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SPECIAL SECTION

The sincere subject

Mediation and interiority among a group of Muslim women in Iran

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This article examines two genres of prayer, *namaz* and *du'a*, among a group of Shi'a Muslim women in Iran. It analyzes the variety of ways in which the legal validity of prayers along with ideas about "presence of the heart" and "sincerity" in worship have been debated. I argue that the debates on worship, even among jurists, remain unsettled, and without a final resolution. I use the ethnographic context of a group of women in Tehran to carry out a comparative analysis of the notion of sincerity as analyzed in the anthropology of Christianity. I show that this comparison can both illuminate ideas and practices of worship in Iran and at the same time add dimensions that are perhaps underemphasized or unexplored in debates on Protestants. I make an attempt to define the concept of interiority and demonstrate its usefulness in understanding religious subjectivity. A historical analysis of religious subjectivity that is arrived at through a study of the power relations that result in particular authoritative discursive traditions is necessary but not sufficient in order to answer the question of what believers are doing, thinking, and struggling with as they attempt to follow the requirements of their religion.

Keywords: prayer, Islam, interiority, sincerity, Iran

One of the most enduring consequences of the Revolution of 1979 in Iran and the devastating eight-year war with Iraq that began shortly after has been a reflexive turn across class and gender lines. In neighborhood cultural centers (*farhang sara*) established after the Revolution, and in homes, people flock to classes and lectures, whose subjects range from weekly readings of the Qur'an in Arabic and Persian, to the poetry of Rumi (Mowlavi or Mowlana in Iran), Hafiz, and lesser-known poets and figures in *irfan* or "mystic" [1] philosophy, and to Jung, yoga, arts of

1. The translation of *irfan* (or *sufi*, which is less frequently used in Persian) as "mystic" is problematic to the degree that in the present context in the United States or United

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self-knowledge (*khod-shenasi*), and, on the lighter side, classical Persian music. After the Revolution, cultural centers were opened in particular in poorer neighborhoods in big cities to offer "healthy environments" for youth to occupy their time.

Whereas keen interest was directed toward Euro-American cultures especially during the last two decades of the Shah's reign (1941–79), after the Revolution, Iranians have become increasingly more curious about their own history, culture, literature, religion, and music. Internal travel has greatly increased, and one routinely hears young and old talking with wonder and enthusiasm about the beauty and diversity of different ecologies around the country. This is in part due to the difficulties of traveling abroad, but the boom in internal travel has deeper roots.[2]

A large part of this return to the self is taken up by reflections on religion. Living under a regime that self-identifies as Islamic and that uses all available media to shape certain kinds of religiosity has put the question of what it is to be a Muslim and what kind of Muslim at the center of daily conversations, debates, and silences. For example, why it is that a good Muslim must pray constitutes one of the most frequently discussed questions on television, radio, on the Internet, and among friends and strangers.[3] Should one pray out of love for God or fear? Is a prayer valid even when our minds wander in the middle of it or does its validity not depend on the concentration of the reciter? Can we pray in Persian or does it have to be in Arabic? Even among religious authorities, there is little uniformity on these questions. Some refer to *namaz* prayers (*salat* in Arabic) as obligations that must be fulfilled (*isqaateh takliif*, "fulfilling obligation"). According to them, whether one's mind wanders or not does not make the prayer legally void. As will be elaborated further below, there are ayatollahs who either do not agree with this position or articulate the various dimensions of worship without taking a strong position.

What is particularly interesting about these questions is the ways in which they render explorations of interiority visible. Exchanges among believers show how they are constituting and reconstituting their interiorities with respect to daily practices of worship and with respect to related semiotic activities such as recitations of classical poetry. On television and radio, a variety of speakers, both *mu'ammam* ("turbaned"—from *ammameh*, "turban") and *mukallah*[4] ("hatted"—from *kolah*,

Kingdom, for example, "mystic" has all the connotations of things and people that are esoteric and very far from daily life. I find this translation misleading for readers who do not know Persian but I have not found a better alternative. So much of the poetry that circulates is "mystic" that it is redundant to refer to "mystic poetry" in the context of Iran (see Davis 1999).

2. The reflexive turn is also among the major reasons for a lessening of reliance on choosing particular religious authorities as "sources of emulation" (*marja'eh taqliid*). Though statistics are hard to come by, I rarely came across women, in particular, who had identified a religious authority as their *marja'*.

3. For studies of *namaz*/*salat*, see Bowen (1993), Parkin and Headly (2000), Mahmood (2001, 2005), Henkel (2005), Simon (2009).

4. The term "*mukallah*" referring to those who are not clerics is not meant to imply that the person actually wears a hat. It is an old expression meant to refer to the division that was created among men as a result of Reza Shah's Uniformity of Clothes laws (1928) that banned turbans and robes except by permission.

"hat") discuss different kinds of praying, fasting, going on pilgrimage, giving alms, and so on (on mediated Islam, see Eickelman and Anderson 2003).

A prominent example of mediated religion in recent years has been the controversy with regard to kidney problems for those who fast in the summer months and do not drink water for longer than fifteen hours. Some religious authorities (a minority) have said that drinking water to avoid illness is what God would want as fasting is not supposed to make us sick.[5] Almost every summer since 2008 during my fieldwork, I was witness to discussions surrounding this debate in taxis, homes, hair salons, and of course the print media. At the moment, there are people who follow this advice and drink water, but it must be said that some drank water (without eating) even before the act was sanctioned

Other questions that arise often have to do with what may or may not be allowed to mediate one's relationship to God beside the Qur'an and the words and actions of the Prophet, the *hadis*.[6] What about prayers in *du'a* books written by imams, or the *ghazal*s of Hafiz or verses of Rumi? Is there a hierarchy of acceptable mediators: for example, are an imam's prayers more acceptable than an unknown saint's whose prayer is printed in some prayer book? If the proverbially famous advice of Rumi is followed and we stay away from mindless imitation, *taqlid*,[7] will we then be on the right path to God?

