Khojas of Hyderabad

An insight in contemporary Nizari Isma'ili interreligious realities.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to explore the way in which a local Nizari Isma'ili community, the Khojas of Hyderabad, translate the articulated ideals of their spiritual leader the Aga Khan on topics of religious identity and interreligious interaction into their daily contexts. By understanding the local community not as a monolithic minority, but rather as a minority consisting of various social layers, data gathered from the Khoja community about topics of memory, normative values and practices, and geographical contextualization are shown to vary among the community members. These differences, in turn, influence the way these community members translate the Aga Khan's ideals into the local context.

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Religions in Contemporary Societies

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Introduction

Fahmida recalls the communal riots of 1989 in Hyderabad, India. Thinking back about the situation the Khoja Nizari Isma'ili community to which she belongs, she recollects: "Those were scary times, scary times indeed when the riots started." After a short pause she continues with a sense of cheeky pride. "However, even before we truly knew what was happening, already there were Khoja volunteers posted at the entrances towards the colony [(Khoja gated community)] as security personnel!" Her smile beams with pride. "Yes, we are well taken care off by our Imam, that is for sure." As Nizari Isma'ilis, Fahmida and the other Khojas of Hyderabad are expected by their Imam to engage with other religious communities with active curiosity. The local context of the Hyderabadi Khojas, however, makes living up to this interreligious ideal difficult at times, or even problematic. In this study I will explore how the interreligious ideal of curiosity translates into local practice for the Khoja community of Hyderabad, India.

Before going further into the details of this research, I will elaborate on the Nizari Isma'ili Khoja community. Nizari Isma'ilism is a transnationally organized Shi'a Islamic religious tradition centered around the spiritual leadership of the living Imam of the community, popularly known as the Aga Khan. There are different communities that adhere to Nizari Isma'ilism and recognize the spiritual authority of the Aga Khan, but the Khoja community originating from the Indian subcontinent makes up the majority of these.[1] There are also Khoja communities that do not recognize the Imamate of the Aga Khan, one of such communities resides in Hyderabad as well. These communities are relatively small in number.[2] Other religious communities in the city use the word Khoja predominantly to refer to the community that does recognize the Imamate of the Aga Khan. Because this research focuses on the interaction between Imami interreligious ideals and local practical translations of these ideals, Khoja communities that do not recognize the Imamate of the Aga Khan are left out of this research. In short: I will use the word Khoja to refer to the community of people sharing in the history and culture of the Khoja caste which originates from the Indian-subcontinent and was initially converted to Nizari Isma'ilism. Nizari Isma'ilism refers to the religion of the Imamate of the Aga Khan.

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[1] Jonah Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern, Globalization and Identity in a Muslim Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) 194-5.

[2] Most of these Khoja communities eventually gave up identifying themselves as Khojas after embracing Sunni or Ithna'ashariyya religious identities. Globally, an estimated number of 100.000 Khoja identify openly with the Ithna'ashariyya Shi'a tradition, according to their own estimates. 'Khoja's Histrory [*sic*]' www.kaajhyd.com/khojas-histrory.htm.

For this research, I limit myself to the Nizari Isma'ili Khoja community of Hyderabad city, India. The Hyderabad Khoja community proved an interesting case study for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, Hyderabad is a city with both a significant Hindu, a significant Muslim population and a visible presence of other religious communities as well. This religious diversity puts the Khoja community in a position where interreligious interactions are inevitable. Secondly, Hyderabad is particularly renowned for its public manifestations of piety. Through festivals and public rituals, different religions in the pluralistic spectrum of Hyderabad make claims on public space to practice their faith. These markers of religious identity add to the visibility of interreligious encounters: Interreligious curiosity becomes tangible through participation in public rituals and festivals either as actor or as spectator. Thirdly, within the Nizari Isma'ili transnational religious framework, Hyderabad does not constitute a major hub in the way Mumbai or London do, adding to the likeliness of a local orientation for the Khoja community rather than a transnational focus. This connection with the local situation allows for more profound differences between local and transnational strategic rationale.

Often in studies about the Khoja community and the Nizari Isma'ili religion, the interreligious ideals articulated by the Imam are taken at face value to describe the interreligious realities facing local Nizari Isma'ili communities supporting the Imam, like the Khojas of Hyderabad.[3] My aim for this research is to explore how the interreligious interactions of the members of the Khoja community in Hyderabad reflect the ideal interactions articulated by the Aga Khan, and how they differ from these. The motivation for this research is not to frame the Khoja community in Hyderabad as a dissent group within the Nizari Isma'ili religion, or to challenge the popularity of the Aga Khan among his followers. Instead, by tracing these differences I aim to find additional factors – other than Imami authority – that influence the interreligious practices in local contexts.

In order to properly assess the influence of additional factors on the interreligious realities of the Khoja community, I differentiate social layers within the Khoja community based on their position relative towards the Imam. Over the course of the 20th century, the successive spiritual leaders of the Nizari Isma'ili religion sought to centralize their authority over the geographically fragmented and international community through the creation of an extensive transnational framework of institutions. Nowadays, these frameworks provide the

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[3] Farhad Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis, Traditions of a Muslim Community* (Mumbai: ITREB 2008) 209; John. N. Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* (London, Luzac Collections: 1953) 372.; T. Purohit, "Identity Politics Revisited; Secular and Dissonant Islam in Colonial South Asia." *Modern Asian Studies* 45, 3 (2011).

means through which the followers of the Aga Khan, like the Khojas of Hyderabad, remain in touch with their spiritual leader. Because of this, I equate the position of the different social layers of the Khoja community in this transnational framework to their position relative to the Imam.

By exploring these different layers and their relation towards the Imami interreligious ideals, I wish to contribute insights both to the field of Ismaili studies, as well as to the field of minority studies.

In the field of Ismaili studies, the Nizari Isma'ili communities that recognize the Imamate of the Aga Khan have been researched in local contexts only to a limited extend.[4] When local Nizari Isma'ili communities like the Khoja communities of India do feature prominently in research, they are mostly understood as homogenous groups. By differentiating social layers among my informants in Hyderabad, I wish to challenge this idea of monolithic local communities. In the field of minority studies, the insights gathered from my Hyderabad informants prove useful for an understanding of processes of a religious minority identity. The processes of appropriation of a religious minority identity have been largely understood as a strategic tool for a community in a socio-legal context.[5] Although this understanding of identity appropriation will be shown to match the identity politics and interreligious ideals articulated by the Aga Khan and his predecessors, the additional factors that contribute to the local interreligious practices of the Khoja community suggest that appropriation of identity and interaction with the religious other are not only based on strategic considerations. Instead, these factors can seem to conflict the strategic rationale behind identity politics, leading to practices opposite of those articulated by the community leadership.

In the following paragraphs, I will go further into a theoretical framework of identity appropriation and its relation to interreligious interactions used in this thesis to explore the influence of local factors on the interreligious reality of the Hyderabadi Khojas.

Minority Identity Appropriation

Contemporary scholars of religion look at the concept of minority identity from various angles, a variety which reflects the inherent interdisciplinary nature of religious studies.

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[4] Exceptions do exist. Recent publications concerning local Nizari Isma'ili contexts include, Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern, Globalization and Identity in a Muslim Community*; F. Daftary (ed.) *A Modern History of the Ismailis, Continuity and Change in a Muslim Community* (London: Tauris, 2011).

[5] S. Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age, A Minority Report,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2015); Lauren Leve, "Identity" in *Current Anthropology,* 52, 4, (October 2011).

Authors more inclined to social and legal perspectives have been inclined to understand a minority identity, especially a religious minority identity, as a legal tool that is used predominantly strategically for socio-economic ends.[6]

As Saba Mahmood demonstrates in her study of the religious minority of Egyptian Coptic Christians, utilizing a minority status can help religious communities to consolidate their religious traditions, as well as that a minority status grants the community certain rights and protection facilitated by the international community. However, minority status is a double-edged sword. While appropriating a religious minority status can enable certain rights, strengthening the socio-economic position of a community, it can also cause a negative sentiment among surrounding communities. Claiming a minority identity effectively designates the community as 'different' from the majority of the country, banishing the community to an outsider position within society.[7]

From a socio-psychological perspective however, a religious minority identity is not necessarily the result of an elaborate socio-economic strategy. Instead, appropriation of a religious minority identity is shaped through daily social interactions. According to research by the sociologists Sheldon Stryker and Richard T. Serpe, the validation of our identity through our social contacts seems crucial for the identities we appropriate as our own.[8] This perception of identity appropriation was further expanded by Mieke Maliepaard and Karen Phalet. Through data collected from Dutch Islamic minorities, they showed that informants who identified more strongly with their minority religion were inclined to have less contacts with individuals from outside their own religious community.[9] Maliepaard and Phalet emphasized the bidirectional nature of this process, implying that not only a strong religious identity directs one's choice for company, but that one's social environment also enhances ones appropriation of a religious minority identity.

These two different approaches each provide a unique perspective on the appropriation of a minority identity without excluding one another. It is clear from a socio-psychological

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[6] Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*; Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern, Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006) 75; Saba Mahmood, *"Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East" Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 54, 2 (April 2012) 421; Dominique-Sila Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities, Ramdev Pir and the Ismailis in Rajasthan* (Delhi: Manohar 2003) 55.

[7] Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age,* 102.

[8] Sheldon Stryker and Richard T. Serpe, 'Identity Salience and Psychological Centrality: Equivalent, Overlapping or Complementary Concepts?' in *Social Psychology Quarterly,* 57, 1 (March 1994) 27.

[9] Mieke Maliepaard and Karen Phalet, 'Social Integration and Religious Identity Expression among Dutch Muslims: The Role of Minority and Majority Group Contact' in *Social Psychology Quarterly,* 75, 2 (June 2012) 136.

perspective that there is a strong connection between the religious identity of the individual and her or his social interactions. This connectedness of social environment and religious identity seems to be reflected in the socio-economic effects of minority identity appropriation explored by Mahmood in the Egyptian context.

Combining these two frameworks underlines the impact identity appropriation can have on interreligious realities. The socio-psychological approach suggests that the appropriation of a strong autonomous identity results in decreased social interactions with people of other religions, as well as that social interactions with members of other religious communities might lessen the appropriation of a strong religious identity. Including this bidirectional relation between religious identity and interreligious contacts as one of the factors influencing identity politics in a socio-legal perspective creates a theoretical framework in which strategic rationale, social contexts and identity appropriation become linked in one comprehensive system.

Both perspectives treat religious minorities as more or less monolithic groups of which the members operate in a uniform rationale. In order to obtain insight in the way the strategic rationale of the Imam influences the Khoja community's daily interreligious interactions in Hyderabad, I will not follow this monolithic understanding of religious minorities. The following paragraph defines the three 'classes' that I used to differentiate the social layers.

A Layered Minority

To understand the influence of local contexts on processes of religious identity appropriation and the interreligious interactions among Hyderabadi Khojas, the results of the fieldwork will be categorized by the three social strata, or 'classes' identified among the interlocutors. Classes in this essay are understood in the sense of unofficial social subdivisions within the community, that relate to each other in hierarchical fashion.[10] The idea of the Khoja minority as a layered community is relatively new to the field of Isma'ili studies. One of the first thorough attempts to classify the Nizari Isma'ili community was featured in Jonah Steinbergs' *Isma'ili Modern, Globalization and Identity in a Muslim Community,* published in 2011. However, the layered-ness identified by Steinberg predominantly existed between the various local Nizari Isma'ili communities, with the Khoja communities featuring as 'elite' communities, while other local communities such as the Nizari Isma'ilis in Tajikistan and

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[10] "Social Class" in *Encyclopaedia Brittanica, http://www.britannica.com/topic/social-class* (accessed on 12-01-2016).

Afghanistan were understood to be of peripheral importance for the international religious community of the Nizari Isma'ilis.[11]

For this research, however, I will not differentiate between the various Nizari Isma'ili communities but rather within the Khoja community of Hyderabad. The Khoja community of Hyderabad constitutes only a small percentage of the city's population. Lacking any other census than publications by the local Khoja community leadership, estimates of the number of Khojas living in Hyderabad add up to something between 12.000 and 15.000 Khojas, 0,13% or 0,16% of the city's population of 8,944 million.[12] Despite these small numbers, the interlocutors displayed a variety of attitudes towards other religious communities, varying from apathetic tolerance to motivated and sincere curiosity. The extent to which these attitudes differed was a major incentive to differentiate social strata among my informants.

As mentioned earlier, this social classification is based on the relative position of the informants to central authority of the Imam. The first of these classes is the leadership itself, embodied by the Imam and the advisors that contribute to his policies directly. More details about the exact traits and properties of the Imamate are elaborated in the chapter 'Basics of the Imamate.' Most important in order to understand the methodology of this research is to note that the Imam of the Nizari Isma'ilis is, in a sense, geographically unbound.[13] The absence of a central geographical location for the community reflects the transnational and globalized nature of the community's leadership.[14] When looking at the Nizari Isma'ili community in a classical center-periphery binary, the leadership 'class' would constitute the center of the community.

The second social layer of the community which I name 'more active members' consists of those members of the community that actively contribute to the maintenance and development of the transnational institutional framework of the Nizari Isma'ili religion. Despite their work in relation to the transnational institutional framework, these members are all recruited from local contexts in the absence of a geographical center. To translate this to a center-periphery binary, this implies that although these members have a strong connection

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[11] Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern, Globalization and Identity in a Muslim Community,* 195-6.

[12] "Major Urban Areas – Population, India", December 2015, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/fields/2219.html (accessed 5-1-2016); "Hyderabad Jamatkhana, India" (January 2016) http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/21264 (accessed 5-1-2016); Interview Zafar, Hyderabad 27-12-2015.

[13] The residence of the Imam is located in the French Ardennes, but this residence does not serve as a geographical center for the religious community.

[14] J. Steinberg, *Isma'ili Modern,* 1.

with the center of the transnational network, they are all recruited from peripheral contexts. As such, these members exist in the twilight zone between the transnational and the local.

The last social layer of the community, featured in this research as the 'more passive members' of the community, consists of the members of the community that are not actively involved in the transnational institutional network of the Nizari Isma'ili religion. These members often have some interaction with the transnational institutions that serve the community, but predominantly as consumers rather than facilitators. Additionally, though mostly bound to the periphery of the community, this does not imply that these community members are immobile. Like the unbound nature of the center of the community, also the periphery of the Nizari Isma'ili community is profoundly transnational. To give an example, many informants that I spoke with either had themselves lived in a different country than they did now, had a family member who lived abroad, or were planning to migrate in the near future. This migration would, however, not bring them closer to the center of the Nizari Isma'ili community.

The social classes featured here do not always neatly reflect the realities of the individual interlocutors included in this research. In some cases, active members of the community would be more geographically bound to one location whereas others had more freedom to navigate between various localities and between periphery and center locations. In other cases, passive members of the community did have the means to position themselves between the periphery of the community and the center, but would simply have no interest in doing this. Moreover, the classification of the Khoja community is not 'real' in the sense that it exists in the perception of the community members, but merely features in this thesis as a research tool. Still, grouping my interlocutors along these definitions related strongly to their profound different stances towards the interreligious ideals articulated by the community leadership. For an overview of the specific classification of individual Khoja informants, see appendix 1.

Through differentiation between social layers, the case of the Hyderabadi Khojas provides the opportunity to apply a combination of socio-psychological and socio-legal frameworks concerning religious identity and interreligious interaction on a community that simultaneously acts on a transnational sphere through the articulations of their transnationally oriented Imam, as well as on a local sphere through the daily encounters of the locally bound community members. In this research, I will provide an insight into the extent to which the

strategic aims of the transnational rationale of the Imamate influence the daily interreligious experiences of the Khoja community in the local context of Hyderabad.

In order to gain insights in how the contexts of the more active and more passive members of the Khoja community related to the ideals articulated by the Imam on the topics of religious identity and interreligious interaction, I apply three methodological approaches on data gathered from both social strata. First of these focusses on memory articulations by the community members, taking in account the past experiences of the community as context for interactions in the present. Secondly, featuring guiding principles in the present, the influence of 'secular' values on the interreligious interactions of the active members are featured. Equally normative for daily life, but centered mostly around the more passive members, is the influence of religious practice peculiarities. Thirdly, the articulations of both social layers of the Khoja community are further contextualized by their geographical position relative to their surroundings.

Before applying this threefold approach to both social layers other than the community leadership, the following paragraph contextualizes the data featured in this research by explaining the peculiarities and limitations of my fieldwork.

Fieldwork

"Sorry, if you don't have an appointment with anyone, I cannot allow you inside." Apologetic but firm, the security guard at the entrance of the Khoja colony in Hyderabad had no other option but to bar my entrance. The Khoja communities of India experienced a lot of inconveniences and hostilities from outsiders poking their noses into their affairs both in recent and more distant pasts, and as such, a lot of effort is put into protecting the community from nosey outsiders such as myself.[15] Responding to these experiences, the Khoja community developed an elaborate system of spokespersons and rules about what information is to be shared with outsiders and what information is deemed private or sacred. Because of this censure, one of the major concerns during my fieldwork was finding interlocutors that represented ordinary members of the community.

During my three-month stay in Hyderabad in the autumn of 2015, I was a guest at the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad. The institute commits itself to research on religious diversity and interreligious interactions in India, as well as to the development of

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[15] The Nizari Isma'ilis have been portrayed negatively by outsiders that claimed insider knowledge of the religious community with the purpose of denouncing the Nizari Isma'ili religion. An example of this is found on webpages hosted for this sole purpose like 'Inside Ismailism' https://insideismailism.wordpress.com/.

interreligious practices and the promotion of interreligious events. Over the course of weeks, I managed to find three separated entrees into the community through the endorsement of individual members that I met spontaneously or through introductions made through the Henry Martyn Institute, through whom I was able to interact closely with eleven Khoja community members in total. Most of my interlocutors, the three individuals that provided access to the Khoja community included, agreed to talk with me under the condition that they would only feature in my research under the guise of pseudonyms. As such, none of the names presented below represent the real names of my interlocutors, but are instead personally chosen pseudonyms or typical Nizari Isma'ili names.[16]

One of these individuals was a thirty-one-year-old religious teacher from the Khoja community to whom I refer as Malika. I met Malika on an interfaith program hosted by the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad. She joined us on the program during her sole week of vacation, in an effort to learn more about the various religions of India and to inspire her students with her interfaith encounters during the program. After our first, somewhat formal, interview, we grew to trust each other through shared experiences during this interfaith program. Over the course of my time in the field, she turned out to be a resourceful guide beyond the frontiers of the Khoja community, chaperoning me during many encounters that would normally be restricted for an outsider as myself. During these encounters she refrained from any influence in these encounters, merely condoning my presence and making introductions.

Other than being a passport into a protected community, Malika also proved to be a knowledgeable source on the workings of the international Nizari Isma'ili community. As an ITREB (Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board) religious teacher in STEP (Secundary Teacher Education Programme), she was involved in many international conferences, providing essential insights into the international commitment of the members of the community. Additionally, the STEP teachers are thoroughly involved in the official Nizari Isma'ili international efforts through ITREB of developing a strong Nizari Isma'ili religiosity. As we got to know each other better, Malika was able to express both the internationally articulated ideal religiosity facilitated by ITREB, as well as the results of their efforts in local realities.

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[16] Typical Nizari Isma'ili names are derived from the community website www.ismaili.net.

Lastly, as a teacher working all across the Khoja communities of India, Malika was able to introduce me to several of her students and their friends, allowing me to include not only adults, but also minors into the scope of my fieldwork. The inclusion of these students would not have been possible without her help. Because of the quality of their education (being exceptionally high), these students cannot be understood as representatives of the average Khoja youngster. However, the boys and girls that were included into this research originated from families of various economic backgrounds and as such they can be understood as representatives of the highly educated Khoja youth in general

Another central source for my research was the thirty-something male I met on the streets surrounding the Khoja colony in Hyderabad, to whom I will refer as Zafar. Zafar was born and raised in Hyderabad, but spent most of his adult life in the United States. A few years back, however, his visa for the United States expired, forcing him to close the supermarket he was running and return to Hyderabad. Several years after his return, Zafar was without a job and living close to the colony in an apartment granted to him by his family members.

After our spontaneous meeting in the streets, initiated by his curiosity, we had regular meetings during my three-month stay in Hyderabad. Zafar was able to introduce me to many facets of daily Khoja life in Hyderabad, as well as granting me insights in the recent past of the community. Despite his commitment to the local community through active volunteering and contributing to local affairs, Zafar represented a clearly different social layer of the Khoja community from the one Malika represented. His commitments to the community were solely on a local and practical level, rarely concerning himself with the articulated ideals of the community leadership. His commentaries and perspectives were educated, but represented a viewpoint from within the local community rather than from the transnational community center.

Other than being a spokesperson for the experiences of the local community, Zafar was also one of my passports into various domains of every-day life of the Khoja community. On several occasions, he would invite me to the cricket matches of his team (consisting solely of fellow Khojas) and on other moments he would introduce me to different facets of his daily life like flying kites on his apartment rooftop with his neighbors and their kids. During our encounters he introduced me to several members of the community who identified more strongly with the local Khoja community than with the international Nizari Isma'ili context.

The last interlocutor that I wish to highlight in this introduction is the forty-something Fahmida, an ex-employee of the Henry Martyn Institute, whom I had the honor of being introduced to in the last month of my research. Unmarried, Fahmida stopped working at the Henry Martyn Institute in order to take medical care of her parents living in the Khoja colony in Hyderabad. Fahmida, like Zafar, was born and raised in Hyderabad, but the slight differences in their respective age (around ten years) makes it so that the colony had yet to be built during Fahmida's early youth. Fahmida's father was one of the board members of the association that facilitated the construction of the Khoja colony in Hyderabad. As such, she and her family enjoy great respect from the community. Additionally, Fahmida had vivid and anecdotic memories about Khoja life and interreligious contacts from her early youth.

During one of our interactions, Fahmida decided to show me around the colony, providing me access to a lot of areas that would normally be off-limits for me as an outsider. Eventually, as part of her guided tour, she brought me inside the bottom floor of the *jama'at khana*, the Khoja place of worship, a place where none of my other interlocutors felt comfortable bringing me before. Her confidence in taking me along to such a private place within the colony, as well as inviting me into her home, have been great boons for my research.

I am greatly indebted to her for insights into the local history of the Khoja community, and the geographical details of the Khoja living quarters. Apart from these invaluable contributions to my fieldwork, Fahmida proved to be a frank and honest interlocutor on her personal experiences. The rare occasions when a topic was too sensitive, secret or beyond her knowledge, she would simply tell me, pointing out other sources of information that might proof more fruitful if possible.

These three individuals, Malika, Zafar and Fahmida facilitated three separated domains of Khoja life in Hyderabad. Malika was able to introduce me to several people actively engaged with the international institutional and educational framework provided by the Nizari Isma'ili community. Zafar, on the other hand, opened the way for me to understand the local Khoja community more on a grassroots level. Fahmida seemed to combine these two by taking me along, showing me various aspects of Khoja daily life, but also informing me on the workings of the more institutionalized levels of the local Khoja community.

During my interactions with my interlocutors, I decided to keep my various sources separated, maintaining the anonymity of my informants for two reasons. Firstly, I wanted my

interlocutors to speak freely and feel safe in doing so. Protecting their identity would grant them some immunity from social pressures that would otherwise oblige them to give answers that would be considered 'correct' according to the community leadership. Secondly, by not knowing whom I had already spoken with, informants were less likely to assume that I would know certain details beforehand, encouraging them to be as specific in their accounts as possible.

Despite of these precautions, I was still surprised by the openness of the accounts of all three of these interlocutors. More than once they would relate to personal experiences in order to contextualize their own opinions, or to inform me on their accounts of local histories. Also, I observed that the lessened social pressures helped them to share things that they would be less likely to share openly or when accompanied by their fellow Khojas.

Through these three informants I was able to get in touch with a total of eleven separate Khoja informants who I could ask questions individually. Additionally, I came in touch with a group of students from the Aga Khan Academy of Hyderabad who were born and raised in Tajikistan and Afghanistan with whom I could only have conversations in group context. Finally, spending three months in Hyderabad I was able to have numerous spontaneous encounters with Khoja and non-Khoja informants with a diversity of backgrounds.

Having briefly introduced the key-informants featured in this research, the following paragraphs elaborate on the differences and similarities between the ideals articulated by the Nizari Isma'ili Imam and the local realities of the Khoja community in Hyderabad. The next paragraph explores the religious identity and interreligious ideals articulated by the Imam of the Nizari Isma'ili Khoja community.

Part 1, Leadership

"Better than anything I could tell you, you should look into the speeches of His Highness the Aga Khan for our views on other religions." Fahmida smiles reassuringly. When asked about her personal experiences with other religious groups in the city, she immediately discards the question as irrelevant. "Sascha, you can learn way more about what we Isma'ilis think through the speeches of his Highness."[17] This honest reflex to refer to the words of the Aga Khan rather than her own experiences echoed throughout the majority of my interactions with other members of the Khoja community as well. These interactions demonstrated the weight and centrality of the authority of the ideals articulated by the Aga Khan in the understanding of the local position towards the religious other.

Because of this common reflex it only seems natural to dedicate the first part of this article to the interreligious ideals of the community leadership, embodied by the speeches of the Aga Khan himself and publications of the boards and councils that support his efforts to spiritually guide his followers throughout the world. The subject of this research is the Hyderabad Khoja community. However, isolating the community's leadership to a local context would lead astray from an honest representation of the Khoja community. Despite the presence of local leaders, it is this international framework of leadership institutions and the person of the Aga Khan that most informants referred to in order to explain their local experiences.[18]

Policies issued by the community leadership in modern times have been extensively studied by scholars of Ismaili studies, and as a result of this, a significant portion of this chapter will address the current academic debates on the nature and contents of these policies, and the institutions that grew from these. In order to highlight the connection of the international and the local, I include an analysis on the specific speech that was suggested to me by informants such as Fahmida, Malika, staff-members of the Aga Khan Academy and some of the students. Through the contents of this document, combined with current academic insights, I will then give an overview on current interreligious ideals articulated by the community leadership and the understanding of the self from which they are derived.

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[17] Interview Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015.
[18] None of my informants would refer to local leaders as a point of reference for their opinions, worldviews or actions. Other than the students of the Aga Khan Academy, who would refer to some of their teachers and the academy's staff-members, informants would either refer to the Aga Khan himself or to one of the many institutions founded by decree of the Aga Khan.

First, however, it is important to explain certain traits and qualities of the Nizari Isma'ili concept of community leadership, and the role of the Aga Khan as the living Imam of the community.

Basics of the Imamate

The religious identity of the Khoja community is a complex one to explain in a sterile theoretical academic fashion. Theoretically, the religious designation of the Khojas as Nizari Isma'ilis places them in the Shi'a fold of Islam. Like all Shi'a communities, Nizari Isma'ilis belief that (divine) leadership of the Muslim community rests with a hereditary succession of Imams, descendants from the Prophet through his nephew Ali. Typically, Shi'a traditions understand the Imams to be infallible and to be 'proof' for the existence of God.[19] For the majority of the Shi'a traditions, the Imam has been hidden from the community by God in order to protect him from repeated assaults on his life. The Nizari Isma'ilis however, recognize a specific hereditary line of Imams of which the current Imam is still alive and present as the ultimate spiritual authority.

Ideals articulated by the current Imam of this line, Mawlana Hazar Imam His Highness Prince Shah Karim al-Hussaini, Aga Khan IV are highly influential on the Hyderabadi Khoja formation of a religious identity and their interactions with other religious groups of the city. Note that Aga Khan is a worldly title, a hereditary title of nobility obtained by the family of the Nizari Isma'ili Imams as a result of the services Aga Khan I, the 46th Imam of the Nizari Isma'ili line, rendered to the Persian Qajar monarch Fath 'Ali Shah by governing the city of Qumm in the first half of the 19th century. The title remained strongly connected with the line of Imams ever since, identifying themselves as Aga Khan I, II, III and so forth. Commonly, reference to the Nizari Isma'ili Imam goes by this title. As a result, unless specified otherwise, Aga Khan is used in this thesis to refer to Aga Khan IV, the current Nizari Isma'ili Imam.

Other than Fahmida, who was featured at the beginning of this chapter, also many of Zafar's cricket friends would refer to the speeches of the Aga Khan for me to learn about their religious identity and their views of the religious other.[20] This influence originates from the traits and properties inherent to the concept of the Isma'ili imamate. I would like to illustrate these traits and properties through the self-identification of the Imam in one of his lectures.

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[19] H. Halm, *Shi'ism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 43-4.
[20] During a lunch after a cricket-match in Hyderabad, 1-11-2015, the topic of interreligious interaction came up. The initial response of the Khoja fellowship was that they followed the instructions articulated by the Aga Khan.

