interactions between shrine’s physical landscape, material architecture and interpretive practices that form the shrine’s narrative. This narrative consists of text, reader and interpretation (meaning) all gravitating around the shrine. Critics have shown that Gross’s notion of the narrative is embedded in fixity of the shrine and its living surrounding.

The prime example of a fixed narrative is the abandonment of power relations and power struggles that enveloped almost all major shrines but also being reflected by these shrines. Therefore, I take shrinescape as denoting to the creative dialectics between shrine materiality, living doctrine & narrative and process of immediate structural & cultural underpinnings that shape and reshape the ways in which the shrine is perceived by its congregation.[6]

Here in this modified definition, shrinescape perpetuates the character of flux and flow of the shrine, because the shrine is understood not only as relics of the past but more importantly a presence of socio-political dynamics that mark the contemporary anticipation of a specific face of the future. What matter the most here is the shrine as an arena but also a field for power relations & economic struggles to enact the meaning of the past for contemporary audience in hope for winning the coming days, dominantly done through careful curation of a certain narrative and interpretations surrounding it.

The case is also true for shrinescape in Najaf and Karbala. As a material and social reality, Imam Ali and Imam Husain's shrines, also several major and minor shrines embedded between the two shrines, have play irreplaceable roles in continuous shaping of content and structure of its congregation awareness, this is especially true for Iraqi Shi'i communities. The two shrinescapes, in addition to other four shrines of Shi'i Imams that happen to be buried in modern Iraqi soil, have been spiritual poles for general Shi'i subjects in Iraq for centuries. These shrinescapes provide consolation for personal problems but also gathering spaces for consolidated communities that preserve themselves as inheritors and defenders of these shrines.

The pragmatic and spiritual benefits available through these shrines is only

possible because countless layers of actors, consisting of both the *ulema* and general public (*bazari* and tradesmen are chief among them beside the royal tribal members) have deployed uninterrupted activities that keep the shrines as an effective shrinescape; build its architecture materiality, filled these physical spaces with meetings related to knowledge production and consumption also life cycle rites related to birth, puberty, wedding and death, celebrated milestone achievements in career or business, all of which come under operational discourse of what is and what is not truthful, beneficial and allowed in the inherited sacred texts, according to immediate power position and economic gain of *ulema*, official government, *bazari* and royal tribesmen, whose authority coming from such texts and practice and in turn make the aforementioned text and practice as reflection of their power dynamics in Iraqi society.

One example of a narrative that promulgates specific meaning for shrinescape in Iraq is the Karbala narrative. Being read in personal and public space, written in circulated books and pamphlets, performed in *ta'ziyeh* and other forms of public drama, not only in Iraq for sure but also from the Balkans to the Bengal complex, Imam Husain's epic struggle and suffering becomes the personal and public most invested narrative, both emotionally, ideologically and socially.

The *Ulema* class and other powerful socio-political actors have had authorial and authoritative positions from the Karbala narrative, which of course could not be possible to be separated from physical and landscape structures of these shrines. *Ulema* not only built their *madrasahs* and *hawzahs* around the sacred major shrines but also act as a legitimate guardian for the shrines. The *ulema* such conduct welcome receptions for the shrine *zuwwar* and collect the financial funds from *zuwwar* and general public, they are allocated for maintaining the necessities of the shrines, such as shrine reparation. Being in physical proximity to the shrine, as a cultural public center, they give intellectual, spiritual and social authority for the *ulema* class as legitimate representation of Shi'i Imams presence.

Furthermore, the Karbala narrative provides rich points of reference for identity formation, not only for the *ulema* class as mentioned above but also for the general public of Iraq, most of it revolving around Imam Husain's *barakah* and acceptable forms of self-perception and self-presentation. This kind of prevalence is genuinely sewn into practice of shrine custody and visitation could be understood by appealing to towering characters in the Karbala narrative as prime examples that successfully gain supreme position in public awareness solely caused by defending Imam Husain.

There are several notable characters in the Karbala narrative that successfully provide archetypal references as embodiment of faithfulness to Imam Husain's cause, a landmark of being Husaini. I have mentioned earlier, Lady Zaynab, a supreme example of Husaini personhood, because of her the Karbala and Imam Husain's martyrdom and legacy could be known. Here I would like to describe two more important Karbala characters that play significant roles in shaping the contemporary global Husaini preference point in their self-ascribing as followers of Imam Husain's path.

