



## Reframing *Arbaeen* Pilgrimage in Western Media through a Cultural Translation: A Framing Analysis

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### Abstract

As the world's largest annual human gathering, *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is fast becoming an international event in which, according to several pieces of published news in some of the world's top news agencies such as *Independent*, a number of people apart from Muslim countries, from several non-Muslim Asian, American, African and European countries participate. This remarkable event has adequate news values including impact, magnitude and bizarreness, but it is underrepresented and/or misrepresented by the western media. It deserves to be systematically discussed in academic discourse. This study made an attempt to situate Western media's representation of *Arbaeen* within the reframing theory by Baker (2006) and the theory of cultural translation as introduced by Homi Bhabha (1994). The main research question to be pursued by this study was how *Arbaeen* pilgrimage has been reframed through a cultural translation by Western media in the last 10 years (from 2007 to 2017). To this end, news stories of the world's top 10 news agencies covering *Arbaeen* pilgrimage were chosen as the corpus of this study. The corpus then was analyzed according to Baker's (2006) narrative theory of translation that views translation as a reframing practice. Unlike the mainstream idea that *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is underrepresented by the Western media, the central argument here was that it is reconstructed and reframed within negative news stories and introduced to unknown audiences as a dangerous event, while this is a narrative with multiple positive implications including peace and solidarity among the nations with volunteers distributing free food and drinks to pilgrims, as well as offering places to relax, wash, and sleep only for Imam Hussein.

**Keywords:** *Arbaeen* pilgrimage, cultural translation, framing, narrative theory, reframing

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## Introduction

Traditionally, the Day of *Arbaeen* has been commemorated by millions of people around the world through holding mourning processions to pay tribute to the sacrifice of Imam Hussain for social justice. Typically, on this day people organize large marches in cities across the world to symbolize the eternal nature of Imam Hussain's Revolution and to show they stand for social justice and honor.

In recent years – after the fall of Saddam's regime – a tradition of walking 80km from Najaf to Karbala has been reignited. Every year since, the number has been rising steadily from 17 million pilgrims to at least 25 million. People from all walks of life and all corners of the globe make the journey, despite the imminent threat of terrorists who have vowed to attack the pilgrims.

Along the 80km stretch from Najaf to Karbala, volunteers distribute free food and drinks to those undertaking the pilgrimage, as well as offering places to relax, wash and sleep. *Arbaeen* Day is now the largest annual peaceful gathering in the world, with numbers set to increase significantly every year.

As the world's largest annual human gathering and the second largest gathering in human history after Kumbh Mela ceremony in spite of the presence of ISIS in Iraq, *Arbaeen* Day has adequate news values including impact, magnitude and bizarreness, but it is underrepresented and/or misrepresented by the western media. In the present study, an attempt is made to problematize this issue from the perspective of Translation Studies.

The current study situates itself within the framework of Baker's (2006) narrative theory of translation as a reframing practice and Farahzad's (2009) theory of translation as an intertextual practice. According to Baker, translation is indeed a narrative of the source text in which translator reframes it according to his/her ideology and subjectivity. So, translations do not fully represent the source texts and the original author but rather, they represent to some degree the voice

and narrative of the translators themselves. Baker identifies four key strategies for reframing the narrative(s) elaborated in a source text or utterance. On the other hand, according to Farahzad, the controversial idea of equivalence between source and target texts emphasized by the traditional (structuralist) theories of translation has been challenged by poststructuralist theorists of translation who replace the concept of equivalence with the notion of norms in translation. She argues that translation should be seen as an intertextual practice. This argument postulates that the idea of establishing equivalence between source and target should be shifted to the idea of establishing chains of intertextuality between the source and the target. With this shift at hand, any metatext that repeats the form or content of a prototxt can be viewed as a translated text, because chains of intertextuality can be identified between them (Farahzad, 2009). This argument is in line with Lefevere's theory of translation as rewriting according to which any derivative text including summarization, historiography, anthologizing should be seen as rewriting and translation also is one of them (Lefevere, 2003). This theory has helped us view the practice of reframing the *Arbaeen* narrative by the western media as a translation practice because an architranseme (the invariant core of meaning) can be established between the original and the reframed narratives. Thanks to these theoretical frameworks, the current study made an attempt to explore the way western media particularly top news agencies translate and reframe the event or narrative of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage occurring annually in Iraq for the English audience.

