"SEALING" THE KORAN
Offering and Sacrifice among Pakistani Labour Migrants*

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ABSTRACT
This article is concerned with the extension of moral space, and the transformation of newly formed relations into moral relations. The two processes implied in this transformation may be conceived of analytically as the "naturalization" of ritual in a novel setting, and the "ritualization" of labour migrants' local relations. The article examines one particular ritual widely practiced by Pakistani immigrants in Britain and spells out its symbolic significance in some detail. One outcome of analysing the ritual in the context of labour migration, i.e. outside its "natural" context, is the way in which it appears to elucidate the underlying symbolic logic of Islamic sacrifice.

Offering, Sacrifice and Ritual Mediation
Sacrifice, wrote Robertson-Smith, is "a banquet in which gods and men share together" (1886: 134). Whether a group of commensals creates its gods in its image or merely renews them in renewing itself (Durkheim 1915: 375), acts of sacrifice or offering have always been regarded as taking place in the context of "natural" groups of kindreds or locally based communities. For labour migrants this "natural" community cannot be simply "renewed"; it must be reconstructed. Moreover, its very reconstruction is problematic, for it implies a shift in commitments: from migrants' natal home to their new place of domicile.

The performance of sacrifices or ritual offerings away from home effects for Pakistani labour migrants a crucial transition. The very structure of the ritual dictates that its efficacious performance is contingent on the mediated ritual support of significant others: kin, friends, neighbours and the poor. The holding of sacrifices and offerings, hitherto unambiguously associated with "home" in its broadest affective and moral sense, is predicated, in other words, on the reconstruction of a moral

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universe, and in order to achieve this reconstruction, migrants must reconstitute crucial moral categories of the person. Once reconstructed, rituals of offering and sacrifice come to be powerful focuses for sociability. A family’s current intimate circle, as well as its widest network of acquaintances, is gathered in order to seek blessing, redemption or atonement.

In substituting a “sacrificial schema” for a prior evolutionary model of sacrifice, Hubert and Mauss recognised the highly complex but nevertheless ordered variation in sacrificial procedures, even within a single society. Crucial to this schema was a distinction between sacrifices of sacralization and desacralization, and although de Heusch has recently criticised this contrast (1985:213), it remains—perhaps in modified form—fundamental for an analysis of the transformation through sacrifice of relations between the gods, the sacrifier and the congregation participating in the ritual.

The distinction emerges quite clearly in an analysis of the ritual offerings and sacrifices performed by Punjabi Muslim labour migrants. Only offerings and sacrifices of “sacralization” are conceived to be possible, even desirable, in Britain. Sacrifices in which the primary intent is of “desacralization” continue to be held exclusively at home, in Pakistan. This reluctance to perform “desacralizing” sacrifices locally is important, for it reveals the autonomous force of a ritual, once its symbolic structure and meaning have become embedded in a local social context. The “naturalization” of ritual, its incorporation into novel social contexts, is thus not automatic; ritual cannot be said to simply sanction or buttress current social relations.

Hubert and Mauss focused on the role of the victim (or offering) as intermediary between sacrifier and god, the profane and the sacred. More briefly, they refer to other specialized persons, such as priests, who act as agents or intercessors and have a special role in sacrifice. The congregation attending a sacrifice is not conceived of apart from the sacrifier, at least with regard to the consumption of the victim or offering. Yet to fully appreciate what makes a Pakistani migrant or migrant family decide whether to hold a ritual offering or sacrifice in Britain or in Pakistan, it is necessary to begin by spelling out the distinct roles of the sacrifiers and of different congregational categories.

When Pakistani labour migrants in Manchester hold rituals locally they are, in effect, expressing the nature of their relationships with other Pakistanis living locally. They are also staking a symbolic claim in their Manchester home and its permanency. These congregational or index-
ical aspects of the ritual are extremely significant, for certain rituals cannot be held, as mentioned, without the ritual services of a broader congregation. I am thus concerned here with the role of fellow migrants as ritual mediators, effecting a desired transformation in the condition of individuals and their families.

Pakistan and Britain

Pakistanis in Britain invest a good deal in their homes in Pakistan. Many migrants send home regular cash remittances, build "pakka" brick and cement houses in their natal villages or nearby towns, and continue to arrange marriages between their children and the children of siblings still resident at home, in accord with the Islamic preference for parallel and cross cousin marriage. They also continue to foster ceremonial exchange relations with friends and relatives at home, returning to Pakistan periodically on prolonged visits, laden with British gifts for a vast number of kinsmen and friends. They invest, in addition, in land, tractors, cars, tube wells and other agricultural or commercial enterprises. It is therefore, perhaps, not surprising to find that the same labour migrants continue to make ritual offerings and sacrifices at home, and to bury their dead at home, transporting corpses at some cost from Britain to Pakistan, and forming regional burial societies for this purpose.

It may be possible to argue, in the light of this, that ritual behaviour simply reinforces and sanctions more pragmatic links. These in turn stem, perhaps, from migrants' sense of alienation from the receiving society. Yet, although it is undoubtedly the case that ritual "investments" in Pakistan parallel other forms of investment, it cannot be claimed that pragmatic or economic calculations are prior to the ritual accompanying them, for both stem from an integral set of experiences and moral ideas regarding where the most highly valued social relations are. This fundamental perception of the locus of valued relations dictates both ritual and economic behaviour.