### **Abbas and al-Hurr as Role Model**

The first person here is Abbas Ibn Ali Ibn Abi Talib, son of Imam Ali from his a wife he married after the death of Lady Zahra, mother of Imam Husain. As Imam Husain's half-brother, lieutenant, war banner holder, and one of the closest male relatives who was present in Karbala, Abbas was present in whole Karbala event from the very beginning. Separated by 250 meters, the same exact meters separating the hills of Safaa from Marwaa, Abbas's shrine is located near Imam Husain's shrine thus twinning it and architecturally perceived as the landmark of Karbala city, as well as spiritual capital for global Shi'i.

The shrine is swamped by *zuwwar* who intentionally enter it before going to Imam Husain's tomb. *Zuwwar* that

already walk continuously for three days and two nights from Najaf to this very point embraced the sensation, both physical, social and spiritual, and it is doubled up because of Abbas Ibn Ali's shrine. Beautifully decorated, Abbas's shrine invites global Husaini to reflect & celebrate the meaning and importance of defending justice.

As Iraqi cultural habit bears witness to the importance of Abbas's shrine, in which Iraqi's in general make it a customary act to make visitation to Abbas first then proceed to Imam Husain.[7] One of *Hazrat* Abbas Ibn Ali's surnames is The Gate of Proof (*Bab al-Hawajj*) as he is well known for his effective intercessions on behalf of any *zuwwar* who are in trouble or have pressing need both in material and spiritual affairs. But more importantly, Abbas emulate the ideal Shi'i and ideal Husaini in knowing, embracing, honoring, and ultimately defending his Imam at any cost, at any given time and place. Abbas, even though he is not the first perfect Shi'i as many historical figures already came forward before him, successfully embodied the unflinching support provided by true Shi'i for the Imam whenever needed.

There is one image widely circulated on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook depicting Abbas sitting on his horse while surrounded by Nile river water. As in many other pictures, I could not see Abbas's face, but this time caused by his position framed as giving

his back to the gazer, and not caused by the given veil put by the painter to block gazer's spectacle, a tradition marks the highest spiritual ranking of *Ahl Bayt* therefore their faces are hidden beneath luminous veils. His horse's face is also hidden from view. Soft and small waves surrounding Abbas and his horse, looks like he stood still or was moving softly with the horse.

It is a captivating image, throat choking sadness emerged when this image caught my sight. Portraying the banner holder of Imam Husain in his attempt to seize some water for Imam Husain's beloved daughter, Sukainah, who along with another member of Imam Husain's caravan was already blocked from accessing Euphrates water



Fig. 1. Art image of Abbas in the Euphrates[15]

for around three to seven days. Abbas seems, in this image, in bifurcated situation; in one point of view, Abbas is surrounded by enormous drinkable water but could not drink it because drinking in this condition is an act of a selfish uncle who left his nephew and his entire caravan thirsty. In another point of view, I see that Abbas with full water bags, stood still, momentarily, and decides to choose suffering & pain of the battle field rather than surrender in front of a killing thirst. He chose to bear a passing suffering and traded it for eternal bliss of *al-Kautsar*, paradise fountain whose water being offered by Prophet Muhammad for every genuine believer (*mu'min*) who will never in thirst again.

Abbas, is simultaneously presented in ideological, cultural and spiritual landscapes, as a safe passage from a Husaini self to Imam Husain's presence. Being interrupted by the archetypal image of genuine Husaini, every Husaini is reminded that being truthful to oneself, practicing justice to others sometimes ends up in suffering, loneliness, alienation and being killed in unimaginable brutality, just like Abbas ibn Ali had demonstrated in Karbala. To be Husaini means, above all, being witness to oneself as an active person of Husaini practices, tenets of it are being truthful and embodying justice. Or more humbly, being Husaini is knowing that no one could attend to be present at Karbala at Imam Husain's side without

the Imam's granted permission.

If Abbas bin Ali has shown the genuine gesture of being a true Husaini from the beginning and ended in Karbala, then Hurr ibn Yazid al-Riyahi is the embodiment of another kind of path for being Husaini.[8] Hurr is Ibn Ziyad's general who is responsible for intercepting Imam Husain's caravan, preventing it from entering Kufa. He was also in charge of making Imam Husain remain in Karbala, and finally he is the man who cut the water supply of Nile river for Imam Husain's camp. Dramatic change occurs in Hurr's life when in the morning of 10 Muharram, precisely before the battle, Imam Husain's address to al-Hurr in was in these words, "Your name is Hurr, meaning a free man. Be free! Both in this world and in hereafter!" thus making him leave Yazid's side and join Imam Husain's side.

