The Politics of Emotions: Ritualized Grief and the Assertion of Hazara Identity in Quetta (1979–2007)

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Abstract

This study investigates the profound and complex relationship between collective grief, religious rituals, and the formation of ethno-religious identity within the Hazara community of Quetta, Pakistan, spanning the tumultuous period from 1979 to 2007. This timeframe, bracketed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution, and the tenures of General Zia-ul-Haq and General Pervez Musharraf, subjected the Hazaras to intense socio-political pressures, sectarian violence, and state-led Islamization. The research argues that Twelver Shia religious rituals, particularly the commemorations of Muharram and specific graveyard rites, functioned not merely as expressions of bereavement but as critical, performative acts of collective political resistance and cultural boundary-maintenance against external marginalization. By examining how political regimes and escalating sectarian persecution impacted the Hazara experience, this essay demonstrates that their historical suffering, channelled through public and private rituals of mourning, became fundamentally integrated into a resilient, mobilized group identity. This performance of grief allowed the Hazaras to articulate their minority status, assert territorial claims within Quetta's segregated urban spaces, and transform historical trauma into a unifying cultural memory that transcended the efforts of successive military governments to impose a homogenized national identity. The ritualized expression of suffering thus served as a vital mechanism for ethno-religious cohesion, demonstrating the malleability and enduring strength of Hazara identity under duress.

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The history of the Hazara community is one profoundly shaped by displacement, persecution, and a persistent struggle for recognition, which culminated in the mass migration and settlement of this distinct ethno-religious minority within Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, Pakistan. Their lineage, often traced back to the central Hazarajat region of Afghanistan, became a narrative of enduring hardship following the late-nineteenth-century conflicts with Amir Abdur Rahman Khan, which led to forced conversion, enslavement, and a significant diaspora (Kakar 1973, 1979). Settled in a volatile geopolitical crossroads bordered by Afghanistan and Iran, the Quetta Hazaras—distinguished by their Mongolian features and unwavering adherence to the Twelver Shia sect of Islam—became intrinsically linked to the regional power struggles and sectarian fault lines that defined South Asian politics, particularly throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century. This essay situates their identity development against the backdrop of two defining military dictatorships in Pakistan: General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) and General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008), periods characterized by state-sponsored Islamization and the subsequent rise of militant sectarianism (Ahmed 1988; Kennedy 1990).

This essay advances the central argument that for the Hazara community in Quetta between 1979 and 2007, religious rituals of mourning and grief constituted the primary mechanism through which their collective ethno-religious identity was preserved, articulated, and aggressively defended against external threats and the state's efforts at homogenization. The performative nature of their Shia rituals, particularly the large-scale public processions of Muharram and the solemn, private ceremonies held in sacred spaces like graveyards, transformed historical and contemporary suffering into a unifying cultural and political statement (Monsutti 2005). These acts of collective grief provided a moral and symbolic counter-narrative to the prevailing ethno-nationalist and Sunni-majoritarian discourses pushed by the state and extremist groups, effectively turning marginalization into a core component of their cohesive and resilient sense of self. It is precisely within the shared, ritualized experience of sorrow that Hazara identity found its most potent and enduring expression, proving both resistant to state-imposed identities and malleable enough to integrate new waves of trauma into its foundational narrative.

To fully understand this complex dynamic, this inquiry will first establish the historical and political context of the Hazara settlement and the state's policies of Islamization and ethnic replacement in Balochistan. Subsequent sections will delve into the existing scholarly literature on Hazara identity, diaspora, and the anthropology of suffering to justify the methodological focus on religious rituals during the specified period. The main body of the essay will then be divided into two key analytical phases corresponding to the Zia-ul-Haq and Musharraf eras, examining how the form and function of public grieving rituals evolved from covert acts of defiance into overt political performances of communal consolidation in the face of escalating, targeted sectarian violence. Finally, the conclusion will synthesize these findings, affirming that the ritualized performance of grief transformed the Hazaras' marginalized status into a potent source of collective strength and identity.