This perception is subject to change. Although many Pakistanis continue to hope that they will ultimately return home, to Pakistan, most of them are in Britain for good. They have brought their families over, they own property in Britain, and many have invested in businesses locally. While they may have arrived as short-term "target" migrants, their stay in Britain has been prolonged indefinitely. Time and circumstances are, from this perspective, crucial determinants of transition. Under some cir-
cumstances the locus of valued relations shifts towards Britain, and migrants tend to invest both in Britain and in Pakistan. Once the transition has occurred, the holding of offerings and sacrifices in Britain becomes commonplace and is taken for granted, while many migrants also bury their dead locally. Although the ultimate symbolic priority of the country of origin remains axiomatic and is rarely questioned, individual “practical” and symbolic investments thus become more evenly distributed between Pakistan and Britain.

My paper concerns this moral transition and its implications for locally based relations between Pakistani labour migrants resident in a single British city. It is worth noting here that while the rituals discussed are symbolically predicated on the amity of the attendant congregation, the congregation itself is a temporary one, a network focused on a household or family. The congregants are selected from a family’s current friendship circle, and even close kinsmen may be excluded if they are involved in a quarrel or dispute. Clearly, the congregational aspects of such rituals vary a great deal from performance to performance, depending on personal circumstances, class background and a host of other factors. My concern here, however, is not with this congregational variation, which I discuss elsewhere, but with the ontological basis of the ritual—what are the preconditions for holding it, and what effects it is perceived to achieve.

My interest is thus in two related processes: the “naturalization” of rituals transferred to a new context, and the “ritualization” of social relationships among labour migrants in town (Gluckman 1962: 24-5). This ritualization takes on a special significance in the urban industrial context. If in rural societies ritual arguably serves to highlight specific roles where multiplex relations prevail, among urban labour migrants such ritualization transforms the segmental relationships between neighbours, workmates or business acquaintances into morally diffuse relationships. Urban ritual overcomes, in other words, the spatial dispersion and segmentation of social relationships by gathering together a varied congregation which is, nevertheless, united in moral support for an individual or family.

From a religious perspective, it is possible for Muslims to perform acts of personal sacrifice or offering anywhere. There is no ancestral shrine, as for many African labour migrants, no central consecrated altar, as for some Semitic people. These rituals are, nevertheless, contingent on a moral spatial order. Performed in order to seek blessing or a release from affliction, they require the support of a circle of significant others. They
cannot be performed in an alien land, in the midst of strangers. Similarly, a man is not buried in the wild, but amidst those with whom he belongs.

The countering of affliction and the seeking of divine blessing are, moreover, crucially mediated for Pakistanis through socially significant categories beyond a migrant’s immediate set of kinsmen. As Muslims, Pakistani migrants believe that the gaining of atonement, expiation or divine blessing requires an act of giving away, of selfless generosity. The act of communication in sacrifice or offering is only fully possible through the mediation of the poor. Without them a sacrifice or offering is incomplete.

There is more to home therefore than just a sentimental attachment. Fundamental acts of Islamic piety are perceived to be possible only in a society where certain social categories exist, and are explicitly recognised. Yet the “poor” are said to be absent in places such as Manchester. For labour migrants the performance of sacrifices and offerings away from their natal home sometimes represents, then, a compromise, a distortion of the meaning of these acts. They cast doubt on the validity and efficaciousness of the rites outside their “natural” setting.

More generally, the transfer of rituals away from their “natural” context is associated for labour migrants with a heightened consciousness of the cultural presuppositions underlying the rituals. The taken-for-granted features of rites become an object of conscious reflection, as migrants grapple to resolve emergent dilemmas around hitherto normal, expected or “natural” aspects of the rituals they perform. Migration, like homecoming or strangerhood, brings into focus the implicit rules and norms hitherto left unquestioned and unexamined (Schutz 1944, 1945). Not just the meaning, but also the countering of misfortune is thus problematic for labour migrants (cf. Mitchell 1956). The effective means of redress have to be extended and reinterpreted for, in an urban industrial environment, many of migrants’ social relations are segmental or recent.

As a big city, Manchester has a heterogeneous Pakistani migrant population. Many of migrant’s friendships have been forged locally, in the context of work or neighbourly interaction. Few migrants have remained encapsulated in networks of home boys or fellow villagers (grain). There are, nevertheless, crucial variations in migrants’ perceptions of the long-term significance of their residence in the city. These perceptions are expressed ritually in differing symbolic orientations. Migrants who make sacrifices locally or bury their dead in Britain tend to sustain much broader networks of friends and acquaintances locally.
Like the "Red" and "School" described by Philip Mayer, migrants vary in their "rootedness", in their very perception of where home is, and in the experience of the surrounding social environment in which they live.

Despite these differences, however, certain ritual acts continue to be performed only in Pakistan by all migrants. These acts, "for the life", like the act of sending a dead man's body home, give ideological priority to the home country, its people, its very soil, over the alienness of the diaspora.