On November 12th 2015, the Aga Khan was asked by the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University to give the 2015 Jodidi Lecture 'for the promotion of tolerance, understanding and goodwill among nations.'[21] After a rather informal start of the lecture, the Aga Khan explains that he stands before his audience not only in the role of an academic, but first and foremost as the '49th hereditary Imam of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims.'[22] Up until now, I have been reluctant in referring to the Nizari Isma'ilis as 'Imami Ismaili' because of the ambiguity of the designation.[23] Still, I would like to use this exact phrasing to elaborate on the concept of the Nizari Imamate.

The phrasing 'Shia Imami Ismaili Muslim' implies many things, as this name refers to the religious denomination of the community. Shi'a refers to the tradition within Islam which beliefs that spiritual leadership of the Islamic community was passed down from the Prophet Mohammad through designation to his nephew 'Ali. Like other Shi'a communities, the Nizari Isma'ilis belief that 'Ali was the first of a hereditary line of spiritual leadership over the community. These leaders are called Imams and are believed to be granted a supernatural insight into the true meaning of the Qur'an, aiding the devotees in their daily lives and religious affairs through their inspired leadership.[24]

Furthermore, inclusion of Ismaili into the defined denomination refers to a specific hereditary line of Imams that is to be understood to be the legitimate one. Ismaili Shi'ites recognize a different hereditary line than the line understood as legitimate by the majority of the Shi'ites, the Ithna'ashariyya or Twelver Shia. The split between these two groups is based on the events following the death of the sixth Shi'a Imam, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq in 765. Isma'ili Shi'ites believe that the seventh Imam was Ja'fars son Ismā'īl, while the majority of the Shi'ites believe that the Imamate was transferred to Ja'fars son Musa al-Kazim.[25] Debates on who rightfully succeeded the Imam did not settle after this split in the Shi'a community, and remain very much part of Isma'ili traditions up until this day. For the majority of the Shi'a communities, the current heir in the line they judge legitimate is believed to be hidden from

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[21] For more information on the Jodidi lecture series: http://wcfia.harvard.edu/lectureships/jodidi.

[22] Aga Khan "Transcript: Jodidi Lecture by His Highness the Aga Khan 'The Cosmopolitan Ethic in a Fragmented World," November 12 2015 http://wcfia.harvard.edu/jodidi/2015/transcript-aga-khan. (accessed on 21-12-2015).

[23] All strands of Isma'ilism place supreme authority in their Imam, making the denomination of 'Imami' ambiguous. However, unlike the Nizari Isma'ilis, these other strands of Isma'ilism have not identified their living Imam, considering him to be hidden from the community still.

[24] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis*, 1.

[25] Halm, *Shi'ism,* 30-1.

the community by God. They believe their Imam to be present up until this day but guiding the community in anonymity, only to reemerge in Messianic fashion at the end of times.[26]

This brings us to the third denominational specification added by the Aga Khan, namely Imami. The Nizari Isma'ilis are the only Isma'ili community that up until this day recognize a living person as their current Imam, henceforth the name Imami. Throughout Shi'ism, the inspired insight of the Imam made him the supreme authority on both worldly and other-worldly affairs. For most Shi'a and Isma'ili communities, the abovementioned absence of the current Imam therefore leads into a theoretical impossibility of there being any absolute authority on these affairs until his return.[27] The Nizari Isma'ili community, however, identifies the Aga Khan as their Imam and as such his authority is believed to be absolute.

The absoluteness of this authority can be best explained through how it is defined in the Ismaili Constitution, a religious-legal document produced for the global Nizari Isma'ili community as part of an effort of the Imamate to consolidate and centralize the Imam's authority worldwide.[28] The first article of this constitution is solely concerned with defining the absolute authority of the Imam, an absoluteness which is repeated throughout the entire document as well. Article 1.1 of the constitution states:" Mawlana Hazar Imam [the Aga Khan] has inherent right and absolute and unfettered power and authority over and in respect of all religious and Jamati [(community)] matters of the Ismailis."[29]

The authority of the Imam is further specified in the other articles of the constitution as well. Additional to the authority specified within the constitution, it is relevant to point out that all of the institutions mentioned in the document are funded from his personal wealth, and all tithes are contributed to him personally.[30] The combination of his absolute authority on both spiritual and community matters, as well as his role as the legal owner of the financial means of the religious community makes the Imam a highly influential leader for his community.

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[26] Halm, *Shi'ism,* 18.

[27] Ibid.

[28] The Ismaili Constitution is mostly concerned with the installation of centralized legal infrastructures for the Nizari Isma'ili community on local, national and international levels which are meant to operate only on personal law and affairs between members of the community when the laws of the countries they reside in permit it.

[29] 'Article 1.1' in Ismaili Constitution (July 11, 1990).

[30] Institutions financed by the Aga Khan include; Councils of social governance on national, regional and local levels, as well as boards of arbitration and reconciliation on those respective levels, educational programs, development thrusts and many more. All these institutions together make up the entire institutional framework of the Nizari Isma'ili community. For an overview of institutions funded by the Aga Khan: 'Article Nine, Grants and Review Boards' in Isma'ili Constitution (July 11, 1990).

The ideal of the absolute authority of the Aga Khan as the Imam is common to the Nizari Isma'ili community throughout the world. In the wording of Peter B. Clarke, the Imam is 'the link with tradition, with Islam, the 'present' political leader, the manifestation of God, the synthesis of the sacred and the profane.'[31] Within the Nizari Isma'ili framework, his authority is supreme on matters of theology, spirituality, community and finance. On a spiritual level, this means that the Imam is understood as the community's primary guide in understanding the *bāṭin* (inner, spiritual) truths of revelation, which are understood as more essential than the *ẓāhir* (external, evident) truths of revelation.[32] Institutionally, any form of institutional organization within the community requires his approval and is dependent on the resources trusted unto his person.

Because of this supreme authority of his Imamate the Aga Khan is expected to guide his global community directly and indirectly on all sorts of matters, one of which being the matter of interreligious interactions. This does not mean that there is no initiative from local communities such as the Khoja community in Hyderabad. However, as was shown by the examples of Fahmida and Zafar's friends, the local community in Hyderabad instinctively refers to the Aga Khan for the formulation of interreligious ideals. These ideals are initialized by the Aga Khan and further developed by him and the community leaders appointed by him. The following paragraphs concern themselves with media through which these ideals are articulated to the Hyderabadi Khoja community and the contents of these ideals in general.

Traditional Means of Articulation, the *gināns*.

The Imam and community leadership have various media through which they can articulate an ideal religious identity. The means of articulations developed over time. Traditionally, in late-medieval times, when the predecessors of the Aga Khan lived in Persia, there was no possibility of direct communication between the Khoja community living on the Indian subcontinent and the Imam. Instead, religious ideals were instructed through *gināns* (devotional songs). These *gināns* were taught to the Khoja community by the Persian *pīrs,* missionary saints who were understood to carry the spiritual authority of the Imam in a certain extent to guide the Khoja communities in the Imam's absence.[33] This practice of sending Persian *pīrs* and instructing the Khoja community on the Indian subcontinent in the Nizari Isma'ili religion through *gināns* presumably originated from the 12th century and continued up

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[31] Peter B. Clarke, 'The Ismailis, A Study of Community,' *The British Journal of Sociology,* 27, 4 (1967) 494.
[32] Farhad Daftary, *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 2.
[33] Ali S. Asani, 'The Isma'ili Gināns: Reflections on Authority and Authorship' in Farhad Daftary (ed.), *Mediaeval Isma'ili History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 266-7.

until well into the 16th century.[34] Over the course of this period, the Imams, residing in Persia themselves at that time, seem to have felt that the *pīrs*, based on the spiritual authority invested in them by the Imam, became too autonomous. As a result, the Imam of the time reasserted his exclusive claim to spiritual authority and discontinued the practice of appointing *pīrs*.[35] After this point, instruction was entrusted unto mundane educators known as *Bābā's* or *Wakīls.* Interestingly, the reliance on the *pīrs* seem to have made the authority of the pre-modern Imam vulnerable in practice, contrasting the superiority of the current Imam argued earlier. This vulnerability features as a prominent motivation for institutionalization of the Nizari Isma'ili religion in chapter 'Mobilization into Modernity.'

Despite the discontinuation of this practice of sending divinely guided *pīrs* to the Indian subcontinent, the *gināns* they taught to the community remain a central part of the Khoja spirituality.[36] This importance of the *gināns* was confirmed by Malika more than once during our interactions: Other than merely stating that they would be included regularly as part of devotional sessions, she would also describe how she was touched by their sound and meaning.[37] The importance of these *gināns* is difficult to overstate, as they feature in the Khoja tradition on a similar level as *aḥādith* (accounts on the actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad and his companions) as sources of true learning for the Khojas.

Due to their importance as sources of religious understanding, and their purpose of instructing the community, any understanding of the religious ideals expressed by the Imam of the Khoja community without the *gināns* would be incomplete. However, other than only being important, the contents of the *gināns* are also considered a sensitive and sacred matter for many of the Khojas, making it problematic for me to include exact *ginānic* wording and articulation. The reasoning behind this secretive contents should probably be understood as precaution against harassment from other religious groups. Many of the Nizari Isma'ili practices have been understood as being un-Islamic by other Islamic groups, or un-Indian by Hindu-nationalistic groups and have more than once provoked violent repercussions because

[34] Farhad Daftary, *The Isma'ilis, Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 478-84.
[35] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis*. 181.
[36] Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 44-5.
[37] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad 29-10-2015.

of this.[38] I will therefore only include summaries and traces of the *ginānic* contents gathered from other sources and the few statements that my interlocutors were willing to make.

Firstly, something about the setting in which *gināns* are conveyed to the community. The *gināns* are seen as 'sacred, secret texts that are only sung without musical guidance in the *jama'at khana* as part of the devotion sessions.'[39] Despite the absence of musical instruments, Malika explains that listening to the songs is mostly an emotional and meditative experience, guiding the listener through topics of self-reflection and contemplation.

The majority of the Khoja *gināns* were written in the secret Khojkī script, a written language specifically developed for the transmittance of the *ginānic* literature. When sung, these songs would be composed in the Hindi dialects of Punjabi, Sindhi and Gujarati.[40] The Gujarati Hindi dialect is a language shared by most Khojas up until today, making it likely that the contents of the *gināns* are understood by the majority of the community, despite the secretive nature of the script.

The *gināns* performed in contemporary devotional sessions were mostly –if not all- written in older times. Traditionally, most *gināns* were attributed to the handful of *pīrs* who converted the first groups of caste converts that would be called Khoja's in the Indian sub-continent.[41] This would mean that the majority of these *gināns* were written in the 12th and 13th centuries. More recent studies however suggest that these claims of authorship should not be understood literally, but most likely refer to the authority of the *pīr* to which the actual author relates himself.[42] Still, the lessons conveyed through these *gināns* serve the community as lessons related to the community through the inspired leadership of previous Imams that were not directly in contact with the Indian Khojas up until this day.

As stated previously, the contents of these *gināns* were considered a precious and delicate religious secret by my informants. Despite this secretive nature, other authors have included some descriptions on their nature and contents, from which a general picture of the *ginānic* teachings can be sketched.

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[38] One of the most recent instances was during the 2002 Gujarati riots, when an entire school bus of Khoja students was massacred. More details and effects of this situation will be dealt with in chapters 'Communicative and Cultural Memory Articulations' and 'Practice'.
[39] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad 29-10-2015.
[40] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 178.
[41] Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 42-44.
[42] Asani, 'The Isma'ili Gināns' 270.

Part of obscurity of the contents is due to their somewhat fluid and oral nature. Ali Asani refers to Albert Lord's description of the inherent fluidity of orally transmitted accounts to explain this. "[The singer's] idea of stability, to which he is deeply devoted, does not include wording, which to him has never been fixed, nor the essential parts of the story. He builds his performance… … on the stable skeleton of narrative."[43] In other words, it is not the wording or the exact phrasing that constitutes the permanency of the oration, but it is the grander narrative, the experience and the lessons for the audience.

The stable narrative conveyed to the Khoja community, originating from the spiritual teachings of the Nizari Isma'ili Imam, was concerned with knowledge of the Qur'an and the peculiars of the Isma'ili faith. Parts of this narrative could include the *bāṭin* (inner, spiritual) teachings of the Qur'an in addition to the *ẓāhir* (external, evident), since the *bāṭin* features prominently in the Isma'ili faith.[44] Other than this, the *gināns* 'extol the virtues of love for and unquestionable obedience to the *pīr* and his teachings.'[45]

This obedience to the *pīr* can be understood as an attempt at bypassing the authority of the Imam, but I would suggest an interpretation of the opposite. As explained earlier, the Imam was not able to be directly connected to the caste converts that would later become the Khoja community during the 12th and 13th century. The spiritual authority that the Imam had invested in his *pīrs* were therefore the only manner in which he could be present for the Khojas, meaning that loyalty to the *pīrs* meant indirectly a loyalty to the authority of the Imam himself. Through the *pīrs*, the authority of the Imam served as the *bāb* (gate) into the *bāṭin* of the Qur'an for the Khojas, emphasizing his indispensable role as interpreter of scripture and the divine.[46]

The *gināns*, however, conveyed more than merely the importance of Imami guidance for the believers. Informants would express mostly their fascinations with the spiritual lessons that were conveyed through the *gināns*. Through metaphors and carefully chosen language, the believers are instructed on the *bāṭin*, or spiritual side, of the Qur'an. Some of these *gināns*

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[43] Albert B. Lord, *Singer of Tales* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) 99, quoted in A. Asani, 'The Ismaíli Gināns' 275.

[44] The *bāṭin,* or hidden meaning of the Qur'an is a central concept of Sufism and Shi'ism, but also features in a lesser degree of importance in contemporary Sunni thought. Additional to the rules and recommendations in the Qur'an that are clear (or *ẓāhir*), even for the untrained reader, the Qur'an is believed to also hold hidden truths. These spiritual and metaphysical teachings are considered incomprehensible through mundane human reasoning, but can be understood at least to a certain extent with the help of a spiritual guide. For the Nizari Isma'ilis, the Imam of the community is the guide *par excellence* for the true understanding of the *bāṭin* of the Qur'an, and the *bāṭin* is often considered more important than the *ẓāhir* of the Qur'an.

[45] Asani, 'The Isma'ili Gināns', 267.

[46] Asani, 'The Isma'ili Gināns', 268.

include spiritual concepts that many be considered as un-Islamic, such as the *Dasa Avatāra ginān* which celebrates the entirety of the hereditary line of Imams as the 10th incarnation of Vishnu.

Inclusion of some these spiritual concepts like the *Dasa Avatāra*, unfamiliar to most strands of the Islamic traditions, is understood by academics in various ways. Some see the appropriation of these concepts, that mostly originated from Hindu religiosity, as an active part of conversion strategy of the first *pīrs* when they attempted to convert the caste that would later become the Khoja caste. By softening the Islamic identity of the religious teachings, the *pīr* could more easily gain trust of the prospected Hindu convert.[47] Conversion could take place without the direct confrontation of the prospected convert's worldview. In this explanation, it is quite possible that the early presence of Nizari Isma'ilism on the Indian subcontinent was mostly seen as 'just another sect' into which the convert would be accepted.[48] Others understand the inclusion of these elements of Hindu culture more as a strategy of *taqiyya* (precautionary assimilation). [49] *Taqiyya* is a strategy familiar to most strands of Shi'ism and one to which the Nizari Isma'ilis is understood to have grown especially acquainted with over the course of centuries of persecution.[50] Before exploring the hybrid nature of these *gināns* further, the following paragraphs first sketch a brief historical context of these persecutions.

Already in the early years of Islamic history, during the rule of the Sunni Abbasid Caliphate in the 8th and 9th century, the Alid Imams, the Isma'ili line included, were seen as a threat for the ruling Sunni caliphs who had no spiritual claim to leadership over the community similar to the claim of the Imams. According to Isma'ili historical understanding, facing persecution and a permanent house-arrest, the Isma'ili Imams left the political heartland of the Caliphate for the Iranian region, while the *da'wa* (mission) and Imami doctrine was kept alive through hidden *dā'īs (*Missionaries comparable to the *pīrs* active in the Middle-East instead of the Indian context).[51] The political threat of the Imamate seemed to be a mayor cause for persecutions by Sunni rulers. When in 910 the Fatimid Isma'ili Caliphate was found by Abū 'Abdallāh al-Shī-ī', who openly proclaimed to be the Imam of the community and who is

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[47] Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 33.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Azim Nanji, *The Nizari Isma'ili Tradition in the Indo-Pakistan Sub-continent* (Delmar: Caravan Books, 1978), 216.
[50] Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines,* 410.
[51] Halm, *Shi'ism,* 163.

understood by Isma'ilis to be the 11th Imam, the political threat posed by the Imamate doctrine became tangible.

The Nizari Isma'ili tradition originates from the Fatimid Caliphate through the presence of *dā'īs* of the Fatimid Caliphate that worked in Syria and the Iranian area from the 9th until the end of the 11th century. Converts to the Isma'ili doctrine would, due to their loyalty to the Fatimid Caliph/Imam, become effective enemies of the Sunni states in which they lived, triggering more persecutions. Many of them resorted to *taqiyya* to avoid hostilities during their missionary work.[52]

After the death of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mutansir in 1094, the Isma'ili community was split into factions supporting various claimants to the Imamate. The son of the Caliph, Nizār, seems to have been designated by his father to become the next Imam. However, Nizār's claim was challenged by the influential vizier of the Caliph who placed his son-in-law, Nizār's half-brother al-Musta'lī on the throne in Cairo. Nizār himself did not survive this coup after a short armed rebellion, but the Irani *da'wa* lead by Hasan Sabbah from the mountain stronghold Alamut remained loyal to the Nizari line of Imams, breaking its ties with Cairo.

Already before the split with Cairo, the Isma'ilis of Alamut and other mountain strongholds openly defied the authority Sunni Seljuq dynasty that effectively ruled the Iranian territories. After the split with Cairo, Alamut and its allies became an autonomous Nizari Isma'ili political entity, which destabilized the Seljuq dominion even further through the presence of their missionary efforts.[53] Eventually, the fifth lord of Alamut, Muhammad II, claimed the Imamate in 1166, stating that he was the heir of Nizar through Nizar's grandson who was supposedly rescued from the Fatimid coup and brought to Alamut. This reappearance of a Nizari Imam further increased the threat perceived because the *da'wa* presence, resulting eventually in the complete destruction of the Nizari Isma'ili fortresses by the Mongol conquerors of the Iranian territories in 1256, following the advice of Persian councilors.[54]

Persecutions like those endured by the Isma'ili communities in early history, as well as later persecution of Nizari Isma'ili converts in the Iranian area resulted in a strongly developed practice of *taqiyya* among Nizari Isma'ilis, trying to mask the conversion of individuals from the watchful eyes of their political enemies. In a comparable manner, the

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[52] Halm, *Shi'ism,* 172-3.
[53] Halm, *Shi'ism,* 183-4.
[54] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 150-2.

pīrs trying to convert caste members on the Indian subcontinent might have resulted into the inclusion of these seemingly Hindu concepts and terminologies, to conceal conversion from the local authorities.

Returning to the *gināns*, defining the hybrid influences of the *ginānic* literature becomes more problematic because of the prevalence of concepts common to Sufi (Islamic mysticism) traditions in addition to the already described influences of Hindu religiosity.[55] For these elements, again, the question arises whether they were included to emphasize a close link with Islamic mysticism to avoid persecution by Muslim rulers on the Indian subcontinent, or whether they were included because of an intrinsic appreciation of their spiritual worth.[56] It is clear however that Nizari Isma'ilis maintained a strong connection with Sufi traditions since the 14th, when the Imam was sheltering among Sufis in Persia after the Mongolian sacking of the Nizari Isma'ili stronghold of Alamut in 1256.[57]

Nizari Isma'ili diversity in tradition does not end with Sufi influences. Ali Asani, scholar of Isma'ili religion and history identified at least four different 'external' influences in *Ginānic* literature, including 'Bhakti, Sant, Sufi and Vaishnavite' elements.[58] Whether these elements should be seen as external influences, or an exponent of an inclusivistic or even pluralistic religious worldview is impossible to judge from the *gināns*.[59] Whatever the motivation for this acculturation of religious practices and traditions, it seems clear through the sheer number of influences that acculturation has been a central tenet in the articulation of the Nizari Isma'ili faith as articulated through the *gināns*.

Several of these *gināns*, like *Dasa Avatāra*, are no longer considered canonic by the community leadership.[60] Discontinuation of the *Dasa Avatāra* can be seen as part of a broader strategy of the Aga Khan and his predecessors to 're-Islamize' the Khoja community and the Nizari Isma'ili faith, but this assumption is difficult to prove due to a lack of a proper overview on which *gināns* are kept within the canon and which ones are not. However, as will be shown later on in this chapter, the Aga Khan and his predecessors show a tendency to re-

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[55] Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy, 'Sacred Songs of Khoja Muslims: Sounded and Embodied Liturgy and Devotion in *Ethnomusicology,* 48, 2 (2004) 264.
[56] Ali S Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim, The Articulation of Ismaili Khoja Identity in South Asia' in Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History of the Ismailis,* 99.
[57] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 180.
[58] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim' 96.
[59] Paul J. Griffith, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) xiv.
[60] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 178.

Islamization in their policies and moments of articulation, making the re-Islamization of the *ginānic* canon plausible.

Summing up, considering the fact that *gināns* are still actively evaluated for their validity for the community up until this day, it seems clear that *ginānic* literature still counts as one of the important media of religious articulation of the Nizari Isma'ili community. It is difficult to extract any exact wordings on interreligious interactions from the *ginānic* literature due to its secretive and sacred nature. However, the traces of documentation that are available point towards a certain willingness of the Nizari Isma'ili leadership to include religious concepts native to their local communities into the repertoire of the Nizari Isma'ili faith. The reasons for this are ambiguous. However, despite this tradition of inclusion, it seems plausible that a certain re-Islamization of the Nizari Isma'ili is happening within the *ginānic* canon.

Mobilization into Modernity

In contrast to the pre-modern Nizari Isma'ili communities discussed above, the Nizari Isma'ili religion today is highly organized. Apart from dozens of councils, boards, associations and welfare institutions, the Nizari Isma'ili infrastructure also features a constitution, a research center and funds for architectural development. All of these are organized in a well-defined, complex and hierarchical structure based ultimately on the authority of the Imam. The Imams of the community directed the formation of these institutions personally, and as a result of this, their foundation can be read as an extension of the Imami articulations on religious identity and interreligious interaction. The following paragraphs will analyze these developments in Nizari Isma'ili policy making by the Aga Khan and his predecessors, and the socio-political strategies of identity which this Nizari Isma'ili modern implies.

The policies of the current and late Aga Khans have been studied extensively by various scholars of Isma'ili studies. The scope of this research will be limited to policies and developments with direct relevance to the Khoja community. The controversial 1866 'Aga Khan' case will serve as a starting point for this historical analysis of policies issued by the Nizari Isma'ili leadership. During this legal case the Khoja community was legally defined by the colonial government of British India as being Isma'ili and Hasan Ali Shah Aga Khan I, the 46th Imam of the Nizari Isma'ilis (Aga Khan I from here on) as their rightful spiritual leader. From this point, developments will be traced up until the final publication of the Isma'ili Constitution in 1990, which seems the most recent official declaration on religious

identity, and which is considered binding for all members of the Nizari Isma'ili community, including the Hyderabadi Khojas.

The 'Aga Khan Case' in 1866 took place in a crescendo of struggles within the Khoja community caused by the coming of the Imam to India in 1841, and its importance can be better assessed within the historical context of the case. Aga Khan I and his predecessors had lived in Persia, serving the Shahs as governors of certain regions such as Kirman and Qumm, changing with the ebbs and flows of Persian politics since 1751. However, because of political intrigue at the Persian court Aga Khan I was exiled by the chief minister of Persian Qajar Shah in 1840. Aga Khan I resisted the exile over the course of a year, resulting in clashes between his personal Isma'ili armed forces and governmental military forces. Aga Khan I's forces were eventually defeated and the Imam was forced to flee into Afghanistan with an armed retinue, seemingly without the majority of his Persian followers.[61] In Afghanistan, Aga Khan I built an allegiance with the British through joined military ventures in the First Anglo-Afghan war (1839-1842). Due to his exploits during this campaign, Aga Khan I was awarded a Princely title by the British, welcoming his spiritual authority into British India.[62] From this moment on, the Aga Khans maintained strong ties with the British government for the assertion of their authority and the development of the Khoja community.

Already before the coming of the Imam to India, The Khoja community was the largest Nizari Isma'ili community as the result of centuries of *da'wa* (mission) presence through the endeavors of *pīrs* and later *bābās* or *wakīls*. After initial conversion of the Khoja caste members somewhere in the 12th and 13th century, these *pīrs* and *bābās* would serve the Khoja communities as intermediaries between them and the Imam living in Persia. During these times, Khoja delegations would travel north to Persia on a regular basis for the purpose of pilgrimage and the transfer of tithes due to the Imam.[63] Effectively, the Khoja communities only experienced the absolute authority of the Imam in a mediated and indirect form.

When Aga Khan I came to Bombay and the majority of the Khojas accepted him as the rightful Imam of the community, several local leaders resisted. Possibly this resistance

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[61] Marco van Grondelle, Across the Threshold of Modernity, The Shi'a Imami (Nizari) Ismailis and British Foreign-Colonial Policy in the period 1839 to 1969. (Utrecht 2008). Van Grondelle only finds limited traces of an Isma'ili presence in the first Anglo-Afghan war in British archives. Additionally, a sizeable Nizari Isma'ili community remained in Qajar Persia, including Aga Khan I's son. and Imam to be, Aqa 'Ali Shah. Daftary, *A Modern History of the Ismailis,* 7.

[62] Clarke, 'The Isma'ilis, A Study of Community,' 484.

[63] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis.* 195. Note that for Nizari Isma'ilis, *hajj* (pilgrimage) is a sacred duty of equal severity to the *hajj* in other Islamic traditions. For Nizari Isma'ilis however, the destination of the pilgrimage is not the Ka'ba but the Imam himself, being the embodiment of divine guidance.

was the result of religious confusion of the local community.[64] After years of pretending not to be Nizari Isma'ilis as part of the *taqiyya* strategy, the communities could've simply forgotten their allegiance to the Imam. Another possibility is that the choice to resist or to accept the claim of Aga Khan I on leadership over the Khoja community was mostly influenced by the socio-economic consequences.[65] The colonial government allowed for distinct legal systems to exist based on religion. As such, Khojas claiming a Sunni identity would be legally exempted from the authority of the Aga Khan, but would also miss out on his investments and protection.

A third alternative explanation for the Khoja resistance would emphasize the importance of the local community leaders, who would've resented the coming of the Imam because his presence would marginalize their own authority. These Khoja leaders would then use ambiguity of religious identity as a weapon to wrest their own communities out of the control of the newly arrived Imam.[66] For Aga Khan I to establish his claim on leadership over the Khoja, he would need them to identify themselves with the Nizari Isma'ili faith. The resisting leaders would however claim Sunni or Ithna'ashariyya identities for their communities.[67] From what I can gather, all three above explanations hold at least some validity and they do not necessarily contradict one another.

The presence of the Imam in Bombay triggered a series of court cases initiated by local leaders of the Khoja community that resisted the coming of the Imam and his claim on community property. These cases culminated into the 1866 'Aga Khan Case'. Judgement in this case came from Justice Sir Joseph Arnould. The dispute addressed in this case was the ownership of Khoja community property such as the Khoja prayer hall in Bombay. Local leaders who rejected the authority of the Aga Khan aimed to claim the prayer hall for their community of 'rejectionists', the Khoja Reform Society, whereas Aga Khan I claimed it based on his spiritual authority over the 'loyalist' Khoja community.[68] After hearing the different parties involved, Justice Arnould gave validation to Aga Khan I's authority over the Khoja community:

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[64] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 195-6.
[65] Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 55.
[66] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim' 106.
[67] Soumen Mukherjee, 'Being "Ismaili" and "Muslim", Some Observations on the Politico-Religious Career of Aga Khan III' in *Journal of South Asian Studies,* 34, 2 (2011) 197.
[68] Joseph. Arnould, 'Judgment delivered Nov. 12 1866 on the 'Khoja Case'(Aga Khan Case) in Bombay Gazette Steam Press, (Bombay 1866) http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/27983 (accessed 8-2-2015).