This article is part of a larger project that pursues the question of what it means to be a Muslim for a group of women in contemporary Iran (on this question, see Mottahedeh [1985] 2008; Fischer and Abedi [1990] 2000). My aim is to argue for attention to interiority, in particular in times of social change, as central to understanding what it may mean to be a follower of any religion. I use the term "interiority" to give acknowledgment to the fact that, over time, individuals make rituals their own. A ritual does not remain intact over decades and at different stages of people's lives. For the group of women I have been working with, from the time they were taught by parents and teachers to pray as children to the present, much has happened. They have gone through periods where they stopped praying and they speak of various events in their lives that have affected their understandings and performance of prayers. They became far more interested in reflecting on this act after the Revolution of 1979. Over decades, they have come to accept some things, reject others, equivocate on still others, describe reasons for praying on different grounds, and currently have ended up with identifying concentration as crucial to the experience of a good *namaz* but one that is a constant struggle. Some have developed techniques to achieve concentration, and when they succeed, that

5. Among these is Ayatollah Bayat Zanjani, who in July 2013 said that a person who cannot tolerate not drinking water for a long while can drink as much as is necessary to extend his or her ability to continue with the fast. See, for example: https://goo.gl/TbbzZ3 (accessed March 13, 2017).

6. Persian does not have the voiceless interdental fricative "th," hence *hadith* is pronounced hadis.

7. One of the most famous verses of Rumi, so often cited that it has become a proverb, says, loosely translated: "People descend into nothingness when they imitate; damned be this imitation [*taqlid*] twice over."

prayer session becomes memorable. Interiority is a way of articulating what they come up with in time in answer to the whys and hows of ritual performances and other requirements of their religion; and relatedly the ways in which they construct and reconstruct almost on a daily basis their relationship to God.

I argue that we cannot know in advance what will be the result(s) of self-transformation. The self-transformations that Foucault talks about are not only unpredictable but change over time and unfold in complex ways. Inspired by Foucault's writings, the model of ethical self-cultivation has been extensively and insightfully elaborated on in relation to the piety movement in Egypt by Mahmood (2005). In her discussion of prayer among mosque participants, she analyzes "how different conceptions of interiority and exteriority are predicated upon different arrangements of power and authority" (ibid.: 134). Explaining notions of discipline, bodily practice, and self-reflection among the women in this group, she writes: "Note that self-reflection plays a different role in this conception in that it is aimed toward molding the 'I' to approximate an authoritative model whose immanent form is the necessary means to the substance the 'I' is to become' (ibid.: 148). This aim is similar to those of certain religious groups in Iran. It may turn out to be the case that for the mosque women in Cairo, this aim, this striving to mold the "I" according to authoritative models, not only succeeds but will always remain the same. But it is not clear whether we can get to know what actually transpires in the process of the molding of the "I." For the group of women I have been studying, the variety of objectives for which they have prayed over decades have changed. For a ritual that takes place five times a day every day over decades, it is likely that, given political and social changes, and different life stages, its ends change too. Moreover, if self-cultivation resulted in something determined entirely by power relations, implying also something predictable, there would be no *spirituality* in the act. Foucault writes: "We could call 'spirituality' the search, the practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary *transformation* on himself in order to have access to truth" ([1982] 2005: 15, emphasis added). It is worth quoting a longer passage from the same work to show how seriously Foucault took the notion of spirituality for understanding the (religious) subject:

> Finally, spirituality postulates that once access to the truth has really been opened up, it produces effects that are, of course, the consequence of the spiritual approach taken in order to achieve this, but which at the same time are something quite different and much more: effects which I will call "rebound"("de retour"), effects of the truth on the subject. *For spirituality, the truth is not just what is given to the subject, as reward for the act of knowledge as it were, and to fulfill the act of knowledge.* The truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject tranquility of the soul. In short, in the truth and in access to the truth, there is something that fulfills the subject himself, which fulfills or transfigures his very being. ([1982] 2005: 16, emphasis added)

This is what he calls the "price" that must be paid for access to truth—a truth that "enlightens," and gives the "subject tranquility of the soul" (see Ghamari-Tabrizi 2016). So many of the women to whom I spoke on the subject of *namaz* articulated a "good" prayer in these terms.

In order to build a case for attention to interiority in my ethnographic context, I will examine debates on the mediation of words and things in two genres of prayer, *namaz* and *du'a*. *Namaz* (*salat* in Arabic) are the required prayers that Muslims must perform five times a day. *Du'a* is a broad category that refers to talking to God spontaneously—referred to as *du'a kardan* ("doing *du'a*"). If the verb "reading" is used with it—*du'a khandan*—then it means reciting prayers from prayer books. Neither is a required act—but it is seen by jurists as a favored act *mustahab*.[8] Nevertheless, it is discussed in the Qur'an and it is widely praised and recommended. I am interested in mediation for the light it sheds on a number of concepts that are at the center of daily discussions on practices of worship. For example, the notions of *huzuureh qalb* ("presence of the heart," "concentration") and *khuluus* ("purity," "sincerity") come up routinely in discussing the performance of the five daily prayers. At its heart, akin to conceptions of sincerity in Christianity and the stakes that are involved (see below) lie anxiety and ambivalence toward the mediation of words and things. Examining debates on mediation allows one to understand better how individuals aim to build and rebuild their interiorities. The most frequently used terms for mediation and intercession are *vaaseteh* (> Arabic root *w-s-t*, "middle") and *tavassol* ("intercession," > Arabic root *w-s-l*, "connection"),[9] respectively.

The genres of *namaz* and *du'a* play central though not uniform roles in the lives of the group of Iranian women I have been working with. Different kinds of prayer and more broadly different kinds of worship show distinct aspects of religious subjectivity. *Namaz* and *du'a* are distinguished on a number of bases: for example, the latter is referred to as mainly "supplicatory," whereas the former is said to be done solely to fulfill God's command. The two biggest differences are that *namaz* is in Arabic whereas *du'a* is in Persian, and for the latter the speaker must come up with an appropriate language to address God, whereas the words of *namaz* are given. But they also have some things in common. The words of *namaz* are set but it *can* have, even routinely, a supplicatory aspect to it (Haeri 2013). *Du'a* can be done anywhere and anytime. People do *du'a* on the bus, on their way to work, just before falling asleep while lying down, and so on. No prayer rug is required. I agree with Seligman et al (2008: 117–18) that, phenomenologically, performing set prayers and talking to God spontaneously are two different acts and we should not treat them as the same.[10] However, as I just mentioned, *namaz* and *du'a* do share similarities too. While Protestant semiotic ideology and its implications for subjectivity

8. There are also prayers such as *zikr* (>Arabic "remembrance" of God), *niyaayesh* ("intimate conversation with God and praising the divine", *monajaat* (>Arabic *n-j-w*, "whispered" prayer, psalm) and *raazo niyaaz* (lit.: "'secret and need") that are often subsumed under the larger category *du'a* but again have their own distinct practices. See Katz (2013: 95) for an informative discussion of *monajaat* as "evoking images of a more personal communing with a tender deity."