## Literature Review

Since this study is going to explore the practice of reframing the *Arbaeen* Pilgrimage by the western media in the light of “cultural translation”, it is better to begin with the what being of “cultural translation” within the context of the present study.

The idea of “cultural translation” is most significantly presented by the Indian cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, (1994/2004). For Bhabha (1994: 172), Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement, whether they are the ‘middle passage’ of slavery and indenture, the ‘voyage out’ of the civilizing mission, the fraught accommodation of Third World migration to the West after the Second World War, or the traffic of economic and political refugees within and outside the Third World. Culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement -now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of ‘global’ media technologies - make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue (Bhabha, 1994). On the other part, after the introduction of cultural turn to Translation Studies in the 1990s, translation scholars shifted from source-oriented theories of translation to target-oriented theories. As Chesterman noted, this was in part a reaction against linguistic approaches that were thought to be too narrow and to neglect the wider cultural and social aspects of translation. As a result of this turn towards a cultural dimension, scholars have looked at translation more as a way of transmitting ideas from one culture to another and thus as a way of influencing other cultures (Chesterman, 2000). The notion of translation has moved beyond issues such as fixed source and target texts, equivalence, translatability and so on; today, its concern is with cultural processes rather than linguistic processes.

Another term that is important for the purpose of this study is “Meme”. The term was proposed and first used by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene*. In this book, Dawkins introduced the notion of a meme as the cultural equivalent of the gene.

As noted by Dawkins (1976: 192) examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, and ways of making pots or

of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process that, in the broad sense, can be called imitation. If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his colleagues and students (Dawkins, 1976). Likewise, Chesterman in *Memetics and Translation Studies* (2000) holds the view that memes are everything you have learned by imitating other people\_ habits, jokes, ideas, songs ... Memes spread like genes, they replicate, often with mutation. Chesterman (2000) also points out that ‘Memes spread as people talk to each other, as they read books and listen to music - or as \_they attend a lecture’ and sees translation as a certain way to spread these memes.

Correspondingly, Darwish (2009: 103) states that memes are cultural replicators, or units of imitation, that are supposed to transmit such ideas within a culture. They can also work as cross-cultural transmitters to other cultures through cross-cultural communication, knowledge transfer or translation mediation. When such replicators fail to transmit these ideas correctly because of mistranslation or a specific translation strategy, they produce mis-memes that replicate a defective meme (Darwish, 2009).

*Arbaeen* pilgrimage as the largest annual human gathering in one of the most turbulent regions of the world, Western Asia, transmits some messages and ideas. In a lecture about *Arbaeen* pilgrimage, Al-Modarresi (2014), a faith leader, lecturer, and theologian, who specializes in Islamic spirituality, states that the first thing pilgrims do upon reaching Imam Hussein’s shrine is recite the Ziyara, a sacred text that summarizes the status of Hussein. In it, they begin the address by calling Hussein the “inheritor” of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. There is something profound in making this proclamation. It shows that Hussein’s message of truth, justice, and love for the oppressed is viewed as an inseparable extension of all divinely-

appointed prophets.... If the world understood Hussein, his message, and his sacrifice, they would begin to understand the ancient roots of Daesh and its credo of death and destruction. It was centuries ago in Karbala that humanity witnessed the genesis of senseless monstrosities, epitomized in the murderers of Hussein. It was pitch black darkness versus absolute light, an exhibition of vice versus, a festival of virtue, hence the potent specter of Hussein today. His presence is primordially woven into every facet of their lives. His legend encourages, inspires, and champions change for the better, and no amount of media blackout can extinguish its light (Al-Modarresi, 2014).