"[The Khojas are] a sect of people whose ancestors were Hindu in origin, which was converted to and has throughout abided in the faith of the Shia Imami Ismailis, which has always been and still is bound by ties of spiritual allegiance to the hereditary Imam of the Ismailis" [69]

With this verdict, the spiritual authority of Aga Khan I as the Imam of the Nizari Isma'ilis over the Khojas was judicially formalized. With this formalization came a narrow religious definition of the Khoja community which was unprecedented up until that moment, but which would remain with the community up until this day.[70] The religious tradition that had acculturated tenets and practices from diverse religious backgrounds such as Sufism, Shi'ism, Vaishnavite and Bhakti elements was suddenly defined as a Shia Imami Ismaili sect.[71]

This formalization of the Nizari Isma'ili identity of the Khoja community was combined with a *farman* (edict) of Aga Khan I, calling unto the Khoja community to drop the practice of *taqiyya*, adhering openly to the Nizari Isma'ili practices and beliefs without hiding them out of fear for persecution.[72] The Khoja communities according to the Imam, had developed a habit for posing as Sunni or Shi'a Muslims not to attract negative attention from their neighboring Muslim communities. Breaking with this, and practicing observance of the Nizari Isma'ili traditions openly would add further validity to the Imam's judicial claim to spiritual authority.

These two elements combined, the 'Aga Khan case' and the *farman* calling for an end of *taqiyya* together culminated into a widely recognized Imamate for Aga Khan I in India, an Imamate consisting almost completely of members of the Khoja caste. With the British recognition of his Imamate, Aga Khan I could assert his spiritual authority formally. Several groups within the Khoja community did not recognize the authority claimed by Aga Khan I despite the British legislative backing. These groups splintered from the Nizari Isma'ili Khojas, converting to Ithna'ashariyya or Sunni traditions.[73] The majority of the Khojas, however, seemed to continue to recognize the Imamate of Aga Khan I after his coming to the

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[69] Ali S. Asani, 'The Khojahs of South Asia, Defining a Space of their Own,' *Cultural Dynamics,* 13, 2 (July 2001) 160.

[70] Mukherjee, 'Being "Ismaili" and "Muslim"', 196.

[71] Note that, despite judicial definitions, a significant minority of Khojas rejected the authority of the Imam nonetheless. Although this group is a minority, not mentioning them would be a grave misrepresentation of the Khoja history and religious life. For more information on these strands of the Khoja tradition that chose for a Sunni or Ithna'ashariyya interpretation of their belief system, I refer to. Teena Purohit, *The Aga Khan Case: Religion and Identity in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[72] A. Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim', 106.

[73] Hyderabad was home to one of these communities. The community is very small but also identifies with the name Khoja. In this thesis, as stated before, Khoja refers to generally to the Khoja community recognizing the Imamate of the Aga Khans.

Indian subcontinent, understanding his claim to be legitimate as they had done in his absence previously. From this moment on, the policies issued by the Aga Khans would influence the culture and life of these Indian Khojas directly.

Policies of Aga Khan I were mostly focused on realigning the religious identity of the Khoja communities in India into a more unified Nizari Isma'ili religion. One of the ways he contributed to this was through the introduction of the *Mukhis* (officers) and the *Kamadias* (assistants) for the various *jama'at khanas* in India.[74] The *Mukhis* and their *Kamadias* were officials assigned personally by the Imam as leaders of the *jama'at khanas*. Leadership over the *jama'at khanas* is up until this day organized through the assignment of *Mukhis* and *Kamadias* by the Imam of the community.[75] These leaders aim to connect their respective communities with the Nizari Isma'ili religion as it was articulated by the Aga Khans.

Aga Khan I also stimulated a revival of literary production by the Nizari Isma'ili community, a production which had been mostly dormant for a great many years since the sacking of Alamut by the Mongolian armies in 1256 with exception of a small period in the 17th century referred to as the Anjudān revival.[76] Apart from stimulating these literary activities, Aga Khan I also began reorganizing the Nizari Isma'ili belief system, at times causing them to realign with practices of other Islamic traditions.

An example of this is found in the inheritance laws for the Khoja community. Before the coming of the Imam to India, Khoja daughters were not entitled to any inheritance of their father's property. In 1847 however, Aga Khan I issued a law for his followers which did allow for daughters to inherit a portion of their father's property, something which was previously unthinkable. Allowing for daughters to inherit brought the Khoja community closer in practice to the Ithna'ashariyya community of India, which maintained a similar practice in respect to female inheritance.[77] Policies like these brought the Khojas religiously closer to the other Muslim communities of India by either realigning with them, or by articulating their religious tenets more clearly.

Aga Khan I was succeeded by his son, Aqa 'Ali Shah Aga Khan II. Aga Khan II lead the community only for a brief four years after being appointed Imam by his father in 1881.

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[74] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 198.
[75] Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.
[76] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 171, 198-9.
[77] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim' 105.

However, in these four years Aga Khan II would both embolden the Nizari Isma'ili identity of the Khoja community, by initiating active and organized collection of the existing *ginānic* material.[78] Additionally, his policies also showed a further realignment and association with the other Islamic communities of India. A realignment mostly illustrated through his elected presidency over the Muhammadan National Association.[79]

Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III, son of Aga Khan II further stimulated these 'Islamizing' trends, combined with a further articulation of the Nizari Isma'ili doctrines. Sultan Muhammad Shah was designated Imam by his father at the age of eight, leading the community as Imam with the help of his guardian and paternal uncle, Aqa Jangi Shah.[80] As the 48th Imam of the Nizari Isma'ili line, Aga Khan III would lead his community for seventy-two years, through two world wars and the decolonization of India. His policies would guide the Khoja community through turbulent years in a way that would define a significant portion of the contemporary Khoja identity and position towards the religious other.

Aga Khan III committed himself to aligning the Khojas with the other Islamic communities of British India through his allegiance with various Islamic associations, political bodies and movements such as the Aligarh Movement and the establishment of Islamic university education.[81] Additionally, Aga Khan III issued a number of *farmans* (decrees) and constitutions which would formulate religious concepts of the Nizari Isma'ili faith in a wider Islamic and Shi'a context, rather than the Vaishnavite, Sant and Bhakti contexts in which they were expressed previously.[82]

The socio-political strategies of Aga Khan III seemed to support and stimulate Islamic unity and nationalism. Firstly, Aga Khan III attempted to issue all sorts of reforms in order to make Islam more modern. Here, modernity refers to the implementation of 'secular' values in the colonial public sphere, such as western education, participation in political life and the privatization of religion.[83] Partly due to these values, Aga Khan III was able to initiate close ties to Western powers.[84] One of the things he endeavored for were 'schools that both educate

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[78] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 199.
[79] Daftary, *The Isma'ilis, Their History and Doctrines,* 517.
[80] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 199.
[81] Explaining specifics of Indian Muslim Nationalism and the development of a separated Muslim India, or Pakistan, would be beyond the scope of this article.
[82] A. Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim', 112.
[83] John N. Hollister, *Islam and Shia's Faith in India (*New Delhi: Kanishka, 1988) 411-2.
[84] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 199.

Muslim boys and girls in their faith, and at the same time in modern secular science.'[85] It is important to note that Aga Khan III refers to Western education as 'secular', but at the same time desires to include Islamic religious education.

Additionally, he endeavored to contribute to the formation of a political identity for Muslims living in colonial India by negotiating the right for Muslims to be politically represented. These endeavors culminated into the foundation of the All India Muslim League, with the Imam becoming its first president, even though the league represented a great many number of Indian Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'a.[86] For Aga Khan III this Islamic political identity went further than merely the right to be politically represented. He was an explicit supporter of separation of India into a Muslim and a Hindu state.[87]

Other than these socio-political ventures of the Imam, Aga Khan III also issued *farmans* and constitutions that would bring the religious practices of the Khoja community closer to the practices of the major Islamic traditions of the Indian subcontinent. This Islamization of religious practices was materialized through a new network of schools that would educate Khoja youth. Among further measures, Aga Khan III also initiated a shift in the names of the Khoja community members. As per tradition, a newborn of the Khoja community would be granted a name by the Imam. Before the 20th century, many of these names were, what would now be called 'Hindu' in sound and origin. Around the turn of the century, however, these names become more and more uncommon, making place for Persian or Arabic sounding names.[88]

Through measures like these and others, Aga Khan III clearly steered away from unity between 'Hindus' and 'Muslims.' For him, the differences between these two were not only 'religious,' but also 'historical' and 'physical', even when the Muslim was only a recent convert to Islam.[89] A statement like this seems a radical turn from practices viewed earlier, where the Nizari Isma'ili Imams were more than willing to allow the Khoja community to retain certain local customs and religious practices. Instead of embracing this perceived

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[85] Aga Khan III 'Presidential Address to the All India Muhammadan Educational Conference: Delhi 1902' in Khursheed K. Aziz (ed.) *Aga Khan III, Selected Speeches and Writings of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah* (London: Routledge, 1998) 206.
[86] Purohit, 'Identity Politics Revisited; Secular and Dissonant Islam in Colonial South Asia,' 718.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim', 112.
[89] Mukherjee, 'Being "Ismaili" and "Muslim", 204. Citing Aga Khan III in an interview with the Times of India, 14-02-1907.

hybrid heritage, Aga Khan III directed the Khoja community culturally, socially, religiously and politically towards ideals of Islamic nationalism.

With the past experiences of the Khoja community with persecution because of their faith by Muslim rulers, one would expect the Khoja leadership to be wary of a nation which based itself on a specific religious identity. [90] One would instead expect the leadership to opt for a pluralistic and secular India, an India in which religious identity would not be an issue for citizenship and inclusion in society. A society organized like this could safeguard the religious freedom of a religious minority such as the Khoja Nizari Isma'ilis, observing religious tenets that would be deemed unorthodox by the majority of Islamic traditions.

An interpretation like this would however assume that a secular country is religiously neutral and objective, an interpretation which was very alien to the lived Indian interreligious realities during British rule as rule was based on division of religious communities.[91] Instead, when secularism is understood in a manner following Talal Asad and Saba Mahmood, opting for an Islamic India might make more sense. For them, secularism is 'the modern state's sovereign power to reorganize substantive features of religious life, stipulating what religion is or ought to be, assigning its proper content, and disseminating concomitant subjectivities, ethical frameworks, and quotidian practices.'[92] According to this understanding of secularism, supporting any form of nationalism by Aga Khan III would mean influencing which party would define the features of Indian religious life.

Analyzing the mobilization of Islamic separatism in colonial India in detail falls outside the scope of this research. Still, a brief glance at for example the Aligarh Movement, the Muhammadan National Association and the All India Muslim League shows a great involvement by the Aga Khans, predominantly in leadership roles. Additionally, leading figures of the separation movement include Khojas like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, generally described as the 'founder of Pakistan.'[93] The Khoja community commitment to Islamic separatism was not limited to supporting the movement, but also included taking the lead in

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[90] For example, persecutions by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in the 17th and 18th century. Shafique N. Virani, '"Taqiyya" and Identity in a South Asian Community' in *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 70, 1 (February 2011) 106-8.

[91] Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2007) 1; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism, Hindus and Muslims in India* (University of California Press, London 1994) 26-7.

[92] Talal Asad, "Trying to Understand French Secularism" as cited in Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age, A Minority Report,* 3.

[93] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim' 108.

this new political movement, potentially bringing them into a position to influence the manner in which this new Islamic state would manage its secular policy.

With this in mind, this apparent 'Islamization' might not be such a radical turn within the Nizari Isma'ili tradition at all, despite the hybrid religious practices of the Khoja community. Instead, in the words of Dominique-Sila Khan, we should see this development 'in the light of the extreme flexibility of Ismailism, which could without contradiction appear successively, or even simultaneously, as a strong ideology supported by political and military power and as a peaceful spiritual message emphasizing the need for inner religion.'[94] For her, whatever the origin of the hybrid elements in the Khoja religion, it was predominantly Nizari Isma'ili flexibility that allowed this hybridity to exist. Islamization of the Khoja community should therefore not be understood as a radical break from hybridity, but as traditional continuation of Nizari Isma'ili flexibility.

The extent of this flexibility echoes the dilemmas that face any religious minority group. In order for the Aga Khans to claim spiritual and legislative authority over the Khoja community, they had to emphasize the differences between Nizari Isma'ilism and the majority groups of Sunni and Ithna'ashariyya Islam. Khoja recognition of the Imamate of the Aga Khans contributed to this, but also Aga Khan II's efforts to collect the *gināns* and the introduction of the *Mukhis* and *Kamadias* further defined the Khoja community as being religiously different from the major Islamic traditions in India. Only through their unique religious identity would they be recognized as a minority by the British government, validating the necessity of self-rule apart from the legal structures offered by other Islamic communities.[95]

Simultaneously, the Aga Khans had to underline the Nizari Isma'ili connection with other Islamic traditions in order to be considered part of the Islamic community of the Indian sub-continent. Whether through conscious strategy or happy coincidence, the commitment to the development of the Islamic community through education, as well as involvement in the Islamic political cause seemed to have precisely this effect. The Khoja community was deemed Islamic enough by the major traditions for leadership to be conferred to Khojas in more than one instance. Through balancing these two strategies, consecutively or even simultaneously, the Aga Khans were able to both assert their spiritual leadership over the Khoja community, as well as to move the Khoja community into a position within the Islamic

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[94] Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 56.
[95] Mahmood, *Religious Differences in a Secular Age,* 67.

community in which he thought they would obtain certain control on the political secularism that was to come.[96]

Whatever the intention behind the strategies of Aga Khan III, the ideal that the Khoja community would easily find a place in the newly formed state of Pakistan proved less successful than imagined. Khoja leaders, especially Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had strived for Pakistan to become a liberal democracy in Western style; a safe haven which would provide Muslim traditions both big and small a place to practice their faith and culture. However, soon after its foundation, various parties attempted to form Pakistan into an Islamic state rather than merely a country that would provide a home for Muslim communities.[97] After some years, debates arose in Pakistan on which form of 'Islam' would be correct, marginalizing religious groups like the Ahmadiyya and the Nizari Isma'ilis who adhere to an interpretation of Islam that seem unorthodox for the Islamic majority groups.[98]

As mentioned before, during his eventful life Aga Khan III had moved to Europe, maintaining close ties with several Western powers. Eventually, in 1957, Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III passed away in his residence in Geneva, designating neither of his two sons but his grandson as successor of the Imamate.[99] At the age of 20 Shah Karim al-Hussaini Aga Khan IV, studying Islamic studies at Harvard University, became the 49th Imam of the Nizari Isma'ili community.

By the time Aga Khan IV became Imam of the community, the issue of Islamic nationalism and decolonization was no longer the prime issue facing the Nizari Isma'ili community. Large groups of Khojas had emigrated all over the world across the former British empire over the past century. The international spread of his community meant that policies of the Imam also had to be elevated from a national to an international level. The initial steps for this international orientation were already laid down by Aga Khan III, but Aga Khan IV drastically expanded the number and scope of Nizari Isma'ili institutions and organizations.

The institutions founded and directed by Aga Khan IV show a flexibility in strategy, similar to the flexibility evident from Aga Khan III's endeavors. Some of the institutions founded by Aga Khan IV aid in the articulation of the own religious identity through

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[96] Mahmood, *Religious Differences in a Secular Age,* 67-8.
[97] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim.'
[98] Ibid. 109.
[99] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 206.

centralization, education, research and the practice of religious ideals, while other institutions focus more on connecting with the global Islamic community through funding, mobilization and development. As with Aga Khan III, the institutions and policies of Aga Khan IV are again infused with 'secular' values mentioned previously, such as western education, participation in political life and the privatization of religion.[100]

Policies that contributed to the articulation of the Nizari Isma'ili faith include the foundation of the Institute of Ismaili Studies. This institute, based in London, funds and facilitates research on the topic of Islam and specifically Isma'ili religion, culture and history, funded by Aga Khan IV. Research done by the institute is often translated in publications widely spread throughout the Khoja community internationally.[101] Like the foundation of the Institute of Ismaili Studies, there are many other initiatives of Aga Khan IV that add to the Khoja self-identification as Nizari Isma'ilis. All these efforts come together in the issuing of the Ismaili Constitution.

The Ismaili Constitution is based on constitutions written for various East-African Khoja communities by order of Aga Khan III. These constitutions provided the East-African Khojas with defined limits and basic structures on which they would be able to derive their daily governance autonomously, while simultaneously providing them with a solid source for the articulation of religious identity. Absorption of Khoja communities into Ithna'ashariyya and Sunni groups stopped almost completely after these constitutions were issued.[102]

In order to homogenize the religious ideals, practices and organizational structure of the widely spread Nizari Isma'ili communities with one another, Aga Khan IV issued the Ismaili Constitution which came into effect in 1986. The Constitution of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims or Ismaili Constitution provides for all the Nizari Isma'ili communities a legal framework which works supplementary to national legal frameworks, underlining that citizenship to a country does not clash with the Nizari Isma'ili religious identity.[103] This explicit relation to state law seems a continuation of the 'secular' values developed by Aga Khan III in the 20th century. The constitution formalizes the spiritual and legal supremacy of the Imam in the first article by stating that the Imam has 'unfettered power and authority' over

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[100] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 206.

[101] All of the interlocutors whose residences I visited, both students and adults, had one or more publications of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in their homes.

[102] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 200

[103] Article 3.2' in Ismaili Constitution and Iqbal S. Akhtar, 'Religious Citizenship, the Case of the Globalised Khoja' in *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region,* 10, 2 (July 2014) 226.

all religious and community matters.[104] Additionally, it also connects the various institutions serving the Nizari Isma'ili community with one another in a complex, hierarchical and moreover universal structure, stimulating an international sense of community.[105]

Other than these measures aiming to bring the Nizari Isma'ili community closer together, Aga Khan IV also issued policies with the aim of improving ties between other Islamic traditions and the Nizari Isma'ili faith. This desire to connect with a larger Islamic community is mostly expressed through the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and its associated institutions which work on developing educational and economic improvement of the Islamic community, as well as the promotion of Islamic cultural expression through architecture and heritage.[106] The network of institutions developed by Aga Khan IV is expansive and diverse, but there are specific institutions in the network that focus explicitly on a broader Islamic tradition, rather than merely on Nizari Isma'ilism.

One of these is the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC). Through the AKTC, funds of the Imam are combined with funding from the World Monument Fund, the Ford Foundation and others in order to preserve, conserve and rehabilitate the 'historic Islamic cities in danger of collapse or of being overwhelmed by the exponential urban growth afflicting many cities in the developing world.'[107] Efforts funded through the AKTC have contributed significantly to the re-appreciation of traditional Islamic cities beyond the scope of tourism. Some of the projects funded by the AKTC have a specific significance for Nizari Isma'ili heritage (such as the restoration of the medieval Isma'ili stronghold of Masyaf in Syria,) but a great number of them relate to the development of a broader Islamic cultural identity.[108]

The articulation of a connection with other Islamic traditions through institutions is also present in direct proximity to the Hyderabad Khoja community. Hyderabad boasts several monuments and sites of heritage relating to the city's Islamic past. For both Sunnism, as well as various Shi'a sects, Hyderabad had long served as a vibrant center of culture and religion in the Deccan. One of the biggest sites of Islamic Heritage, the tombs of the Qutb Shahis, former rulers of the Hyderabad area, suffered long neglect and desolation. However,

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[104] Article 1.1' in Ismaili Constitution (July 11, 1990).
[105] M. Waseem, 'Introduction' in M. Waseem (ed.) *On Becoming an Indian Muslim, French Essays on Aspects of Syncretism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2003) 35.
[106] Malise Ruthven, 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions' in Daftary (ed.), *A Modern History of the Ismailis* (London 2011)189-219.
[107] M. Ruthven, 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions,' 215.
[108] Such as the tombs of Timur Shah, former king of Greater Afghanistan and Humayun, the second emperor of the Mughal Empire. M. Ruthven, 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions.' M. Ruthven, 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions,' 217.

the AKTC took it on itself to fund the restoration of the tombs, restoring this heritage site in a joint effort with the Andhra Pradesh State Department of Archaeology and Museums and the Quli Qutb Shah Urban Development Authority, even though the Qutb Shahis had no specific connection to Nizari Isma'ilism.[109]

Just as his predecessors, Aga Khan IV mobilized the Khoja community through institutions and policies that showed strategic flexibility. On the one hand, a great number of assets at the disposal to Aga Khan IV were utilized to further articulate a distinctive identity of the Nizari Isma'ili religion, while on the other hand the religions connection to other Islamic traditions was emphasized. However, where Aga Khan III still focused his mobilization on a national level, Aga Khan IV shifted to an international level. Articulation of religious identity shifted to an international system of institutions and a universal constitution for the Nizari Isma'ili community. Simultaneously, the association with a broader Islamic identity was emphasized through an international web of associations and institutions, showing an explicit commitment to a Pan-Islamic engagement of Aga Khan IV. Like the strategies of his predecessors, efforts of Aga Khan IV were charged with 'secular' values like those developed by Aga Khan III in the 20th century.

Summarizing, efforts to mobilize the Khoja community and generating a Nizari Isma'ili modernity by the Aga Khans show a multitude of strategic goals implying a tremendous flexibility of the Khoja identity. The Aga Khans initiated policies and formed institutions to further emphasize the uniqueness of the Khoja minority by actively articulating the Nizari Isma'ili religion. Both through legal frameworks of the British colonial government of India and through redesigning the infrastructure of Khoja religious life and the development of an international standard for the Nizari Isma'ili religion, the Khoja community developed an active identity as Nizari Isma'ili, leaving behind the inexplicit religious identity of the past. Additionally, to this emphasized uniqueness of the Khoja religious identity, the Aga Khans also stimulated a more intimate connection with a broad scale of Islamic traditions. First through the call for national unity of Muslims in India and the development of an Islamic political identity, and later through a Pan-Islamic engagement on both social-economic affairs as well as matters of heritage. '

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[109] 'Revitalisation to begin on Quli Qutb Shah archaeological park in Hyderabad, India' 10-01-2013 akdn.org, http://www.akdn.org/press-release/revitalisation-begin-quli-qutb-shah-archaeological-park-hyderabad-india (accessed on 03-03-2016).

This multiple and seemingly contradicting strategy seems to agree with an understanding of minority status as a social, legal, political and economic instrument.[110] Through the above described mobilization, the Aga Khans could position themselves and their communities in positions that improved their socio-political agency first on a national, and later on an international level. Underlining the uniqueness of the Nizari Isma'ili religion served as validation of the authority of the Imam and through his authority as opportunity for highly organized mobilization of the community. Connection to a broader Islamic identity, however, provided the Aga Khans and the Khojas with enlarged relevance, becoming representatives not only for a relatively small religious tradition, but for the entirety of Islamic traditions throughout the world.

Through this diversity of strategy, the Aga Khans tried to maintain the inherent flexibility of the religious identity of the Khoja community, despite the overall trend in colonial and post-colonial settings to categorize a religion as 'one thing or another,' formalizing and essentializing religious distinctions.[111] At the same time, the Aga Khans also strongly made the decision for emphasizing the label Islam which provided the community with more political relevance on an international level. The following paragraphs explore the way in which these strategies translate to leadership articulations in current times.

A Post-Modern Perspective, speeches

The previous paragraphs showed the importance of religious articulations in the traditional literature of *gināns* and the implied articulations in the socio-political strategies of the Aga Khans. However, the majority of my informants would not refer to *ginānic* literature to explain to me the Aga Khani ideals, nor would they scrutinize the modernizing policies of him and his predecessors. Instead, one of my informants, Zafar, would stand up in the middle of one of our conversations on the interreligious contacts of the Khoja community to show me a large, beautifully illustrated book. Zafar kept the book on one of the side tables in his living room, a visible location which was hard to miss. With a proud smile he said. "I don't know everything of course, but I regularly look up details in this book."[112] The illustrated book was a collection of speeches and addresses given by the Aga Khan and articles referring to Isma'ili history.

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[110] Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age,* 66.
[111] Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age,* 69.
[112] Interview Zafar, Hyderabad 27-12-2015.

These paragraphs will analyze the articulated interreligious ideals within these speeches and addresses, specifically in one address that was deemed as the most representative for the Aga Khans leadership. Further details about the relevance and scope of this address will be given later. First it seems important to elaborate a bit more about the concept of these speeches in general. In the previous paragraphs the processes of institutionalization of the Nizari Isma'ili community were summarized. The complex network of institutions, councils, boards and comities was defined as a Nizari Isma'ili interaction with modernity. In the past decennia, these infrastructural and cultural developments of the Nizari Isma'ili community enabled the Aga Khan to articulate his ideals on religious identity and interreligious interaction directly in the form of spoken words and to transmit these articulations to large proportions of his diasporic followers. This relation to Nizari Isma'ili modernization, being the result of this process of modernization, makes these addresses in a sense post-modern. These articulations go beyond the sterile and clean institutionalization of the Nizari Isma'ili interaction with modernity by enabling community members to feel connected to the Imam on more intimate level, hearing his voice and seeing his face. Many of my interlocutors, like Zafar, interact closely with the materials and excerpts produced from these speeches, allowing them access to the Imam in a way their pre-modern Khoja ancestors could hardly imagine.

The current Imam has been especially active to articulate religious guidelines through medium of the spoken word. Speeches and public addresses by the Aga Khan are followed meticulously by the Khoja community of Hyderabad, either through transcriptions such as the example of Zafar, or through internet broadcasts, watched by the elderly and the young alike.[113] These public addresses are numerous and diverse. However, one specific speech was suggested to me by two separate interlocutors, and was considered representative by several other interlocutors.[114] The speech they mentioned was the 12 November Elizabeth Jodidi lecture given at the Weatherhead Institute, Harvard, by the Aga Khan in 2015, which addressed the issue of interreligious interaction directly.[115] The decision for featuring this speech is based on the fact that it was well known among my Hyderabadi Interlocutors, as well as that it addresses a crowd that consists mostly of outsiders (non-Khojas and non-Nizari Isma'ilis). Because of this outsider audience, which is considered to have only limited

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[113] Interview Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015 and interview with Aga Khan Academy student Shaila, 31-10-2015.

[114] Interview Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015, Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 27-12-2015.

[115] Aga Khan 'Transcript: Jodidi Lecture by His Highness the Aga Khan "The Cosmopolitan Ethic in a Fragmented World" http://wcfia.harvard.edu/jodidi/2015/transcript-aga-khan.

knowledge on the Nizari Isma'ili religion, the Aga Khan elaborates on his religious identity explicitly.

It is important to take note of the distribution of these moments of articulation. Like other public addresses from the Aga Khan, this address was made available to the community through the website of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). Publishing these lectures and addresses in one centralized (digital) location makes these sources easily accessible for Khoja community members and other Nizari Isma'ilis throughout the world. Additionally, by publishing these transcripts on this centralized location also influences the context in which they are presented. Nizari Isma'ilis, like the Khoja community members, who wish to access the transcript of the Aga Khan's Jodidi Lecture will find the source in a database of Aga Khani public addresses instead of finding it in a database of Jodidi Lectures.[116] This centralized infrastructure of publication echoes the centralization of the global Nizari Isma'ili religious community brought about by the institutionalization of the community in modern times. In the following paragraphs, the Jodidi lecture is analyzed for the interreligious ideals articulated in them.

"I was probably having too much fun at Wigglesworth or Leverett House to venture out to something so serious as the Jodidi Lecture."[117] The Aga Khan speaks in a relaxed and informal tone about his time at Harvard University reminiscing about how he was in many aspects an average Harvard student, playing sports and not working exceptionally hard.

During his address, the Aga Khan identifies himself on multiple levels and in various contexts. His self-identification as the Imam of the (Nizari) Isma'ili community was first and foremost of these. However, he also specifically positioned himself as a spokesperson of the developing world. In the wording of the Aga Khan, the AKDN 'centers its attention in the developing world' As a result of this focus developing world, he explains his own inclination to be predominantly a 'developing world's perspective.' To underline this position, he adds that his Jodidi lecture has 'little to do with the industrialized West.'[118] This articulation of an identity that is specifically non-western echoes the transnational trait of the Nizari Isma'ili identity mentioned before. The fact that the Aga Khan's primary residence is currently in

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[116] Additional to the AKDN publication, the Jodidi Lecture is also published on the website of the Jodidi Lecture series.
[117] Aga Khan, 'Transcript: Jodidi Lecture by His Highness the Aga Khan.'
[118] Ibid., 'Jodidi Lecture by His Highness the Aga Khan.'

Gouvieux, France and that he himself is a British citizen is not attributed any relevance in his articulated self-identification.

From this geographically unbound position, the Aga Khan used the remainder of his address to reflect on what he calls the 'cosmopolitan ethic'. This cosmopolitan ethic featured in his address as the solution to what he identified as one of the biggest threats facing processes of harmonious globalization. The Aga Khan posed that 'global promise' has been matched by a 'tribal wariness' caused by an increased amount of cross-cultural confrontations. He stressed that technological progress in means of communication has facilitated an improvement of humanity's ability to live together harmoniously.