The variation in ritual performance is not simply one of cultural background, exclusivity or continued encapsulation in the sense first defined by Mayer (1961, 1962). Pakistanis of all classes and backgrounds, whether rural or urban, educated or uneducated, continue to foster an exclusive culture and remain, in most cases, encapsulated within Pakistani circles of kinsmen, friends or acquaintances (on the complexity of life styles cf P. Werbner 1981). Nevertheless, the broadening of social networks and the celebration of certain domestic rituals locally marks an important personal transformation: from being a Punjabi defined in terms of a highly particularistic socio-geographic identity—as originating from a specific village, kin group or neighbourhood—to becoming, in addition, a Mancunian, an urbanised Muslim, a member of a farflung Pakistani diaspora, an indefinite sojourner rather than a temporary visitor. The construction of self and personal identity is thus a crucial component of this transition.

It is difficult to specify all the circumstances in which such a shift in the perception of valued relations may occur. Pakistani migrants of city origin appear to hold rituals of offering, though not necessarily of sacrifice, wherever they live, as long as they have built up a network of local friends. Among villagers, however, the transition is probably related to the maturation of families and the re-emergence of the three-generational household in Britain. Where migrants have large numbers of relatives living nearby this contributes to their sense of being settled but it is the location of very close family members—parents, siblings or children—which seems most crucial. Clearly then, their is no single isolated social characteristic which determines the transition but, as I argue below, over time migrants are drawn into the performance of rituals locally, often almost despite themselves.
"Sealing" the Koran

Core Rituals

The ritual I focus on here is known as *khatam quran*, the sealing of the Koran, or the communal Koran reading. It is held primarily by women in the domestic domain and is an important locus of interhousehold women-centred sociability (cf. P. Werbner, in press). It is thus a feature of migrant life mostly absent during the all-male, initial phase of migration, and only introduced into Britain with the arrival of wives and families. The ritual is very widespread and appears in different variations from North Africa, throughout the Middle East and South Asia to Indonesia. It has Hindu and Sikh variations (on one form of this ritual, cf. Hayley 1980). Its structure is almost everywhere essentially the same, with a sacred book being read first, often in an esoteric language, followed by a meal or fruit offering. In the Hindu version, this food is first offered to an image of a god or goddess, but this act is, of course, absent in the Islamic form of the ritual. Despite its ubiquity, there appear to be, outside Indonesia, few anthropological accounts of the ritual and its sociological or symbolic significance.

The *khatam quran*, although perhaps the most central domestic ritual performed by Pakistanis in Manchester, is a relatively simple, unelaborate ritual. In times of danger, thanksgiving or transition Pakistanis convene their fellow migrants for a ritual of formal prayer and commensality. Like the *slametan* for the Javanese (cf. Jay 1969: 188-238), this seemingly simple ritual lies at the heart of Pakistani religious observance and may be regarded as a "core ritual" (cf. Geertz 1960:1). It is performed by a congregation composed mostly of women who are gathered in the house of the ritual convener. Between them the assembled guests read the entire Koran in one sitting. Each of the participants reads one or more chapters (*spara*) out of the thirty in the Koran. The reading is dedicated to the person convening the event, and is regarded as a service performed by the readers for the convener and his or her family. After the reading of the Koran has been completed at least once, an offering of food is made which is distributed to the guests. In Pakistan a share of the food is set aside for the poor as charity (*sadqa*), but this is not done in Manchester as "there are no poor people here". By custom, the Koran should be read with absolute accuracy, so as not to confuse Arabic words which vary only slightly in their spelling. A high degree of ritualism thus characterises one part of the proceedings. Otherwise, the structure of the ritual is very simple, and it contains little figurative elaboration.
Despite this apparent simplicity, however, the ritual embraces central religious and moral ideas and forms the basic model for a series of other rituals, all concerned with the two themes of sacrifice and prayer. The analysis of labour migrants’ perceptions of the ritual, and of related rituals, brings into sharp focus what they consider are the fundamental features of the rites. It thus highlights the crucial elements of sacrifice and offering from a novel angle, lending some credence to certain approaches in the general debate about sacrifice and offering.

Symbolically, the moral attachment of a family to its current home and surroundings is tangibly expressed during *khatme quran* through a transformation of secular into sacred space. One room in the convener’s house—and, by extension, the whole house—assumes, temporarily, certain features of a mosque. Shoes are taken off at the threshold to the room and people read the Koran seated on the ground. Along with the burning of incense, these observances serve to define the space as holy or sacred. The following description sets out the basic features of the ritual.

When I arrived at S.’s home the ritual had already begun. Downstairs, a few men were occupied in last minute preparations for the meal, assisted by one of the women. Upstairs, eight women were reading the Koran in one of the bedrooms. Mattresses had been laid on the floor and a white cloth spread over them. The women were seated on this sheet, their heads completely covered by chiffon scarves (*dupatta*). Their shoes had been left on the threshold of the room, where they lay in a large heap. The room was filled with the aroma of burning incense. A pile of books on a raised surface in the midst of the seated women represented the chapters of the Koran still to be read. Each woman sat with a book containing one chapter in her hand, reading the Koran in a soft murmur. The little talking there was took place in hushed voices, but mostly the women concentrated on getting the reading over with.

When they had completed reading the whole Koran, the women came downstairs to join their husbands, who had arrived as the reading was nearing completion. All the guests gathered together for a joint meal. Before the meal was brought to the table, a prayer was said in private over a portion of the food, asking God for forgiveness in case any mistake had been made in the proceedings.