According to a published analysis titled “Ziyarat al-Arbaeen and the Civilized Message of Unity”, it is believed that Ziyarat al-Arbaeen of the shrine of Imam Hussein – peace be upon him – constitutes a tremendous momentum of gains. Each year, these gains manifest with new aspects, rendering confidence that practicing these rites positively influenced the political, ideological and sociological environment of the Iraqi people on one hand; and on the credibility of the school of Ahlul Bayt – peace be upon them – on the other hand. Moreover, it has also set the view of the global general opinion straight in regard to the aforementioned views. On the other hand, it is not something new that there is an increase in the fears of the increased rate of the influence of al-Arbaeen rituals by the Reactionary systems, such as that of Saudi Arabia and its allies, which are related to those of the Zio-Western fears. In fact, these fears are related to inter-related interests and functions, originating from the aggressive, arrogant, imperialist and sectarian nature of this detested alliance. Moreover, it originates from its resounding and ignominious defeats and losses at the hands of the followers of Ashura’s approach and the Husseini sacrifice, in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, simultaneously (“Ziyarat al-Arbaeen and the Civilized Message of Unity,” n.d.).

*Arbaeen* as an event happened in 7<sup>th</sup> century, after almost 1400 years is still a red-letter day within and across national boundaries of

Iraq. It marks forty days after the day Ashura, the day Hussain ibn Ali was martyred in the battle of Karbala, a holy city in Iraq. Today, this historical event is a public narrative presenting in Iraq every year by millions of people.

In recent years, after the fall of the Saddam regime, millions of people, a few days before *Arbaeen* each year, begin their walk from the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf (a holy city in Iraq) to the shrine of Imam Hussein. They take part in this spiritual walk to represent the story of Imam Hussain and his family by walking on foot symbolically towards Karbala. This crowd marching containing millions of people of different nationalities, cultures, races, and sects shoulder to shoulder - with thousands of tents (Mawakebs) and makeshift kitchens to serve these people without any charge, as well as thousands of locals who beg these pilgrims to accept their hospitality are all the signifiers of the exclusive concepts of this narrative.

The narrative content or the signified of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is the sublime moral features like philanthropy and rightfulness in the character of Imam Hussain and his family, especially his sister Zainab, as some of the main characters of the religion of Islam. Indeed, Islam by means of the *Arbaeen* pilgrimage against some western policies such as Islamophobia is depicted to all people all around the world correctly.

The narrating of this narrative is very crucial for these pilgrims and real Muslims (not Daesh and other groups created or supported by America\_ according to Hillary Clinton's book *Hard Choices*, 2014) and also those seeking truth and justice. Hence, the role of narrators here is the most significant aspect of this narrative. Today media particularly top news agencies are the best narrators in transferring considerable narratives since they are fast, credible, universal and influential in streamlining social, cultural and political movements. But how they reframe this narrative in translation process and which framing advice they apply for reframing are the controversial issues in this study.

What we know about narrative is largely based upon the literary type of narrative, particularly the novel. However, Monica Fludernik (2009), in *An Introduction to Narratology*, provides an in-depth definition of narrative:

“Narrative is all around us, not just in the novel or in historical writing. Narrative is associated above all with the act of narration and is to be found wherever someone tells us about something: a newsreader on the radio, a teacher at school, a school friend in the playground, a fellow passenger on a train, a newsagent, one’s partner over the evening meal, a television reporter, a newspaper columnist or the narrator in the novel that we enjoy reading before going to bed.” (p.1)

She (2009) states we are all narrators in our daily lives, in our conversations with others, and sometimes we are even professional narrators (should we happen to be, say, teachers, press officers or comedians)” (Fludernik, 2009).

Similarly, Rimmon-Kenan wrote that newspaper reports, history books, novels, films, comic strips, pantomime, dance, gossip, psychoanalytic sessions are only some of the narratives which permeate our lives (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002).