9. Also the term *shafaa'at* is used from the Arabic root *Sh f* ' (with *ain*), meaning "intercession" and "to mediate."

10. Mark Berch (2005) offers a useful review of the distinct positions of various rabbis with regard to prayer. The differences of opinion are often rather similar to what I have described here. I thank Reviel Netz for calling my attention to this article.

is primarily described on the basis of *spontaneous* prayer, as can be seen in the central role assigned to spontaneity in discussions of sincerity, Muslim subjectivity, in contrast, is most often defined based on *obligatory* prayers. This creates too sharp a contrast that is unsupported by historical and ethnographic studies.

Using the tools of linguistic anthropology in the study of genres (Bakhtin 1986; Hanks 1987; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Briggs 1993; Ferguson 1994), and of semiotic ideologies and their implications for aspiring (or not) to particular practices (Silverstein 1979; Kuipers 1998; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Irvine and Gal 2000; Irvine 2001; Gal 2005; among others), I offer an ethnography of these genres—how they are used and how they are reflected on. The genres are recognized local categories that are particularly useful in ethnographic investigation. They are simultaneously sociohistorical institutions circulating in political and literary spheres and employed on a daily basis by individuals who come to have their own ways of practicing, performing, and thinking about them (see Luhrmann [2012: 157] for the use of genre to analyze evangelical prayer). Before turning to the ethnography of the two kinds of prayer, I discuss the larger theoretical frame of the research presented in this article in order to clarify the kinds of questions that I pursue. In what follows, I will provide a discussion of the opinions of various religious sources on intention and sincerity and will then move on to an ethnography of *namaz* and *du'a* as practiced and elaborated on by some of the members of the group of women with whom I have been doing research since 2008.

Intention and sincerity: Unsettled debates

There are a number of crucial debates among Muslim Iranians that have remained unsettled over the last few centuries. Some of the most important ethical and philosophical questions have been written about by jurists, poets, writers, historians, scientists, and ordinary people (Ahmed 2016: 32–46),[11] but there has been no final settlement. More broadly, there is a great deal of ambivalence and ambiguity with regard to particular forms of piety and pious acts that are more evident if we do not concentrate exclusively on legal sources. It is important to acknowledge the continued existence of the debates and the fact that no side has achieved full victory, so to speak. Such is the case with matters that have to do with the relative importance of intention versus sincerity with regard to acts of worship (*ibadaat*). Currently in Iran, intention has become an utterance (as opposed to being a silent act) said after the

11. Actually one can say that Ahmed's entire book is devoted in part to a historical demonstration of this point. In his extended discussion of the *ghazals* of Hafiz, Ahmed states:

> The socially pervasive language of the *ghazal,* a language in which people thought about and fashioned their experience of the self and in which they spoke to each other about the individual and collective self, is thus a language that expresses, not merely a theoretical tension between legal and non-legal norms—but the very ethos of lived reality comprising a plurality of evidently contradictory meanings in life. (2016: 36)

The worlds of jurists and poets may appear as standing entirely separate from each other, but they have been intermingling for quite some time. Some faqih tried their hand at poetry and poets commented on the faqih's juridical opinions.

ablutions when one stands to pray (for discussions among Sunni jurists, see Bowen 1997; Powers 2004, 2005; Katz 2013).[12] For each prayer, one must utter, "I undertake two [three, four] prayer cycles in order to get close to God, *allaho akbar*," and then one begins the prayer proper. Beyond the inclusion of this utterance, which is widely accepted as required in the performance of the *namaz*, there are many different kinds of opinions. For example, one of the younger ayatollahs I spoke with, who has had both seminary and European education, said that the utterance of this intention is all that is required for a prayer to be legally valid. He added, "Certainly one must intend the prayer to be fulfilling what God has asked for and for no other reason such as other people's judgment of him, but for a prayer to be valid, you do not need concentration." He called this "*isqaat-e takliif*"—that is, "getting the obligation done." Other ayatollahs, such as Grand Ayatollah Morteza Motahari (1919–79), one of the most prolific and respected ayatollahs, elaborate on the issues in this way:

> Islam does not accept any act without *niyyat* [intention]. There are two pillars [*rukn*] to *niyyat*: (1) What am I doing? (2) Why am I doing what I am doing? What am I doing is the essence of *niyyat*, so that it must be for getting close to God and for [His] approval [*raazi*]. *Niyyat* is so important that if one gauges the act itself and the *niyyat* that goes with the act, the *niyyat* dimension is more important on the body of the act. This is the meaning of the *hadis* of the Prophet, who pronounced [*farmood*]: the *niyyat* of the believer [*mu'min*] is higher than [his] act. . . . Many others have spoken on this point . . . this shows the great interest/importance [*ihtimam*] to Islam . . . that [any] act must have *niyyat*, must have attention [*tavajjoh*] so that one [*insaan*] understands what [one] does and not undertake the act unaware.[13]

Under the subheading "The nature of habit [*'aadat*]," Ayatollah Motahari continues:

> Scholars of psychology say: when something becomes a habit, it acquires two contradictory properties/peculiarities [*xaasiyyat*]. The more the act becomes a habit and the more one practices it [*tamrin*], [one] does the act with more ease [*saadeh va sahl*]. The more it becomes a habit for a typist to type, the faster and easier the work gets done. But the more [he] becomes habituated to it, the less [he] pays attention. . . . That is why in Islam the problem [*mas'aleh*] of *niyyat* has received so much attention to prevent *ibaadat* [worship] from becoming *'aadat* [habit].

He then cites his teacher Grand Ayatollah Boroujerdi (1875–1961) as saying that:

12. Powers (2004) argues that it is only a misreading of Islamic jurists when historians of Islam in the West have imputed spirituality to intention. I argue that the ambivalence and the variety of debates show that it is not just a matter of wrong interpretation by Orientalists or other, more recent scholars. The debates remain unsettled. An early anthropological study that is an exploration of legal and laypersons' views and actual practices and shows the unsettled state of debates on temporary marriage is S. Haeri ([1993] 2014).

13. The third-person singular pronoun in Persian does not indicate gender; and it does not have to be explicitly present. Hence I put "he" in brackets to indicate that the pronoun does not exist in the original.