Since this was a *khatam* held by middle-class migrants, mainly urban in origin, men shared in the meal. There was some joking, as when the convener left the room to bring some more food; “she is going to pray” the men joked, amidst much laughter.

The reason for the *khatam* was never openly stated during the proceedings. It was, apparently, held because the couple convening the event were recently married (although the husband had been living in Britain for many years); they had recently arrived from Pakistan, had been unemployed but had both found jobs and were able to repay their debts.
It was, in other words, a khatam held as thanksgiving after a period of hardship and change, and it marked the couple’s residence together in a new home. The congregation attending were all friends, with the exception of the convener’s brother.

The food prayed over at the completion of a Koran reading consists, usually, of water, milk, a sweet dish, rice and fruit. The fruit is distributed first, immediately after the reading is completed, while the readers are still reclined on the floor. The selection blessed is representative of abundance, purity and the essential ingredients of a meal. The portion of the food prayed over is distributed first in order to ensure that it is entirely consumed, and none thrown away.

The Countering of Misfortune

Khatam quran rituals are held in order to ask for forgiveness (bakhsh), thanksgiving (shukriya), and divine blessing (barkat, or baraka in Arabic). Although the three notions appear at first glance to be different, the ideas surrounding them are closely linked (cf. also Hubert and Mauss 1964:14). The emphasis depends on the occasion. If the khatam quran is held to celebrate recovery from an illness, it is held for shukriya, thanksgiving. Since, however, there has been, it is believed, an unwanted intervention by God or spirits, a sin possibly committed either knowingly or unknowingly, an act of expiation is also involved. The convener is thus seeking to rid himself of the condition which caused the misfortune or affliction (bala, musibat) while at the same time seeking barkat. Hence, khatam quran rituals are intended to transform the state of the convener from that induced by negative intervention or lack of divine protection into one of barkat—endowed through positive divine intervention. Barkat is thus the obverse of affliction. This opposition is expressed in the formal structure and permutations of different offerings or sacrifices Pakistanis make.

The khatam quran ritual is divided into two key phases: in the first phase the Koran is read. This is the phase of consecration. In the second phase, food, which constitutes, in part at least, an offering, is presented to the assembled congregation. The two phases, although closely linked, represent two separate religious acts, each surrounded by a set of theological and cosmological beliefs.

The central feature of the first ritual phase is the recitation of the Koran. This recitation is considered to have immense power. The divine force invoked in the recitation has the power to expel evil spirits and to
protect against them. The reading of the Koran also evokes *barkat*, which is then imparted to the food served. *Barkat*, or *baraka* in Arabic, is a ‘beneficent force, of divine origin, which causes superabundance in the physical sphere and prosperity and happiness in the psychic order’ (Encyclopedia of Islam 1960:1032). The text of the Koran is charged with *barkat*. A *Khatam quran* is intended to transform the state of the convener into one of *barkat*, which is also shared by those reading the Koran in his or her name. The complete recitation of the Koran, especially if done in a short time, is considered a meritorious achievement. Pakistanis say they read the whole Koran because they “cannot be quite sure what particular passage suits the occasion”, and this is particularly so where danger is present. The Koran, they say, includes a saying for every type of occasion, but the location and meaning of these passages is known only to God. By reading the Koran in its entirety they ensure that they have read the appropriate passage. In this way they hope to influence God, which is the intention of the *khatam*.

This type of explanation clearly stresses the magical power of the Koran in influencing God and the spirits. This magical aspect is indicated by the great emphasis placed on accurate reading. There must be no change of *zabar* or *pech* (minor vowel marks in Arabic), for this might change the meaning of the word. Indeed, the Koran is read in Arabic, which few Pakistanis understand (although most migrants have, of course, read the Urdu translation of the Koran).

In an alternative explanation, the morality of the Koran is emphasised. The Koran contains “all the laws and sayings needed to live a good life”. When moving to a new house, I was told, it is right that the whole Koran be read. Where the Koran has been read, one is reluctant to sin or, if one does sin, one feels guilty about it.

*Sacrifice and the Mediation of the Poor*

Going against the magical aspect of the Koran as a book containing *barkat* is the notion of intention or *niyat* (*niya* in Arabic) central to Islamic religious observance. While much emphasis is placed on the accurate reading of the Koran, the reading is followed by a prayer over the food asking God for forgiveness for any errors made in the proceedings. My informants were clear that the intention supersedes the ritualistic aspects of the event. Perhaps the most important difference between the two phases of the ritual—the Koran reading and the offering made—relates to this distinction. Paradoxically, perhaps, the reading of the Koran
represents the more ritualistic phase, while the commensal meal and the associated offering given away to the poor is closely tied to the intention of the convener. And, moreover, the difference between the way in which offerings are made is linked to subtle differences in intention rather than in the form of food or money given away. Was the *khalam* held for *shukriya* (thanksgiving), for *barkat*, during illness, to consecrate a new house? The intention is all important.