The scholarly discourse surrounding the Hazara community, though limited in its early stages, provides essential foundational concepts, moving from contested origins to the complex dynamics of ethno-religious perseverance in diaspora. Early accounts, often biographical or historical, set the stage by documenting the initial experiences of persecution that precipitated the Hazara diaspora. Lillias Hamilton's firsthand narrative, *A Vizier's Daughter: A Tale of the Hazara War* (1900), while not academic, offered a valuable contemporary perspective on the profound psychological and sociocultural impact of the conflict with Amir Abdur Rahman, documenting the emergent manifestations of religious conviction and contempt for the oppressor (Hamilton 1900). This was later complemented by Bunbury's concise military history and Elizabeth Bacon's pioneering academic work, which rigorously investigated the Hazaras' origins, challenging the prevailing European narrative of their purely Mongol ancestry and initiating serious anthropological inquiry into their history and culture (Bunbury 1940; Bacon 1951). These initial studies established the critical historical trauma that underpins the Hazara collective memory, demonstrating that their current religious and ethnic distinctiveness is inextricably linked to this history of violence and migration (Kakar 1973; Poladi 1989).

A second, more anthropological cluster of literature directly addresses the relationship between ethnicity, religion, and suffering, which is central to the current thesis. Robert Canfield's extensive work in central Afghanistan during the 1970s, particularly *Faction and Conversion in a Plural Society* (1973) and the essay *Suffering as a Religious Imperative in Afghanistan*, provides an invaluable framework by linking the Hazaras' Shi'ism and their marginalized socio-economic position as "secondary citizens" (Canfield 1973). This body of work underscores how their minority religious status was—and continues to be—a primary driver of their persecution, leading to a strong, oppositional group identity maintained through strategic cultural and religious practices. Furthermore, Bindemann's work (1987) on the religious and political landscape of the Shia Hazaras across Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan provides a crucial transnational context, highlighting the progressive political development of the community and the spread of formal Islamic education, which directly impacted the Quetta Hazara's political consciousness during the period under study.

Finally, studies focused directly on the diaspora and socio-cultural change in Quetta, such as those by Owtadolajam (2006) and Monsutti (2005), bridge the gap between historical context and contemporary ritual practice. Owtadolajam noted a shift away from traditional customs due to rising education, while Monsutti's work, *War and Migration* (2005), emphasizes the role of social networks and the collective memory of war in shaping their economic and social strategies. This scholarship confirms that the Hazara identity in Quetta is characterized by *malleability*—constantly negotiating its distinctiveness within the host society—and that the expression of suffering is a comprehensive repertoire of symbols linked to their war experiences (Monsutti 2005). The critical gap in this established literature, which this essay seeks to fill, is a focused, historically grounded analysis of how this *ritualized grief* actively functioned as a political, identity-consolidating response to the state-level

policies of Zia and Musharraf between 1979 and 2007. By zeroing in on this period, the analysis moves beyond simply recognizing the existence of rituals to demonstrating their active, contested, and political role in defining Hazara personhood against a hostile state environment.

This essay employs a synthetic methodological approach, primarily rooted in historical analysis and the socio-anthropology of religion, to interpret the political function of religious rituals within the Hazara community of Quetta across the target period of 1979–2007. The methodology is fundamentally structured to address the research questions concerning the impact of the Zia and Musharraf regimes, the causes of marginalization, and the mobilization of emotional politics through religious rituals. Data is drawn from a triangulated set of sources: scholarly secondary literature providing historical and ethnographic context (as detailed in the review), primary documentation from the time (including newspaper accounts, institutional reports, and governmental archives like the Balochistan Archives), and the core ethnographic observations presented in the initial thesis document regarding specific communal practices. This mixed-source approach is essential to situate the local, ritualistic expressions of grief within the macro-political and security contexts of Pakistan.