In order to counter this tribal wariness, the Aga Khan suggested a 'cosmopolitan ethic,' which entails an active engagement with the problems of communities around the world, especially with the challenges faced by the 'developing countries' in the world. This engagement should on the one hand transcend national and community borders, but on the other hand respect local diversity. In the wording of the Aga Khan, a cosmopolitan ethic entails 'a readiness to work across frontiers of distinction and distance without trying to erase them.'[119] This diversity is not only found among communities of different religious identities. The Aga Khan pointed out specifically in his address that also the Nizari Isma'ilis themselves were highly diverse, and that their 'daily lives were deeply distinctive and decidedly local.'[120]

Despite these local differences and challenges posed by cross-cultural encounters, the Aga Khan underlined that a harmonious globalized society requires a deep curiosity and acceptance of cultural differences. He emphasized the need for 'true dialogue' on both a personal level but also on in institutional spheres. Recognizing difficulties that may arise from these dialogues, he called for the ambassadors of these dialogues to practice patience and endurance. Referring to a phrasing of the former Governor General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson, he urges his audience to 'listen to their neighbor, even when they may not particularly like him.'[121] The importance of this phrase in his address was hard to miss for his audience as he repeats 'Is that message clear? You listen to people you don't like!'[122]

The Aga Khan closed his address on this cosmopolitan ethic with a theological statement, which constitutes an articulated theology of religious and cultural diversity.

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.

> A passage from the Holy Quran that has been central to my life is addressed to the whole of humanity. It says: 'Oh Mankind, fear your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women...' At the very heart of the Islamic faith is a conviction that we are all born 'of a single soul.' We are 'spread abroad' to be sure in all of our diversity, but we share, in a most profound sense, a common humanity[123]

This theology of pluralism, which featured as the Aga Khan's closing argument for the need of a cosmopolitan ethic, can be understood as being an inclusivistic theology of the other.[124] Theology of the other refers to the manner in which interreligious differences are theologically explained in various domains such as truth, salvation and others. Through articulations like these, the Aga Khan reminds both those who belong to the Nizari Isma'ili faith as well as those who don't that the Nizari Isma'ili communities like the Khojas of Hyderabad understand diversity (both cultural as well as religious) theologically to be inherent to mankind, and that these differences cannot deny a 'common humanity.'

As with the other media of articulation, also the Jodidi address of the Aga Khan showed certain flexibilities when it comes to interreligious and intercultural encounters. On the one hand, the Aga Khan was very clear about his own religious identity as a Nizari Isma'ili Muslim and a spiritual leader. This connection with a broader Islamic tradition was repeated in the theological argumentation for his theology of the other, featuring the idea of unity of soul not merely as a Nizari Isma'ili tenet, but attributing it to Islam in general. Simultaneously, the Aga Khan also underlined the presence of diversity among and within nations, recognizing significant xenophobia between these diverse communities. However, despite of local difficulties and frictions among communities, the Aga Khan reiterated the need for perseverance and active curiosity in facing the differences between communities in order to achieve a harmoniously globalized world.

Relating to the two perspectives on minority identity mentioned before, the flexibility with which the Aga Khan seems to utilize the Nizari Isma'ili minority identity strategically fits the socio-legal perspective as offered by Mahmood. On the one hand the Imam underlined the uniqueness of the Nizari Isma'ili religious identity, especially when introducing himself as the Imam of the community. On the other hand, the Imam underlined the connection with

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Griffith, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Oxford 2001) xiv.

other Islamic traditions and acted as a spokesperson for Islam in a broader sense when discussing broader topics of globalization. Additionally, the Aga Khan also displayed an awareness of the socio-psychological influences as explored by Stryker and Serpe. The Aga Khan's repeated call for dialogue and curiosity, even towards 'people you don't like', suggests an awareness that in local contexts moments of social contact influence processes of interreligious interactions and ideas of unity.

The three sources of Aga Khani articulation featured in Part 1 of this research, the traditional *gināns,* the institutional bodies of modernity and the post-modern media of the spoken word showed an articulated religious identity strongly connected to a broader Islamic identity in general, but that was simultaneously utilized to underline the uniqueness of the Nizari Isma'ili community to which the Hyderabadi Khojas belong. These two identifications are continuously balanced in the various articulations by the Aga Khan and his predecessors, sometimes in seemingly contradicting ways. These strategic maneuvers were shown to be recurring for the articulations of the social tier of the Nizari Isma'ili leadership. Whatever the strategic maneuvers however, the Jodidi lecture emphasized an ongoing commitment to interreligious curiosity and connection as an ideal for the Nizari Isma'ili community based on theological and ideological arguments. Added to this is the ideal of pan-Islamic unity expressed by the Nizari Isma'ili leadership since the institutionalization of the community in modern times and maintained until present day.

As stated before, the aim of this research is to explore the way in which these articulations are translated to interreligious realities for the local Hyderabadi Khoja community, and what other agents might influence these interreligious realities other than leadership articulations. Many of the ideals of religious identity and interreligious contacts of the Nizari Isma'ili leadership were developed in relatively recent. Flexibility was shown to be part a traditional part of the Khoja identity, but the drastic shifts might conflict the local sentiments of the Khoja community in Hyderabad. As such, the way my interlocutors remember the past, and the influence these memories have on their current issues of identity will feature prominently in the exploration of the interreligious realities of the local community.

Additionally, in line with the socio-psychological perspective on social interaction and minority identity, the influence of several identity markers of the Hyderabadi Khoja

community are highlighted from the interactions with community members. The strong connection between social interaction and identity might cause the theological and ideological elaborations of the Aga Khan to inspire stronger ties between Khoja community members and their neighboring communities, but other identity markers like values and practices might still be cause for fragmentation.

Furthermore, echoing the Aga Khans awareness of local differences and difficulties, geographical factors will be explored with equal significance. Despite the affinity for local realities displayed in the Aga Khani articulations, the pan-Islamic connection and interreligious curiosity of the Nizari Isma'ili community is mostly formulated in the context of a globalized world and a cosmopolitan ethic. In order to identify with these articulations, a connection with a cosmopolitan ethic seems essential, a connection which might be more or less significant depending on the geographical position of the Khoja informants featured in this research. Part 2 of this research will explore the way in which these additional domains influence the more active members of the community

Part 2, Active Members

She sported a weary half-smile while we reflected on our earlier visit to a Sunni madrasa in the city which focuses on interreligious dialogue as part of an interfaith program hosted by the Henry Martyn Institute. I was sitting on the rooftop of the Henry Martyn Institute with Malika, a religious education teacher for the Nizari Isma'ili community in her early-thirties. Malika was clearly moved by her encounter with the madrasa's *maulana* (chief scholar) and the manner in which she disagreed with his statements on interreligious dialogue and religious pluralism. When I ask her about her experiences during the visit, she gathers her courage with a breath and admits: "For me, the hardest part of interfaith dialogue is reconciling with my fellow Muslims."[125]

Malika is affiliated with the Secondary Teacher Education Programme (STEP), one of the many institutions, associations and foundations engaged with the education and development of the religious community. All of these institutions are directly or indirectly funded by the Nizari Isma'ili community through the Aga Khan and function as instruments for educating the Khoja community in affairs of (global) citizenship and religion. The STEP Program focuses specifically on the religious development of teenagers and preteens. Remarkably, Malika was not the only interlocutor actively involved with the network of Nizari Isma'ili institutions who displayed clear signs of discomfort and hesitation when interacting with the Muslim community of Hyderabad, despite the leadership's clear call for an open tolerance and active curiosity towards their fellow Muslims. An example of this is given by Shaila, a seventeen-year-old student of the Aga Khan Academy, a private international institution of high quality education. During one of our conversations, I asked her about her interactions with other Muslims. She admitted with a sigh: "Sometimes you just don't feel like having to explain yourself over and over again, right?"[126] She preferred not sharing too much about her own religious identity with other Muslims in the city.

This position towards communities they understand as having, in principle, the same religion, seems to be a break from the interfaith tenets articulated by the community leadership and the Aga Khan, which were shown to focus on a religious self-understanding as Islamic and a desire to connect to a wider range of Islamic traditions. In short, there is discrepancy between official statements and the articulated experienced reality by those actively involved with the Nizari Isma'ili institutions, the active members. This discrepancy suggests that self-

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[125] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad, 29-10-2015.
[126] Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Shaila, 31-10-2015.

identification and the interreligious reality of the active members are not solely formed through the top-down identity policies of the community leadership. The following chapter analyses three additional domains apart from Imami authority.

First of these are the historical memory articulations of the active members, the way the active members of the community recollect their past. Such articulations and the methodologies for interaction with the past are closely linked to how someone understands him/herself in the present, which in turn is closely linked to interreligious relations derived from this understanding. The second domain featured in this part is the domain of the liberal/secular values of the group which were developed in the transnational setting of the Nizari Isma'ili leadership. However, translating these values to local contexts sometimes causes these values to clash with those of groups neighboring the Khoja community. Last of these domains is geography. The Nizari Isma'ili community to which the Khojas of Hyderabad belong are often understood as a community without territory, and as such geographical influences tend to be of secondary focus in Isma'ili studies. The transnational space of the Nizari Isma'ilis however is not an empty space and the geography of this space influences the Khoja community. Simultaneously, the more active members of the Khoja community are also part of the local geographical context of Hyderabad. The combination of this double geographical context results in a complex mix of geographical belonging that influences Khoja identity issues and interreligious reality.

Historical Memory Articulations

The Khoja community members have a well-developed sense for history. This is especially the case with the Khojas actively involved with the institutions of their community. The development of this sense for history, or historical memory, is generated through publications and educational programs by the Aga Khani institutions as well as through other sources. Some of these sources are of similar formal nature such as the *ginānic* literature canon which feature in the devotional sessions of the *jama'at khana*. Other sources are more informal such as recollections of the past among family members and friends. Whatever its source, memory is closely related to identity, and as such features in this research as one of the key domains of influence on everyday interreligious realities of the community.

The concept of historical memory has been thoroughly discussed over the course of the 20th and 21st century, and definitions and methodologies still vary greatly.[127] For this research, I define historical memory as the recollection of the past by my interlocutors through methodologies taught to them by the various institutions of the Nizari Isma'ili community. The contents of the historical memory of the active members of the Khoja community however is evasive, personal and fluid. This evasiveness is a result of continual interplay between three agents that influence the form and contents of these memories, namely persistent cultural traditions, the ingenuity of memory makers and the subversive interests of memory consumers.[128] Tackling the fluidity of the historical memory of the Khoja community is something that is beyond the ambition and scope of this thesis. Instead, this thesis will focus on the articulations of historical memory made by the Khoja informants, as well as the methodologies which the Nizari Isma'ili 'memory makers' introduce to the active members of the community. In other words, the way the Khojas are taught to interact with the past, and how they articulate their recollection of the past.

The definition of historical memory in this thesis is derived from Jan Assman's differentiation between types of collective memories of the past that reflect the agents that influence them. Historical memory refers to the 'official' historical narrative.[129] 'Official' should be understood here as 'in line with the memory making authorities' of a society or community. This does not mean that historical memory is understood as an untouched result of the ingenuity of those memory makers, for they are also subject to the persistence of cultural elements. Also, it would be unrealistic to say that these memory makers can bypass the interests of the memory consumers altogether. However, emphasizing the role of memory makers in the formation of historical memory reflects the influence that is derived from their official status and the memory making tools that are made available to them.

Currently, the most up to date teaching methodologies of the memory makers of the Khoja community have only been widely introduced to the active members of the community and the youngsters they educate.[130] As such, the perspective of historical memory, with its

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[127] Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean, Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann, and many others interact with the concept of memory in a wide variety of approaches, using a variety of terminology ranging from 'historical consciousness', 'collective memory', 'cultural memory' and 'historical memory'. These approaches have their differences but the overlap between them is problematic for using them simultaneously.

[128] Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies' in *History and Theory*, 41, 2, (May 2002) 179.

[129] Jan Assman, *Moses the Egyptian, The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998) 25.

[130] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015.

primacy to the influence of the memory makers, predominantly reflects the context in which the active members articulate their memories. For contextualization of articulations of memories by the passive members, who only had limited or no access to these methodologies, a mixture of A. Assman's and J. Assman's concepts of 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory' are better equipped. Further details of these approaches to memory are elaborated in the chapter 'communicative and cultural memory articulations.'

The Khojas rely heavily on educational programs organized by themselves for the development of their historical memory, because the history lessons of India barely touch topics that Khoja community members would fully identify with. Instead, they are inclined to relate to Isma'ili historiography and the study of the history of the Nizari Isma'ili narrates the past of a religious community that transcends borders of states and nations as far back as the Fatimid Caliphate of Egypt and the mystical 'assassins' of Alamut in Persia. Both my student and adult interlocutors would refer to this transnational history as 'their' history, seeing themselves as heirs to the Nizari Isma'ili heritage more than anything else.[131]

The current methodology used by the Khoja community is the outcome of a historiography that was transformed drastically over the past. Most of the pre-modern physical annals of the Nizari Isma'ili history were lost during the Mongol sacking of the former headquarters of the Imam in Alamut, Persia.[132] As a result, during the remainder of pre-modern times, the Nizari Isma'ili history was narrated to the Khoja community mostly through anecdotal and mystical accounts, passed on orally mostly for the purpose of conversion and the active manufacturing of an identity.[133] It was not until the mobilization efforts of the Aga Khans that the Isma'ili historical sources were reassembled into a central body of knowledge through institutes like the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Currently, the Institute of Ismaili Studies is actively involved with the historical education of the Khoja community through the ITREB (Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board), which provides the community with educators trained in special programs, most significantly the STEP (Secundary Teacher Education Programme) program. Through the STEP program, community members are taught to educate the youngsters of the

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[131] Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Shaila, 31-10-2015, interview with Malika, Mumbai, 21-11-2015, interview with Zafar, 27-12-2015.

[132] The Mongolian conquerors of Persia sacked the Nizari Isma'ili strongholds in order to root out the instability they had brought to the region before.

[133] Virani, '"Taqiyya" and Identity in a South Asian Community', 102.

community on topics of religion, citizenship and history, treating these subjects not as separated, but as connected fields of study.[134] For this thesis, the teachers trained in the STEP program are considered active members of the community. They work for a community institution as their profession, and this institution aims to stimulate the religious identity of the Khoja community.

Remarkably, the teacher educators of the STEP program are themselves not necessarily of a Nizari Isma'ili background. These teacher educators are instead recruited from wide-ranging backgrounds, based first and foremost on their teaching ability.[135] In the sense of academic background, the teacher educators are expected to have qualifications on a post-graduate level in either Religious Education, Islamic Studies or Humanities, 'enabling [them] to assist the Programme Leader in the integration of the pedagogic and content aspects of STEP'. Additionally, the educators are expected to have certain familiarity with the institutional framework in which ITREB operates.[136] Other than this, the educators are not required to have any further affinity with the Nizari Isma'ili community, indicating a certain privatization of religion and appreciation of secular education methods. These indications imply a hint to the 'secular values' put forward in other policies and institutions founded by the Aga Khans.

The infrastructure of the ITREB religious and historical education shows a mixture of secular tools used within the rationale of a religiously defined historical memory. The ITREB serves mostly to provide community members with a developed Nizari Isma'ili religiosity. Because of this ambition, the historical memory provided by ITREB is framed alongside the parameters of the religious community, concerning itself with questions about 'what was our community in the past?' 'what is our community now?' and 'what can we expect of our future?' Moreover, education provided by ITREB is designed to grant insight into the processes that have led to answers to these questions past.

This is best illustrated with the example of the account of Malika on her classes on the 'assassin myth' of the Nizari Isma'ili community. She told me about her experiences teaching

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[134] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015.
[135] Job vacancy 'Teacher Educator Secondary Teaching Education Programme' https://jobs.theguardian.com/job/6231732/teacher-educator-secundary-teacher-education-program/, 04-01-2016. (accessed on 12-03-2016).
[136] Phone interview with Malika, Utrecht, 09-03-2016 and 'Teacher Educator Secundary Teaching Education Programme' https://jobs.theguardian.com/job/6231732/teacher-educator-secundary-teacher-education-program/.

about the 'assassin myth' when I was meeting her in Mumbai. One of the topics she was teaching her students was the topic of the 'assassin myth.' This myth signifies a collection of misconceptions concerning the history of the Nizari Isma'ili community during the Alamut period in Persia.[137] These ideas originate from Islamic heresiographers that aimed to denounce the unorthodox sect through exaggerated writings dating from Abbasid (750-1258) times. This religious propaganda against the Nizari Isma'ilis was included into Marco Polo's writing, which in turn led to the popularization of these conceptions in Europe, leaving a lasting imprint on European imagining of the Nizari Isma'ili community, which up until today remains a recurring theme in popular culture.[138]

The exact definitions of the 'assassin myths' are vague, but there are certain iconic recurring traits to the story. The 'assassin myths' describe the workings of the mountain fortresses from which the Nizari Isma'ilis operated during the Alamut period. According to the myth, the leader of the fortress would be a mysterious man called the 'Old Man on the Mountain,' often portrayed as a sly, wise and very powerful old man, who would train his disciples to become notorious assassins of unquestionable loyalty. The Old Man on the Mountain (sometimes identified as Hasan Sabbah, the first leader of Alamut, at other times referring to Rashid al-Din Sinan, the Syrian Nizari Isma'ili leader whose encounters with the crusaders invigorated the western 'assassin' myth) would instill this unquestionable loyalty in his disciples by temporarily exposing the young 'assassins to-be' to immense bodily pleasures of orgies with a harem trained specially for this purpose and using heavy doses of drugs. The Old Man would then afterwards, after the devotee regained his senses, explain that the brief experience was a glimpse of the paradise of God from which Adam and Eve were cast down, and that the devotee would return to this place after death if they served God well through loyalty to the Old Man.

These drug infused disciples would then set out as instruments of the Old Man on the Mountain, spying for him and committing spectacular murders of important political figures of the factions opposing the Old Man.[139] These murders are often depicted as suicidal acts which from which the assassin had no hope to escape, striking in highly guarded places such

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[137] The Alamut period lasted from 1090 until 1256, named as such because Nizari Isma'ili supporters of the Imam, and later the Imams themselves ruled a Nizari Isma'ili state/faction from this fortress as well as others spread through Persia and to a lesser extent Syria.

[138] Examples range from videogames like the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, the American drama series *Marco Polo*, or the 1981 novel *Alamut* by the Slovenian author Vladimir Bartol, to name but a few.

[139] The English word 'assassin' is derived from the Arabic slang which was used by the heresiographers to sometimes depict the Nizari Isma'ilis, namely *hashishin* or user of hashish. Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 13.

as a throne room or royal pavilion in an army-camp. In the typical 'assassin-myth' narration, the assassin would not resist capture and would freely subject himself to torture and punishment without ever breaking loyalty to his master, believing that this loyalty would be his guarantee ticket for entering paradise once more.

Few to no Khojas today would identify with these stories of a sexualized, drug-infused community of drilled assassins and trained harem slaves, and many aspects of these myths were based on very little to no historical evidence whatsoever. However, for a long period of time this narrative confirmed the orientalist projections of Western observers on the group.[140] Additionally, the resilience of the heresiographic accounts created a discourse around the Nizari Isma'ili identity which defined the religious tradition as having nothing to do with Islam or spirituality, at times even being styled as the antithesis of Islam.[141] With such a strong and negatively charged discourse around the Nizari Isma'ili identity, a lot of effort has been put in the debunking of these myths through historical scholarly exercise by the Institute of Ismaili Studies. Additionally, Khoja teens are also exposed to these myths and deal with them and their historical context not only to become familiar with them but also to come to terms with their existence.

Malika explained to me how she would introduce the touchy topic of the 'assassin myths' to her students. "What we do is we invite our students to imagine themselves in the position of various peoples living in the time of Alamut. We ask them to imagine being a neighboring Sultan, or a scholar serving such a Sultan, or anyone else who might have encountered the Isma'ilis of Alamut."[142] Then, once the students have assumed these roles, they would be exposed to various encounters and 'cases' in which a confrontation with the Nizari Isma'ili residents of the hillforts would be simulated, including reports of drastic conversion in the cities and spectacular assassinations of allies. Through these games and simulations, the students are then invited to reflect upon the documentation and treatises written about the assassins, and to explain why the author would have written what he has about the Nizari Isma'ilis.

Additional to exercises like these, which stimulate the Nizari Isma'ili students to come to terms with both hostilities of the past as well as the present, the students are also introduced

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[140] Western scholars have long looked at Islamic and Middle-Eastern communities through a colored lens, portraying these communities and their cultures as feminine, irrational, sexualized and deceitful. The 'assassin myth' fits neatly with such an understanding of Islamic culture. Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

[141] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 10-11.

[142] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015.

to more contemporary works on Nizari Isma'ili history. In this combined approach, the students are educated not only to connect more readily with other Islamic communities, but also to stand firm in their own identity because of their historical understanding of the past. As such, this method reflects the goals of the community leadership to both develop a solid understanding of the community identity, as well as to generate a 'pan-Islamic' reality for the community members.

Malika herself was impressed by the effect these methods had on her pupils. Most of the students seemed to attain an understanding of the motivations that moved these authors to write what they wrote about the Nizari Isma'ili community. Some students would explain that they were able to imagine the fear with which these authors had to deal with or the confusion caused by religious differences.[143] Although the students stood firmly in their own understanding of the Nizari Isma'ili history, Malika could see in them that they also had some sense of sympathy for the authors of the past.[144]

This case of the 'assassin myth' education shows the complexity of the methodologies introduced by the historical memory makers of the Khoja community. Teachers of ITREB do not merely educate the pupils on past events of the religious community to enable a sort of extended pool of experience for them. Instead, teachers like Malika engage their students with the past to grant them an insight into the processes that led up to past events. Additionally, this awareness of the 'historicity' of the past is not only used to explain the past, but also to embolden the students' confidence of their own identity as Nizari Isma'ilis. Furthermore, the awareness displayed for historical processes is simultaneously developed as well as utilized. Instead of allowing the students to feel victimized by the misrepresentations made by other Muslims and Westerners in the past, which would lead to a further estrangement between Khojas and other religious communities in the city, Malika and her colleagues aim to counter this sentiment by challenging their students to sympathize with the heresiographers and Sultans, rather than seeing them as the other.

The effectiveness of this approach became immediately apparent through interactions with (former) students of Malika and students of other STEP teachers of ITREB. I encountered the traces of this influence throughout my interactions with the students of the Aga Khan Academy in Hyderabad. One afternoon two of Malika's former students, Shaila and Amina, both around sixteen years old, were showing me around on the Academy campus.

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[143] Interview with Aga Khan Academy Student Amina, Hyderabad 31-10-2015.
[144] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015.

I asked the two girls about religious diversity on the premises. It had struck me how the vast majority of the Academy's student body consisted of Khoja students, despite the articulated ambition of the school to host students no matter their creed or religion. When I asked them about this they confirmed that the number of non-Khojas was limited, but 'rising steadily' ever since the school was founded in 2011.[145]

Triggered by this question, the two girls started to talk among themselves about the various backgrounds present in their classes, slowly realizing that especially other Muslims were barely represented in their classes. Both of them, but especially Shaila, the more talkative of the two, displayed a clear disappointment because of this small number. "It would be good to have more Muslims in our classes. There are two girls of who I know that they are Muslim but… Who knows, maybe there is more than we know?"[146] That last question was phrased hopefully, but Amina could respond little more than a confirming nod.

The small number of students of other Islamic traditions is probably caused by a combination of reasons. One of which being that the pilot classes for the Aga Khan Academy consisted purely of Khoja students.[147] By starting with a homogenous student body, the Academy could more easily try certain infrastructural and procedural matters without having to consider the varying needs of students of various backgrounds.[148] Additionally, the Aga Khan Academy is not permitted to produce any form of active marketing through commercials and such as part of its own policies. The reasons behind this policy are equally diverse but the main reason appears to be to avoid disruption of – and rivalry with – local educational initiatives that might have less funding available than the Aga Khan Academy.[149]

Altogether, the small number of students of other Islamic traditions than Nizari Isma'ilism might be explained as a symptom of an ineffectiveness of the methodology of the historical memory makers. When explained like this, the historical memory of the active members of the community only has a limited influence on the institutional realities of the

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[145] Walk with Shaila and Amina, 31-10-2015. The junior classes started one year before the senior classes. The first intake of students was in August 2011 for the Junior School and 2012 for the Senior School, including the residential program.
[146] Walk with Shaila and Amina, 31-10-2015.
[147] Interview with Shaila, 31-10-2015, Interview with Nadira, Admissions of the Aga Khan Academy, 31-10-2015, Interview with Siraj, student of the Aga Khan Academy, 31-10-2015.
[148] For example, initially the Academy facilitated weekly visits to the *jama'at khana* for Khoja students that desired to join the devotional sessions. If the student-body had been more diverse, the Academy would have been obliged to arrange similar facilities for the other religious students as well. During the pilot, it was quickly discovered that the Khoja students abused the transportation facilities to get free transport to the city center for leisure purposes and as such the program was cancelled.
[149] Interview with Nadira, Admissions of the Aga Khan Academy, 31-10-2015.

community. Instead, understanding historical memories like these to influence the intentions of community members first and foremost seems more reasonable. Both the institution as well as the students themselves articulated a clear willingness for a connection with the other Islamic traditions of the city without any reserve caused by hostilities of the past. As such, it seems that the historical memory of the past interreligious hostilities, articulated by ITREB is echoed by the articulations of the many active members of the community consisting of teachers, students and organizational staff.

In relation to the policies of the community's leadership, the manner in which the Khoja memory makers tried to develop historical memories showed certain resemblance to the course defined by the Aga Khan in general. Just as the Aga Khans strived to stimulate, the educational programs of the community simultaneously try to develop a stronger identity as Nizari Isma'ilis as well as to connect with other Islamic traditions, preventing past differences to antagonize contemporary allegiances. However, this approach of a historical memory making did not only affect the religious identity of the Khoja community and its interreligious affairs in the ways explicitly intended.

Developing historical memories is not necessarily a neutral and objective process, even when the developed memory promotes a neutral and objective stance towards the past. Instead, a historical is in a sense a normative instruction, concerned with the 'correct' way to interact with the past, and how to present it.[150] The way the students, teachers and staff-members reflect on the past by sympathizing with the various parties involved in a past event is seen as the 'proper' way to interact with this past. As a result of this, the set of normative institutions that educate the active members of the Khoja community in how they should interact with the past develops into a 'culture of history'.[151] This 'culture of history' is bound primarily to the community in which it was developed, creating a community bias for what is the 'correct' way to interact with the past.

It would be wrong to understand the ambitions of the development of a historical memory for the Khoja community, which are to promote confidence in the identity of the

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[150] Roy Rosenzweig and David P. Thelen, *The Presence of the Past, Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 3-4.

[151] Bernard Jensen, 'Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History' in Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean, *Public History and Heritage Today, People and their Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK 2009) 52. Jensen translates *Geschichtskultur* as 'historical culture'. However, to prevent confusion about the temporal dimension of *Geschichtskultur,* namely as something of the present and not the past, I prefer the translation 'culture of history.'

community as well as to come to terms with past hostilities, as being unique for the Khoja community. Quite the contrary, this development of a set of historical memories is comparable to the memories which are developed in history classes in European countries when they deal with World War history or American education on the Civil War. Still, in local contexts of the Khoja community like the Hyderabad context, this specific 'culture of history' might clash with those developed by the other communities of the city.

In comparison, I visited one of the more renowned Sunni educational centers in Hyderabad, the Al Mahadul Aali Al Islam Hyderabad, Institute for Research and Specialization in Islamic Sciences founded by Sunni Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani. The madrasa is renowned mostly because of its innovative mixture of classical Islamic education combined with courses in so called 'secular education' as well as for its interreligious engagement.[152] The madrasa is one of the few institutions of Sunni education on high-school level with a copy of all four Hindu Vedas as well as several bible copies. During my visit to the madrasa, the son of the maulana, Maulana Omer Abideen explained that the teens are taught about the other religious communities of the city through exposure to scripture and doctrine of the other communities, as well as through history lessons and meetings with members of the other communities.[153]

Despite overlap between the two institutions, both embracing secular subjects as part of the curriculum as well as an explicit mission for interreligious understanding, both institutions showed a different 'culture of history'. Where the Khoja students were asked to take on the role of various actors of past events to empathize with them and to familiarize themselves with possible motives, the Sunni students of the madrasa engaged with the past majorly through literature, names and dates.[154] One of the most striking results of these particular communities was that motives for actions in the past were for the Sunni students less of a focus than for the Khoja students. The Sunni students were studious to know what had happened in the past, without asking about the 'why' of it.[155]

A difference in 'culture of history' between two communities can have an appalling effect because of its normative value. When this happens, a divide between two communities

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[152] Interview with Maulana Omer Abideen, 27-10-2015 Hyderabad.
[153] For example, several students of the madrasa came to visit the Christian students of the Henry Martyn Institute during Christmas bringing Christmas gifts and joining the celebrations.
[154] Interview with Maulana Omer Abideen, Hyderabad 27-10-2015; Interview with madrasa students, 27-10-2015, Hyderabad.
[155] Interview with madrasa students, Hyderabad 27-10-2015; Interview with madrasa teacher Pranay, Hyderabad 8-12-2015.

is emphasized. This divide does not necessarily generate hostility, but it does promote the experience of a 'correct' self and an 'incorrect' other. This experience could lead community members away from the pan-Islamic unity as promoted by the Imam to a certain extent.