Hurr is reported to have said words like this in front of Imam Husain, "May I be your sacrifice, O Son of Allah's Apostle, I am the one who prevented you from going back to Medinah, and I kept being with you so that you had to camp in this land. I had never imagined Ibn Ziyad's men would turn down your suggestion for making peace thus get you caught in such a fate. By God, if I had known the situation would end up here, I would never have gotten involved in this. Now I repent to God from what I have done, would my repentance be accepted?" Imam

Husain answered, as seen before, “Your repentance is accepted. You are al-Hurr (free man) both in this world and in hereafter”. [9] Again we are witnessing a person being truthful toward himself, in front of horrible consequence, the price of life itself.

Many modern readers of the Karbala narrative find al-Hurr as a captivating character; sinful but managing to escape the curse of falsehood in the end, by way of a deepening tafakkur, thinking and feeling existentially, intensively and extensively thus embodied the Prophet Muhammad’s tradition, “*tafakkur* (reflecting) for a moment is better than 70 years of pious acts.” Al-Hurr’s repentance, a difficult, critical and dangerous one, plays as an effective redemption not only for his soul but also for Husaini’s hope, hope for always standing for justice side by side with Imam Husain whatever the consequence is, whatever the personal quality a Husaini had before. [10] Just like dusty and fatigued *zuwwar*, after walking 83 miles from Najaf, found Imam Husain’s shrine as Kautzar on earth. She has no choice except to approach it, no matter how dirty and dusty she is. Only because Imam Husain’s *barakah* will clean up her spiritual, material, social unholiness, just as Imam Husain did for al-Hurr.

Above anything else, what al-Hurr represents is global Husaini’s hope for self and communal redemption.

In the very last instance of his life, al-Hurr makes the hard decision that redeems his entire wrongful past life and transforms it into an exceptional example in the Husaini path caused by Imam Husain’s *barakah*. This hope for redemption experienced by global Husaini after encountering the al-Hurr narrative or spiritually (or both) is sometimes presented as an invitation not so much for self-denial caused by feeling of unworthy (reasons ranged from career to regular mistakes continuously done) than for cultivating the ability to “knock and wait at al-Hurr’s shrine door,” representing the effect of Imam Husain’s conversation with al-Hurr and its redemptive consequence.

It is impossible to imagine the emergence of global Husaini as an ongoing identity formation without its being facilitated in, staged at, and channelled through the shrinescape of Imam Husain. At best, without the shrinescape of Imam Husain, being Husaini would be only scattered ritual attachment being held at Shi’i communal pockets, or perhaps signalled in papers and conversations among men and women of letters. The physical presence of global Husaini at Imam Husain’s physical shrine annually, along with other Husaini which together enveloped by ongoing practices (hospitality is chief among it), provides reflections and narratives about this man’s martyrdom. It truly provides

anchor for self-reference that marks the sameness and the difference of self and others.

Here I would like to elaborate more on the crucial relationship between identity formation of global Husaini and the character field where the *Arbain* walk takes place. As I mentioned in previous chapters, the *Arbain* walk is a walking event that started in one shrine (Imam Ali's) and ends in another shrine (Imam Husain's). As a walking activity, this event is best understood as movement performed by millions of *zuwwar* that come from many countries in the contemporary world.

It is significant for me to glean suitable understanding of identity construction in contemporary *ziyarah* studies in order to demonstrate the urgent need to elaborate *ziyarah* exploration as discourse[s] of movement. Replicating *ziyarah* as movement embodied both in constant flow of social practices and contemporary world as always *en route*, I argue that if *ziyarah* analysis would like to comprehend phenomena of identity building, then itself should be moving along new understandings of movement.

As reflected in *Arbain* walk, here *ziyarah* is advanced as arranging and arranged embodied practices mounted under concepts such as movement and flexibility of social practices and cleverness of epistemic discourse demanding capture, and cultural

meanings of *ziyarah* in a world that is always *en route*, where identity building becomes its major aim.[11]

I take identity as self-identification ingrained in a specific social field but capable of meeting and engaging the others by exercising strategically calculated movement. I borrowed this definition from the so called dialogical self-theories nurtured primarily by Hubert Hermans.[12] Hermans saw that self is always in a dialogical condition and at an affrontational state with an outward self (externally) and with the unknown side of the oneself internally. The most captivating point of this definition of self is that it highlights self as an arena where personal psychological dimensions meet, engage and dialogue with local, national, regional and global socio-economic historical circumstances surrounding the self in dialogical nature.