The problem of how to manage misfortune or deal with affliction is at the heart of all these observances. Pakistanis believe that nothing happens without the will (*raza*) and knowledge of God. Hence their view of affliction and misfortune is closely related to their view of the moral order, of good and evil in the eyes of God. A serious illness or misfortune is believed to be caused by the intervention of evil spirits and these can only be exorcised through God’s help. Indeed, they should not have afflicted a person in the first place unless he or she lacked divine protection. In cases where *khatme quran* or sacrifices are performed for a person who is seriously ill or has a chronic illness or an unnatural condition (such as barrenness in women), or in times of misfortune or trouble, the ritual is held for the explicit purpose of expelling evil spirits through the recitation of the Koran and through almsgiving. Some migrants, who deny the presence of evil spirits even in the case of serious illness, talk instead of the presence of misfortune or danger caused in their view by sin. It is the misfortune, *musibat* (or *bala*), which a person rids himself of through almsgiving and prayer. Reading the Koran is seen both as a protection against such misfortune and as a means of exorcising evil spirits.

Not all *khatme quran* are associated, however, with exorcism, or even primarily with expiation since, as we have seen, many are intended to seek divine blessing or as thanksgiving, after the danger has departed. As will be seen, the ritual stress dictates the ritual form. In de Heusch’s terms, is the intended effect “‘conjunction’” or “‘disjunction’” (1985: 213)?

A crucial, feature of sacrifice in this regard has to do with what parts of a sacrificial victim or offering are consumed and what parts are given away or destroyed. From this perspective, the significance of the commensal meal following the Koran reading cannot be understood apart from other practices of Pakistani sacrifice. Hence, true sacrifice, i.e. the ritual slaughtering of an animal, may take a number of different forms. In Manchester, many Pakistani migrants perform animal sacrifices locally on two main occasions: at the annual *Eid Zoha* festival and after the birth of a child, particularly a son. The first sacrifice is known as *qur-
bani, the second as haqiqa. The structure of the qurbani sacrifice represents an explicit model for the proper division of an animal in personal sacrifice, where the ritual act is intended to be both piacular and for the sake of divine blessing.

Qurbani sacrifices are performed to commemorate the binding of Ismail by his father Ibrahim (the Islamic version of the binding of Abraham in the Old Testament). This myth, whether in its biblical or koranic form, exemplifies the principle of substitution of a life for a life in sacrifice. According to Islamic tradition the bakra (sacrificial victim) is supposed to be divided into three equal parts, with a third shared by the family of the sacrificer, a third by kinsmen and friends, and a third given away to “the poor”. In Manchester, since “there are no poor” two thirds are given away to kinsmen and friends.

As performed locally, the victim is slaughtered in the very early hours of the morning of the festival, either by the local Muslim butcher or by the sacrificer himself, who accompanies the butcher to the local abattoir. Often several families join in making a single sacrifice, usually a lamb. The victim is then cut up by the butcher and divided into portions. After the morning prayers members of a family gather for a mid-day meal, and in this a third of the victim is shared. The sacrificer allocates the rest of the meat, usually divided into two pound portions, among his neighbours and friends living in Manchester. Usually, he knocks on the door of each house he visits and hands the meat over to the person on the threshold, telling him or her that it is qurbani. If the people are close friends he enters the house, but if they are mere acquaintances he will usually hand over the meat on the threshold to whoever opens the door. In some cases I found that people were not quite sure of all the families who had presented them with qurbani that year. It may happen that the meat is handed over on the doorstep to one of the children who does not remember the name of the donor. Knowing who brought qurbani is not very important, for no expectation of reciprocity is implied, and no debt has been incurred. The sacrifice is made in the name of God (khuda da nam) by the sacrificer and his family, in order to gain merit, or to expiate sin.

The qurbani sacrifice contrasts significantly with another form of personal sacrifice known as sadqa (from the Arabic sadaqa, a term also used for almsgiving in general). Sadqa sacrifices are always performed in Pakistan. They are preceded by a khatam quran and are held, I am told, “for the life” : if someone is mortally ill, or has escaped a very bad accident, a sadqa sacrifice is made. The idea appears to be one of substitution,
and the unusual aspect of this type of sacrifice for Pakistanis is that the animal is given away to the poor in its entirety. Neither the sacrifier nor any of his kinsmen are supposed to partake of the sacrificial victim. To do so would be to detract from the efficacy of the ritual act. In cases of abnormal illness, I was told, the meat is not even given to the poor, but is thrown away.

Two beliefs are implicit in *sadqa* sacrifice among Pakistanis. On the one hand, as the name of the sacrifice—*sadqa*—indicates, the sacrifice is an extreme act of almsgiving. On the other hand, it is also an act of expulsion of evil spirits or misfortune. For Pakistanis there is no belief that a sacrifice should be burnt or destroyed, nor is there a view that the “life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11). There is, moreover, no sacred altar or shrine. The idea that God is partaking directly of any tangible substance, such as the blood of the animal, is abhorrent (cf. *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* XI: 29). The blood of a sacrificial victim is for Muslims *haram*, i.e. prohibited and sacred. Their view appears to be that blood removes all the impurities from the animal before it is shared and consumed. In other words, the flow of the blood is a purificatory element of the sacrifice.