This sense of difference of 'culture of history' translates into a variety of active Khoja viewpoints about interactions with the other Islamic communities. Some of the students, but also mature members of the active community like Fahmida were positive about the possibilities of learning from communities with a different view on the past, or at least on deconstructing the myths still associated with their community today. Shaila and Amina, for example, immediately started to speculate about the interesting exchanges they could have if only there had been more students of other Islamic traditions among the Aga Khan Academy's student body. Fahmida similarly stated that the Khoja community had an ongoing duty to explain themselves properly to the other communities of the city. Other students like Firuz, and two of his friends whom I also met on the Academy campus were more inclined to accept being misunderstood. As a result, these students felt more disconnected to the other Muslims of Hyderabad.[156]

In conclusion, the development of a historical memory among the Khoja youth by ITREB echoes the religious identity and interreligious ideals as articulated by the Imam of the community. By deconstructing the myths concerning the Nizari Isma'ili past the students bolster their confidence in their own religious identity. Meanwhile, the students also learn to sympathize with the historical figures who tried to denounce the Nizari Isma'ili faith through the spreading of these negative myths concerning the tenets and practices of the community allowing them to come to terms with these past hostilities. This makes them more receptive for the other Islamic traditions.

However, the development of a historical memory for the Khoja community does not only facilitate mediation between the Khoja community and the other Islamic communities of Hyderabad. Due to the specifics of the Khoja 'culture of history', which differ from the 'culture of history' of other Islamic communities of Hyderabad, the active members of the Khoja community feel a certain disconnection with these communities, generating a perception of the self and other. Some of them respond to this by actively seeking to explain

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[156] Interview with Firuz 8-11-2015, Interview with Siraj and Kifayat, 31-10-2015.

their point of view and to learn from these differences, whereas others are more inclined to avoid these topics of history altogether.

The articulations of historical memory by the more active members of the Khoja community of Hyderabad granted insights into the way this historical memory influenced their translation of Imami ideals to the local context of Hyderabad. However, other than their memory, their interreligious interactions were also influenced by the 'secular' values that were acculturated by the community over the course of the 20th century. The influence of differences in normative frameworks of the Khojas and those of the other religious communities in Hyderabad is explored in the following paragraphs.

'Secular' values and Privatization of Religion.

Accidentally, her headscarf slips of her head, revealing her long hair. Malika, together with students associated with the Henry Martyn Institute, was visiting the madrasa featured earlier in this thesis during an interreligious meeting week hosted by the Henry Martyn Institute.[157] By ruling of the madrasa, women were only allowed to participate in the meeting there if they would cover their hair. For Malika and the majority of the Khoja community, wearing a headscarf is not a necessity and some see the practice as oppressive to women.[158] In silent protest against the practice, Malika was capable of accidentally dropping her headscarf five times during our visit.

Other than distracting the Sunni students of the madrasa, Malika's protest also signified something deeper that I encountered several times during my interactions with the Khoja community. The Khoja community is largely brought up with values that differ from those of their surrounding communities in Hyderabad. These values include many aspects but consists predominantly of gender perspectives, ideals on the role of religion in private and public life, means of political and social activism, ethical understanding of economic developments and preferred methods of education.[159] Most of these find their origin in articulations of the Imam, and they cause the Khojas to feel estranged from their neighbors, sometimes leading to silent protests like those of Malika, while at other times escalating into a harsher confrontation.

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[157] Visit to the madrasa, Hyderabad, 27-10-2015.
[158] None of my female Khoja contacts was wearing a headscarf. Interview with Malika, Hyderabad 29-10-2015.
[159] Tasleem Damji and Catherine M. Lee, 'Gender Role Identity and Perceptions of Ismaili Muslim Men and Women' in *The Journal of Social Psychology,* 135, 2 (April 1995) 215-223; Akhtar, 'Religious Citizenship, the Case of the Globalised Khoja' 219-36 and Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 202.

Naturally, these values are not only present among the active members of the community. Also the passive members of the Khoja community are born and raised within Nizari Isma'ili Khoja culture and feed from the same sources of moral development. However, due to the way the passive members interact with other religious communities (as will be discussed in the chapters 'Passive Members') these differences in values are seldom the primary cause for enhanced or diminished interreligious interactions.

The values mentioned above are mostly referred to in literature as being 'secular' values, to contrast them with the values of surrounding communities which are more explicitly derived from a religious rationale.[160] However, many of these values find their origin within the religious tenets articulated by the community leadership in recent and distant pasts, making 'secular' somewhat of a misnomer. Additionally, though largely focused around the topic of religion, the scope of these values go beyond merely the role of religion in public life, which indicates that 'secular' is even more of a misnomer. To analyze the entirety scope of these clashing values between the Khojas and other communities in Hyderabad would be too ambitious for this research. Instead, I limit myself to the privatization of religion.

There are multiple reasons why the privatization of religion is chosen as the subject of my observations. Firstly, the privatization of religion is a value which will be shown to be broadly articulated by my informants, as well as that it resonates academic literature.[161] Additionally, the idea of a privatized religion ultimately influences the manner in which individuals would prefer religious traditions to encounter one another in the public space. The publicness of these encounters adds to the visibility of differences in values. In order to understand the influence of clashing values better, I will first go into the 'foreignness' which is attributed to these values.

There are several aspects to these 'secular' values that cause them to be seen as 'foreign' to the Indian context. The first of these aspects is historical. As described in chapter 'Mobilization into Modernity', the *dā'īs* and later the Imam himself came to the Indian subcontinent from Persia. Although the Khoja community itself was formed mostly from

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[160] Purohit, 'Identity Politics Revisited: Secular and "Dissonant" Islam in Colonial South Asia' 711-13.

[161] Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs*, 503; Akhtar, 'Religious Citizenship, the Case of the Globalised Khoja' and on privatized religion in India, Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism, Hindus and Muslims in India,* 12; Peter van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia; The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) 164-5.

converts native to the subcontinent, the foreign leadership has an 'outsider' connotation to it for some people.[162] In Hyderabad, this sentiment is mostly nourished by the more radical Hindu nationalistic Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) supporters, and became especially clear through tense confrontations during the riots of communal violence in 1989.[163] In current times, with the Imam residing in Europe, there is little reason to assume change on this matter.

Additionally, most authors pinpoint the introduction of these 'secular' values to the Aga Khans support for western-style education for their community.[164] This is not to say that good education is a prerogative of western cultures, but when Aga Khan III endeavored to reform education for Muslim youth in India, he broke not only from a traditional Islamic curriculum, but with the entire system of Islamic education and madrasas, which Aga Khan III viewed as 'parrot like' education.[165] Although the aim of education remained the development of the faith of the boys and girls as well as the development of them as citizens, the methodology used was taken from Western contexts.

Lastly, many of these values echo similar points of view mostly known from a Western context, and judging from the close ties between the Aga Khans and Western powers, it does not seem unlikely that they were developed with the Western context in mind. However, as with the educational reforms, also issues like woman's rights and privatization of religion are maybe considered liberal values, but they are not prerogatives of Western society. Still, several informants saw exactly these values as a foreign threat to what they saw as the traditional values of the Indian society.[166] An important side-note to take in consideration is that the Khoja community as a rule see these exact values not as something clashing with the traditional tenets of Islam, but instead see them as crucial pillars of what it is like to be Muslim.[167]

Overall, these clashes of values appeared to be prone to being observed as clashes not on, for example, a traditional/secular binary, but as clashes on a foreign/native binary.[168] As a

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[162] Hollister, *The Shi'a of India* 376-7.
[163] Interview with Mr. Nayakulu, Police Officer in Hyderabad, 29-09-2015, interview with Zafar, 28-10-2015, other Muslim communities, being framed as un-Indian, faced similar criticism during moments of communal tension.
[164] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 202 and Purohit. 'Identity Politics Revisited,' 715.
[165] Purohit, 'Identity Politics Revisited' 715.
[166] An example of this came from an address given by maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, who claimed that the privatization of religion was one of the biggest threats to Indian society. Hyderabad, 27-10-2015.
[167] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 23-11-2015.
[168] Referring here to 'secular' and 'traditional' as defined by William E. Shepard in William E. Shepard, "Islam and Ideology, Towards a Typology" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 19, 3 (August 1987) 307-36. In context of Islam, he defines the secular position as not relying on religious traditions to face the challenges

result of this typology, these clashes were often experienced not as an internal affair within one civilization, but seen on a grander scope of self and other, a clash of civilizations.[169] With this in mind, the following paragraphs will analyze the various themes on which these 'secular' values of the Khoja community cause the active members to feel a disconnection with their surrounding communities.

The 'secular' value that I wish to address is the privatization of religion. Privatization of religion features mostly in theories on secularism to describe for example the role of religion in the French secular context of *laïcité*.[170] In this sense, any form of religious identification in the public sphere should be avoided. By keeping the public sphere empty of religious identification, ideally, no one is excluded from public life.[171] In Khoja context however, we should see this privatization not as an instrument to order public life. Because of the absence of a Khoja state, this ideal of privatization should instead be understood as an instrument to maintain safety despite the Khoja minority position. Whether this instrument is the intuitive result of centuries of *taqiyya* practiced by the Khoja community, the deliberate result of western-style secular ideals, an attempt at adaptation to the 'land of abode' or a combination of any of these three remains mostly unclear.[172]

Whatever its exact cause, the ideal of a privatized religiosity resonates through many encounters I had with my informants. As with the introduction of the other 'secular' values, also the privatization of religion seems to be enhanced through the educational systems of the community. An essential part of the religious education offered by ITREB focuses on what Malika calls the 'deconstruction of religiosity.'[173] The philosophy behind this approach is that Nizari Isma'ilis around the globe, Khojas included, will be confronted with peculiarities and uncertainties of their religiosity by the people around them. By challenging the religiosity of the students, deconstructing it and then inviting the students to restructure their own

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of modernity, whereas a traditional position implies a trust in traditional infrastructures to deal with the challenges of modernity. This example is not to state that using these two typologies would be preferred.

[169] Examples of such an interpretation were found among different communities in the city. Some interlocutors I met on the streets from Shi'a and Sunni traditions would phrase their differences with the Khojas as such, stating them as being outside the Islamic civilizations. "No no no, they are not Muslim!"

[170] Taylor, *Secular Age,* 423.

[171] José Casanova, 'Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration' in *Eurozine* (29-07-2004)

[172] Virani, '"Taqiyya" and Identity in a South Asian Community',124. and Khan, 'Conversion and Shifting Identities', 55.

[173] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad, 29-10-2015.

religiosity, the program tries to develop a more durable and stable faith.[174] As a result, quite a large portion of the students come out of it religiously agnostic or atheistic. But because this theological break was facilitated by the community, it does not require the individual to renounce his or her membership to the Nizari Isma'ili or Khoja community.

However, although contemporary Khoja youth is introduced to this privatized religiosity through education, older active members of the community echo a similar philosophy. An example of this is found in an interview with Fahmida in her residence:

> The first thing you need to understand is that, as Isma'ilis, we believe in the Unity of Soul. We believe that everyone originates from one great soul. God, and to this soul we will all return… …There is no real difference between human beings that can truly divide. For mankind is all part of God. As a result of this, I believe that any perceived difference is okay and not too relevant. Whenever these differences would lead to conflict or violence, I recommend to simply move away. Because by responding with equal conflict you only make things worse.[175]

For her, like for many others of the active members of the Khoja community of Hyderabad, religious difference ultimately is of no consequence, and therefore confrontations of these differences should be avoided. Because of this marginalization of religious difference, there is also little room for peer-reviewed religiosity in her worldview, reducing the need for a communal religious responsibility. Despite the theological reasoning for her point of view, this account of Fahmida's view of religious difference hints strongly to the Khoja ideal of privatization of religion.

This does not imply a complete abandonment of the idea of a religious community. For Malika, who confirms that in her understanding 'everyone can have their quest for God, also without the guidance of the Imam', there is still merit in following Imam. In her wording: 'those who follow the Imam have guide in their quest', while someone else might have to find their path to God alone.[176] But, in the way she can rely on the Aga Khan as her Imam, she also believes that other traditions and spiritual leaders can guide people towards God, as well as their own experiences and encounters.[177] During one of our conversations on this topic I brought up my own agnostic worldview, asking her to recommend guidance. She smiled

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[174] Ibid.
[175] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015.
[176] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad 29-10-2015.
[177] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 23-11-2015.

before exclaiming in disbelief. "Oh come Sascha, you know that I can't decide for you what guide to follow! You have your own quest for God!"[178]

This idea of privatization of religion is not only embedded in the Khoja interactions with other communities in the city, but also in the internal differences in religion. Firuz, for example, casually mentioned that he considered himself being religiously 'agnostic, bordering on atheist' but generally comfortable with the Khoja community and the leadership of the Imam.[179] Firuz is surely not the only member of the Khoja community who has a skeptical stance towards the religious tenets of the Nizari Isma'ili faith, many fellow students and adults identified themselves in similar fashion without hesitation or scorn.[180] When other students observed this in their fellow Khojas, most would not frown upon this decision.[181]

Research on the Khoja communities in different parts of the world reflects similar results. During fieldwork in London, Peter B. Clarke observes that the Khoja community members in the city display a liberty to criticize the authorities of the community, the tenets of the faith and the overall workings of the community.[182] Clarke however adds to this that criticism during *jama'ati* events like sessions of worship rarely happens to prevent spoiling the ambience and being branded as a critic.[183] Similar patterns are also observed in the Canadian context, where the Khojas seem to express similar liberal views on critical reflection towards tradition within the community, and a relaxed attitude towards dissent from tradition.[184] One of the more striking examples of this is the increased spread of *gināns* for aesthetic value. Traditionally, the *gināns* are considered as a sacred mystery of the Nizari Isma'ili community, to be sung without musical instruments and only during sessions of worship. Modern technology however has led to an increased spread of *gināns* for their aesthetic value, often accompanied with musical instruments. Instead of violently tracing the sources of these *ginān* recordings, ITREB instead published guidelines for the community on what would be a respectful way to make and spread these recordings.[185]

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[178] Ibid.
[179] Interview with Aga Khan Academy Student Firuz, Hyderabad, 8-11-2015.
[180] Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Siraj, 31-10-2015; interview with Aga Khan Academy student Shaila 31-10-2015; interview with Khalil at cricket match, 1-11-2015.
[181] Interview with Malika, Mumbai, 21-11-2015. Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Amina, 31-10-2015.
[182] Clarke, 'The Ismailis, A Study of Community' 487.
[183] Idem.
[184] Damji and Lee, 'Gender Role Identity and Perceptions of Ismaili Muslim Men and Women', 221.
[185] Karim H. Karim, 'At the Interstices of Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity: Ismaili Engagements with Contemporary Canadian Society' in Daftary (ed.) *A Modern History of the Ismailis,* 280-1.

Related to this privatized religiosity of the Khoja community is the almost complete absence of public displays of piety. Other than a gentle bell chiming through the streets around the *jama'at khanas* to indicate the start of a session of worship, Khoja piety is barely visible in public life. In contrast to the gentle chime of the Khoja bell is the ongoing audioscape of religious life in Hyderabad, where the *adhan* (call to prayer) and Hindu devotional songs boom loudly amplified through the streets. There is no religiously prescribed dress code for the community. This is contrasted by the veiled Islamic women in the streets of the Islamic neighborhoods. Added to this is the absence of rituals that take place in the public sphere. This absence of public piety might be the result of the context in which the Nizari Isma'ili religiosity was developed within the Khoja community, carefully hidden to avoid persecution. However, even after the Aga Khans repeated calls for an end of *taqiyya* and a bolder affirmation of religious identity, the Khoja community refrains from any form of visible or public piety.[186]

Summarizing, the privatization of religion is an essential part of contemporary Khoja culture. Not only does this privatization of religion echo through the articulated religious ideas of the active community members, but it also resonates in the absence of public displays of piety. This concept of privatization of religion is however contrasted by the religious visible displays of piety in the public space of Hyderabad by surrounding communities.

Religiosity in the city is considered a public affair and is inseparably connected to various aspects of public life.[187] Piety is reflected in the cityscape, like for example through the presence a gigantic Buddha statue overlooking Hussain Sagar, the central lake of the city. Additionally, piety is publicly expressed ritualistically through a wide range of religious festivals and commemorations held on the streets of the city. However, the topic of public rituals will be discussed in Part 4 'Ashura and other Public Rituals'. Added to this public presence of piety, religion also features prominently through visibly pious politicians.

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[186] Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 44.

[187] This interconnectedness of religion with other domains is quite common to many contemporary societies, those that claim to be secular included. Carl Calhoun, 'Secularism, Citizenship and the Public Sphere' in Carl Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, *Rethinking Secularism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 79.

Over the past decades India in general, but also Hyderabad specifically saw a significant rise in communal unrest and religious nationalism.[188] For Hyderabad specifically, the rise of Hindu religious nationalism in political form through the BJP was met with the rise of the hardliner Islamic party All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM).[189] Both of these political parties treat religion not as a privatized but as a communal matter. On any day of the year, even outside election periods, politicians of both parties display themselves on billboards and commercials as visibly pious individuals through dress, slogan and gesture.[190] This omnipresence of public piety signifies not only a custom to publicly wear ones religious identity, but also the desirability of such a public display. This desirability might be best explained through Lara Deeb's description of public piety in the context of Lebanon:

> The uncertainty inherent to [national identity] is manifest in the continual performance of identities on a national stage-as various groups announce their presence and sometimes try to impose that presence as more dominant than others. Like uncertainty, this sense of being betwixt and between existed on both the personal and the communal levels, and contributed to the importance of public piety…[191]

Such public use of religious identity does not necessarily contradict the ideals articulated by the Khoja leadership, which also clearly embraced its Islamic identity in order to create a political identity. The active members of the community however seemed highly uninterested in mixing religious identities with local politics as long as the Khoja community has a space to live its own religious life freely. The idea of embracing an Islamic political identity in Indian politics as initiated under Aga Khan III seemed completely void in my interactions with active members of the community.[192] Whether this apolitical position was locally bound

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[188] For more information on religious nationalism in India: Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism, Hindus and Muslims in India.*

[189] Neena A. Rao and S. Abdul Thaha, 'Muslims of Hyderabad, Landlocked in the Walled City' in: Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds.), *Muslims in Indian Cities, Trajectories of Marginalisation,* (New York 2011) 192-4. Ashgar A. Engineer, 'Hyderabad Riots: An Analytical Report' in A.A. Engineer (eds.) *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India,* (Hyderabad: Universities Press 1991) 291.

[190] For example, the city was adorned with billboards displaying solemnly dressed AIMIM politicians wishing everyone *'Eid Mubarak'*, regardless of the date.

[191] L. Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern,* 36-7.

[192] This is not to say that my Khoja interlocutors were apathetic towards local issues and government. Quite the contrary, many interlocutors saw it as their moral duty to commit themselves to local issues. But instead of solving these problems through politics, many interlocutors preferred solving these problems through a strongly developed civil society. Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Shaila, Hyderabad 31-10-2015; Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015; Interview with Malika, Mumbai 20-11-2015.

to the Hyderabad community was difficult to assess. Also, it might have been possible that interlocutors were simply not sharing their political views with me, judging them unrelated to my questions of religious community and interreligious interactions. Still, contrasting religiously motivated AIMIM sentiment I can once more feature Fahmida's words: "Whenever these differences would lead to conflict or violence, I recommend to simply move away."[193]

This apolitical understanding of the Khoja religious identity as Nizari Isma'ili Muslims does not imply that the Khoja community consists of apolitical individuals. Quite the contrary, a very essential part Khoja education is the development as an awareness of civil responsibilities of community members in a manner similar to the civil society ethic articulated by the Aga Khan in the Jodidi Elizabeth Lecture.[194] An example of this ethic is found in Fahmida's recollection of her youth and her choices in education. As a young girl, when she moved to the Khoja residential colony on the Chirag Ali Lane, the young girl came in touch with the Henry Martyn Institute. Only in her teen years, Fahmida was already strongly motivated to work for better interreligious relations, and specifically a better understanding between the Khoja community and other Islamic traditions. As such, she dedicated herself to – and educated herself on – these matters. At the time, the Henry Martyn Institute was not officially offering education as such. Fahmida, however, out of a sense of mission and responsibility, repeatedly barraged the office down the road with her request for education and later a place to work, which resulted in a career in interreligious understanding lasting for over twenty years.[195]

Another example of this civil society ethic is reflected in the education given by the STEP teachers of ITREB. In their classes, Malika and her colleagues focus a lot on the civic responsibilities of the students, not only through theoretical ideas but also through practice. During one of the classes of one of Malika's colleagues, who she was assisting, the students were invited to come up with a plan to solve local issues with litter and garbage dominating the cityscape. At the end of the class, one of the ideas of the students was chosen, and the entire class would then endeavor to put this idea into practice.[196] Through methods like these, the students are stimulated to engage actively with the society in which they live. However, in

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[193] Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.
[194] Aga Khan 'Transcript: Jodidi Lecture by His Highness the Aga Khan "The Cosmopolitan Ethic in a Fragmented World" 12-11-2015.'
[195] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015.
[196] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015.

these stimulated forms of citizenship, the religious identity of the active members of the community seems only present in the motivations behind their actions. Neither the cleaning of litter nor the interreligious endeavors of Fahmida were carried out under a visible, articulated or public banner of religiosity. This is contrasted by some of the works of other communities in Hyderabad, with institutions like the Henry Martyn Institute or the Al Mahadul Aali Al Islam Hyderabad, who commit themselves to interreligious understanding under a religious banner.

Also on a more individual level, the Khoja community members carry themselves quite differently from the members of their surrounding communities because of this difference in opinions on the role of religion in the public sphere. The almost complete absence of religious apparel is distinctive from both the other Hindu and Islamic communities of the city. In most cases, in line with Fahmida's philosophy of live and let live, these differences do not have any direct effects on daily life, especially because religious dress is mandatory in a relatively small number of communities.

For the active members of the community, the difference between Nizari Isma'ili privatized religiosity contrasted by the public displays of piety by their fellow citizens have been extensively discussed and explained through education. Additionally, the educational system provides opportunities to reflect on encounters with public displays of piety, familiarizing the active community members with these encounters as well as with the possible motivations behind these public displays.[197] As a result, encounters with these differences seldom lead to shock. The few times when the active members that I spoke with did feel like sticking up for their ideals on privatized religion, this would be translated into teasing behavior rather than direct confrontation. One of these examples was already used in the introduction of this chapter, with Malika accidentally losing her headscarf numerous times during a madrasa visit. Another example comes from Fahmida's youth. Before the construction of the Khoja residential colony on the Chirag Ali Lane, Fahmida lived in a mixed neighborhood boasting families of different religious backgrounds.

Fondly Fahmida recollected the game she used to play with the other children in the street, 'touch the Brahmin.' According to Fahmida, the game started by chance, with one of the non-Brahmin kids accidentally running into the Brahmin neighbor. When Fahmida realized that the Brahmin was disgusted by this, she and the other kids turned it into a game in

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[197] As part of the education provided by ITREB. Interview with Malika, 21-11-2015.

protest against the Brahmins hierarchical worldview.[198] Fahmida added that the game was probably not started around an articulated disagreement with the manner in which the caste system arranged public life in India. Still, seeing the pride shimmer in her eyes for her youthful resistance, I estimate this deed from the past still served her as an ideal course of action today.

At a more theoretical level, however, clashes between the idea of privatized and public piety can be more profound. An example of this was found in an address from maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani which he gave during my visit to his madrasa with Malika. The maulana was addressing the issue of interreligious cooperation in Hyderabad, and how he strongly recommended joint ventures on this topic. Up until this point, Malika had been relatively positive on her encounters in the madrasa, apart from some observations on gender inequality she made.[199]

However, as the maulana continued, a shock of distaste became visible on Malika's features. The maulana was speaking either in Hindi or Urdu, which was then translated into English by the son of the maulana. As a result, I had only been hearing the address through maulana Omer Abideen's translation. Malika, and several of the other visitors joining us in the audience were however fluent in the language the maulana was speaking and notified me individually that the translated version of the audience given by Omer Abideen differed from the original audience given by maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani. While Omer Abideen was articulating a peaceful and cautious desire for the religions to come together in order to fix the problems of the city, the words of maulana Khalid were carefully written down by Malika and several other people from various religious backgrounds. Afterwards, Malika explained her shock to me by translating their transcripts of the maulana's speech, which was calling upon the religious communities of Hyderabad to band together to 'fight the evils' of modern society such as 'secularism' and 'homosexuality.'[200] For Malika, this was not at all the prospect with which she aspired to connect with other religious traditions than her own.

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[198] Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.
[199] The madrasa hosted education for both boys and girls, which Malika considered a good thing. However, for the girls, the madrasa would not offer hostel services, significantly decreasing the availability of education for girls that were not living close to the madrasa. This agitated Malika, stating that education should be available equally for both sexes.
[200] Address by Maulana Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, translated by madrasa teacher Pranay and Malika, Hyderabad 27-10-2015.

The shock on Malika's features was clearly visible, leading her eventually to conclude: "For me, the hardest part of interfaith dialogue is reconciling with my fellow Muslims."[201] Despite joining the one-week interfaith program – of which the visit to the madrasa was one of the activities – with the fullest intention to obtain a deeper understanding of the other religious traditions of Hyderabad, Malika felt an intense disconnection with the Sunni maulana of the madrassa. Simply put, originating from the 'secular' values with which Malika was brought up, binding together with other religious parties to reorganize public life and morals was not at all what she hoped that would come about through interreligious cooperation. Seated on the rooftop with which I started this chapter, Malika confessed her difficulty with living up to the interreligious ideals articulated by the Aga Khan. "I want to understand my fellow Muslims, but how?"[202] Whether her example is representative for the entire Khoja community of Hyderabad remains difficult to assess due to the limited amount of informants featured in this research. However, the severity of the encounter illustrates well how clashing values can lead into disassociation.

Conclusively, the Khoja community inherited through the developments of the 20th century a series of so-called 'secular' values. The number of values that can be traced back to these developments are numerous but one of the more striking ones is the privatization of religion. When analyzing the effects of these values linked to the Nizari Isma'ili religious identity on the interreligious actions of the active members of the Khoja community, a diverse pattern becomes clear. The privatization of the Khoja religiosity is contrasted by the clear presence of religiosity in Hyderabad on various domains, ranging from personal yet visible dress-codes to the significance of religion in local politics.

The rise of religious nationalism in the political sphere was developed partly through direct influence of the Khoja leadership in various ways, including involvement by Aga Khan III in the Islamic political identity and statements proclaiming the supposed incommensurable nature of Hindu and Islamic traditions in one single nation. Still, despite involvement of the leadership in its development, the rise of religious nationalism in the political sphere seems to have led into a disinterest in local politics from the Khoja community members I spoke with, because many of them feel unrepresented by the national and local politicians. Instead, many

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[201] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad, 29-10-2015.
[202] Interview with Malika, Hyderabad, 27-10-2015.

Khojas express their sense of civic duty through non-political initiatives that tend to be void from articulated religious identity.

In the sense of religious presence in the tangible public domain through dress-code or religious social norms, the active members of the Khoja community seemed to prefer to avoid confrontation, adhering to prevalent norms in public life in Hyderabad, only sporadically expressing their disagreement through subtle, cheeky and mostly silent protests. It was however in the more theoretical theatre of ideals and ambitions concerning the public domain, illustrated through Malika's encounter with the maulana, that contrasting values led to a more profound confrontation. The feeling of disconnection which was generated through this encounter gave rise to a feeling of helplessness in Malika in the face of the Aga Khans call for an active curiosity to the religious other. Her prospective on connecting to larger Islamic communities in Hyderabad was severely challenged. Whether this example is representative for the entire Khoja community of Hyderabad remains difficult to assess, but during my stay I made no observations that would suggest otherwise.