Considering translation as a form of re-narration, Baker (2014) argues that translation constructs rather than represents the events and characters it re-narrates in another language. She points out that translators and interpreters do not mediate cultural encounters that exist outside the act of translation but rather participate in configuring these encounters: they are embedded in the narratives that circulate in the context in which they produce a translation and simultaneously contribute to the elaboration, mutation, transformation and dissemination of these narratives through their translation choices. From this perspective, the most important aspect of what translators



and interpreters do is that they intervene in the processes of narration and re-narration that constitute all encounters, and that essentially construct the world for us (Baker, 2014).

With the above concepts at hand, now this is debatable that from which perspective the narrative of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is reframed in the western media. To understand the role of news translation as reframing, we may turn to framing theory for answers. The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

According to Entman (1993, p. 51-52), the concept of framing, whatever its specific use, consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text. Analysis of frames illuminates the precise way in which influence over a human consciousness is exerted by the transfer (or communication) of information from one location - such as a speech, utterance, news report, or novel - to that consciousness (Entman, 1993). He identifies selection and salience as the essential part of framing. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. By drawing on the example of the cold war, he shows that frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. He defines each of these terms as following; Communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief systems. The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences

that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments. The frames that guide the receiver's thinking and conclusion may or may not reflect the frames in the text and the framing intention of the communicator. The culture is the stock of commonly invoked frames; in fact, culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping (52-53).

Discussing the effects of translation on the reframing news, Darwish (2009) argues that by submitting news to translation it undergoes a reframing process that entails a reconstruction of a constructed reality already subjected to professional, institutional and contextual influences.

Studying on the reframing narratives (or news) in situations of conflict, Baker defines frames as 'structures of anticipation, strategic moves that are consciously initiated in order to present a narrative in a certain light' and framing as 'an active process of signification by means of which we consciously participate in the construction of reality' (Baker, 2006).

According to Abbott (2002), Baker (2006) and Herman et al. (2005), framing can serve as a tool of analysis which demonstrates how the same narrative can be reframed in different ways by different narrators, including translators (Luo, 2015).

Baker (2006) in *Translation and Conflict* identifies four key strategies for mediating the narrative(s) elaborated in a source text or utterance: 1) Temporal and spatial framing, (2) Selective appropriation of textual material, (3) Framing by labelling and (4) Repositioning of participants.

Temporal and spatial framing involves selecting a particular text and embedding it in a temporal and spatial context that accentuates the narrative it depicts and encourages us to establish links between it and current narratives that touch our lives (Baker, 2006: 112). Selective appropriation of textual material is realized in patterns of omission

and addition designed to suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text or utterance, or aspects of the larger narrative(s) in which it is embedded (Baker, 2006: 114). Labelling refers to any discursive process that involves using a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative. Any type of label used for pointing to, or identifying, a key element or participant in a narrative, then, provides an interpretive frame that guides and constrains our response to the narrative in question. Names and titles are particularly powerful means of framing in the sense elaborated here (Baker, 2006: 122-23). Repositioning of participants allows the translator or interpreter to reconfigure the relationship between here and there, now and then, them and us, reader and narrator, reader and translator, hearer and interpreter. Whether in the form of paratextual commentary or shifts in the expression of any of these parameters within the text itself, translators and interpreters can actively reframe the immediate narrative as well as the larger narratives in which it is embedded by careful realignment of participants in time and social/political space (Baker, 2006: 132).

Overall, using these key strategies as framing devices, news translators reframe events/narratives; in the meantime, they reflect their political and cultural perspectives or their affiliated news agencies. Framing *Arbaeen* pilgrimage as in Muslim's view is supposed to remind the event of Karbala and Ashura. So, to reframe and make a positive or neutral translation of this large annual human gathering in media, it is better to notice what are the real memes of this narrative.