Islam recognises, moreover, no priestly order. Nor do the poor constitute scapegoats, bearing or accumulating the sins of the donors (Parry 1980). The gift to the poor completes and seals the act of offering a sacrifice (for a structural analysis of the processual form of a sacrifice cf. Richard Werbner, in press). Communication in sacrifice is therefore achieved for Pakistanis indirectly, via the poor, and through an act of giving. Thus, one informant told me:

> Many people (i.e. the poor) only see meat when it is given to them. That is a benefit to God in an indirect way. One feeds somebody poor and God likes it. No, the blood has no meaning. Giving blood in sacrifice is a thing among Hindus, they give blood to *Kali*, these are pagan customs. But not in Islam.

The central mediatory role played by “the poor” in atonement and expiation presents labour migrants with an intractable dilemma in their desire to perform certain ritual acts outside their “natural” setting; for their perception of the poor reflects, profoundly, the way in which labour migrants reconstitute their moral universe.

Who are “the poor” (*lokan gharib*)? For Muslims the poor may include any person, even members of one’s own kin group or village, such as widows or orphans. They do not form a clear category of outsiders, and
this is made quite explicit in the Koran. The notion of the poor cuts across the categories of family, friends and fellow villagers, such as low caste or landless labourers, to embrace the widest humanity Pakistanis recognise: the beggars around Saints’ tombs, or the residents of orphanages, leper homes, etc. I was frequently told that I could not imagine real poverty, living in Britain. There are, moreover, no persons in Britain willing to define themselves as poor and take the remains of commensal meal or sacrifice. It is worth noting here that although the part of the meal given away to the poor is the equivalent of the juta, or leftovers, given among Hindus to lower castes, the Islamic idea of giving to the poor is not as clearly predicated on a notion of immutable hierarchy. It does, however, imply real inequality in wealth and property, and it is significant that in Britain, where few people are entirely destitute, there are no Muslims willing to define themselves as belonging to this category.

Pakistani labour migrants universally direct their almsgiving towards Pakistan. If they hold khatam quran, qurbani or haqiqah rituals in Manchester, it is because they feel that the further crucial social category of friends is present here. Without sharing among friends, there is no communal meal, no barkat, no communication with the divine. It is possible to hold all these rituals by proxy, through kinsmen at home, in Pakistan. The sacrificer sends the money for a meal to be prepared or a beast slaughtered in his name. Many migrants, especially more recent arrivals of village origin, virtually always perform these rituals at home. Perhaps for them, more than for middle-class, urban migrants, the poor are a known and personalised group. The village or home neighbourhood remains the focus of their significant relations; they remain rooted back home, symbolically, emotionally, experientially. Yet over time, they too come under increasing communal and social pressure to reconstitute a moral universe in Britain. Before going on to discuss this process, let me return briefly to the meal which follows the communal reading of the Koran and its ritual significance.

The Rootedness of Labour Migrants

In Manchester, the meal following the Koran reading is shared in its entirety among the assembled guests. For some migrants this makes the significance of the meal problematic and even negates its role as an offering. They regard the meal primarily as an act of hospitality. Other migrants claim, however, that the food is an offering (niyaz) given in the
name of God, and usually following a vow (mannat) made in times of affliction or personal crisis. Certain universal features surrounding the meal confirm its continuing ritual significance: the "sealing" of the Koran is invariably followed by a distribution of food; the food is prayed over, usually consists of primary elements, and must not be thrown away. In addition a portion of food—usually fruit—is often sent home with guests and this food is known as tobarak or bakshish (from the Arabic roots for blessing or request). The intention of the offerer appears to be the chief determinant of the designation of the offering.

Clearly, however, the ambivalence apparent in migrants' exegesis regarding the khatam meal reflects the fact that in Britain the meal is not appropriately apportioned. We have seen that the nature of divine intervention is related to the form of sacrificial distribution, that a structured relation exists between the consumption of the offering and the contrast between good and evil intervention. This may be represented in the following diagram:

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<td>(PAKISTAN)</td>
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<td>meat partly eaten and partly given away</td>
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<td>both expiation and barkat/communion</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(PAKISTAN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sadaqa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meat all given away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exorcism/danger/expiation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAGRICE 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(MANCHESTER)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(niaz or korbani)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meat all eaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>barkat/communion only</td>
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*KEY:*

+ = positive intervention
- = expiation or expulsion of evil spirits

Whereas the commensal meal following the Koran reading imparts barkat, the full ritual efficacy of the meal as a piacular offering (niaz) can only be achieved through a sharing of a portion of the food with the poor. In other words, it can only be achieved in Pakistan, at home.

Nevertheless, as migrants sink roots locally, and in response to misfortunes and afflictions which befall them locally, they begin to hold khatam quran gatherings locally, as the following case illustrates:
Naim's family have a simple and frugal lifestyle. The family lives in the central residential enclave, nearby two other closely related couples whom they see frequently. Both Naim and his wife are educated and come from a small town in Northern Punjab. Until the end of 1976 they resisted becoming involved in the activities of the residential cluster. They explain this mainly on financial grounds—he is the sole breadwinner with a simple factory job, and they have five children. In addition, they remit regularly to their family in Pakistan. They live in a cheap terraced house which is poorly decorated and in need, as it subsequently emerged, of major structural repairs. Naim's wife, however, has been on a number of visits to Pakistan and has frequently expressed her positive and deep links with her family there.