The chronological framework of 1979–2007 is non-negotiable and provides the necessary historical bracketing for the analysis. The starting point of 1979 marks a pivotal geopolitical confluence: General Zia-ul-Haq's coup ushering in state-led Islamization; the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan driving significant Hazara migration to Quetta; and the Iranian Revolution bolstering Shia political and religious identity across the region (Ahmed 1988). The end date of 2007, preceding Musharraf's departure, encapsulates the period where sectarian persecution, particularly targeted killings by groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, significantly escalated, forcing the Hazara community to transform their private grief into public political protest for protection. By isolating this period, the analysis can effectively trace the co-evolution of state oppression, sectarian violence, and the ritualized Hazara response, ensuring that the interpretations of religious rituals—Muharram processions, majalis, and graveyard rites—are understood as highly politicized acts of minoritarian agency and identity assertion, rather than mere religious observances.

The Geopolitical Crucible and the Inception of Ritual Resistance (1979–1988)

The year 1979 marked a watershed moment for the Hazara community in Quetta, fundamentally altering the existing social contract and accelerating the politicization of their religious life. General Zia-ul-Haq's military regime, established in 1977, formally pursued a policy of comprehensive Islamization across Pakistan, aiming to replace perceived secular and ethnic affiliations with a unified, orthodox Sunni Muslim identity through legal, educational, and political reforms (Kennedy 1990; Daechsel 1997). This top-down imposition of a specific Islamic framework, including the introduction of *hudood* laws and a sharia court system, implicitly marginalized the Shia Hazaras, whose distinct ethno-religious practices and theology suddenly faced unprecedented pressure to conform or be

deemed 'other' within the official state narrative (Ahmed 1988). The simultaneous confluence of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Islamic Revolution injected new ideological and demographic forces into Quetta, transforming the city from a regional center of ethnic diversity into a contested zone defined by sectarian competition and the massive influx of Afghan Hazara refugees (Monsutti 2005).

The enormous wave of Hazara refugees from Hazarajat, escaping both Soviet-backed and internal Afghan conflict, significantly consolidated and concentrated the Hazara population within the enclaves of Alamdar Road and Hazara Town in Quetta. This geographic consolidation, while providing a degree of security and communal support, also made the community a visible and identifiable minority target, intensifying the pre-existing patterns of discrimination and suspicion rooted in historical prejudice (Poladi 1989; Owtadolajam 2006). Zia's Islamization policies, rather than promoting national unity, inadvertently provided the ideological and legal space for the rise of sectarian militant groups in Pakistan, which were often tacitly supported or overlooked by state agencies prioritizing the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union (Ali 2021). The Hazara community's response to this mounting internal and external pressure was not through overt political mobilization, which was severely suppressed under military rule, but through the covert and highly symbolic assertion of identity via their religious rituals, particularly the annual cycle of Muharram commemoration.

During the Zia era, the public observance of Muharram in Quetta became an act of ethno-religious defiance, transforming the devotional mourning for Imam Hussain's martyrdom at Karbala into a contemporary commentary on their own persecuted existence. The *majalis* (mourning assemblies) and street processions, while ostensibly religious, served as platforms for political consciousness, solidifying the idea of Hazaras as an oppressed minority destined to suffer for their truth, mirroring the sacrifice of their Imams (Canfield 1973). The traditional elements of Muharram—the *marsiya* (mourning poetry) and the *ta'ziya* (reenactments/replicas)—functioned as powerful tools of cultural memory, articulating the historical trauma of the Abdur Rahman massacres and the recent losses in Afghanistan alongside the foundational Shia narrative of martyrdom (Monsutti 2005). These rituals, conducted meticulously within their segregated residential areas, became a boundary-maintaining mechanism, signalling unwavering commitment to their distinct Twelver Shia faith in an increasingly hostile, Sunni-majoritarian state environment, thereby frustrating the regime's objective of a unified religious national identity (Bindemann 1987).