## **Theoretical framework and Method**

For the purpose of analyzing *Arbaeen* reframing, Baker's (2006) narrative theory of translation was employed. This theory encompasses four key strategies for framing narratives: 1) Temporal

and spatial framing, 2) Selective appropriation of textual material, 3) Framing by labelling, 4) Repositioning of participants. In chapter 6 of *Translation and Conflict*, Baker provides us with the elaboration of these strategies which has been briefly written in the literature review of this thesis. These strategies were searched out in the news stories by Freytag's Pyramid. Using Freytag's pyramid, it was possible to analyze visually aforementioned strategies in each part of a narrative. In 1893, a German scholar named Gustav Freytag recognized the dramatic elements (Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Actions and Denouement) as the building block of a narrative structure. Freytag also proposed that these elements can be depicted as a pyramid diagram, hence the name Freytag's Pyramid (Harun & Razeef Abd Razak, 2013). The parts of narratives of each news story were analyzed according to Freytag's pyramid depicted in the following diagram:

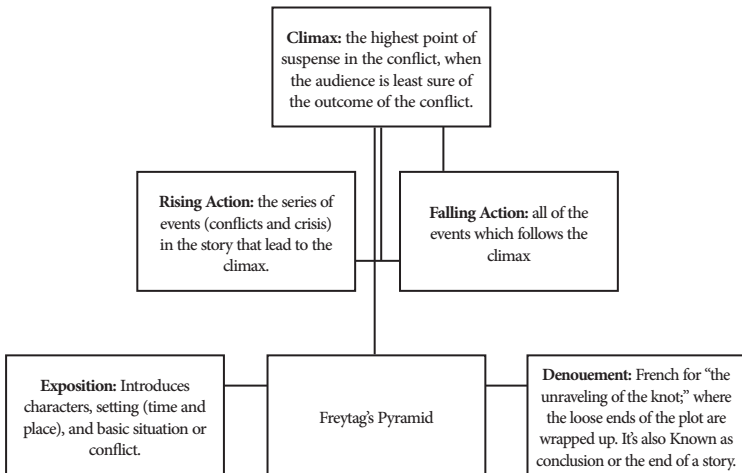


Diagram 1.

To analyze *Arbaeen* narrative in western media through cultural translation, top 10 western news agencies were examined. The term

“Arbaeen” was searched in the search boxes or archives of each of these sites and all text news stories embodying the term of *Arbaeen*, not the pictured or video ones, from 2007 until 2017 were collected. In searching for “Arbaeen”, occasionally some news stories about *Arbaeen* Square of Suez in Egypt or the district of Masaa Al Arbaeen in the city of Hama in Syria were shown which had nothing to do with the ceremony of *Arbaeen*; therefore, they were completely disregarded.

According to two ranking websites Alexa<sup>1</sup> and eBizMBA<sup>2</sup> and an analysis at Pew Research Center<sup>3</sup>, the top 10 western news agencies selected for this study include CNN, NY Times, Reuters, Euronews, Independent, BBC, Fox News, NBC news, MailOnline and Associated Press. Some of these news sites like Fox News and Euronews might only have been known as news channels, while their sites are also popular and one of the most visited news websites.

The total number of text news stories about *Arbaeen* found from these sites from 2007 until 2017 was 135 items. Of course, all of these 135 items were not analyzed, but two news stories randomly from each site, 20 in total, were reviewed. However, as for NBC news, only two text news stories about *Arbaeen* were found through the search box that both were reviewed. Each two random news were selected unseen through the total number of news for each site.

## Analysis and Discussion

Now, it is time to apply the theoretical framework on the narrative of *Arbaeen* in a bid to show how this narrative is reframed by the western media for the Western audience. As mentioned above, we have analyzed 20 news stories, but because of the space limitation, we just discuss two case studies here.