Until 1976, when Naim's mother's brother died suddenly, Naim's wife had held only one hukam since her arrival in Manchester several years before. She held it after her youngest daughter had recovered miraculously from a fall from a second-story window. The daughter had been in hospital for a fortnight without speaking, and on the day she spoke her first word, her mother organised a hukam, to fulfill her vow. The Koran was read once only, and the spars (chapters) of it were distributed as following: some were read by a cousin residing in the same house, some by an old woman living next door whom Naim's wife addresses as 'mother' (and does not know her name), and the rest by the two daughters of her husband's workmate who is also a close neighbour and friend living opposite Naim's house. The readers did not gather at the house of the convener, nor were they feasted to a cooked meal. Instead, each was sent a parcel of fruit to her own house. Some close friends and relatives were not asked to participate and Naim's wife explained that this was because there had been enough people for a single Koran reading.

Several months later, Naim's mother's brother died suddenly and tragically at a young age. The mortuary hukum held by the family were very large, communal affairs, which mobilised all known friends and acquaintances. The corpse was sent back to Pakistan, but before it was sent, a wake took place at Naim's kinsman's house, also within the residential enclave. Virtually all the women of the neighbourhood were there, and, as is the custom, there was a great deal of wailing and overt expressions of sympathy and support. Close kinswomen, such as Naim's wife, were almost possessed with grief, and were held by comforting neighbours. Naim's close friends helped wash the body and prepare it for its journey to Pakistan.

The case illustrates the progressive incorporation of migrants into the local community. Funerary hukam rituals in particular are widely embracing social occasions, mobilising relatives and friends from all over Britain and acquaintances—even strangers—living locally. It is considered the duty of friends and neighbours to pay a visit of condolence to the bereaved family, and participate if possible in some of the funerary rites. In the central residential enclave, neighbours congregate at the
house where a death has occurred immediately on hearing about it, even if they did not know the bereaved or his family personally. For acquaintances such attendance and prayer for the dead at the house of a bereaved workmate or neighbour is a moral and religious obligation \( (a \text{ shurat}) \), especially if the death has occurred in Manchester, but even if the death is of a close kinsman of their acquaintance in Pakistan.

Hence, as migrants’ stay in Britain is prolonged and extended, misfortune, affliction and particularly death draw them into the local community. A death is followed by three funerary khatme quran at prescribed intervals and they are intended to seek forgiveness and merit \( (swab) \) for the deceased, and thus to facilitate his or her entry into heaven. During the funerary khatam the congregants repeat a certain Islamic prayer 125,000 times \( (or \text{ savalak in Urdu}) \) over the chickpeas or date stones which, according to one version, represent the sins of the deceased. Symbolically, then, funerary khatam rituals, which are held with increasing frequency as the local community ages, are more elaborate than personal khatam rituals.

A further, and major, difference between a death khatam and one convened for personal offering is indexical: whereas personal offerings are exclusive affairs, drawing together an intimate circle of friends, funerary khatme are large, open and inclusive. While certain people are invited, anyone is welcome to attend them \( (on the significance of this distinction cf. Turner 1974: 185; Richard Werbner 1977: XII-VII). \)

Death is also the occasion for the collection of chanda, contributions, made in order to send the corpse to Pakistan, accompanied by a close relative. In recent years migrants from certain parts of Pakistan have founded formal death associations \( (cf. P. Werbner 1985) \). Thus, paradoxically perhaps, the ritual acts surrounding death both draw migrants into a locally constituted moral community while at the same time institutionalising the link back home. The independent force of ritual belief is most evident here, for ritual precipitates the formation of enduring organizational structures, whose significance may come to extend well beyond the reason for their formation. As migrants’ sojourn is extended indefinitely, the ad hoc collections which took place previously in factories or neighbourhoods are being replaced by formal arrangements. For many migrants, therefore, the myth of return is no myth: in death migrants return home on their final journey.
Conclusion

This paper has been about the extension of moral space, and the transformation of newly formed relations into moral relations. The two processes implied in this transformation were, I argued, the "naturalization" of ritual in a novel setting, and the "ritualization" of labour migrants' local relations. I focused in the paper on one particular widely practiced ritual and spelt out its symbolic significance in some detail. One outcome of analysing the ritual in the context of labour migration, i.e. outside its "natural" context, is its elucidation of the underlying symbolic logic of Islamic sacrifice.

The Pakistani case is not unique. Short term labour migrants, it seems, rarely perform certain ritual acts away from home. Almost everywhere, they make personal offerings and sacrifices at home, and almost everywhere they prefer, if possible, to bury their dead at home. Not surprisingly, therefore, burial societies are a very widespread form of migrant association. Less recognised, perhaps, has been the common tendency to make personal sacrifices at home. Once again, this tendency is not unique to Muslims. Thus, for example, Kalanga labour migrants in Northeastern Botswana invariably return home to hold a sacrifice, for it cannot be held without the ritual mediation of crucial kinsmen.

Nevertheless, as the migrant's stay is prolonged and extended, there is a shift in their symbolic orientation. Compelling reasons grounded in migrants' beliefs and current circumstances create a need to make offerings and sacrifices away from home. In this paper I have shown that although Pakistani migrants may hold certain rituals by proxy in Pakistan, this denies critical beneficial features of the rites involved. Only relative newcomers, who believe their stay in Britain is truly temporary, prefer this option.

