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Ritual and Memory of Shi'a Practices in India's Deccan
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ABSTRACT

My research examines contemporary Shi'a ritual practices, such as Muharram processions, visits to shrines (*ziyarat*) and ceremonies (*majlis*) commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, grandson of the Prophet, in the battle of Karbala in 680 A.D., which represent memory in space. In particular, I explore the ritual geography of Shi'a neighbourhoods in Hyderabad's old city, which embodies cultural memories of former Indo-Islamic Muslim rule and is still locally constituted through exchanges between historical Shi'a networks in the Indian Ocean region. I look at ways in which ritual practices – as repeated, rehearsed links from the past – act as practical mnemonics representing the culture of former Mughal rule in the everyday lives of Shi'a Muslims, while remaining fluid as modes of cultural self-invention. I therefore explore contentious ritual practices, such as self-flagellation (*qama zani*), and the ways in which reformist discourses (using religious media to alter traditional practices) are contested, revealing strains between global (imagined) and local Shi'a identities in the context of increasing interconnection along the Indian Ocean rim. I am particularly interested in examining the living presence of history as expressed in ritual experience, and the ways in which this interrogates notions of historical time, Indian and Islamic identities, and notions of urban space.