Geography, facilitating proximity in locality

Apart from their historical memories and a set of 'secular' values, the active members of the Khoja community are further influenced in their interactions with other religious communities by their geographical orientation. In the following paragraphs I analyze the absolute and relative geographical positions of the active members of the Khoja community. In this context, an absolute geographical position relates to the environments in which the active community members interact directly with their surrounding communities, and in which they spend their daily lives. The relative geographical position of the community members, in turn, relates to the conceptualization of space in the culture of the active members of the community. Simply put, what are the dimensions on space through which they understand themselves to be? Based on these observations I will then reflect on the manner in which these positions influence the way the active members interact with other religious communities. Before featuring observations from the field, it is important to briefly summarize the geographical history of the Khoja community to get a grip on some basics of Khoja geographical understanding in general.

As mentioned before, the Khoja community of Hyderabad relates themselves most strongly with Nizari Isma'ili history, and a recurring geographical theme in Nizari Isma'ili history is the statelessness of the community. The Nizari Isma'ili Imam is understood to be

the heir to the Fatimid Imams, and since the Fatimid Caliphate of Cairo, which lasted until defeat by the famous Saladin in 1171, the Nizari Isma'ili have not been autonomously in control of state-like territories.[203] From 1090 until 1256, Nizari Isma'ili communities held a presence in a series of mountain strongholds from which the leading *dā'īs* and later the Imams of the community themselves led an opposition against the ruling Seljuk dynasty of Persia, but the fragmented and limited territorial claim of this opposition only vaguely resembled a state.[204] Especially on the Indian subcontinent, the Nizari Isma'ili *da'wa* (mission) never resulted in an autonomous territorial state. Instead of being bound by territory, the Nizari Isma'ili community that included the Khoja caste, was bound by faith. Throughout Nizari Isma'ili history, community members identified themselves with something that transcended the borders of the state in which they lived.

This transnational space to which the Khoja community members relate themselves is not an empty space, nor is it a space in which distance is irrelevant. One of the most important landmarks in the transnational space to which the members of the Khoja community relate themselves is the Imam himself. As a central focal point, the Imam seemed a permanent feature of the transnational landscape to all of my interlocutors. Like any other religious community, the medium that connect the devotees with the transcendent, the Imam in the case of the Khojas, is essential for the community.[205]

In this sense, the Nizari Isma'ili community works mostly along the lines of a classical network with a central point, the Imam, and peripheries, the local communities physically separated from the Imam. This does not mean that Khoja community members permanently relate their actions and movements to the position of the Imam, but in general my informants would be able to find some connection to his guidance almost at any given moment, or at least would be able to discern how far away from his guidance they would be positioned. This is to be understood not only in a physical, but also in a metaphorical fashion.

To give examples of both; Zafar, when he was talking to me in his apartment about his life in Hyderabad, was far away from the Aga Khan in a physical sense. However, he could bring the guidance of the Imam relatively close by relating to the magazines and collected addresses and wisdoms published by ITREB.[206] This still relates to relative yet physical

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[203] Daftary, *The Isma'ilis, Their History and Doctrines,* 5.
[204] Daftary, *The Isma'ilis,* 9.
[205] Birgit Meyer, "Mediation and the Genesis of Presence, Towards a Material Approach to Religion" (Utrecht 2012) 26.
[206] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 27-12-2015.

proximity to Imami guidance. In a metaphorical sense, Firuz was able to discern in some of his friends a move away from Imami guidance. Some of his friends took to drinking and smoking cigarettes.[207] By committing themselves to these practices, they would metaphorically stray from the guidance of the Imam. What is most important to note here is how these two spheres are connected. Zafar, for example, would be able to discern the metaphorical position of the Imam through the relative physical proximity of his guidance through the magazines laying on his sidetable. Physical proximity facilitates tools for the Khoja community members to position themselves closer to the Imam in a metaphorical sense. As a community of individuals that, in general, wish to be guided by the Imam, being able to assess the metaphorical proximity to the religious ideals articulated by him is essential. Because of this, the physical proximity to the Aga Khan becomes equally important because this latter proximity enables the former.

In 'pre-modern' times, the physical distance to Imami guidance was very long and difficult to navigate in the absence of technological and institutional means to connect to him. Local Khoja communities often had to rely on local deputies of Imami authority and would only occasionally, maybe once in their lifetime, come close to a direct source of Imami guidance through pilgrimage to him as a person.[208] As a result of this distance in physical terms, the Khoja community members could only relate themselves to the position of the Imam as being significantly distant. The *pīrs* would mediate a certain feeling of proximity, however also his authority would be locally bound.[209] Effectively, the institution of the Imamate might have been in a sense transnational, but the Khoja identity was definitely articulated in a local setting. The only agents interacting somewhat transnationally in this landscape were the Imam and his *pīrs*.

However, the institutionalization of the Nizari Isma'ili community brought about by the Aga Khans over the course of the 20th century expanded the possibilities for the community members to become agents in the transnational space. To recollect, the Aga Khans, especially Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV, founded numerous institutions and collectives that, together, formed an expansive institutional network, serving the transnational as well as local Khoja communities. The institutions founded by the Aga Khans slowly became, in a sense, additional landmarks to the transnational space of the Nizari Isma'ili

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[207] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[208] Daftary, *The Isma'ilis, Their History and Doctrines,* 457.
[209] The *dā'īs* were each send to their respective regions where they were expected to spread the message of Nizari Isma'ilism.

community. The Imam-founded institutions like the AKDN, AKTC and ITREB started to form into structures which became essential mediators to connect the local communities to the Nizari Isma'ili international framework and the Imam.[210]

For example, ITREB provides local communities with doctrinal information and theological tenets through publications, educational programs and technologically advanced communication. In this example, the connection is not only a way for the local communities to access the Imam more easily, it also signifies an attempt of the Imamate to reach out towards these local communities, to include them into the transnational identity of the Nizari Isma'ili community. The infrastructures provided by institutions like ITREB significantly lessened the physical distance between local Nizari Isma'ili communities and the Imamate This enabled more direct communications between them, which led to religious homogenization, but sometimes also to confrontations when local communities felt that their practices were threatened by a transnational religiosity which was predominantly styled in Khoja practices.[211] For the Khoja community of Hyderabad, however, this seemed hardly an issue.

As shown above, mobilizing the Nizari Isma'ili community into modernity brought local communities physically closer to the Imamate, allowing them to maintain a connection with the transnational at almost any given moment. This proximity was facilitated through a complex network of institutions that were founded by Aga Khan III and Aga Khan IV. In the transnational space, the central landmark of the Imamate is currently no longer surrounded only by several peripheral elites that serve as intermediaries between the Imam and the local communities.[212] Instead, the Imamate is positioned in the middle of an elaborate network structure that provides infrastructures between these local communities and the Imamate.

It is, however, important to note that these institutions are not mere instruments controlled by the central authority of the Imam. Instead, these institutions consist of individual members of the community, and the scale of institutionalization ensures that a significant amount of community members are actively involved in these. The AKDN alone operates an

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[210] Ruthven, 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions' 190.
[211] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim' 121.
[212] The phrasing 'peripheral elites' is taken from Ukrainian American historian Alexander J. Motyl, *Imperial Ends: The Decay, Collapse and Revival of Empires* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). In this context they refer to elites in peripheral contexts that have local authority derived from the empirical center, in this case the Imami authority.

estimated 20.000 full-time equivalent volunteers and around 58.000 full-time and part-time employees world-wide.[213] Additionally, there are also numerous community members that contribute to the work of the AKDN occasionally or in part-time context. The AKDN is the largest of the institutional networks founded in the 20th century, but there are several more such as ITREB, adding up to a significant increase in the amount of community members involved in facilitating proximity to the Imam than in pre-modern times, effectively becoming mediators of his authority.

These active members of the Nizari Isma'ili community have a peculiar geographical position in the transnational space of the community. The lack of a territorially bound geographical center for the community creates a situation where all these mediators originate from local peripheral contexts. Malika, for example, originates from one of the larger cities of Maharashtra state in India, where the majority of her relatives still live today. Fahmida herself was born and raised in Hyderabad. The institutions in which they operate, either as volunteers or as employees, are inherently transnational in their organization and scope. Depending on their job descriptions, this transnational nature effects the individual active members differently.

Malika, for example, encounters the transnational nature of the STEP teacher program of ITREB directly on both a theoretical as practical level. On a practical level, Malika travels the globe extensively to participate in training and development sessions provided by the transnationally operating ITREB. On these meetings, teachers from all Nizari Isma'ili communities all over the world gather in one place, often this place is London, to exchange and develop methodology, to align ambitions of their education and to update themselves on recent developments in doctrine. Furthermore, as a specialist within the ITREB network, Malika teaches in various places across the world, mostly in Indian contexts because of her local affinity there.[214] The effects of this mobility are extensive. Malika still maintains a strong Khoja identity. However, this Khoja identity is very flexible. Even after our many conversations in Hyderabad and Mumbai, I found it difficult to comprehend fully where her home was. During her stays in Hyderabad, she would be staying either with relatives or in a temporary apartment on the Aga Khan Academy campus. During her stays in Mumbai, she would also either rely on her relatives or on temporary housing provided by the local community. For the entirety of my contact with Malika of three months, she was only able to

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[213] Ruthven, 'The Aga Khan Development Network and Institutions', 189.
[214] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 23-11-2015.

visit her parents once, despite living with them officially.[215] For Malika, even though ITREB recognizes and happily utilizes her local affinity in the Khoja community, her commitment to the Nizari Isma'ili institutional framework leaves her mostly traveling across the world with only temporary places of residence. Through her education, Malika does not only connect herself to the international network of the community, but also enables such a connection for the community members she encounters in local contacts.

A more locally bound example is found in the person of Nadira. I only spoke to her relatively briefly and only in her role as professional working for the Aga Khan Academy. As a result, my account on her personal situation is a bit more general. Working for the Aga Khan Academy of Hyderabad, Nadira worked and lived permanently in Hyderabad. The Aga Khan Academy, however, is part of an international network of higher education which is still mostly in a developing stage, with Hyderabad being the second and most recent location of the network to be finished.[216] The Academy educates mostly students from the Hyderabad context, but also students from different nationalities are accepted. As a result, the student population of the campus is mixed, including some students from Afghanistan and Tadzhikistan as well as other nationalities.[217] The teaching staff is also recruited internationally as well as locally.[218] In general, life for Nadira is more geographically stable, residing in Hyderabad with only the occasional traveling to other countries. Still, her work is very strongly related to the international framework of higher education, causing her to reflect on situations and encounters in her professional life not only from a local, but also from a transnational perspective. Moreover, through her mediation as admission employer for the Aga Khan Academy, Nadira facilitated not only her own connection to the transnational infrastructure of the community, but she was also able to help facilitate this connection for other community members.

More locally oriented active members of the Khoja community are represented in the person of Fahmida. As the daughter of one of the co-founders of the Khoja living colony (gated Khoja community), her engagement with the institutional networks are profoundly local in nature. Mostly active through voluntary service within the community, Fahmida

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[215] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015.

[216] The first Academy was found in Mombasa, Kenya. Additional locations are under construction in; Maputo, Mozambique; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic and Damascus, Syria. Eleven more locations are planned for the future. For the exact list: 'Aga Khan Academies Worldwide' www.agakhanacademies.org http://www.agakhanacademies.org/general/aga-khan-academies-worldwide.

[217] Interview with Nadira, 31-10-2015, Interview with students from Tadzhikistan and Afghanistan, 31-10-2015.

[218] Interview with Nadira, 31-10-2015.

displayed an extensive knowledge not only on the details of the local community, but also on the infrastructures of the living colony on Chirag Ali Lane in one of the central neighborhoods of Hyderabad called Abids. Despite this local affinity, also Fahmida was strongly connected to the international infrastructure of the Nizari Isma'ili community. Fahmida was in close contact with the employees and volunteers working in the *jama'at khanas,* who coordinated local and international philanthropic and social initiatives.[219] Despite being locally bound due to, first, her work, and later the care for her elderly parents, Fahmida was profoundly connected with the center of the Nizari Isma'ili community through the media and infrastructure provided in the local Hyderabad context, and her voluntary contributions to these institutions. Moreover, Fahmida was able to help her fellow community members to connect to this transnational network by sharing her experiences.

The three informants featured here were connected to the international network of institutional structures around the Imam in different ways. Malika was the most geographically mobile of the three, whereas Nadira to a lesser and Fahmida to a greater extent were more bound to the Hyderabadi context. Despite these differences among them, all three of these members were not only able to connect with the transnational network themselves, but also capable of facilitating similar access to the people around them. This double role, both as connected member as well as connector, signifies a profound shift in the transnational space in which the Khoja community operates.

In contrast with the traditional organization of the transnational space of the Nizari Isma'ili community, which consisted of a largely empty transnational space, with the Imam as central landmark and with a handful of peripheral elites that connected the lay-members of the community to the transnational center, the Khoja community developed a class of active members: Locally bound community members that are not only strongly connected with the center of the network, but also serve as infrastructure for their fellow members. In effect, the amount of intermediaries was increased drastically due to the mobilization efforts of the community in the 20th century. Additionally, this new class of intermediaries was connected with the center more strongly through modern means of communication. The effect of this double role on the active members is, at times, confusing. In general, strategies that seem logical in a transnational context might prove difficult and illogical in local contexts.

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[219] Visit to the *jama'at khana,* 2-12-2015.

Concluding, active members of the Khoja community have a complicated position in the Nizari Isma'ili transnational space to which they relate. This space consists of both physical distances as well as metaphorical distances. Physical proximity refers to the relative proximity of landmarks in this space such as the Imam to the individual, either directly or mediated through other means. Metaphorical proximity, which is facilitated through the physical, refers to the extend in which the ethical and religious opinions of the individual are aligned with those of others in the transnational space. In order to religiously align the community, both the Imam of the community who is identified as the center, as well as the individuals of the community who form a periphery, require mediators to bridge the physical distance.

The active members of the Khoja community appear to fulfill a double role in this. On the one hand, active members of the community are inherently locally bound due to the absence of a territorial center. However, through institutional infrastructures, these locally bound members of the community develop strong ties with Imam, the center of the community. As a result, the active members enter into a double role of being both a connected member in the transnational space, as well as becoming part of the institutional infrastructure which facilitates connection to the center for others.

This double role often leads to a confusing position in interreligious contacts. On the one hand, the transnational affinity of these active members allows them to emphasize more easily to the pan-Islamic unity articulated by the Imam. The rationale for a pan-Islamic worldview is inherently one that transcends national borders. However, the local affinities of the active members that are equally nurtured, occasionally place them in situations that seem to defy the logic of the transnational policies of the Aga Khan. Especially in local situations where Khojas feel threatened by the religious communities around them, the transnational ambition of pan-Islamic unity and active curiosity towards the religious other can feel farfetched or even irrelevant.

Conclusions, Active Members and Interreligious Realities

The previous paragraphs analyzed three domains that influence the religious identity of the active members of the Khoja community in Hyderabad as well as their interreligious realities apart from religious guidance from the community leadership. The three domains, consisting of historical memory, 'secular' values and geography influenced the way the Khoja

community members saw themselves as well as the way they viewed the religious other profoundly.

Firstly, the active members of the Khoja community were stimulated to interact with different elements of the history of the community in a specific way. As with any form of historical memory, the resulting culture of history implied a 'correct' way to interact with past events as opposed to 'incorrect' ways. This normative connotation, though inherent to any culture of history, sometimes caused a feeling of disconnection with the other religious communities of Hyderabad that had a different culture of history.

Secondly, over the course of the 20th century, the Khoja community adopted several values that were at times understood as 'secular' and 'foreign' by other communities in Hyderabad. In some cases, these differences in values would not lead to uncomfortable confrontations for the active community members, however in others, like those related to public piety, the active community members I interacted with in Hyderabad showed a certain feeling of disconnection with the religious communities around them.

Thirdly, the active community members of Hyderabad I met are marked by a peculiar geographical position. In order to develop a strong connection with the center of the transnational Nizari Isma'ili community to which the Khojas relate, the active members I encountered develop a strong transnational affinity. However, as active members, these Khojas are not only expected to develop themselves transnationally. Instead, in order to fulfill the role of mediator between the more peripheral local communities and the central landmark of the Imamate, the active members also seem to maintain a strong local connection. This dual-affinity, both local and transnational, sometimes leads into confusing encounters with the religious other.

Reflecting from the socio-psychological perspective introduced earlier – the perspective focused on the connection between social contacts and identity appropriation – the moments of confusion and confrontation the active members encountered in local interreligious realities seem to be the result of conflicting social contexts and the identities they wished to appropriate. The Nizari Isma'ili community, to which they primarily relate themselves, positively validates practices and values that are denounced by the social contexts they encounter locally. As Maliepaard and Phalet showed in their research, this mismatch seems to work both ways. Not only does the strong association with the transnational Nizari Isma'ili context influence the expressions of religious identity of the active members. The

different expressions of religious identity by the other religious communities they encounter in local social encounters also cause them to disassociate themselves from these communities. The informants featured here specifically seemed to have difficulties associating themselves with a pan-Islamic identity in the local context of Hyderabad.

To add to the complexity of this contradiction, the active members showed a clear desire to execute the connection that the Imam offered as interreligious ideal. This desire seems to reflect a strong willingness to identify transnational Nizari Isma'ili social context. Effectively, the active members of the Khoja community resemble a case in which the transnational identity they wish to appropriate requires them to socially connect with communities that do not approve of or connect with these articulations of that transnational identity.

Part 3, Passive Members

Sunlight illuminated the small portrait of Aga Khan IV standing on the car's dashboard in glass casing designed especially for this spot. The car was a large, silver-colored, modern SUV-type vehicle owned by Mustafa. He, Zafar, Khalil and myself were heading towards the city's outskirts. The three men, good friends, had a lot to discuss and in their comfortable enthusiasm for one another they sometimes unconsciously fell back into Gujarati. However, the bits and pieces that I could gather made it clear: these three men were looking forward to their day off from work or weekly schedules to play.

However, as relaxed as these men were playing cricket or talking about many aspects of their lives, most of them had to a lesser or greater extend a certain reserve towards interactions with other religious communities and talking about those. Where most of them were rather comfortable with their neighbors from Hindu backgrounds, they reflected on their contacts with other Islamic communities with less enthusiasm. When I first asked Zafar about his contacts with the other religious communities in the city, he responded: "If they just let me be, I let them be."[220]

This sentiment was reflected in the responses of his friends, as well as in the response of one of the Academy students, Firuz. Especially when I asked Firuz about his contacts with other Islamic communities.

- What can you share about your religion with other Muslims?
- Mostly with them, I like to keep it simple. I just tell them that I am a Muslim and leave it at that. I am not really comfortable with explaining them more. Not all of the Muslims of Hyderabad are like this, but many of them are quite narrow minded, ridiculing Ismaili beliefs or they simply don't recognize us as Muslims.[221]

These responses of the more passive members of the community that I spoke with were quite remarkable and diametrically opposed to the 'active curiosity' articulated by the Aga Khan. Like with the more active members of the community, the passive members are influenced in their opinions by more factors than merely the ideals of the Aga Khan. The influential factors that are explored in this part are comparable to the factors explored in the part concerning the active members that I encountered. The ones that I wish to highlight for this research are the articulations of communicative and cultural memory by the members of the community, the

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[220] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015.
[221] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.

differences in norms of religious practice between the Khoja community and the other religious communities of the city and the local context in which the passive members of the community operate. Firstly, the next paragraphs will go further into the articulations of memory by the more passive members of the Khoja community.

Articulations of Communicative and Cultural Memory

Through publications of ITREB and communicative interaction among community members, both direct or mediated through, for example, internet fora, many of the Khojas are capable of articulating elaborate memories of the past of their community. Contrary to the more active members of the community, the more passive members have only limited to no connection to the history education offered by the ITREB teachers or memory makers. Instead, the influence of the memory makers is relatively on par with the roles of cultural persistency and the agendas of the consumers of memory. As such, understanding these recollections of the past as historical memory is somewhat problematically.

Jan and Assman and Aleida Assman identified more types of memories other than historical memory each formulated in different contexts. Two perspectives of memory that come together in the context of the more passive members of the Khoja community are the perspectives of 'communicative memories' and 'cultural memories.'[222]

In this thesis, borrowing definitions from the Assmans, communicative memories refer to the memories that are formulated between people in social constellations. This definition relates strongly to the collective nature of memory formation identified by the philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, and goes beyond it by specifying the primacy of this collectiveness in a more specific context. Due to its dependency on social interaction, communicative memories are inherently generational.[223] When these memories are passed down to the next generation, a new memory of the moment of passing down is generated, rather than that the same memory can be handed down completely unaltered. The three agents of memory formulation: the ingenuity of the memory makers, persistency of cultural elements and the agendas of the memory consumers relate to each other differently in this communicative domain of memory. The discursive nature of this form of memory continually takes place in the theatre of persistent cultural elements that influence all participants. The

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[222] Jan Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory, Ten Studies* translated by Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 3.
[223] Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory,* 24.

memory makers of communicative memory tend to be informal and unorganized authorities, contrasting the institutionalized memory makers of the historical memories.

Other than communicative memory, the more passive members of the community also interact with the 'cultural memory' of the Khoja community. The reason that Zafar can articulate memories about the Alamut period of Nizari Isma'ili history is not because generation after generation narrated these memories down to him. Instead, Zafar interacts with the publications made available to him by ITREB. Through publications like Farhad Daftary and Zulfikar Hijri's 2008 *The Ismailis, An Illustrated History*, which ITREB made available to members of the Khoja community, more passive members like Zafar can reach back through canonized sources. Cultural memory in this thesis is defined along the lines of Assman's definition, constituting the memory formation through textual intermediaries made available to the community members.[224]

In the perspective of cultural memory, the three agents of memory formation feature again in a different constellation. The documents are sometimes read, and even more often discussed in a collective and communicative setting, for example during or after devotional sessions in the *jama'at khana* or among family members and friends. These actors, combined with the publishers and distributing institutions of these documents of cultural memory represent the agent of memory makers. The plurality and indirect influence of these memory makers limits their influence somewhat, which results in discursive space which can be filled by the persistent cultural elements and the interests of the memory consumer. When Zafar reads *The Ismailis, An Illustrated History*, there is no educational program to guide him to one specific reading of the text. As a result, his cultural context as a Hyderabadi Khoja, theoretically, should have more influence on him than on Malika or her students who use a specifically developed methodology to interact with their past. In similar fashion, also Zafar's personal interests should influence his reading more.

As with the historical memory of the more active members of the community, also the contents of the communicative and cultural memories of the more passive members is evasive, fluid and personal and therefore outside the scope and ambition of this thesis. However, recollections of the past are strongly formative of actions in the present. In order to grant more insights in issues of identity of the more passive members of the Khoja community, as well as to contextualize their interreligious realities, their perception of the

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[224] Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory,* 28.

past is essential. Additionally, the scope of this exploration of memory articulations is further limited to the case of sectarian violence. The choice for this case rests predominantly on the intensity of these violent encounters, which make their influence somewhat more tangible and traceable among the articulations of informants. Additionally, the Hyderabadi Khoja community did not experience any sectarian aggression during my stay there, which guarantees a position of these encounters confined to memory.

Through the articulations of these memories, and understanding them through the combined lenses of communicative and cultural memory, the following paragraphs attempt to explore ways in which the cultural and communicative memories of the more passive members included in this research are articulated, and how these influence their current interreligious realities.

"Hyderabad is fine. People sometimes call us names or ridicule us, but it's not like there is violence or anything these days. It's not like places like Gujarat where Isma'ilis were killed because of their religion."[225] Zafar and I were seated on the street in front of his apartment, just a few streets away from the living colony at Chirag Ali Lane in the central Abids area of the city. The killings he was referring to took place in Gujarat in 2002. During riots of communal violence, a school bus of Isma'ili students was targeted by Hindu radicals. Because the Khoja students were Muslims they were killed by the assailants. Zafar was still clearly struck by the act of violence.

In response to this act of violence, the Aga Khan evacuated the Gujarati Khojas from the area and a large portion of the evacuees had migrated to Hyderabad. After explaining me some things about the situation for the Gujarati Khojas, Zafar concluded. "But nothing like that happened here, Hyderabad is peaceful I guess."[226] Zafar seemed somewhat unconvinced. Like Zafar, also Khalil seemed unconvinced by the durability of this peacefulness, believing it only to last as long as people would keep to themselves. "Look, as long as everyone keeps minding their own business we'll be fine. Hyderabad is a peaceful city."[227]

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[225] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Interview with Khalil, Hyderabad 1-11-2015.

In general, sectarian violence is explained by Hyderabadi locals more as an occasional event rather than a permanent attribute of the city.[228] When sectarian violence did occur it has mostly been associated with riots instigated by politicians for political gains.[229] However, even though locals seem to play down the extent of sectarian violence in the city, Hyderabad has a long history of sectarian hostilities dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.[230] The forceful inclusion Islamic princely state of Hyderabad into independent India in 1948 further escalated existing tensions.[231] The significance and extend of these moments of violence are difficult to assess, with many sources contradicting themselves. What, however, is clear is that communal violence and tension has remained part of Hyderabadi history and that these tensions take place between Hindu and Muslim nationalist parties and their respective followers.[232]

Despite this ongoing tension in the city, the Khojas of have been successful in avoiding inclusion in these conflicts so far. The repeated instances of violence have, however, triggered the Hyderabadi Khojas to organize private security for their colony. Fahmida, who experienced several of instances in which sectarian tension in the city erupted into violent encounters, described these security measures to me.

> There was a terrible violence in the city, terrible. The rioters came here to Abids as well. However, we already had volunteers from our community and of other Khoja communities protecting the entrance to the colony. The entire colony was saved from harm![233]

The security measures of the Khoja community remained in place to some extent, even when tensions in the city relaxed somewhat. Zafar, for example, was a regular on security duty for the colony. When I asked him to tell me about what security duty was like, he explained to me as follows.

> You know, we keep an eye out for the colony and the streets nearby. If someone is harassing some girl, or acting funny, we keep an eye on them, especially after dark. And when tensions in the city flare up, we make sure our streets are safe. We keep good contact with the local

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[228] Many interlocutors that I spoke to briefly, Muslim, Hindu and Khoja alike, would underline how peaceful the city is.
[229] 'Was Mayhem Orchestrated to Unsettle Rosaiah Govt?', timesofindia.indiatimes.com 30-05-2010, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/Was-mayhem-orchestrated-to-unsettle-Rosaiah-govt/articleshow/5740937.cms (accessed on 12-11-2015).
[230] Rao and Thaha, 'Muslims of Hyderabad,' 191.
[231] Ibid.
[232] P. Kruizinga, *The History of Communal Violence in Hyderabad and the Henry Martyn Institute,* (Zeewolde 2008) 22-5.
[233] Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.

police, they know we do this and they're fine with it. And if we need help they usually to take our word.[234]

Through measures like these, the Khojas have avoided casualties of sectarian violence in the city. The swift manner in which the security was organized described by Fahmida imply an awareness in the community of the dangers of sectarian violence.

Traces of a past of persecution and violence are well documented in the Khoja cultural memory, featuring as a theme in Khoja history up until today.[235] The experience of sectarian violence and repression in early medieval times are believed to have led to the development of the doctrine of *taqiyya* (precautionary assimilation), which allowed for the devotees of the community to renounce their religious convictions if that would prevent them from endangering themselves in the face of prosecution.[236] In pre-modern contexts, in which Khojas and other Isma'ilis could be openly persecuted by the rulers of the states in which they lived as minorities, *taqiyya* became standard practice for most Nizari Isma'ili communities like the Khojas.

With the coming of Aga Khan I to India and the guarantee to freedom of religion under British Colonial rule, the Imam ordered for the practice of *taqiyya* to be discontinued to strengthen the religious identity of the community. [237] Despite this discontinuation, *taqiyya* was also kept in the Khoja cultural memory through articulations and statements by Aga Khan I and witnesses in the 'Aga Khan Case'. In these occasions, *taqiyya* was used as an explanation for the doctrinal diversity present among Khojas themselves.[238] Doctrinal diversity could have been a threat for the idea of the Khoja community as al belonging to the same religious denomination. As such, the concept of *taqiyya* features as an interesting case of cultural memory in relation to doctrinal shift which resembles the analyses of Assman on conversion. The cultural memory of *taqiyya* was kept alive, and was utilized to explain the old way which was now considered 'wrong', which in this case was the diversified doctrines of the Indian Khojas. This 'wrong' diversified old religious doctrine was replaced with the 'correct' one, which was the unified religious doctrine, practice and identity of the Indian Khojas as Nizari Isma'ilis.[239]

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[234] Interview with Zafar, 28-12-2015.
[235] Asani 'The Khojahs of South Asia, Defining a Space of their Own.'
[236] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 4.
[237] Asani, 'From Satpanthi to Ismaili Muslim', 106.
[238] Daftary, *The Ismailis, Their History and Doctrines,* 516.
[239] Assman, *Moses the Egyptian,* 8.