> Essentially it is not enough for the person to pay attention to intention and to intend to get close to God. It is not enough, [he] must in [his] heart be as if he is talking to himself: four prayer cycles for the noon prayer I perform to get close to God and then say *allaho akbar*. Of course from the point of view of motivation [*angiizeh*], this does not take care of it; motivation has its own place, but in this way the act moves from a state of being performed with unawareness to awareness.[14]

One of the most famous living ayatollahs, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli (b. 1933), discusses this question on his website under the heading "*ikhlas* and *khuluus* in the ethical debates of Javadi Amoli." As is current in Persian, *khuluus* and *ikhlaas*, both derived from the same root *kh-l-s* ("pure," "purify"), are used interchangeably. Amoli begins by saying: "Our very first duty is to perform acts with *ikhlas*." He refers to what is required for ensuring this as "*khuluus-e niyyat*" ("sincerity of intention")—the *niyya* itself must have *khuluus* ("sincerity"). Later on when he discusses fasting in Ramadan, he implies that this kind of sincerity may lead to achieving a kind of presence in the company of God: "To be a guest [*mihman*] of God leads one to *ikhlas*."

The website of the seminarians of Qom, Mashhad, and Najaf called Wikifeqh has entries for *khuluus* and presence of the heart.[15] With respect to *khuluus*, the website offers a number of categories in order to explicate its meanings: lexical, idiomatic, as applied to performing acts of worship for getting closer to God, peripheral intentions, and distinction between *fiqh* and law (*huquuq*) (the list is longer). Lexically, the word is defined as "purifying one's intention [*niyyat*] from other than God," that is, to intend to pray with only God in mind. It then goes on to state that certain other intentions, if present, do not invalidate the act: intentions such as wishing to become healthier through fasting, or cooling off as a result of the ablutions with water, or wishing for more *ruuzi* ("daily bread") in performing the night prayer. More importantly for our discussion, it makes a distinction between *fiqh* ("jurisprudence") and *huquuq* ("law"):

> One of the differences between *fiqh* and law is that in *fiqh* the discussion of *ikhlaas* is brought up [*matrah mishavad*] whereas in the science of law [*ilmeh huquuq*] there is no place [*jaaygaah*] for *ikhlaas*; because in law the aim [*hadaf*] is for the right [*haqq*] to be given to its owner and the owner of the right to arrive at [his] right so that whether [his] motivation [*angiizeh*] is spiritual/divine is not at issue. But in divine *fiqh* the existence of a motivation and the spiritual elevation [*ta'aaly*] of human beings and their closeness to God are aimed at. *This sheds light on the falseness [botlaan] of the views of those who think of the role of fiqh as only a managerial [modiriyati] one and see it as the same as law*. (Emphasis added)

14. These quotations are from his book entitled *Education in Islam* [*ta'liim va tarbiyat dar islam*], itself based on lectures give in 1972–73 (http://lib.motahari.ir/Content/938/132, accessed March 13, 2017).

15. https://goo.gl/yUc3JSv
The website states that it is based on the views of the "great *fuqahaa*" (experts of *fiqh*), that is, the most well-known Shi'a scholars (accessed March 13, 2017).

The website has a lengthy entry on "presence of the heart." It does not offer a lexical or etymological explanation but it goes on to discuss the term under sixteen headings and thirty-four subheadings. The entry begins with the "Importance of presence of the heart" and states that:

> [Presence of the heart] is discussed in many verses [*aayaat*] and (religious) stories [*ravaayaat*], all of which emphasize that the degree of acceptability [*qabooli*] of *namaz* depends on one's attention [*tavajjoh*], and even so, unfortunately, many of us do our *ibaadaat* [acts of worship] without presence of the heart and with complete inattention [*havaas parti*], and it is for this reason that we pray for a lifetime but we do not see any of its spiritual [*ma'navi*] and soul-caressing [*ruuh navaaz*] effects.[16]

It could be argued that these different opinions on the hows and whys of worship are in fact articulating political boundaries and rifts among various groups. That would certainly not be false. However, I suggest that if we were to analyze the differences as *merely* signaling political fissures, we would lose sight of the continued ambivalence of texts, persons, and movements on such matters. In Iran, as in other Muslim communities at different times, such differences have indeed ended up at the locus of political movements. Bowen (1997) discusses how the practice of actually uttering the *niyyat* at the beginning of each prayer served as a hugely polarizing debate in Gayo among "modernists" and "traditionalists." Katz's study of *salat* (*namaz*) in Sunni *fiqh* between the ninth and the sixteenth centuries includes a chapter entitled "Valid prayer and ideal prayer." She finds that:

> Beyond the basic fulfillment of the rules, however, Muslim thinkers recognized that *salat* could be performed with varying degrees of attention, sincerity, and emotional intensity. It might merely discharge one's obligation toward God and thereby avert otherworldly punishment, or it might increase one's intimacy with the divine. . . .Various authors pondered the relationship between legally adequate and spiritually ideal prayer, and explored means to cultivate more profound *salat*. (Katz 2013: 44)

Hence, the unsettled nature of these debates does not seem to be limited to Iranian Shi'as. The main agreement that is evident is that intention has a legal status whereas *khuluus* does not. Let us now examine the ways in which *namaz* and *du'a* are practiced and viewed by some of the members of the group of women with whom I have been working.

Prayer good and bad

To begin this project, I followed some of the women in this group to their weekly Qur'an and poetry classes.[17] I have gotten to know about twenty-five women, most of whom are in their sixties and from a range of middle-class backgrounds. They

16. https://goo.gl/7MYnYE (accessed March 13, 2017).

17. I interviewed their Qur'an and poetry teachers at length. In addition, I organized a number of group interviews with about eight women present each time, and though I

have college education and have studied Qur'anic Arabic (or have taught themselves). A few have Masters degrees. Almost all have led long-term professional lives, serving as high school teachers for public schools (majority), as principals, dictionary editors, and so on. The older ones are now retired and receive pensions. In this group, some are longtime friends, having taught at the same or adjacent high schools, and others are acquaintances. They live in Tehran, though several have grown up in cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan, and Yazd, but as Tehran attracts huge numbers from other parts, one comes across non-Tehranis routinely. They have all been praying for a few decades, a fact that contributes greatly to their articulateness with regard to their particular kinds of religiosity. In the course of the last few years, I met some more than others, mostly owing to their availability in summertime. Almost all have lost their parents, though I did interview a few women of their mother's generation. With a few exceptions, most do not have living husbands—having lost them either owing to old age, divorces, accidents, or illnesses.