The cultural dynamics implicit here have comparative implications: short-term labour migrants depend upon others still resident at home to sustain their cultural heritage and perform for them a whole complex of ritual acts. They may stress diacritical emblems such as dress or language, and may seek the company of fellow migrants, but they do not attempt to replicate the religio-cultural environment they abandoned. Long-term sojourners, by contrast, recreate and revitalise—within the constraints of their new environment—the richness and complexity of their original culture. This is particularly so when the culture of origin is urban and universalistic, as it is for Pakistanis. Hence the prevalence and focal role of domestic rituals amongst long-term migrants. Hence
also the re-introduction of religio-ideological debates and conflicts in the public sphere, and the increasing popularity of literary cultural events. The sinking of local roots leads not, in other words, to the denial of the migrants’ cultural heritage, but to its renewed celebration.

NOTES

1 Hence the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the Jews in 70 A.D. brought Jewish sacrifice to an abrupt end.

2 I discuss further dimensions of this problem in P. Werbner, 1986; in press. Clearly, relationships between kinsmen in town may undergo a critical change. Thus Mitchell (1956) points out that in town rivalry within the kin group is replaced by support and cooperation in the face of wider oppositions (p. 379). R. Werbner, in a critical reappraisal of Mitchell’s view, argues that rather than reaching the “rawest grievances”, the “ministering of relatives at expiatory feasts in a town is an aspect of their bids for mutual support in the midst of potentially hostile strangers” (R. Werbner 1972: 229-31). Conflicts between Pakistani kinsmen in town do seem often to persist, hence the continuous stress on friendship.

3 In this Islamic sacrifice and offering may differ from that of some African societies (for a comparative overview cf. de Heusch 1985). Evans-Pritchard’s denial of the ritual significance of the commensal meal following a sacrifice is well-known, but the significant variations in the distribution and disposal of the victim on different occasions by the Nuer would seem to imply that its consumption by a congregation does have a ritual import. Nuer sacrifice, in other words, does not end with the immolation of the victim.

4 Discussions of the Muslim notion of “baraka”, are too manifold to be listed here. The most extensive anthropological discussion is still probably that of Westermarck (1968, 1926) for Morocco, who also discusses at length the “baraka” present in the Koran (vol. I: 139) and in sacred passages (205-219).

5 The full elaboration and complexity of the procedures regarding the distribution of a victim is discussed by de Heusch (in press) and Richard Werbner (in press). Werbner argues that this distribution mediates the movement, not only of gods vis-à-vis people, but of different categories of people vis-à-vis each other.

6 Islam does, of course, have its holy men (pirs), saints, marabouts, etc. who mediate with God (cf. Jeffery 1979, Eickelman 1976). They are considered to carry baraka, but do not, apparently, become repositories of sin, since baraka makes them immune to the sins of others.

7 The gaining of merit in Islam should not be confused with the gaining of merit amongst Hindus and Buddhists. The Islamic belief is in an active an watchful God, meting out punishment and reward at will. In conjunction with is the notion of expiation and forgiveness, or purification from sin, the annulment of previous sins. The notion of merit in Islam is associated with eschatological beliefs regarding divine punishment after death, for it is then that the good and evil deeds a person has committed during his lifetime are weighed, and his destination to hell or heaven decided. Reward and punishment after death are at the centre of Islamic faith, but even after death forgiveness may be sought from God for the dead man. Hence, redemption remains a possibility to the very end, as it does not in Hinduism or Buddhism.

8 I am grateful to Tom Selwyn and Roger Ballard for drawing my attention to parallels in Hindu and Sikh practice.
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A Disquieting Suggestion

Arthur Danto, the well-known American philosopher, prefaced a book he wrote in the 70's on oriental thought and moral philosophy titled *Mysticism and Morality* with the following words:

The factual beliefs (that the civilizations of the East) take for granted are ...too alien to our (the West's) representations of the World to be grafted on to it, and in consequence their moral systems are unavailable to us.

The factual "beliefs" that Danto talks of are not about the structure of the DNA molecules or the space-time singularity in the region of Blackholes or even the laws of conservation of energy. Rather, they are beliefs about the social world which engage his attention. Suppose that Danto is right, and that the truth of his advice is independent of the culture of the audience to whom it is addressed. Suppose furthermore that thinkers from the East take this suggestion seriously as well. What would they say?

They would say that the factual beliefs that the West takes for granted are too alien for them to be grafted on to the beliefs that the East holds, and in consequence the moral systems elaborated by the Western thinkers are unavailable to them. This would mean that from the intuitionist to utilitarian ethics, from Kantian to contractarian ethics, from deontological to consequentialist ethics, would all be unavailable for the Eastern civilizations. But, that is not all. The very terms in which the Western thinkers conduct their ethical discourse cannot be adopted by the East: the notions of 'good' and 'bad'; the terms like 'moral' and 'immoral'; the concepts of 'moral rules'; the very idea, then, that "moral rules" are universalizable. Consider just one more extension of these implications: all moral systems which recognize that human rights are inalienable moral rights possessed by all human beings become unavailable to Eastern civilizations.