Here self is less perceived as a fixed and closed circuit of psychological and social identification entrenched in similar closed social arenas but more as a holes-containing frontier always in constant encounter, engagement and dialogue state with others. Internal and external (historical) identities of self, are in the context a more glocalised world. It understands self as ceaselessly in formation based on creative response toward complex psychological and historical surroundings in which self is perceived rooting.[13]

Mr. Nato's exposition fits

appropriately into this exploration. When I asked him about his self-perception as Husaini coming from a *Kejawen* background, his answer promulgates the notion that self is a holes-containing frontier being, constantly reshaped in movement as constitutive in identity making. I quote Mr. Nato,

“Around mayor shrines in Iraq, especially at Imam Ali and Imam Husain shrines, not only one time I witness ones staring at my *blankon*. It truly makes me wonder, until an old scholar, a sheikh, with whom I had several long conversations, told me that in the past a man with *blankon* have come here, to Iraq, and served as sandals keeper for *zuwwar* at Imam Ali and Imam Husain’s shrines. It occurred to me that Sunan Kalijaga had several prolonged stays in the middle east exactly for keeping sandals in Imam Ali and Imam Husain’s shrines” [14]

Mas Nato’s ability to reconnect his *blankon* as both proud symbol of *Kejawen* and an operational wearable of a Husaini from *Kejawen* Indonesia, Java operates on the notion that self, is not fully understood in itself, rather it always moves to a frontier state to meet, dialogue, engage with others. In Mr. Nato’s case here, the others are tripartite; an old Sheikh that represented historical manifestation of the contemporary Iraq nation, an inherited and circulated narrative of a stranger with *blankon* that came to Iraq for keeping *zuwwar* sandals in Imam Husain and Imam Ali’s shrines, and Mr. Nato’s own temporary unawareness of archival account of Sunan Kalijaga

visiting Iraq as part of his larger yet unconscious self.

The dynamic engagement of an Indonesian Husaini, as reflected in the above quotation of Mr. Nato’s account, demonstrates that shrinescape plays a decisive and irreplaceable role in informing and forming Mr. Nato’s self-referential as contemporary *Kejawen* being embraced by Imam Husain’s *barakah* marked not only by Mr. Natos’ presence in the shrine, but also his newly found legacy of Sunan Kalijaga’s foundational act as Husaini.

Global Husaini, without shrinescape of Imam Husain, will eventually become dispersed testimonies of non-Shi’s account about Imam Husain’s martyrdom. These testimonies become communal or national ones, never fully developed to a global and united testimony. Shrinescape of Imam Husain not only facilitates for presence united and globally consolidated testimonies, but also invites and stages the locus and embodiment of such testimonies in the form of personhood of global Husaini. Even though global Husaini only represent a tiny percentage of Imam Husain’s lovers and devotees, its proclamation on interreligious dimension of the *Arbain* walk as an annual venue for Imam Husain’s devotees successfully enact the message of love as practicing justice in public space, a core message of Imam Husain’s martyrdom.

From this point, the definition of public space has escaped the binary opposition of sacred versus secular, where public space is claimed by the secular with nation state as its main space regulator. Shrinescape offers, at least global Husaini's version of shrinescape, interreligious space as space for all, even for non-affiliated people. Here the main concern is the question of effective authenticity of religious messages (justice above all, but also love, care, compassion all in all in practical nature) and not at all about religious posturing which is sometimes empty from compassionate practices.

## Conclusion

The coinage of global Husaini that I offer in this study is an attempt to critically engage with Shi'ism, in which Imam Husain's martyrdom occupy its central tenet, as a situated social actor that endlessly meets, has dialogue, engages with other religious persons, both religious people from different faiths and persons that are non-affiliated with established religions.

The *Arbain* walk provides the venue and field for such fruitful encounter. As an annual *ziyarah* event done in the name of Imam Husain, Shi'i from all of the corners of the world have opportunity to witness and reflect on Imam Husain's martyrdom and legacy, strategically inspired by the presence of non-Shi'ss at the centre of their veneration practice. Noticeable numbers

of Catholics, Orthodox Christian, Presbyterian Christian, Hindu, and *Kejawen* are observed doing the *Arbain* walk annually. Similar with their co-lover of Imam Husain from Shi'i groups, these non-Shi'ss also started the walk from Imam Ali's shrine in Najaf and ended in Imam Husain's shrine in Karbala.

Global Husaini's presence in contemporary the *Arbain* walk could be seen as global reinventing of non-muslim presence in the Karbala event fourteen centuries ago. From an unnamed Syrian Christian Priest to Dutt of Husain Brahmin, this shared memory and legacy drives forward the dynamic encounters between Shi'is and non-Shi'ss in shrinescape of Imam Husain. The *Arbain* walk is a global Shi'i arena for escaping their identity as always in negative power and doctrinal tension with its coreligionists namely Sunni Muslim, by proposing genuine global identity capable of embracing not only Sunni but other religious people in the broadest meaning of the term. Here the *Arbain* walk is a strategic effort by global Shi'is to become an active part of the broader global Husaini, all united under the banner of Imam Husain's martyrdom.[]

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