This strategic utilization resembles some of the influence of the cultural memory makers the Aga Khans and the Nizari Isma'ili historians of ITREB and the Institute of Ismaili Studies. The memory of *taqiyya,* a doctrine developed in the face of persecution, is still kept alive in order to instruct the Khojas to maintain a strong and homogenized religious identity. However, the context of persecution in which *taqiyya* was developed also teaches the community to be weary of the vulnerability of a religious minority. Partly as a result of this, local communities like the Hyderabad community remained alert for interreligious tensions. In these situations, they sought ways to, on the one hand, facilitate security for the Hyderabadi Khoja community as well as maintain an articulated religious identity. In this sense, the colony became a safe haven for the Khojas to feel secure in their own religious identity.[240]

For the Hyderabadi Khojas, however, sectarian violence does not only exist as a cultural memory. Living in Hyderabad, most of them also experienced the religious tensions in the city themselves. Additionally, the Khojas of Hyderabad also received large numbers of evacuees from Gujarat in response to sectarian violence there. The social interactions with these Gujarati Khojas, as well as the social interactions among themselves generated a flux of communicative memories about sectarian violence.

Zafar told me about life in Hyderabad when the evacuees had just arrived. "I don't know man. Things are different now they are here. Their culture simply is different."[241] When the evacuees from Gujarat first arrived, all of them were sheltered in and around the living colony. During the course of the years, more of them were relocated to another area in the city called Mehdipatnam, were eventually, they founded a new *jama'at khanas.* As an involuntary host, the severity of the Guajarati violence was mostly felt through the impact that the large number of evacuees had on daily life in and around the colony. However, other than discomforted by sheltering the Gujarati Khojas, Zafar was deeply touched by the stories of the Gujarati massacre.

Additional to his statements of disapproval mentioned earlier, Zafar reflected on the situation.

These people [The Gujarati Hindu radicals] really are capable of anything it seems. They are dangerous people. It's a tragedy something like this has happen just because of differences

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[240] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015. For more on the effects of the Hyderabad Khoja living colony, see chapter 'Locality and Segregation.'
[241] Interview with Zafar, 28-10-2015.

between communities… … I think, sometimes, that it would be easier if they would simply not know about us, just leave us alone.[242]

Caused by the interactions with the Gujarati refugees, Zafar's account should be understood as an articulation of a communicative memory. With these reflections, and the explicit longing to more anonymity, Zafar's account could be understood as a nostalgic articulation of the memory of *taqiyya,* a longing to a time in which Khojas did not have to explain their own religious identity within defined borders. Whether such an interpretation would be representative for the Khoja community is questionable as no other informant would explicitly state as such.

The more passive community members did share a reserved stance towards explaining ones religious identity to others in the city, and all of them, Zafar included, added to this that they were generally more comfortable with explaining themselves to their Hindu friends rather than their Muslim friends.[243] Among the Hyderabadi Khojas that felt bound to the local context, Fahmida was the only one to articulate strongly the opinion that Khojas should explain their own religious identity clearly to contacts in all religious communities.[244] The overall uncomfortable stance of explaining the Khoja religious identity to Muslims among passive community members is, in a sense, remarkable. Not only during the Gujarati, but also during the Hyderabadi instances of communal violence, the Khoja community was perceived to be predominantly threatened by Hindu nationalist radicals.[245]

A possible explanation for this can be found in the connection with the memories to times of *taqiyya. Taqiyya* still remains a strong part of the Khoja memory and, as such, the Khoja identity. Historically, on the Indian subcontinent, Nizari Isma'ili Khojas suffered persecution predominantly from the hands of Sunni rulers and Sunni Muslim majorities.[246] As a result, *taqiyya,* for the Khoja community, was mostly developed and acculturated as a tool for dealing with Sunni majorities and not Hindu majorities. Possibly, referring to the agents of memory articulations, this precaution towards Sunni Islamic communities still remains among the more passive Khoja community members as a persistent cultural element.

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[242] Interview with Zafar, 28-10-2015.
[243] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015, Interview with Siraj and Kifayat, 31-10-2015, Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015, Interview with Khalil, Hyderabad 1-10-2015.
[244] Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.
[245] Interview with Zafar, 28-10-2015.
[246] Daftary, *A Short History of the Ismailis,* 187; and Khan, *Conversion and Shifting Identities,* 30.

Summarizing, the more passive members of the community utilized both cultural and communicative memories to connect with their past and make sense of the interreligious realities in contemporary situations. Explorations of their memory articulations concerning communal tensions in Hyderabad and elsewhere were shown to influence the local Hyderabadi Khoja community in a double fashion.

Firstly, the cultural memory of persecution made it so that the community maintained a memory of the vulnerability of religious minorities, even when the traditional tools for coping with this majority vulnerability were doctrinally discontinued by Aga Khan I. This influence became clear through the highly organized and swift response of the Hyderabadi Khoja community in response to communal tensions in Hyderabad that threatened to spill into the community's living colony.

Secondly, the communicative and cultural memory of repression and persecution was readily linked to interreligious caution that seemed to linger among community members despite the discontinuation of the practice of *taqiyya*. Only one respondent suggested a certain longing to return to the practice of precautionary assimilation. However, a majority of the more passive Khoja community members featured in this research displayed a reserve towards fully expressing their own religious identities to members of other religious communities. The specific reservation to explain their identity to the Muslims of Hyderabad was shown to correspond to the context in which the Indian Khoja community developed their memory of persecution, namely as repressed subjects of Sunni Muslim rulers.

Relating these matters to the identity politics of the Aga Khan and his articulated ideals of active interreligious curiosity, the more passive Khojas featured in this thesis seemed somewhat hampered in their willingness to follow the Aga Khans leadership due to the memories of interreligious tension and persecution. The combination of religious-nationalist violence in the communicative memory articulations of the community and a long cultural history of persecution from Muslim hands led these Khojas to opt for distance between them and the other religious communities surrounding them. Remarkably, despite the explicit commitment of the Aga Khan to a pan-Islamic ideal, the Khojas articulated a specific reserve towards the other Muslims in the city.

"No these people know nothing of Islam, they are not Muslims."[247] A shop owner in the Charminar area of Hyderabad, the old district which is one of the major Islamic quarters in the city, seemed taken fully by surprise when I tell him I came to Hyderabad to study Khoja community of Hyderabad. When I try to explain to him that I am curious to all sorts of Islamic traditions, including the Khoja community he shakes his head in disapproval. "Nothing these people will show or tell you has anything to do with Islam, my friend. No, go visit the Mecca Masjid down the road and talk with people there." The severity with which the shopkeeper denied the Islamic claim of the Khoja community struck me at first, but it was a sentiment that would be repeated in the majority of the encounters I had with other citizens of Hyderabad.

When I sat a while longer with a shopkeeper, I had the opportunity to hear him out as to what motivated him to deny the Islamic claim of the Khoja community. After repeating himself a few times that he did not see why the Khojas would be called Muslims, he eventually started giving reasons. "They believe their Aga Khan is a prophet, they pray in a wrong way, they don't fast, they don't join us with Ashura and they don't even bury their dead properly."[248] Whether the shopkeeper's claims were true or not, it is clear that the perceived differences between the Khoja religious beliefs and practices and his own were reason for him to understand them as being two entirely different traditions. Even more, the shopkeeper seemed cautious or even suspicious for the dangers of having outsiders such as myself associate the Khoja religious beliefs and practices with Islam.

During my three month stay in Hyderabad, I had – in total – six spontaneous encounters like these, where locals would see the Khoja community of Hyderabad separated from the rest through their practices. One encounter was with a waiter in a restaurant-bar in uptown Banjara Hills who, after asking me what I was doing in Hyderabad, laughed at the idea of understanding the Khojas as a Muslim minority. When I asked him why he felt this was a wrong understanding, he came up with similar reasons as the shopkeeper. "They worship their Aga Khan as a prophet, they don't visit the mosque and they don't commit to the Muslim cause in Hyderabad."[249]

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[247] Encounter with a shop-owner in Charminar area, 10-10-2015.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Encounter with waiter, Hyderabad 19-12-2015.

Not only local Muslims seemed struck by the perceived uniqueness of the Khoja practices. Also two men identifying themselves as Hindus that I met in a café closer to Abids (the neighborhood where the Khoja gated community is) agreed together that there was a strangeness to the Khoja practices. One of them looked thoughtfully out the window of the café, vaguely in the direction of the Khoja living colony. "Muslim? I'm not sure if I would call them that. It's not like they go to the mosque right?" His friend then joined in in a happy tone. "Even if they are Muslim, they at least join the festivals!" For these two Hindu men, each in their fifty's, Khoja practices that they considered un-Islamic made them stand out somewhat positively.

These accounts echo the experiences of Firuz and the other more passive members of the community featured in the introduction of this part. These accounts combined suggest that these informants saw the differences in practices between the religious communities of Hyderabad and the Khoja community as one significant source for estrangement and distance. Especially the informants belonging to other Islamic communities seemed to experience the Khoja practices offensive to the way they understood the Islamic tradition. In the following paragraphs I will provide some examples of Khoja religious practices and how these differ from those of the communities around them, as well as how they show similarities. The paragraphs following this overview will explore how these similarities and differences further shape the interreligious interactions of the more passive Khoja community members.

Two Aga Khan Academy students, Siraj and Kifayat, are seated on one of the desks in the chemistry lab of the Academy campus. They were showing me their teaching facilities and while they were touring me around the campus, we came to the topic of holidays. Siraj looks at Kifayat as the latter of the two names the Nizari Isma'ili holidays. "First there is the Imams birthday, so Aga Khans birthday. Then there is his 'ascension' day, the day that he became the Imam [(commonly called Imamate day)]. Lastly we also celebrate *Nevruz,* that is Zoroastrian New Year, which is on the spring equinox." Siraj buds in: "Oh and we participate in fasting."[250] The first three of these are seen as official Nizari Isma'ili celebrations by the community members. The latter, fasting, is observed differently by the Khojas of Hyderabad than by the other Muslims of Hyderabad. Most Islamic communities of Hyderabad observe fasting during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. For the

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[250] Interview with Kifayat and Siraj, Hyderabad 31-10-2015.

Khoja community of Hyderabad however, fasting happens only when the new moon coincides with the first Friday of the month, which results in zero to three days of fasting each year because, unlike the lunar calendar of other Islamic traditions, the Nizari Isma'ili calendar is not based on moonsighting but on a standardized calendar dating from Fatimid times.[251]

Nevruz, Imamate Day, the Imam's birthday and the specific Nizari Isma'ili fasting are celebrations and ceremonies observed in Hyderabad almost exclusively by the Khoja community, with the exception of *Nevruz* which might be celebrated by other minority communities in the city like the Hyderabadi Parsees.[252] As such, the Khoja festivities tend to be an internal community affair, making it unlikely for other religious communities to share in these experiences. The Khoja informants I spoke with seemed more than content with this.[253] Still, in other contexts the participation in rituals and festivals of each other's religious traditions was seen as a symbol and gesture of interreligious curiosity and acceptance, as well as that it is a moment of social interaction with individuals of other communities.

One explanation for this exclusive nature of the Khoja celebrations might be that they form identity markers for the community. Academically, differences in ritual practice in Hyderabad and elsewhere have been understood as not merely the result of difference in worldview, but also as an active identity marker for minority communities.[254] If this issue of identity serves as a motivation for the exclusive nature of Khoja ceremonies and festivals, then this exclusiveness could be understood to echo the identity policies of the Aga Khan in that sense that they underline the uniqueness of the Khoja community. Another motivation for this exclusive nature of the Khoja festivities and celebrations might have to do with fear for rejection or aggression (either verbal or physical) from other religious communities that would feel offended by the Khoja rituals and ceremonies. Such a motivation would echo the cautious view of interreligious interaction displayed by Firuz, and Zafar and his friends. These two motivations do not necessarily contradict one another and it seemed to me that both might

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[251] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.

[252] The Hyderabadi Parsee community is a very small community with numbers dwindling still. 2015 estimates suggest a number of 1136 Parsees living in Hyderabad. 'Parsi Population Slides in the Twin Cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad' parsikhabar.net, http://parsikhabar.net/india/parsi-population-slides-in-twin-cities-of-hyderabad-and-secunderabad/11055/#.VynHdHrIuhE

[253] Where my informants would openly talk about participation in other's religious rituals, traditions and practices, none of them ever brought up the idea of inviting others in their ceremonies and rituals. When I asked several of them about this, being Zafar, Firuz, Mustafa and Shaila, they would either be unable to answer that question, shrug it off or respond along the lines of 'What use would it be for them?'

[254] An example in Hyderabad context: Syed Ali, 'Collective and Elective Ethnicity: Caste Among Urban Muslims in India' in *Sociological Forum*, 17, 4, (2002) 608. In the context of Shi'a minorities in Lebanon: Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern*, 36.

be true to some extent. Whatever the motivation, this exclusive nature of the Khoja holidays offers little opportunity for shared religious practices.

Contrasting this exclusive nature of the Khoja holidays, most of my Khoja informants did have an interest in participating with the public religious holidays of other religious communities in the city. However, these public religious holidays such as Diwali, Christmas and Ashura constitute a combination of two different domains of this research: the privatization of religion and practice. Part 4 is specifically dedicated to address the complexity in which these public rituals influence the interreligious realities of the Khoja community of Hyderabad.

Other than exclusive religious holidays, the Khoja community also have rites of passage concerning marriage and death, which differ from those same rites of the other religious communities in Hyderabad, Hindu and Muslim to some extent.

When it comes to marriage, the Khoja community follow principles similar to the Islamic principle of marriage as a contract between individuals. This contract is understood as something mostly of a social and religious legal significance, and not as a moment of transcendent significance. Other than the contract ceremony, which is called *nikāḥ* and can take as little time as a few minutes according to Firuz, the wedded couple can decide for themselves how to celebrate their wedding, not unlike the other Islamic communities of Hyderabad. The *nikāḥ* ceremony for the Khojas of Hyderabad is held at the *jama'at khana*. As such, ritualistically, the Nizari Isma'ili practice of marriage is not different from that of other Islamic traditions who hold a very similar ceremony in the presence of their imam.

There are however some contextual differences that have some influence on the interreligious interactions of the Khoja community. One of these is the matter on whose authority people are wed. In pre-modern times, before the Aga Khans came to India in the nineteenth century, *nikāḥ* ceremonies would often be led by Sunni *qadis* (Islamic legal judge) whenever this was convenient, causing additional exchange and interaction between the Khojas and the Sunnis.[255] When Aga Khan I came to India and sought to consolidate his authority of the Khojas in India, this practice was discontinued. After his coming, all *nikāḥ* ceremonies were supposed to be held in the *jama'at khanas*. According to one account, some Khoja communities used to 'consult Brahmin priests for omens' concerning their marriages,

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[255] Hollister, *Shi'a of India,* 369.

and would do that still today.[256] However, I observed no indications of such a practice for the Hyderabad community. Instead, most of the Khojas that I spoke with were more inclined to jest about the Brahmin caste and their purity rites rather than describing them as spiritual authorities.[257] Because of this I find it implausible that Hyderabadi Khojas still consult Brahmin priests for their marriages, making the whole ceremony an internal affair.

Another way in which the Khoja marriage practices differ from those of surrounding communities is the way in which marriages and divorces are communicated in the community. On a weekly basis, during a *jama'at khana* devotional session, all the marriages and divorces of that week are announced publicly to the community members. This public aspect to marriages and divorces as a community affaire influences the way my informants talked about the morals of their own community. Zafar mentioned with a wry smile on his features that his fellow Khojas 'no longer take marriage seriously' and that they 'would marry someone only to divorce a short time later.'[258] Firuz mentioned a similar pattern, stating that nowadays the Khoja community is losing its piety.[259] Both of them described this perceived increase in divorces as a sign of a decrease of piety within the Khoja community, denouncing the ease with which their fellow Khojas would divorce their partners. Firuz went as far as saying that this impiety was 'probably a reason why the other Muslims of the city don't really take us seriously.'[260] This feeling of shame and disapproval for the casual attitude towards marriage seemed to enhance their preference of keeping Khoja community affairs private, or at least not share them with their non-Khoja friends.[261]

When it comes to death and the funeral rites of the Khoja community, there are not only social differences with the funeral rites of the other religious communities of Hyderabad, but also ritualistic differences.

The Hyderabadi Khojas, like other Nizari Isma'ili communities around the world, belief that identity becomes insignificant after death. Firuz provided a theological explanation for this.

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[256] Hollister, *Islam and the Shi'as Faith in India,* 410.
[257] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015; Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad. 8-11-2015.
[258] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015.
[259] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[260] Idem.
[261] Both Zafar and Firuz underlined that they felt comfortable sharing this with me because, as a European, I would probably not be shocked by a casual attitude towards marriage.

For us, all the dead return to the one soul of God. Then, your name and identity no longer mean what they meant for you when you are alive, but they only, sort of, stand in the way for this unity. Simply put, the dead have no identity.[262]

The concept of the dead without identity was echoed by all the Khoja informants that I had the opportunity of broaching the topic of death with.[263] This concept of the dead without identity is in a sense unique in the religious context of Hyderabad. The Hindu concept of reincarnation of the soul somewhat resembles the fading identity of the dead, but especially compared to the other Abrahamic communities of Hyderabad, be they Muslim or Christian, the Khoja understanding of death is unique, as are the Khoja funeral rites.

The funeral rites of the Khojas are called *mayath*. Within the living colony of the Khojas in downtown Abids area, there is a special commission that takes care of the fulfillment of the *mayath*. From what I gathered from my informants, the deceased is retrieved by the members of the commission for a ritual washing in a special sequence of waters. After this washing, the body is embalmed to be displayed to the relatives of the deceased once more.[264] After this viewing, a small retinue travels with the body to the Khoja gravesite in Secunderabad, few kilometers from the Hyderabad living colony, where the deceased is buried without a tombstone or marker of location.[265] Every ten years or so, the commission adds a new layer of soil on top of the previous graves for the new dead to be buried in.[266]

Contrasting the anonymous gravesite of the Khojas in Secunderabad are the many Islamic cemeteries that dot the Hyderabadi cityscape, housing the dead of both the Shi'a as well as the Sunni Muslims of the city. Shrines of deceased Sufi saints decorate the corners of the many streets of the city. Some of these as well as the larger cemeteries were completely surrounded by modern motorways, or ended up inconveniently in the middle of a thoroughfare because of the Islamic understanding that graves should not be moved,. These cemeteries and saint-graves are majestically decorated with calligraphic verses of the Qur'an and the names of the dead who lay there, awaiting resurrection at the end of times. On the other end of the spectrum, the gravesite in Secunderabad also differs strongly from the crematory pyres of the Hindu population of Hyderabad.

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[262] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[263] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015; Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad; Interview with Malika, Mumbai.
[264] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[265] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015; Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015.
[266] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.

The Khojas of Hyderabad used to share some of the cemeteries of the other Islamic communities of the city, despite differences between the Khoja and other Islamic funeral rites. However, the funeral commission of the Hyderabad community raised enough funds for their own gravesite and as such the joint venture was ended.[267] As was the case with marriages, institutionalization of the Khoja community lead to a decreased necessity for cooperation with the neighboring Islamic communities for religious practices.

Other than these rites of passage, the Khoja community devotional sessions in the *jama'at khana* also display some differences with the devotional practices of their surrounding communities. Some of these, especially where the Khoja community differs from the other Islamic traditions of the city, were already mentioned in other parts of this thesis, such as the inclusion of *gināns* (devotional songs) in the prayer sessions, or the mandatory *hijra* (pilgrimage) towards the Imam instead of the Ka'ba.

Other differences that add to the isolation of the Khoja religious practices from the other Islamic communities of the city are the times of prayer, and the manner in which these times of prayer are announced. Rather than praying five times a day, the Khojas pray two times a day. The first prayer takes place at four in the morning with devotees already gathering at two. In the evening there is a second prayer at seven. According to Malika, these timings originate from times of *taqiyya,* when Khojas had to attend the prayer sessions of other communities additionally to their own prayers to mask their identity as Nizari Isma'ilis.[268] The absence of the call to prayer from the *jama'at khana* is probably the result of *taqiyya* as well. According to some of my sources the call to prayer is replaced by a bell which is chimed in the streets around the *jama'at khana,* but details about this chiming remained vague and at times contradicting.[269] Differences in devotional practice with other non-Islamic communities are too plenty to sum up in this thesis.

Summarizing, the religious practices of the Khoja community are predominantly isolated from the religious practices of the surrounding communities, other Islamic communities included. Some of these rites and ceremonies used to be practiced in cooperation with other

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[267] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[268] Interview Malika, Mumbai.
[269] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 27-12-2015; Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.

Islamic communities in the city, but as a result of further institutionalization of the Nizari Isma'ilis, the Khojas of Hyderabad became more self-reliant for their practices over time.

In that sense, the self-reliance of the local Khoja community in Hyderabad echoes the endeavors of the Nizari Isma'ili leadership to manufacture a religious identity for the Khoja community that was distinguishable. However, as was explored in part I, the socio-legal strategy of the Aga Khans was a complex and seemingly contradicting one. Not only did the Aga Khans seek to articulated an elaborate Nizari Isma'ili identity, they also sought to stimulate interreligious curiosity and a link to a globalized pan-Islamic unity. This connection with pan-Islamic unity is however not echoed by the social reality of the religious practices of the Khoja community.

The increased self-reliance of the Khoja community to provide their own infrastructures for religious practices further isolated their religious practice, decreasing the moments of social contact. In turn, this decreased social interaction seems to have led to a further estrangement of the Khoja religious practices and other Islamic communities in the city as was shown by the opinions of non-Khojas.

Locality and Segregation

Facing Chirag Ali Lane, one of the major thoroughfares of downtown Abids area, stands the proud, clean, milk-white facade of the Hyderabad *jama'at khana*, sporting five large wooden entry doors which can be reached via the lush green garden with fountain. The front doors to the Khoja hall of prayer opens only for the devotional sessions, which take place at four in the morning and seven in the evening, before sunrise and after sunset. When the doors are opened, an outsider observing the building from the street catches a glimpse of an impressive glass lamp that illuminates the antechamber that precedes the actual devotional space. This outsider will most likely never see the inside of the building, and from where he is standing, he misses the majority of the devotees that enter the building from a side-door located inside the gated community, away from prying eyes. The Hyderabad Khoja living colony is a secluded place.

One of the factors that influences the interreligious realities of the Khojas in Hyderabad is their geographical position in the city, and the way the Khoja location relates itself to the rest of the city. Especially for the more passive members of the Khoja community, who are more geographically bound to the Hyderabad locality than the active members, the cityscape

provides for the theatre in which the interreligious realities of the Khojas take place. The secluded living colony on Chirag Ali Lane and the adjoined *jama'at khana* feature in this thesis as the geographical focal point of the Nizari Isma'ili Khoja community of Hyderabad, with the majority of my informants either residing in the colony itself or in apartments surrounding the colony.[270] Also, most of the institutional infrastructures of the Khoja community are centered around this colony.

The city houses more Khoja hubs than the colony, but these are less central to the Khoja infrastructure and were little known by the non-Khoja informants. One of these hubs is the area of the city called Mehdipatnam, which is located somewhat outside the center of the city and serves mostly as a transition area between the city center, the more uptown and posh neighborhoods as well as the suburbs of the city. Refugees from Gujarat that left the area because of the communal violence are the main inhabitants of this hub.[271] However, the hub does not serve as a infrastructural and institutional center as the Chirag Ali Lane colony does. Also, Secunderabad, Hyderabad's twin city which forms a significant portion of the Hyderabad urban area, has its own *jama'at khana* and living colony. However, this *jama'at khana* seemed mostly independent from the Hyderabad Khoja community. Other than this, the Aga Khan Academy of Hyderabad campus situated a few kilometers outside the city is another hub for Khojas, though its students and teachers are not necessarily Khojas nor do their families have to live in Hyderabad.

One of the ways the colony influences the interreligious realities of the Khoja community is its isolation. The secluded nature of the Khoja colony is not an accidental symptom but instead seems to have been actively designed in the construction of the colony and the way life in the colony is organized. This design becomes clear in the many ways in which the infrastructure of the colony shelters Khoja daily life from outsiders.

First of these is the visibility of the colony. From publicly accessible streets the only parts of the colony that are visible are the illustrious *jama'at khana* as described in the introduction of this chapter, the two entrance gates to the colony which consist of simple but functional metal fences, and the facade of the Aga Khan Health Centre which administers all

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[270] Fahmida and her family live in the colony, and Malika stayed there with friends during her visits to Hyderabad. Firuz's parents, Zafar, Khalil and Mustafa lived in surrounding apartments. The residences of my other contacts remained unknown during our interactions, but from their description of life in Hyderabad (for example proximity to the *jama'at khanas*) I gathered that most of them lived in the area as well.
[271] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015; Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015.

sorts of healthcare to the Khoja community. Further down the road stands the Aga Khan Diamond Jubilee School run by Khojas but open to children of all backgrounds. Other than these, nothing of the living colony is visible from outside because the view is blocked by Chirag Ali storefronts and concrete walls. Added to this limited visibility of the Khoja colony, most of the visible buildings have (back)entrances accessible from inside the colony. So, while the *jama'at khana* and Aga Khan Health Centre are visible from the public roads, the Khojas enter them without being observed by outsiders. The exception is the Aga Khan Diamond Jubilee School, which probably has to do with the schools ambition to include both Khoja and non-Khoja children. However, even when the Khoja children go to school, they only have to pass through public space for an estimated 200-meter walk.

Added to this limited external visibility of colony life, the colony also offers many services which allows for many aspects of Khoja daily life to take place in the safety of the colony. The Aga Khan Health Center was already mentioned, which offers a wide variety of healthcare services including dental care and physiotherapy.[272] The *jama'at khana* building also houses the offices of the Aga Khan Development Network, creating internal workspaces for a number of Khojas. The Khoja community even organizes a canteen in the colony from which many of the Khoja families can get their meals relatively cheap if they feel like having additional company. Additionally, also the funeral and marriage ceremonies described in the previous chapter take place almost entirely in the safety of the colony. In the wording of Fahmida 'I can spend an entire week inside the colony without ever having to come outside.'[273]

Other than visibility, the Khoja living colony is also defined by its position relative to the rest of the city. Abids area is one of the many urban centers in Hyderabad, situated adjacent to the central train station of the city and in walking distance of some of the city's landmarks. The area is considered relatively posh though not extremely so. Religiously, Abids area is one of the few thoroughly mixed areas where both Muslims and Hindus live. Lastly, most of the city's churches, including the largest two, St. Georges Church and St. Joseph's Cathedral are in the area. Compared to the overall distribution of religious communities in the city, most of which are either distinguishably Muslim or Hindu segregated in different neighborhoods and colonies, Abids area is a bit of an oddity in the city.[274]

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[272] Interview with Fahmida, 2-12-2015.
[273] Idem.
[274] Rao and Thaha, "Muslims of Hyderabad," 189-212.

The economic situation of Abids area reflects the position of the Khojas as compared to the other Islamic communities of the city somewhat. In general, the Muslims in Hyderabad feel suppressed by the Hindu majority in the city, especially economically. Despite the amount of Hyderabadi Islamic IT specialists working abroad, few of them find work in the booming IT industries of the city nor do they find access to stable government jobs.[275] Instead, many of these IT specialists seek their opportunities abroad in the west and Saudi Arabia based on the perception that they would be discriminated against when they apply for similar jobs in Hyderabad.[276] Closely connected to the economic situation of the Hyderabadi Muslims is the neglect of public spaces and housing in the Old City, as well as limited education, low income, poor diets and limited hygiene, resulting in a severe case of 'urban deprivation'.[277]

The Khoja community, however, experiences only little of these plights that are seen as typical for the Hyderabadi Muslim community. Overall the Khoja community is wealthy, with a large group of them working in well-paid jobs, or owning small businesses. Some of these businesses grew out to become integral part of the Hyderabadi shop assortment.[278] Overall, the economic situation of the Khoja community is experienced as equal or more favorable than that of the Hindu majority of the city. Most of my Khoja informants mentioned that the accessibility of quality education was a major cause for the differences in economic profile between Khojas and other Muslims in the city.[279] Education enables the Khojas of Hyderabad to participate economically in society and to learn commercial skills. Additionally, organizations as ITREB as well as the Aga Khan Diamond Jubilee School and the Aga Khan Academy host educational programs that stimulate social responsibility, which are understood to add to the economic empowerment of the Khoja community.[280]

Other than differences, the economic profiles of both the Khoja community and the other Islamic communities of Hyderabad showed similarities in terms of migration. Both groups, Khojas and other Muslim communities in Hyderabad, are marked with a high rate of economic migration to the west. Informants would either have lived in western countries

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[275] Rao and Thaha, "Muslims of Hyderabad," 201-2.
[276] Syed Ali, "'Go West Young Man': The Culture of Migration among Muslims in Hyderabad,' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 33, 1 (January 2007) 42-3.
[277] Rao and Thaha, 'Muslims of Hyderabad,' 201.
[278] Most renown of these is the Hollywood Footwear shoe store chain, a company owned by Hyderabadi Khojas.
[279] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015; Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015; Interview with Firuz, 8-11-2015; Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015; Interview with Amina, 31-10-2015.
[280] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 21-11-2015; Interview with Shaila, 31-10-2015.

themselves, or would have a family member or close friend who had or did so still.[281] This frequency corresponds to observations made between 1997 and 2002 among the Muslim community of the Old City area, close to the Charminar landmark.[282] Additionally, both the respondents to the 1997-2002 research as well as my Khoja informants now underlined the improved chances of a man to marry favorably if he holds a visa for the United States.[283] According to Malika, a man holding a green card would be considered an 'A-class partner for marriage' in a comparison which introduced some partners as low as 'F-class' partners.[284]

However, despite this similarity, the Khoja community seems economically segregated from the other Muslim communities of the city, a segregation which is reflected by the location of the Khoja living colony outside the main Islamic area of Old City. Instead of having to cope with perceived neglect and deprivation like the other Islamic communities centered around Old City, the Khoja community created a gated community which provided the basics that were lacking in other parts of the city.