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1. <https://www.alexa.com/topsites/category/News>

2. <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/news-websites>

3. <http://www.journalism.org/2011/05/09/top-25/>

## Case Study 1: Fox news

The first case study by Fox news is a combination of three distinct narratives skillfully interconnected, each of which contains several plots within itself. The first narrative is about the explosion of two car bombs in a parking lot near busloads of pilgrims on the eastern outskirts of Karbala on Monday, the second narrative is in connection with the sectarian violence, and the third one is related to the political situation of Iraq. The temporal and spatial framework of the news is not precise, since it is constantly fluctuating between various times and places. The news begins with the narrative of car bombs and situates it in the introduction of the political situation of Iraq. The main discussion of this study is the narrative of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage; therefore, the narrative of Nouri al-Maliki's government and political factions in Iraq are overlooked. The news is backed into the narrative of blasts and pilgrims. It introduces *Arbaeen* indirectly as “the end of a 40-day mourning period for the Islamic sect's most beloved saint”, and then illustrates the details of bombings. Afterwards, *Arbaeen* is directly introduced in the following way: “a 40-day mourning period to observe the seventh century death of the Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson”, and then the death of Imam Hussein is considered the reason for Islam's historic Sunni-Shiite split — the ancient divide that provided the backdrop for the sectarian bloodshed in Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led war. Here, the martyrdom of Imam Hussein is incorrectly translated into the reason and base of the so-called Islam's historic Sunni-Shiite split, while, there is no split between Sunnis and Shiites. According to an analysis<sup>1</sup> titled “The myth of the 1,400 year Sunni-Shia war” by Murtaza Hussain, were they [Sunnis and Shiites] truly enemies, millions of people of both sects would have stopped peacefully converging on the annual Hajj pilgrimage many centuries ago”. This Middle Eastern politics analyst writes that sharing this belief that “the sectarian violence of today is

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1. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/2013719220768151.html>

simply the continuation of an ancient religious conflict rooted in events which transpired in the 7th century” is not only a misreading of history but a complete and utter fabrication of it. This is actually the strategy of divide-and-conquer. In this analysis published by Aljazeera, Hussain shows that western powers and their local allies have sought to exacerbate these false divisions in order to perpetuate conflict and maintain a Middle East that is at once thoroughly divided and incapable of asserting itself. And as a conclusion, he points out that if Islam is to continue as a constructive social phenomenon, it is important that these traditional relationships and ways of life are not destroyed by modern ideologies masquerading as historical truths. Similar to most of other cases studied in this research, this case also identifies Imam Hussein’s martyrdom with the origin of the schism between Shi’ites and Sunnis. Seemingly, sectarian schism is the dominant frame of this narrative in the western media. Furthermore, it is constantly accentuated that this ceremony is particular to Shiites while Sunni Muslims also participate in *Arbaeen* for Imam Hussein. An article<sup>1</sup> in the Huffington Post describes this. Considering another peculiar feature of *Arbaeen*, Sayed Mahdi al-Modarresi in this article notifies that while *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is a distinctively Shia spiritual exercise, Sunnis, even Christians, Yazidis, Zoroastrians, and Sabians partake in both the pilgrimage as well as serving of devotees. Similarly, according to a news story by Mark Piggott in 2014 in *IBTimes*<sup>2</sup>, it is reported that 20 million Shia Muslims - as well as some Sunnis, Christians, Yazidi and other faiths - are on their way to Karbala, Iraq to participate in the world’s largest annual gathering of people, the religious pilgrimage of *Arbaeen*. *IBTimes* (International Business Times) is a growing digital global news publication that provides comprehensive content around the most important business, economic and political stories from around the world for an audience of

1. [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sayed-mahdi-almodarresi/arbaeen-pilgrimage\\_b\\_6203756.html?guccounter=1](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/sayed-mahdi-almodarresi/arbaeen-pilgrimage_b_6203756.html?guccounter=1)

2. <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/20-million-shia-muslims-brave-isis-by-making-pilgrimage-karbala-arbaeen-1476618>