I became drawn to the study of prayer after listening to a number of women discuss their experiences of *namaz*. In particular, I wanted to know more about what they referred to as "good *namaz*" (*namaazeh khoob*), or not being satisfied (*raazi*) with their *namaz*, which I was repeatedly hearing. What could they possibly mean by these descriptions? Does one not simply stand to pray because one is told to and because it is a fundamental requirement of one's religion? Just what are people up to when they pray? Do they not repeat verses that are from the Qur'an in the correct number of prayer cycles (*rak'at*) and then are done with the obligation—*isqaateh takliif*, as one of the ayatollahs put it?

Namaz is the obligatory prayer that believing Muslims must perform five times a day, at dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, and night.[18] It is composed of what are called *rak'ats*, or prayer cycles. The dawn prayer is the shortest and has two cycles, the evening prayer has three, and the rest have four. Each *namaz* is a recitation of several usually short *sura*s from the Qur'an. The first one, *al-Fatiha*, is obligatory (Iranians call this *sura al-Hamd*), but after that any other *sura* can theoretically be recited. In practice, certain *sura*s have become more or less standardized. *Namaz* has a structure almost similar to a narrative in that it has a beginning, a middle, and an ending salutation that is called *salam*. It is therefore not simply a recitation of a string of *suras* that suddenly begin and end. What is crucial to recognize with respect to *namaz* is that it takes time from the beginning to the end. This span of time is central to how it is experienced. In terms of duration, it would be similar to reciting the Lord's Prayer 3 or 4 times.

The second major category of prayer is *du'a* "that is, 'a calling out,' 'summoning' and 'supplication.'" It is a voluntary act most often involving spontaneous speech addressed to God. While the term "voluntary" seems necessary in order to

asked questions, these sessions were free-flowing conversations. With two exceptions, all these sessions were tape-recorded.

18. As is widely known, while Sunnis recite each prayer separately, Shi'ites group the noon and afternoon and evening and night together and pray three times a day rather than five. But some of the women I met leave their prayer rug open all day and at times perform their prayers separately rather than group them together, depending on a variety of factors.

distinguish it from *namaz*, the term *du'a* itself is simply a category of prayer and has no semantic connotation of "voluntary" in it. *Du'a* encompasses different kinds of invocation (Katz 2013: 29–43) and is a broader kind of prayer that can include different aims and ways of address—some people's language is more intimate in structure and tone than others. One may "do *du'a*" (*du'a kardan*) on some days but not on others. As was mentioned earlier, the verb that is used with *du'a* conveys whether it is one that is made up of the reciter's words, or from a prayer book that contains *du'a*s written by imams in Arabic. Hence, *du'a kardam* ("I did *du'a*") generally means that it was in Persian, whereas *du'a khandam* ("I read prayer") means that the words were written by someone else. Reciting a few verses of a Qur'anic *sura* can be *du'a* as well. The point is that this category of prayer is closer to the idea of prayer in contemporary Christianity, where there do not seem to be any prayers that are obligatory, though some that are widely used are formulaic. The most routine time for *du'a* is after a *namaz* is finished. Most reciters told me that after their *namaz* is done, they sit on their prayer rug and talk to God.

I began conversations about *namaz* with questions such as: "Do you pray at home or at a mosque?"; "Have you been praying for a long time?"; "Who taught you how to pray?"; "Are you communicating with God when you pray?"; and so on. What struck me was the number of times the reply was a variation on "I am not at all satisfied [*raazi*] with my praying [*namaz khoondan*] these days." This was then followed by an explanation of the reasons for the lack of satisfaction. For example, inability to concentrate was mentioned as the most important reason for what was considered an unsuccessful *namaz*.[19] Some told me that when they cannot concentrate, they "break" their prayer because a few seconds into it, they realize that their mind has wandered. Without presence of the heart, one cannot make a connection to the divine.

The first thing a Shirazi woman told me when I explained that I would like to talk to her about *namaz* was that she was not able to concentrate and hence was not doing well with her praying. Her father had recently passed away and he had made certain requests of his children in his will. The requests turned out to greatly trouble her and so she could not concentrate and was dissatisfied with her praying.

Her confrontation with the implications of her father's will offers an example of the kinds of quandaries and even impasses that rather routinely come up for those committed to following the requirements of their religion. Her father had been a highly successful businessman in Shiraz. He had been pious and had prayed regularly, fasted, and gone on pilgrimage to Mecca a number of times. But "even more importantly," she told me, he had simply been a "good human being" (*aadameh khoob*)—he had been kind, generous, and had taken care of his family as well as of strangers. When he died, his children read out his will in a family gathering. In his will he had asked them (sons and daughters in their fifties and sixties) to pay someone to go to Mecca to perform the *hajj* on his behalf and also to pay one or more people to perform *namaz* on his behalf to make up for any that he may have

19. Luehrmann (this collection) describes how the failure of the two women to arrive on time at the church service was seen as the work of the devil. A few of these women said that at times when they find it so difficult to concentrate, they ask: "Is this *sheytan* preventing me from doing my prayer?"

missed in his lifetime. These requests greatly puzzled and troubled his children. This woman was distraught: "I suddenly asked myself, did I even know my father? How could he ask us for these things when he knows that there are people who don't even have their night's bread [*nooneh shab*]—when he had been a good person throughout his life? Did these people finally get to him and scare him at the end of his life?" She employs a widely used expression that alludes to the regime without naming it or any particular person: *iinaa* ("these [people]"). Her dislike of giving money to someone to do the *hajj* on her father's behalf is reflected in a widely used saying when the topic of pilgrimage comes up: before spending money on the *hajj*, one must check with forty neighbors to the right and forty neighbors to the left to make sure that they do not need that money for more urgent purposes.

Her father's will and the difficult implications it had for her made her lose all concentration, especially at prayer times. While finding out what are the reasons for losing concentration is a challenge because the stories are often quite personal, similar kinds of uncertainties arising out of events such as this are also a major reason for stopping prayer altogether for a period of time, as I discovered in my fieldwork.[20] I find Carlo Severi's approach to ritual full of resonance with what I was told by these women, although he investigated what seems to be the vastly different context of the nonliterate, American Indian Kuna tribe. Severi argues that the space of a ritual is also always simultaneously the space of doubt and fragmentation:

> Ritual is not to be seen as the static illustration of a traditional "truth," but rather as the result of a number of particular inferences, of *individual acts* of interpretation, involving doubt, disbelief and uncertainty. . . . Reflexivity appears no more, in this perspective, as a "comment" on ritual effectiveness made from the point of view of daily life. . . . *Reflexivity is, in this case, situated within the ritual context.* (Severi 2002: 27, emphasis added)

Luhrmann (2012: xxiii) also discusses uncertainty as "remaining at the heart" of experiencing a relationship with an invisible presence. The women in my group comment on the *namaz* outside of the ritual context as well. Quite often the subject of *namaz* would stir comments that had to do with what it means to pray, that is, what does performing the namaz commit the reciter to in terms of ethical obligations. I heard many variations on "Doing *namaz* means you don't lie, you don't cheat. You don't take what is not yours and say it is yours. . . . It is not just a matter of standing there and saying those words."