When asked about the influence she thought the existence of the colony had on the interreligious experiences of the Khoja community, Fahmida was very clear that she saw it as a boon to the Khojas curiosity to other religious communities. Seated in her apartment looking out over the central square of the Chirag Ali Lane living colony she told me: "I think the safety of the colony gives us the extra courage to come out and meet other people."[285] When I asked her specifically whether she thought that the gated community made it more difficult for Khojas to get in touch with other religious communities, she shook her head. "Quite the contrary, I think it helps them."[286] Fahmida's assertion seems to be confirmed by the experiences of Malika, who developed a keen interest in other religious traditions than her own despite having lived significant portions of her life in contexts that were secluded much like the Hyderabad living colony.[287]

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[281] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015.
[282] Ali, "'Go West Young Man,'" 38.
[283] Ali, "'Go West Young Man,'" 45.
[284] Interview with Malika, Mumbai 23-11-2015.
[285] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015.
[286] Ibid.
[287] In her place of birth, Malika was predominantly surrounded by the Khoja community there. A similar situation exists in Mumbai were she spend a lot of time in the context of her work with ITREB. Also, during her stay in London, she was living in apartments together with other Nizari Isma'ilis.

The experiences of other informants however do not fully correspond with the accounts of Malika and Fahmida. Aga Khan Academy students Shaila and Amina seemed struck by the small number of students of different backgrounds they interacted with in Hyderabad, especially other Muslims.[288] Zafar was proud to say that many of his friends were non-Khojas. However, most of these friends he only knew from after his return to Hyderabad from the United States, living in the apartments close to Chirag Ali Lane rather than inside the colony itself.[289] Firuz, who grew up close to the colony – but not inside it – mentioned the friends of his parents, many of who were either Muslim, Christian or Hindu. Additionally, he was send to a non-Khoja primary school where he was the only Khoja student, because his parents wanted him to experience communities other than the Khoja community.[290]

Taking the experiences of my other Khoja informants in account led me to reevaluate Fahmida's statement on the influence of the secluded colony on interactions with other religious communities. Life in the gated community of the Khojas probably adds to the reassurance of the Khoja identity, which also seems in line with socio-psychological perspectives on identity that closely link the assertion of an identity to social interactions with others of such an identity. A strong identity does not necessarily imply a reserved stance towards interreligious relations, for Fahmida it even meant the opposite. However, working for the Henry Martyn Institute for the majority of her life, she would have plenty of opportunities to have social interactions with people from other religious communities in the city as well. Other Khojas have less opportunities for encountering the religious other in their daily lives. The exclusive nature of the Khoja living colony seems one of the causes of this.

Another result of this segregation is the way in which the pan-Islamic ideals of the Aga Khan are translated to a local context in Hyderabad. On economic issues, the Hyderabadi Muslims are in a completely different position than the Hyderabadi Khojas. Additionally, the Hyderabadi Muslims, both Shi'a and Sunni, organize their financial means through *wakf* boards (charity funds based on Islamic law). These *wakf* boards function as financers of economic and social welfare for the Muslim community in Hyderabad, investing money in profitable enterprises, mosques and the maintenance of some of the city's Islamic heritage

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[288] Interview with Shaila and Amina, Hyderabad 31-10-2015.
[289] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 27-12-2015.
[290] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.

sites. The *wakf* boards are relatively ineffective in improving the social situation of the Muslim population of Hyderabad despite their considerable financial means.[291]

The Khoja community does not contribute to these *wakf* funds. Instead, through institutions like the Aga Khan Development Network, which is in turn funded through the tithes paid to the Aga Khan in person, the Khoja community contributes autonomously to the development of the Hyderabad cityscape. The ineffectiveness of the *wakf* boards starkly contrasts the efficient funding and development schemes of the Aga Khan Development Network for the social situation of the Hyderabadi Khojas which adds to a feeling of competition and rivalry in their ambitions of improving urban life in Hyderabad.[292]

Conclusions, Passive Members and the Religious Other

The previous paragraphs explored the relation between the more passive Khoja community members in Hyderabad and the religious identity and interreligious ideals articulated by the Imam. The more reserved stance of the more passive members of the Khoja community towards interreligious interaction, especially with the Muslim communities of Hyderabad was analyzed by focusing on three factors that were understood as being of significant influence on the daily realities of these more passive members.

Firstly, the influence of Hyderabad's history of sectarian tensions was assessed through articulations of the community memory of sectarian violence. The articulations of these memories were divided in two categories, being articulations of either cultural memory or communicative memory. Firstly, the Khoja community seemed to cultivate a strong cultural memory of the vulnerability of their religious minority community for interreligious violence, which enabled them to respond rapidly to the impeding danger of violence, preventing Khoja casualties in Hyderabad. Secondly, the cultural memory of *taqiyya*, as well as the communicative memories of the community, seemed connect interreligious tensions to past persecutions by the hands of Sunni rulers and majorities. Especially the caution towards the Islamic community of the city displayed among the Hyderabad community members starkly contrasted the pan-Islamic ideals of the Aga Khan.

Secondly, the previous chapters explored the religious practices of the Khoja community, and how these practices influenced the interreligious realities of the passive Khoja community members. The unique practices of the Khoja community were shown to

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[291] Rao and Thaha, 'Muslims of Hyderabad,' 206.
[292] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.

have a history of mediating moments of social interaction with other Islamic communities. Previously wedding ceremonies and burial grounds were shared with other Muslims. However, as a result of increased institutionalization, the Khoja community became more autonomous in their religious practices. This increased autonomy of the Khoja community seemed in line with the articulated ideal of the Aga Khan to embolden the Khoja religious identity. However, this autonomy also led to decrease of social interactions with the Islamic community, further jeopardizing a sense of pan-Islamic unity between Khojas and other Islamic communities.

Thirdly, the position of the Khoja community in Hyderabad was identified as significantly influencing the Khoja religious identity and interreligious realities in daily life. With Khoja life in Hyderabad being organized predominantly around the gated living colony in Abids area, segregation, both geographical as well as economical, featured in this exploration as a major theme. The security provided by segregation seemed to enhance the confidence with which the Khoja community members practiced and articulated their religious identity. Simultaneously, the economic as well as geographical segregation separated the Khoja community from the struggles of the other Islamic communities of Hyderabad completely. As such, the organizational and economic efficiency of the Khoja community inspired feelings of rivalry and competition among the other Muslim communities of Hyderabad, especially due to their repressed economic position, leading to further estrangement between Khojas and other Muslims in Hyderabad.

Overall, the more passive members of the Khoja community in Hyderabad seemed to reflect the Aga Khans policies in emboldening the Khoja religious identity. Through increased autonomy and segregation, the more passive Khoja community members felt encouraged to embrace their own traditions. However, despite this commitment to an autonomous Khoja religious identity, the passive community members predominantly felt hesitant to articulate this identity to members of other religious communities, especially Islamic communities. This hesitance was shown to be related to the memory of religious tensions in the community's cultural and communicative memory.

Additionally, this segregation and autonomy of the Khoja religious identity significantly decreased the incentives for the more passive Khoja community members to connect with other religious communities in the city. The lack of incentives to connect, combined with the memory of sectarian violence threatening the community seemed to refrain the more passive Khoja community members to practice the Aga Khan's ideal of

interreligious curiosity. Instead of seeing interreligious curiosity as a stepping stone for a harmonious pluralistic society, the Hyderabadi Khojas opted for caution in the display of diversity.

Part 4, Ashura and other Public Rituals

Up until this point, the religious identity articulations and interreligious realities of active and passive members of the Khoja community have been explored separately in order to reflect the social layers of the Hyderabad Khoja community. However, the social stratification of the Khoja community is not understood in this thesis as being absolute. Some informants displayed traits of both the more active as well as the more passive social strata. In order to let the data recovered from informants of the two different social layers converse with each other I bring them together in a case study of Khoja interaction with Ashura and other public rituals in the final part of this thesis.

The sound of drums fills the Hyderabadi streets. The instruments are accompanied by the loud rumbling of trucks and chanting of people. The smells of sweets and snacks are combined with the diesel fumes and the naturel scent of large groups of people. Few aspects in Hyderabadi religious life leave such an overwhelming imprint on city life as the religious festivals and public rituals of the various communities of the city.

Hyderabad boasts many festivals and public rituals throughout the year from all sorts of backgrounds. Hindu festivals like Diwali and Ganesh Chaturth are celebrated on the streets *en masse.* Especially Ganesh Chaturth, during which statues of the Hindu deity Ganesh are offered to the large central lake of Hyderabad, Hussain Sagar, manages to attract massive numbers of devotees both from the city itself as the surrounding areas.[293] Due to the nature of the festival, which consists majorly of long processions carrying statues of the deity Ganesh sometimes as tall as ten meters, results in a very visible form of piety, affirming the city's connection with Hindu traditions.

In the days leading to the processions many groups of people work together, being they families, neighborhoods or companies, to build the statues for the festival. The majority of these statues are constructed in temporary workshops that mushroom around the city in anticipation of the great event, but others are made on private premises of their sponsors instead. One of these workshops was erected close to the Henry Martyn Institute where I stayed during my fieldwork. I visited the workshop after the festival, when the majority of the

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[293] It is difficult to make an assessment of the number of devotees that join the ceremonial processions as participants or merely as onlookers, and finding accurate numbers proved difficult. But during my visit to the festival in 2015, the area immediately surrounding the 4,4 km^2 lake was completely filled with people joining the festivities.

work of the craftsmen was done. Language barriers prevented long conversations between me and the workers of the workshop, but I was able to have more detailed conversations with the manager of the workshop, who would also serve as a translator for his personnel. He explained to me that during the process of production, the statues were still considered mundane objects. However, as became clear from interactions with him and his craftsmen, the individuals working on these statues were energetic and proud in anticipation of the sacredness that would be embodied by their crafts on a later date.[294]

Ganesh Chaturth, due to its visible nature, grew into an identity marker for the Hindu presence in Hyderabad over the course of the 20th century. Allegedly, the festival was celebrated predominantly in a private setting, and was transformed into a public event due to stimulation by BJP and Congress politicians.[295] As a result, Ganesh Chaturth was often connected to instances of communal violence in Hyderabad, either due to increased emotions of Hindu nationalist radicals in anticipation of the event, or as the target of Islamic radicals wishing to target one of the central identity markers of the city's Hindu communities.[296]

Another public event of piety for which Hyderabad is globally renown is the Ashura commemoration of the Shi'a community.[297] During Ashura, Shi'a communities commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain at the battle of Karbala in 680. Ashura, which is the tenth day of the month Muharram, signifies the climax of a series of commemorations during the first ten days of the month. During Ashura, devotees move to the streets and publicly perform a ritual of spectacular self-flagellation to mourn the gruesome fate of Husain and his companions. In a long procession clad in black, male devotees navigate through the old city center of Hyderabad. The procession starts from the various *Ashoor Khanas*, where the sessions of mourning took place in the days leading up to Ashura. From there the processions move past Hyderabad's most famous landmark Charminar, to the riverbanks of the Musi River which runs along the northern border of the Old City quarter. During the course of this massive procession, bare-chested males, both men and boys, rhythmically beat themselves across the chest with flat hands while holding razors between their fingers, resulting in a

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[294] Interviews in the temporary statue workshop, Hyderabad 10-10-2015.

[295] Extensive research into princely funding of Hindu festivals in Hyderabad, before the forceful inclusion of the Princely state in independent India show that Ganesh Chaturth was not among the publicly funded festivals. Karen Leonard, 'Hindu Temples in Hyderabad, State Patronage and Politics in South Asia' in *South Asian History and Culture,* 2, 3 (June 2011) 361-3.

[296] Rao and Thaha, 'Muslims of Hyderabad,' 197-8. and A.A. Engineer, 'Communal Killings in Hyderabad,' *Economic and Political Weekly,* 19, 40, (October 1984) 1689.

[297] For an extensive and contemporary description of the ritual in Hyderabad, I recommend Karen G. Ruffle, 'Wounds of Devotion: Reconceiving *Mātam* in Shi'i Islam.' *History of Religion,* 55, 2 (November 2015) 172-195.

spectacular and bloody display of devotion. During the procession, the devotees lyrically lament the fate of Husain over the rhythm of the beating. Like in other cities with large Shi'a communities, Hyderabad's Ashura procession attracts throngs of people, both spectator and participant.[298]

For many Shi'a communities in the world, the commemoration of Karbala is one of the major public identity markers, so much so that it is often seen as a 'cultural paradigm' both by Shi'a community members as well as outsiders.[299] The significance of the commemoration is reflected in the permanent presence of the exquisitely decorated halls of mourning, the *Ashoor Khanas*, which serve no other purpose than storing the banners devoted to the martyrs of Karbala and housing the mourners during Muharram. Hyderabad alone boasts around 140 *Ashoor Khanas*, some dating back as far as the 16th century when they were commissioned by the royal family of the time, the Qutb Shahis. The sensitivity of Ashura as identity marker for the Shi'a community of Hyderabad becomes even more clear in the debates concerning the funding of the commemoration and the maintenance of the *Ashoor Khanas*. When in 2013 it became clear that promised financial support for *Ashoor Khana* maintenance from the government was not made available, this sparked a strong sentiment among the Shi'a and Sunni communities of the cities that the government did not represent the Islamic sentiments in the city.[300]

There are many differences between these two public events of piety. Where one is festive the other is an occasion of mourning and while one of them is developed in a context of Hindu traditions, the other originates from a Shi'a Islamic context. Despite these differences, the two events also resemble one another in numerous ways. To name some: Both events define public space and infrastructure as a stage on which devotional acts can be performed. Both events require physical space to facilitate preparation, in the form of either temporary workshops or permanent *Ashoor Khanas*, which for this reason transform into spaces of spiritual anticipation. Both events emphasize destructive physical actions, either through offering statues to the waters of Hussain Sagar or through the self-flagellation of the devotees, and both events do not only attract large numbers of devotees, but also equally impressive flocks of spectators from different religious backgrounds.

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[298] Ruffle estimates the amount of visitors in tens of thousands. Ruffle, 'Wounds of Devotion', 192.
[299] Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern,* 130.
[300] A.Y. Khan, 'Promised funds for Ashoor Khanas nowhere in sight' in *The Hindu, Hyderabad,* 22-11-2013.

Despite the similarities between these two events, the Khoja community members had different relation to both of these. Neither the passive members, nor the active members of the community that I interviewed would attend the Ashura procession, while most of them had attended the Ganesh Chaturth at least once or twice in their lifetime.[301] The reason for this difference in attitude has a lot to do with the re-articulation of religious identity by the Aga Khans over the course of the 20th century, which problematized Khoja participation in Ashura commemoration.

On the one hand, especially under the current Imam, Aga Khan IV, the Khoja community endeavored not only a connection with a pan-Islamic identity, but also in general an open attitude towards other religious traditions. To recollect, Aga Khan IV specifically advised not only passive tolerance to other religious communities, but an 'active curiosity' for the religious other.[302] Simultaneously, in order to claim authority over the Khoja community, the Aga Khans had to emphasize the uniqueness of their Nizari Isma'ili religious identity. As a result, the Aga Khans discontinued many religious practices that the community had seen as their own, with the argument that these acculturated practices were the result of centuries of *taqiyya,* and were therefore no longer required.[303] was the ritualistic commemoration of Karbala on Ashura.[304]

The ideal of interreligious curiosity and the homogenization of Khoja religious doctrine were translated to the Hyderabadi context as followed. The community members that I met were, in general, very open to the idea of participation with religious rituals and festivals of traditions other than their own. During our conversations, young recalled how he and his parents had a yearly tradition of visiting the local church for the Christmas service. Similarly, he and his friends would participate with Diwali celebrations with their Hindu friends.[305] For Zafar, participating in Diwali and Ganesh Chaturth came with equal ease and merriment.[306] Also, two Aga Khan Academy students, Siraj and Kifayat, recollected fond memories of Christmas and Diwali celebrations in the years past.[307] For most of them, the

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[301] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015; Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015; Interview with Malika, Hyderabad 27-10-2015; Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015; Interview with Khalil, Hyderabad 1-11-2015 and others.
[302] Aga Khan "Transcript: Jodidi Lecture by His Highness the Aga Khan 'The Cosmopolitan Ethic in a Fragmented World' 12-11-2015.
[303] See chapter 'Mobilization into Modernity.'
[304] Hollister, *Islam and Shia's Faith in India,* 409.
[305] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[306] Interview with Zafar, Hyderabad 28-10-2015.
[307] Interview with Siraj and Kifayat, 31-10-2015.

festivities were an occasion to celebrate with friends from different religious backgrounds than their own.

For all of them, festivals like Ganesh Chaturth did not seem related to the 'Hinduification' of Hyderabad like they did for the other Muslim communities of the city. If these festivals did represent such a process, the Khoja informants did not seem to mind. The only informant that I spoke with that showed some reserve to attending Ganesh Chatturth and Diwali was Firuz. For him, these festivals were unnecessarily hazardous for the living environment in Hyderabad through contamination and pollution. As a result, he and some of his fellow students were helping initiatives to transform these celebrations into environment-friendly happenings.[308]

However, when it comes to the issue of participating in Ashura, it was clear that a different sentiment was prevalent among the community members that I had met. There were two types of responses from my interlocutors, one of which I associate with the active members of the community and the other response with the passive members of the community.

The response that I came to associate with the passive members of the community was that association with the Ashura commemoration would be not only not recommendable, but even unadvisable. When I asked Khalil and Mustafa about their opinions towards the Ashura ritual while we were sitting at the edge of the cricket playfield, they made a slight scoffing sound and shook their heads. After a short silence Mustafa pointed at the field, stating that 'bodies were meant to do beautiful things like sports, not to be mutilated.' In similar fashion.[309] Zafar would repeat several times that the mutilation of the body was not a good way to commemorate. Also Firuz, who like Fahmida seems to be somewhat in-between the role of active and passive member, stated in disdain that he would never go to the Ashura commemoration. The bloodiness of the whole ritual was for him something that he did not want to associate with religiousness.[310]

The more active members of the community, despite their equal aversion for the ritual, seemed not to support their opinions with arguments based on the corporal but of the spiritual aspects of the ritual. Malika for example explained to me how the Khojas would not commemorate the death of Husayn because 'a new Imam was enthroned by God upon his

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[308] Interview with Firuz, 11-2-2015.
[309] Interview with Khalil and Mustafa, Hyderabad 1-11-2015.
[310] Interview with Aga Khan Academy student Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.

death.' For her, the death of Husayn did not mean the death of the Imam. She bases this belief on the principle that 'the world can never be without an Imam.'[311] For her, the death of Husayn is a tragic historic event, but not one that requires more commemoration than the multitude of tragic deaths in human history. After explaining this, she added that the 'Aga Khan strongly recommended against it.'[312]

Malika was not alone in bringing up similar doctrinal reasons for not joining the Ashura commemorations either as participant or spectator. Fahmida smiled when I asked her why Khojas would not join. After shaking her head, she responded. "Sascha, the dead require no commemoration. It is the living that require our attentions."[313] Her words echo the religious doctrine of the Khoja community concerning funeral rites and death as Firuz explained them: "The dead have no identity."[314] Also Shaila and Amina explained that they had never visited the Ashura commemorations, and based themselves on similar doctrinal arguments. In the wording of Shaila. "What good does it do Husayn of we commemorate him even this many years after his death? It's not like we can commemorate all the tragic heroes of the past."[315] Amina nodded in silent confirmation.

The absence of the Khoja community during the Ashura commemoration was known to the participants and observers of the Ashura commemoration. During my observations I was partially guided by a member of the Ithna'ashariyya community of Hyderabad who helped me and other visiting researchers and students of the Henry Martyn Institute understand the ritual commemoration in the Old City area. When asked whether any Khojas would observe the ritual he shook his head immediately and replied with a definite 'no.' When asked for a reason, he simply shrugged. Later, while the ritualistic procession of flagellators passed us, I was able to speak to several spectators about the same topic. The first of these, who identified as a Christian, could not explain why the Khojas were absent during the commemorations. However, later I spoke with a Sunni local from Old City. He replied that the distance between Abids area and Old City was too great for the Khojas to be bothered to come over. He said this without scorn or resentment in his voice, he simply did not expect them to be there. His sister nodded and added "It is not their thing to do."[316]

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[311] Interview with Malika, 27-10-2015.
[312] Idem.
[313] Interview with Fahmida, Hyderabad 2-12-2015.
[314] Interview with Firuz, Hyderabad 8-11-2015.
[315] Interview with Shaila and Amina, 31-10-2015.
[316] Interview with Sunni couple during Ashura, Hyderabad 24-10-2015.

Although the Khoja absence was known, there was little known about their reasoning behind this, nor did the spectators that I spoke with seem bothered by the absence. When I asked the same Sunni spectators why they were present themselves, they said they were present in solidarity for the suffering of their fellow Muslims. Additionally, for them, the death of Husayn was also experienced as a tragedy for Islam in general, and therefore, as Muslims, they were required to at least observe the practice.[317] During the day, I encountered a similar respect and solemnity among three other Sunni observers of the ritual. This mood of solemnity and moral solidarity seems to contrast the observations made by Karen Ruffle (year), who noted the following mood:

> Spectators and participant alike take pleasure in this event. For the casual observer and nondevotee, it is the spectacle of the grotesque, and for *mātamdār* and faithful Shi'a a like, spiritual beauty is derived from the sensual experience of the 'pleasure of the whip'[318]

The ambiguity that results from these separate observations has to do with the motivations of the Sunni spectators, who Ruffle defines as 'casual observer and nondevotee', and who I experienced as more solemnly connected to the ritual on a spiritual level. Whatever the motivations of the Sunni spectators, the lack of surprise or scorn at the Khoja absence suggests that the Khojas were not understood to share the responsibility of observing the commemoration, even though the responsibility was explained to be the responsibility of the entire Muslim community.

The way the Khoja interlocutors related to Ganesh Chaturth and other Hindu festivals, as well as the way in which they argued their disassociation with Ashura commemoration, suggest a complex relation towards the interreligious ideals of the Aga Khan among the Khojas of Hyderabad. The willingness and curiosity of the Khoja informants to observe and at times even participate in the Hindu festivals reflects the interreligious curiosity articulated by the Aga Khan.

The commemoration of Ashura in contrast, was avoided by the active members mostly on a doctrinal basis. The doctrinal reasoning of the active members can be understood as the exponent of the identity politics of the Aga Khan and his predecessors, which was focused on the articulation of a religious identity which was autonomous from other Islamic traditions for

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[317] Idem.
[318] Ruffle, 'Wounds of Devotion' 192.

socio-legal reasons. However, in avoiding the ritual altogether, the active members seem to struggle with the articulated ideal interreligious curiosity. Especially when viewed in light of the Aga Khan's emphasis of pan-Islamic unity despite diversity among Muslims, the absence of the active members at the Ashura commemorations seems to point out a case in which articulated ideals are difficult to translate to local contexts.

The more passive members of the Khoja community that I spoke with went as far as explicitly denouncing the ritual because of their disapproval and disgust of mutilation of the body as a sign of devotion. Where the active members seemed motivated to limit their disassociation with the ritual to doctrinal, theoretical diversity without further normative consequences, the more passive members seemed to feel comfortable in openly disapproving of the practice. Possibly, this strong apathy towards the ritual might be the result of the rapid discontinuation of the practice among Khojas themselves, which could leave normative traces in the worldview of the passive members. Whatever its cause, the more passive members seemed not to relate to the Aga Khani ideals of pan-Islamic unity and interreligious curiosity in the locality of Hyderabad in respect to the Ashura commemorations.

Conclusions

In conclusion, individual interactions with eleven informants from the Khoja minority of Hyderabad showed that contexts in which they lived seriously influenced the manner in which they were able to utilize the interreligious ideals articulated by the Nizari Isma'ili leadership. However, because of the different contexts in which the more active and the more passive members of the community operated, their utilization of the Aga Khani ideals also differed.

The Imams of the community, the Aga Khan and his predecessors, were shown to articulate a seemingly contradicting religious identity and interreligious ideal for their followers since the 20th century. On the one hand, the Aga Khans promoted a keen curiosity towards the religious other in general. Additionally, through canonization of scripture and political activity, the Aga Khans explicitly emphasized the Islamic connections of the Nizari Isma'ili faith and community. This Islamic familiarization eventually developed into a transnational pan-Islamic ideal. On the other hand, they simultaneously emphasized the uniqueness of the Nizari Isma'ili tradition, distancing themselves from many religious practices they previously shared with other Islamic traditions.

These seemingly contradicting ideals resulted into confusing realities for the active members of the community. Informants like Malika showed a profound willingness to translate the ideals articulated by the Imam into practical reality in the local contexts they encountered. However, the culture of their historical memory articulations as well as the 'secular' values they inherited as part of their transnationally developed religious identity occasionally caused severe confrontations between them and the other religious communities they encountered in these local contacts. Additionally, their position half-way between two social contexts, one locally bound to Hyderabad and one transnational Nizari Isma'ili, produced conflicting systems of social validation. Although their transnational identity expected them to connect with other local religious communities, the absence of social validation of this willingness to connect from local communities seemed to incapacitate the active members from doing so.

For the passive members of the community the interreligious ideals articulated by the Imam were utilized only partially in their daily realities. Within the cultural and communicative memory of the community there were examples that taught the passive members about hardships suffered because of religious differences, especially with other Islamic communities. Additionally, the profound absence of shared practices drastically

limited the moments in which passive members would interact religiously with the other communities in the city. Lastly the geographical and economic segregation of the Khoja community in Hyderabad from the other Islamic communities further limited the opportunities of social interaction. The few expressions of Khoja religious identity that were known for others in the city often led into verbal disapproval by other Muslims in the city. Because of this, the more passive Khoja community members felt especially disconnected from the pan-Islamic ideals articulated by the Imam.

These observations culminated into the observations linked to Ashura and other public displays of public piety. In the context of Hyderabad, both the active and the passive members seemed to readily participate with the public Hindu festivals, as well as those of other religious communities, even when the other Islamic communities of Hyderabad experienced these as markers of a threatening Hinduification of the city. Contrasting this willingness to participate, both the active and passive members of the Khoja community actively avoided the public Ashura commemoration, despite the fact that this commemoration seemed to serve as an identity marker for the other Islamic communities of Hyderabad. The more passive Khoja community members mostly drew arguments for avoiding the ritual from physical aspects of the ritualistic commemoration. Through these arguments, most passive members seemed to actively denounce the commemoration ritual. The more active members of the community relied mostly on the theological discourses developed in the transnational sphere of Nizari Isma'ilism to disassociate the Khoja religious identity from the practice of Ashura. For them, the commemoration was inadvisable, but they would not condemn the practice as radically as the more passive members of the community would.

Altogether, these observations imply that the strategic aims articulated by the Aga Khan only influence the local realities to a certain extent. The active members of the community were markedly touched by his ideals, and endeavored industriously to translate these ideals into practical realities in spite of the disillusions and confrontations they encountered from these. For the passive members of the community, the ideals articulated by the Imam as well as the policies issued by him resulted in a stronger religious identity. However, especially the interreligious ideals about pan-Islamic unity seemed problematic for the them to utilize in local contexts.

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Appendix 1: Classification per Informant

More Active Members	More Passive Members	In between
Malika	Zafar	Fahmida
Nadira	Khalil	Firuz*
Shaila*	Mustafa	
Amina*		
Siraj*		
Kifayat*		

* Classification reflects the ambitions articulated by the student rather than the current position of the student