over 5 million in the U.K. and 50 million people worldwide every month through its network of digital publishing platforms. Moreover, there are also many video clips and pictures which show Sunni Muslims and Christians participation in Arbaeen pilgrimage. But according to Baker's selective appropriation strategy, the participants of this narrative are identified with just Shiites. Hence, Arbaeen pilgrimage is labelled with particular Shia ceremony. This labelling alongside constantly emphasis on Sunni-Shia conflict is the powerful frame to reframing Arbaeen pilgrimage in the western media. In November 2016, a MintPress News article<sup>1</sup> entitled "Media Blackout as Millions of Muslims March against ISIS in Iraq" also announces that "millions of marchers participated in the annual Arbaeen Procession in Karbala. The marchers are said to come from over 60 countries, and most of them have marched all the way to Karbala from other Iraqi cities like Najaf and Baghdad in a show of devotion. Each year, Sunni Muslims and followers of other religious groups such as Christians join the journey to mourn the martyrdom of Imam Hussein". MintPress News is an independent journalism organization in America. This article was sourced from American Herald Tribune<sup>2</sup>, a website edited by Canadian professor Anthony Hall, a 9/11 and Sandy Hook shooting conspiracy theorist who had been suspended from his job at the University of Lethbridge on charges of antisemitism. Back to the news, a number of previous bombings have also been reported that highlights the negativity of the news containing the narrative of *Arbaeen*. Moreover, there is no indication as to the pilgrims traditionally walk 80km from Najaf to Karbala. Consequently, the interconnection of narratives and the existence of numerous participants makes it difficult to pinpoint their positioning and repositioning. However, it is clear that not only the *Arbaeen* walking and gathering is reframed as a distinct narrative, its key participants such as Imam Hussein and his followers are repositioned in a made-up story of sectarian violence.

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1. <https://www.mintpressnews.com/media-blackout-millions-muslims-march-isis-iraq/222443/>

2. <https://ahtribune.com/religion/1348-media-blackout-isis-arbaeen.html>



## Car Bombs Targeting Shiite Pilgrims Kill 26 in Iraqi Holy City

Published January 24, 2011 Last Update December 8, 2015

BAGHDAD – Two car bombs tore through parking lots packed with Shiite pilgrims Monday in an Iraqi holy city, pushing the death toll from a week of attacks to more than 170.

The uptick in violence poses a major test for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's new and somewhat shaky coalition government as followers of a powerful Shiite cleric and key ally demanded he fill key security posts.

The blasts struck Karbala as hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were massing for religious rituals marking the end of a 40-day mourning period for the Islamic sect's most beloved saint. The first attack occurred about 7 a.m. in a parking lot near busloads of pilgrims on the eastern outskirts of Karbala, 55 miles (90 kilometers) south of Baghdad. Police and hospital officials said that six pilgrims were killed and 34 people wounded in that attack. Another bomb was discovered nearby and dismantled before it could explode, police said. More than four hours later, a second explosion struck pilgrims on the southern edge of the city, killing at least 20 people, including two soldiers, and wounding 42, the officials said. There is a vehicle ban in Karbala for the holy period so pilgrims are dropped off at parking lots and walk in.

The police and hospital officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information.

Monday's attacks followed a triple suicide bombing last week along two highways leading to Karbala that killed 56 and wounded at least 180 — most of them Shiite pilgrims.

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims are gathering in Karbala for Monday's ceremonies marking the end of *Arbaeen*, a 40-day mourning period to observe the seventh century death of the Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

His death in battle near Karbala sealed Islam's historic Sunni-Shiite split — the ancient divide that provided the backdrop for the sectarian bloodshed in Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led war.

No group claimed responsibility for Monday's blast, but car bombs and suicide attacks are the trademark of al-Qaida in Iraq and other Sunni religious extremists.

Those groups have frequently targeted Shiites in a bit to re-ignite sectarian violence that pushed the country to the brink of civil war.

Since the end of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated rule, Shiite politicians have encouraged huge turnouts at religious rituals, which were banned under the former regime, as a demonstration of Shiite power.

Followers of anti-U.S. Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who have been blamed for some of the worst sectarian violence in past years, criticized al-Maliki for not naming new defense, interior and national security ministers.

Al-Maliki formed a new government on Dec. 21 after months of political deadlock but has said he needs more time to find security ministers who are apolitical. He maintains control of the ministries in the meantime.