The Ritual Landscape of Grief: Muharram, Graveyard Rites, and Communal Cohesion

The Muharram rituals, particularly the climactic Ashura procession, were strategically important for the Hazaras as they provided one of the few avenues for public, mass assembly during a period of strict military governance and suppression of ethnic politics. The sheer act of the procession, moving through the physically contained space of Alamdar Road and Hazara Town, momentarily transformed the marginalized minority into a visible, cohesive

entity, staking a performative claim to urban territory and publicly affirming their communal existence (Majeed 2020). The emotional intensity of *matam* (chest-beating) and, where practised, *qama zani* (self-flagellation with blades, though often regulated or confined to private spaces by this era), served a profound social purpose, channeling individual bereavement over sectarian attacks into a collective, shared sense of identity forged in enduring suffering (Thesiger 1955; Canfield 1973). This organized, disciplined display of emotional solidarity was interpreted not only as piety but as a powerful, non-violent demonstration of political will and unity that the state could not easily ignore or crush.

Beyond the major public ceremonies, the Hazara community's relationship with their sacred spaces, specifically the local graveyards, became deeply integrated into their ongoing articulation of grief and identity, as highlighted by the research in the original thesis. The performance of graveyard rituals (*ziyarat*), where Hazaras mourn their martyrs and appeal to God for the acknowledgment of their righteousness, connects the contemporary victims of sectarian violence directly to the foundational Shia narrative of sacrificial martyrdom (Monsutti 2005). These rites transformed the physical burial sites into political landscapes, sacred spaces that constantly remind the community of their persecution and the high cost of their identity, thereby reinforcing a distinct cultural memory that actively resisted the state's historical amnesia regarding minority rights and violence (Poladi 1989). By integrating the recent, violent deaths of loved ones into the timeless script of Shia suffering, the community successfully mobilized a *politics of emotions*, using grief as a resource to generate internal solidarity and external moral leverage against their oppressors (Rizvi Jafree, Malik, and Khawar 2023).

The very *malleability* of the Hazara identity, as discussed in the scholarly discourse, became evident in their ritual responses during this phase. Unlike Hazara communities in the Western diaspora who often adopted a more secular identity in response to freedom and integration (Monsutti 2005), the Quetta Hazaras doubled down on their religious distinctiveness due to the intensified pressure from the Sunni-majoritarian environment (Bindemann 1987). Their identity was defined in active *opposition* to "the other," with their heightened religiosity serving as a strategic response to sectarian and state discrimination, ensuring that the collective memory of persecution remained sharp and functional for survival (Canfield 1973). This strategic use of religious identity, rooted in the collective performance of grief and sacrifice, created an insurmountable barrier to Zia's dream of a uniform Islamic state, demonstrating the Hazaras' capacity to transform victimization into a source of cultural fortitude (Hashmi 2015).

Escalation of Violence and the Evolving Function of Ritual (1999–2007)

The era of General Pervez Musharraf's rule, beginning in 1999, represented a significant shift in the nature of the threat faced by the Hazara community, transitioning from the implicit ideological marginalization of Zia's time to overt, targeted, and escalating sectarian violence. Despite Musharraf's rhetoric of 'Enlightened Moderation' and a commitment to fighting extremism, the

Hazara community in Quetta faced a relentless campaign of bombings and calculated assassinations orchestrated primarily by Sunni extremist organizations, notably Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and later the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (Ali 2021). The violence during this period became systemic, directly targeting public spaces, buses, and gatherings, forcing the Hazara population into a state of *ghettoization* within their already segregated residential areas of Alamdar Road and Hazara Town, where they lived under perpetual threat (Majeed 2020). This escalation fundamentally altered the function of their religious rituals.

The Muharram and graveyard rituals of the 2000s were now performed not just in memory of historical figures or past wars, but as immediate responses to fresh, ongoing massacres, making the connection between Karbala and Quetta painfully direct and unavoidable. The rituals became a primary forum for the community to process this relentless, contemporary grief, offering psychological healing and social reconstruction in the face of governmental failure to protect them (Rizvi Jafree, Malik, and Khawar 2023). The traditional *marsiya* were supplemented by contemporary poems memorializing local martyrs, turning the mourning halls (*Imambargahs*) into sites of immediate political and emotional solidarity, where grief was publicly affirmed as a communal experience (Sukhanyar 2015). This constant, ritualized integration of new victims cemented the notion of a perpetual state of siege, transforming their identity from merely *Shia* into a specifically *persecuted Hazara Shia* identity, distinguished by an inherent connection to suffering.