Dollaa raast: *Namaz* without sincerity

It is noteworthy that a *namaz* without presence of the heart has a name and one that is used frequently in conversation. The very antithesis of a *namaz* that is with

20. My presentation at the 2016 American Anthropological Association, "What can the study of genres teach us about interiority?," offered ethnographic cases of women who had stopping doing the *namaz* for periods of time because they were angry at God. This is referred to as *qahr baa khodaa*.

khuluus is called "*dolla raast*." *Dolla raast* literally means (mindlessly) bending and straightening over and over while rushing through the words of the *sura*s. A frequent example brought up was that of "jumping to pray" at the sound of the *azaan* (call to prayer) when one is a guest at someone's home. To pray "in front of others" risks ostentation (*tazaahor*), and although by the time one gets home that particular prayer time may have passed, almost all my interlocutors preferred that to praying in someone else's house where they would not have privacy. As discussed above, the concern with appearing ostentatious and duplicitous at the time of *namaz* and more generally in carrying out *ibaadat* ("worship") is centuries old (Bashir 2011: 68–74). On television when certain officials were shown at *namaz*, a critique voiced by various people was that though they have been doing it for a long time, it has not made them any more truthful and honest.

One of the questions I posed to the women I spoke with was concerned with finding out whether they regard the *namaz* as a form of communication—are they addressing God when they recite the *sura*s? In reply to this question, a number of discussions ensued on the implications of authorship, on repetition, and on meaning. A woman in her sixties who taught social studies in high school for decades and has a Masters in sociology from an American university began by telling me:

> It is definitely a conversation [*sohbat*] for me, believe me. It is a conversation for me, I mean that I am talking to God. I begin with *Hamd [al-Fatiha]*. . . . I think this is a kind of summary of the whole of Qur'an. I think it is the only *sura* in the *namaz* where you are actually addressing God. Here you are talking to someone who has both a general kindness and a specific one [for you]—a God that is like this, a God that is like that. And then you say, "God [*khodaya*] guide me . . . to a path where there is no hate, there is no wickedness . . . not the path of those who have lost their way and thereby made you angry because they did not follow your rules. You ask for these things from God.

In response to my question about what it means to recite the same *sura* (such as the one she mentions in this quote) every day five times a day, I was told that no *sura* always means the same thing. The same woman just quoted said:

> I want to tell you something. If you pay attention, every day when you recite this you find something new. In my opinion, this is like the Qur'an. Now you in this situation under these conditions understand this [*sura*] in this way. You then go further on and you might understand it in a different way because your thinking and knowledge [*shenakht*] have moved further.

Another woman told me: "Today, the phrase 'those who have gone astray' [in the *sura* of *al-Fatiha*] for me means Mubarak [former President of Egypt], tomorrow it may be someone else." One may also pose a question in the recitation of a *sura*. The last two lines of the opening *sura* speak of a "path." One woman said that she is not sure how to get on that path and asks God about it. So what the *sura* "means" changes, and also, while the form (the words of the *namaz*) remains the same, what is actually communicated does not. It was explained to me that although they do not choose the words, they do try to tell God what is on their mind. When they succeed in doing so, that is a good *namaz*. As Bloch notes in his analysis of

the special features of ritual language: "Ritual is therefore a place where, because the ordinary forms of linguistic communication are changed, we cannot assume the semantic processes of more ordinary communication" (1974: 56). In this regard, Bowen seems to have reached a similar conclusion in his study of *salat* in Indonesia, namely an absence of any strict form–content relationship:

> The *salat* is not structured around an intrinsic propositional or semantic core. It cannot be "decoded" semantically because it is not designed according to a single symbolic or iconic code. In particular times and places Muslims have construed the *salat* as conveying iconic or semantic meanings, but as part of particular spiritual, social and political discourses. (1989: 615)

In short, it seems to me that the form–content relationship takes on multiple forms and is to be discovered in the case of each ritual.

Autonomy in choosing what to communicate in formulaic prayer

That what is communicated *can change* from prayer session to prayer session, from one day to the next, while the form stays the same has profound implications for the relevance of ideas about language use to notions of freedom and individual autonomy. The women in this group do not refer to changes in what they communicate as "freedom of communication," for example, but it is clear that their not having *chosen* the words of *namaz* has not irrevocably exiled them into the unchanging words of God and away from what they feel compelled to communicate. So the meanings proliferate, and what is communicated depends on the reciter. The lexical meanings and theological interpretations of the verses can come in and out of focus, may be more or less related to what the reciter wants to communicate; their indexical relations to the lives of the reciters prone to change as they and the world around them change.

Following the consequences of vernacularization after the Reformation, and disagreements over formulaic prayers, a widely influential Protestant semiotic ideology was formed (Targoff 2001; Keane 2003; Bialecki and Hoenes del Pinal 2011; Lambek 2016). As I interpret this ideology, a central tenet is the assumption that individual freedom is bound up with the *individual's choice of words*. In a discussion of "sincerity as freedom," Keane argues that "for many ordinary Protestant converts, sincerity is inseparable from other aspects of agency and autonomy that are functions of modernity's promise of more concrete and immediate forms of freedom" (2007: 214). Citing Asad (1996) and Taylor (1989), he states that

> sincerity emerges in European discourses as part of an account of how the individual's interiority is the chief site of that which might elude political coercion. By extension, sincere speech is that which is compelled by nothing that might lie "outside" the speaker, whether that be, for example, political authority, written texts, or social conventions. (Keane 2007: 214)

Texts of set prayers for these women are not viewed as merely just another kind of language with either complex or transparent semantic and propositional meaning,

lacking any ambiguity. Language in such cases is not a dry social convention that simply "lie[s] outside" the speaker. Given, for example, Christian worshippers' recitation of the Lord's Prayer at home over decades and at church every Sunday, it is hard to imagine that it would remain "exterior" to them, (Du Bois 2009), and if it did, how would we know that? On the one hand, the beauty, musicality, and special powers of the language of the Qur'an and the *sura*s that are uttered during the performance of the *namaz* are commented on, interiorized, and embodied. Having repeated these five times a day every day for decades, what would it mean to say that they "lie outside" the speaker just because the words are not theirs? On the other hand, this language does not "compel" the speakers in any necessarily uniform or predictable manner. It is a language that perhaps sometimes, if not always, moves the reciter in ways that involve her emotions. The emphasis on speech and thoughts in this formulation seems to ignore how emotions and silence are, at least at times, part and parcel of sincere enactments of worship.