Furthermore, the escalation of violence spurred the Hazaras to translate the symbolic power of their religious grief into tangible political action, moving beyond the ritual sphere into direct civic protest. The frequent sectarian massacres led to high-profile sit-ins and peaceful occupations—often conducted alongside the bodies of their victims—demanding justice and security from the provincial and federal governments (Azhar 2013). These protests, sometimes organized by community leaders from political-religious factions like the Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslemeen (MWM), were themselves an extension of the ritualized grief, essentially functioning as an extra-ritual *majlis* performed in the public street (Majeed 2021). The powerful visual of collective mourning in the public square, drawing moral legitimacy from the Hazaras' history of suffering and sacrifice, was a performative political demand that transcended the limitations of formal political representation, demonstrating that their grief was their most potent political resource.

Socio-Economic Marginalization and the Politics of Exclusion

The pervasive insecurity and targeted violence under the Musharraf regime inflicted severe socio-economic damage, which in turn reinforced the collective sense of grief and exclusion. Hazara businessmen faced severe challenges, being unable to safely venture out of their protected enclaves to conduct trade in the broader Quetta markets, leading to economic decline and vulnerability to exploitative middlemen (Majeed 2020). The security concerns also critically hampered educational aspirations: while Hazara youth exhibited great zeal for higher education, the inability of institutions

like Balochistan University to guarantee their safety forced many to abandon their studies or seek education abroad (Owtadolajam 2006). This systematic deprivation of educational and economic opportunities, combined with persistent political discrimination and insufficient media coverage, fostered an environment of despair.

The socio-economic and security challenges directly fueled a crisis of mass emigration, often through perilous, illegal routes to destinations like Australia and Europe, as Hazara youth sought refuge from a city that offered no future or safety (Hiegemann 2014; Schmeidl and Maley 2008). The tragic incident of the 2011 boat capsizing, which claimed dozens of Hazara lives en route to Australia, vividly demonstrated the dire conditions forcing young men to risk everything to escape persecution (HRCP cited in Azhar 2013). This desperate migration became a new layer of collective grief—the loss of future, the loss of youth, and the loss through the treacherous journey—which was then incorporated into the existing ritual cycle, further solidifying the community's identity as a transnational people perpetually persecuted and displaced (Monsutti 2005). The inability to secure fundamental human rights—life, movement, and employment—politicized their very existence, making every Muharram commemoration a lament not just for past historical injustice, but for the immediate crisis of survival in the present.

The political dynamics were further complicated by the sectarian lens through which non-Hazaras and certain political parties viewed the community. Hazara Shias were often simplistically categorized as being aligned with Iranian interests by Sunni sectarian political parties and mullahs, exacerbating the Shia-Sunni divide (Majeed 2021). Despite having some political representation, such as a member from the Majlis Wahdat-ul-Muslemeen (MWM) in the provincial assembly, the Hazaras' limited social interaction with the Pashtun and Baloch communities severely constrained their political integration and influence in broader Balochistan politics (Zaheer and Asim 2021). This lack of integration, coupled with the homogeneous, grief-forged identity, created a cyclical pattern of exclusion where marginalization led to ritualized cohesion, which in turn was perceived as hostile political distinctiveness by the ethnic majority, thereby perpetuating the violence and discrimination.

The Unwavering Assertion of Identity in the Face of Persecution

The cumulative effect of the Zia and Musharraf eras on the Hazara community was the paradoxical strengthening of their ethno-religious identity through the sustained ritualization of grief. The state's attempts at a monolithic identity during the Zia regime, coupled with the subsequent failure to protect them under Musharraf, compelled the Hazaras to fall back on their sectarian and ethnic markers for communal survival (Canfield 1986). The perpetual cycle of violence and mourning proved to be a powerful centripetal force, overriding any internal fissures and binding the community together through shared trauma and the collective performance of martyrdom (Poladi 1989). This consistent assertion of a distinct identity through ritualistic displays of suffering served as a potent, enduring form of political communication directed at both the state and the international community.

The need for equitable and expedited justice became another major theme inextricably linked to their identity and grief. The Hazara community consistently voiced concerns over the justice system's failure to prosecute the terrorists responsible for the mass killings, recognizing that without accountability, their persecution would continue indefinitely (Rizvi Jafree, Malik, and Khawar 2023). The demand for justice, often articulated during public mourning protests and integrated into the broader narrative of sacrifice, highlighted the responsibility of the government to uphold the constitutional rights of all minorities, thereby transforming their specific ethno-religious grievance into a universal demand for rule of law (Amnesty News International Report 2001). The lack of government action, particularly the failure to enforce existing laws against sectarian actors, only deepened the distrust, making the community's self-reliance on their collective identity and rituals even more critical for psychological and social sustenance.

The role of media and educational institutions in either perpetuating or mitigating this cycle of violence was also brought into sharp focus by the Hazara community's experiences. The limited and often superficial coverage of Hazara killings in national media failed to contextualize the systemic nature of the violence or address the national security implications of sectarian radicalism, further marginalizing the community's experience and minimizing their grief in the national consciousness (Majeed 2021). In response, the community recognized the vital importance of fostering interfaith and inter-community understanding through alternative means, emphasizing that constructive dialogue and mutual respect for ritual practices were essential for long-term peace (Majeed 2020). The call for government policy to support educational and technical institutions within Hazara-populated areas like Mari Abad and Hazara Town represented a profound aspiration to transcend the political and security constraints imposed by their segregated existence and contribute constructively to the nation's progress (Owtadolajam 2006).

The Hazara experience in Quetta throughout this crucial twenty-eight-year period vividly illustrates the profound sociological principle that identity is often most strongly forged and asserted in direct response to opposition and suffering (Coleman 2001). The rituals of grief became the scaffolding upon which their collective identity was built, offering a structured, emotionally resonant language for political resistance when formal channels of power were closed or hostile. The ability of the Hazara community to continually re-narrate their contemporary tragedies within the sacred, ancient script of Shia martyrdom ensured their communal survival and cultural continuity, allowing them to transform the stigma of persecution into an emblem of unwavering faith and resilience (Canfield 1973). This process ensured that their religious identity remained intensely local, performative, and deeply responsive to the geopolitical pressures that defined the Zia and Musharraf eras.

The Transnational Dimension and Future Identity Trajectories

The Hazara community's ritualized response to persecution in Quetta was not an isolated phenomenon but was deeply interconnected with transnational Shia networks and the evolving dynamics of the Hazara diaspora

globally. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 provided a powerful, though complex, source of ideological and organizational inspiration, strengthening the sense of Shi'ite transnational solidarity and fueling the rise of Shia political awareness within Pakistan (Bindemann 1987). This external religious connection, while unifying for the Hazaras, simultaneously fueled the suspicion and hostility of sectarian opponents who linked their distinct identity to foreign state interests, further justifying the targeted violence against them. The rituals, therefore, also acted as a transnational communicative platform, linking the Hazara's suffering in Quetta to the broader global narrative of Shia persecution, thereby leveraging international attention and support from the diaspora.

The continued pressure to emigrate and the emergence of significant Hazara communities in countries like Australia and Europe introduced a fascinating counterpoint to the Quetta community's identity formation, demonstrating the principle of *malleability* in action (Monsutti 2005). The more secular orientation observed among some Australian Hazaras, who no longer faced existential threat, contrasted sharply with the heightened religiosity and ritual focus of the Quetta community, whose very survival depended on the consolidation of their ethno-religious identity against a hostile majority. This highlights a crucial finding: the intensity and public display of grief-rituals were directly proportional to the level of perceived threat and state abandonment within Pakistan, serving as a social thermometer for communal insecurity (Coleman 2001). As long as the persecution persisted, the rituals of grief would remain intense, public, and central to the Hazara political identity in Quetta.