Contemporary Shi'a Iranians as represented by the views of the ayatollahs discussed above, the seminarians, and the women in this group share the anxiety about whether a ritual is done from the heart; whether the speaker is being sincere, is aware of whom she is addressing, and so on, but they do not see the whole set of issues as exclusively a matter of semiosis. There does appear to be an acknowledgment of emotions in the definition of sincerity in that the spontaneous speech is coming from inner thoughts, but little is made of this aspect. As the women in this group explained to me, if, in doing the *namaz,* they feel unmoved, and if they are unable to arrive at a kind of copresence with the divine, then they have not arrived at a good *namaz*. In Foucault's terms, they have not managed to reach spirituality—something that unambiguous, transparent, and exterior language can barely accommodate or give rise to.

Moreover, it may or may not be that individual interiorities lie outside of political *coercion*, but what about *persuasion*?[21] On a daily basis, those in power in Iran (as elsewhere) make attempts to persuade citizens in a number of ways for a variety of ends. The very people who use terms such as "these" and "these people" to distinguish themselves from "them" have favorite television programs headed by speakers chosen by the centralized state television authority. They listen and watch with eagerness broadcasts of the call to prayer, devotional songs and poetry, recitation of *du'as*, the news, cooking and baking programs, and children's programs. It would be reasonable to argue that interiorities are formed, shaped, constituted, challenged, revised, and so on, in relation to worlds that include political authority, written texts, and social conventions. In other words, how can individuals have an interiority at all without the world outside—a world that distinguishes in such absolute terms between what lies outside and what lies inside (Moore 2015).

21. There is an emerging and fascinating literature on diaries written by ordinary Russians after the October Revolution. Among other things, the diaries show the degree to which some Russians went back and forth between being persuaded of the potential virtues of the Revolution and at the same time being rather worried about its consequences (see, e.g., Hellbeck 2009). I thank Gabriella Safran for calling my attention to this literature. In anthropology, Caton (1993) provides an important extended discussion of the conceptual importance of persuasive power as opposed to brute force.

Even with vernacularization, speakers of languages do not appropriate them to the same degree and equally successfully. There is no absolute freedom in the use of language: vernaculars are less restrictive than sacred languages, but there are still constraints (Haeri 2003: 13–17). Words come to be associated with certain groups, certain people, certain historical moments or social practices, despite the struggles of those who would like them to have other associations and tastes. This is what we have learned from Bakhtin (1982, 1986; see also Gal 2013) and from authors and poets who insist on using sacred languages with heaps of historical interpretive dust like Classical Arabic (Haeri 2003), Biblical Hebrew (Alter 1994), Katharevousa (Herzfeld 1996), and so on.[22]

As Bakhtin pointed out, the saturation of language with other people's intentions should move us to a more nuanced formulation of the relation between choice of words and freedom and individual autonomy. Moreover, the recitation of the words of others in prayer (or poetry) under an imponderable variety of conditions and at different stages of our lives cannot be a simple matter of "rote imitation," making parrots out of us and taking away our abilities to think independently. As some of the women I spoke to reminded me, "Good copying takes thinking."

Talking to God with or without imams' intercession: The day-to-day politics of *du'a* books

Most of these women told me that when they finish their *namaz*, they sit on their prayer rug (*sajjadeh*) and "talk to God in Persian." That is generally how most people end their *namaz*. One of the biggest differences between *namaz* and just talking to God after *namaz* is that, in addition to this *du'a* being in Persian, the believer is on her own in coming up with a language of address and an appropriate tone to talk to God. For this kind of *du'a*, concern about mediation rarely surfaces. It is with respect to *written du'a*s available in prayer books, composed by various imams, and edited by various clerics, that suddenly one hears a great of deal of ambivalence about matters that were generally not voiced in discussions of *namaz* or spontaneous *du'a*: great preference for Persian over Arabic; not using *du'a* to only "do business" (*tejaarat*) with God; the unacceptability of counting one's *du'a*s so that thirty repetitions would get the reciter one thing, fifty another thing. Several women told me of their disapproval about using the prayers of imams because the imams are not, as some firmly believe, any closer to God. The whole approach is quite different from the kinds of concerns brought up in discussions of *namaz*.

There is wide availability of one particular *du'a* book, *Mafatih al-Jinan* (Keys to Paradise), which contains *du'a*s written by various imams—the book comes in multiple versions and sizes, many with interlinear translations into Persian—and is

22. Robert Alter recounts how he "once heard Avraham Shlonsky, the leading figure in the generation of poets . . . in the twenties and thirties, say in his characteristically theatrical manner that *every Hebrew word came swirling behind it a wake three thousand years long*, so that the poet had to struggle consciously to cut off echoes and associations he did not want in his poem" (1994: 11, emphasis added).

ubiquitous in homes and in particular in mosques and shrines. *Mafatih* was compiled by a scholar cleric by the name of Sheikh Abbas Qomi (1877–1940). This book was published before 1979 but soared in popularity after the Revolution. The prayer book that occupied that position for decades previously was *Sahifeyeh Sajjadieyeh,*(The Book of Sajjad) which is in print today and comes in many versions and editions (some with Persian poetry). It is believed to have been written by the fourth imam, Zein al-Abedine, known as Imam Sajjad, who was born in the mid-seventh century. With respect to the use of *Mafatih*, the debate about one's own words versus those of others routinely occurs. Several women said with evident distaste, "I don't own any *du'a* books; I don't like them I don't read them." They argued that when it comes to *du'a*, they don't need other people's words; they have a lot to say themselves. They added further that they like talking to God in Persian when they do their *du'a* partly because it adds to their concentration. The low esteem in which *Mafatih* is held appears to be both gendered and class-based. The educated middle classes find it more objectionable than those in the lower classes, and men more so than women across classes (Torab 1996, 2006). However, even among the middle classes, as represented by the women in this group, in certain religious gatherings such as the Prophet's birthday, some prayers from the *Mafatih* are elaborately recited by professional female reciters. In these cases, there is usually more acceptance of the prayer book as part of a congregational and ceremonial occasion.

Beside memorials and celebrations, prayer books are not used in any official or regular religious services offered by mosques as is the case for many denominations in Christianity. There are no standardized prayer books. Even on Fridays when people go to mosques, listen to a sermon (*khutbeh*), and perform the noon prayer, there are no congregational readings from prayer books. Within a sermon, there are frequent references to verses from the Qur'an. The preacher often translates and interprets what the verse means. And there are call-and-response acts between the preacher and the congregation—the congregation saying "*amen*" or "*elahi amen*" (although at least in larger mosques this has changed entirely to *allaho akbar* in more recent times); and when the name of the Prophet or names of other Prophets and holy figures are mentioned, certain formulas are used by the audience, such as "Peace be upon him." But there is no reliance on a prayer book.

Prayer books among Shi'a Muslims in Iran offer readers prayers and acts that are called *mustahab*, meaning that reciting and following them are not required of the believer but they are "favored." There is, however, no legally sanctioned support for acts that prayer books recommend readers to do, such as reciting certain prayers on certain specific days (Prayer for Thursday, Friday, etc.), for specific purposes, or for a certain number of times.

One of the women I interviewed is from a well-known religious family. She went to graduate school to study Persian literature after her children grew up but she stopped her studies after one year. Unlike most of the other women in this group, she was not a high school teacher and did not hold a regular job. But she is invited on a weekly basis to participate as a guest lecturer in Qur'an and classical poetry classes. Her father, who is now deceased, was a famous translator of the Qur'an. She said sarcastically that these days "they come up with the prayer book of

Omm Davood, Baba Aameleh [made-up names] . . . they just keep producing these books and pamphlets . . . who says you can learn anything from reading these?" She continued:

> *Mafatih* is too facile, it makes one's job too easy. It effectively says "read this and you will be connected to God." It is being a true Muslim [*musalmaneh vaqeyi*] that is very difficult. And they have even planted some stuff in it like "tie such and such *du'a* to yourself if you want such and such." But *du'a* is a spark [*jaraqqeh*]. We light a matchstick so that we can light a lamp with it. A *du'a* is a spark for good deeds. My father used to say when you get in a car, say this prayer, "God protects you for He is the most merciful." But then he said, saying this means that afterwards, you do not honk, you don't go down a one-way street, etc.

What she means by "planted" is that in addition to legitimate prayers written by various imams or those taken from the Qur'an, there are recommendations such as reciting a prayer thirty-three times (or any specific number), for example, in order to increase the chances of God answering one's wishes. Such *tejaarat* ("business") with God is what some of these women are against, to one degree or another. The woman continued:

> Once a man who was my father's student came to him as usual to read *Hajj Mulla Hadi Sabzevari's Manzoomeh* [treatise]. He told my father, who was on his way to Mashhad [where the shrine of the eighth imam, Imam Reza, is located], "Please take this ring and drop it into the inner shrine." My father said, "Can I give it to someone who needs it?" He then sold the ring and gave the money to a grocer in a neighborhood where he knew two university students whose fathers were farmers [i.e., poor] as credit for their groceries.

She finished this story by saying, "You see, people just choose to do what is simpler." According to this woman, her father's student wanted to use his ring as an offering to the eighth imam so that he would recommend him to God. Of course, those who cannot spare a ring are a majority and so in their case doing business with God would be an act such as reciting a prayer a certain number of times or using prayer beads (*tasbiih*) to count certain phrases.

As can be seen, disagreements on whether a true Muslim should or should not seek intercession are fought on similar grounds to those between Catholics and Protestants. To learn to construct a relationship with God on bases that are inspired by imams or the great mystic poets is one thing. But to use their words exclusively to pray—in other words, to create an idolatrous relationship with their words or one that creates a parallel with the Qur'an—is a different matter. And, finally, to ask them to intercede on one's behalf when one is in need is unacceptable to many people.

Conclusion

I argue that ritual is like language: both precede the subject, but at some point, in ways that are not entirely clear, individuals make their own connection to these structures. Speakers of the same language all end up finding their own presence in

the signifier (de Certeau 1984; Johnstone 1996), with various degrees of success. No two speakers of the "same" language sound exactly alike. Similarly, with rituals, believers understand, articulate, and practice them and find connections to them that change over time and are rarely exact copies of what they have been taught. And practices and reflections do not remain the same throughout an individual's life. The study of interiority contributes to understanding how an imponderable variety of individuals at different stages of their lives make a ritual their own.

The notion of sincerity allows comparative analysis by its focus on the relationship between the individual and God. Among this group of women, sincerity is not an exclusively semiotic matter—in fact the change of emotional state is perhaps one of the most important indicators of a "good *namaz*." What can be said about the unsettled nature of important debates on worship in Iran with respect to modern subjectivity? At the very least, we can say that Iranians do not seem ontologically different from those for whom such matters appear to be closed (Hann 2014). The concerns and anxieties that surround the historical emergence of sincerity have been articulated in many different ways and in various genres by Iranians for centuries. There can be a great deal of reflexivity even or especially in the face of a repeated act and one whose words the performer has not authored. It is by comparing interiorities that we can avoid implicit and explicit essentializations of people, practices, and ideologies.

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Le sujet sincère: médiation et intériorité parmi un groupe de femmes musulmanes en Iran

Résumé : Cet article étudie deux types de prière, namaz et du'a, pratiqués par un groupe de femmes chiites en Iran. Il analyse comment la validité juridique de ces prières, les idées de "présence du cœur" et de sincérité dans le culte ont été débattues. Je suggère que les débats sur le culte, même parmi les juristes, restent irrésolus. J'utilise le contexte ethnographique d'un groupe de femme à Téhéran pour mener une analyse comparative de la notion de sincérité telle qu'elle a été utilisée dans l'anthropologie de la chrétienté. Je montre que cette comparaison peut éclairer les idées et les pratiques du culte en Iran mais également conférer de nouvelles dimensions à cette notion, dimensions qui ont pu être sous-estimées ou non-explorées par l'étude du Protestantisme. Je tente de définir le concept d'intériorité et de démontrer son utilité pour comprendre la subjectivité religieuse. Une analyse historique de la subjectivité religieuse attentive aux rapports de force associés à des traditions discursives influentes est nécessaire mais insuffisante pour répondre à la question de ce que les croyants font, pensent, et éprouvent dans leur tentative de suivre les injonctions de leur religion.

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