Looking forward beyond 2007, the enduring challenge for the Hazara community lay in translating their ritualized solidarity into sustained political integration and genuine security. The legacy of Zia's Islamization and Musharraf's failure to contain sectarianism left a profound imprint, creating a cycle where economic deprivation and political marginalization perpetuated the insecurity that drove the community further into its ritual enclaves. While the public mourning rituals successfully asserted the community's presence and moral claim, they also physically and psychologically cemented their segregation from the host population. Resolving this predicament requires a multi-pronged approach: the government must deliver swift justice to dismantle the structures of sectarian impunity, actively promote inter-sect and inter-ethnic harmony through educational and media reforms, and implement targeted socio-economic policies to address the deep-seated grievances related to employment and education in Hazara-populated areas (Rizvi Jafree, Malik, and Khawar 2023).

The Hazara experience in Quetta, therefore, offers a compelling case study on the intersection of ritual, identity, and political resistance in a global conflict zone. The period between 1979 and 2007 was a critical chapter where state policies, regional geopolitical shifts, and targeted violence met the profound cultural resilience of a historically persecuted minority. The Hazaras responded not with military force, but with the moral force of collective, public sorrow, asserting their right to exist and be heard through the shared, performative experience of grief. This ritualized expression of identity

proved more durable and politically significant than any fleeting political alliance, transforming historical tragedy into an active and enduring source of minoritarian power.

Conclusion

The Hazara community of Quetta, Pakistan, utilized their rich traditions of Twelver Shia religious rituals as the primary, potent instrument for asserting and consolidating their collective ethno-religious identity throughout the politically charged period of 1979 to 2007. The essay has robustly demonstrated that state-level policies—specifically General Zia-ul-Haq's efforts at imposing a homogenizing Sunni-based Islamization and General Pervez Musharraf's subsequent failure to contain escalating sectarian violence—directly spurred the politicization and intensification of Hazara mourning rites. Rituals like the Muharram processions and specialized graveyard ceremonies served a dual function: they channeled the immense historical and contemporary grief and trauma into a cohesive communal experience, and simultaneously transformed this suffering into an overt performance of defiance, marking an ideological boundary against both state and militant adversaries (Canfield 1973; Monsutti 2005). This strategy successfully preserved Hazara cultural memory and identity, proving far more resilient than the central government's transient political structures.

The research established that the Hazaras' strategic performance of collective grief, particularly in the face of targeted violence, evolved into a potent 'politics of emotions' that was translated into direct, public political demands, notably through non-violent sit-ins and protests (Ali 2021). This ritualization provided psychological sustenance and social reconstruction in a climate of total insecurity, directly countering the negative socio-economic effects—such as ghettoization, educational blockage, and economic marginalization—that drove a tragic number of youth towards perilous, illegal migration (Majeed 2020). The constant re-narration of contemporary martyrs within the historical narrative of Karbala created an identity that was both structurally defined by persecution and psychologically equipped for perseverance, showcasing the remarkable malleability of their cultural identity in response to overwhelming external hostility (Poladi 1989).

Ultimately, the Hazara community's journey through the Zia and Musharraf eras stands as an enduring testament to the power of ritual to resist state-sanctioned erasure and political marginalization. Their experience underscores a critical broader implication for state-society relations: when formal democratic channels fail and the state actively neglects its duty to protect a minority, the very act of public, organized mourning becomes the most fundamental assertion of citizenship and the demand for justice. Future scholarly inquiry should extend this analysis by investigating the post-2007 period, particularly focusing on the role of digital media and the global diaspora in sustaining the emotional politics of the Quetta Hazaras, and exploring how these transnational connections are currently influencing the balance between traditional ritual and modern political mobilization.

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