"We demand that the appointment of security ministers to provide security for the Iraqi people be expedited," said Fawzi Akram al-Tarzi, a member of al-Sadr's bloc in parliament. Security forces also have been targeted in the latest spate of violence, which began last Tuesday with a suicide bombing targeting police recruits in Tikrit.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaida front group, has claimed responsibility for the Tikrit attack as well as two bombings last week at security force headquarters in Baqouba that together killed 10 people.

Also Monday, police said two bombs in Baghdad killed an Iraqi army intelligence officer and his driver and wounded eight bystanders in separate strikes that hit a Shiite and a Sunni neighborhood. Hospital officials in Baghdad confirmed the fatalities.

In northern Iraq, police said unknown gunmen killed two members of a government-backed Sunni militia known as Awakening Councils, of Sahwa, as they were driving in their cars southwest of the city of Kirkuk, 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Baghdad.

And a roadside bomb exploded near Tikrit as Salahuddin provincial Gov. Ahmed Abdullah al-Jubouri's motorcade was driving by, wounding five of his bodyguards, said police spokesman Col. Hatam Akram. The governor was not hurt in the blast near Saddam's hometown, some 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of Baghdad.

Violence has dropped dramatically in Iraq since the height of the war three years ago, but bombings and drive-by shootings still persist on a near daily basis.

## Case Study 2: BBC

The title of our second case study which has been reframed by BBC is “Karbala bombs kill dozens during Shia commemorations”. It depicts the source narrative ‘commemoration of Imam Hussein in Karbala’ as a platform for killing dozens of people. Transmitting the news of bombings in different areas of Iraq and emphasizing their proximity to Karbala, this narrative suppresses the narrative of *Arbaeen* through the outbreak of unfortunate events, suicide attacks and the number of killed and injured people. The *Arbaeen* commemoration is not mentioned in more than two or three lines in the body of the news, but due to the title, it is foregrounded and reframed as the reason and platform of danger. As Baker (2006) states: “Titles of textual and visual products such as novels, films and academic books are not normally part of a rival system in which they compete with each other, but they too can be used very effectively to (re)frame narratives in translation”. In addition to reframing *Arbaeen* as an integral part of bombings narrative in Iraq, the key elements of this narrative are repositioned. The number of pilgrims has significantly decreased to hundreds of thousands and their nationality has been limited to Iraq. Nevertheless, it has been referred in some Western media to the presence of twenty million people from about forty nationalities. On the other hand, by placement of *Arbaeen* commemoration in the rising action and then the climax part of Freytag’s pyramid (bomb attacks and suicide bomber), a memorable link between *Arbaeen* and spilling blood is established within the memory of the audience, and then, by repetition of this news in the falling action of the pyramid, it is stored in memory. The news of suicide bomber and bombings near a police station are reported twice, before and after the *Arbaeen* commemoration. There is no doubt that this kind of reframing the narrative of *Arbaeen* has an effect on large numbers of the receiving audience, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all. Certainly, the effect of this narrative on the mind of audience

acquainted with the source narrative ‘*Arbaeen* pilgrimage’ is different from the one with no schemata of this ceremony. *Arbaeen* is a historical event whose annual commemoration contains rich cultural memes. The happenings at this ceremony, from serving of refreshments to its effects on pilgrims, can include valuable cultural components for translation into other languages and nationalities through the media. But narratives such as this one focus just on bombings in different areas of Iraq and the possibility of terrorist attacks, labeling ‘*Arbaeen* pilgrimage’ as a hazardous journey.

### Karbala bombs kill dozens during Shia commemorations

20 January 2011

Two bomb attacks near the Iraqi city of Karbala have killed at least 50 people and injured more than 150, officials say.

The blasts happened on two routes being used by pilgrims taking part in the Shia Muslim commemorations of *Arbaeen*.

Earlier, a suicide bomber killed at least three people in the central city of Baquba - the second deadly attack in the city in as many days.

Violence in Iraq has reduced in recent years, but attacks continue.

Thursday's bombings occurred near police checkpoints controlling the northern and southern entrances to Karbala.

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims are converging on the city from all over the country for the *Arbaeen* commemorations, which reaches its climax next week.

The BBC's Jim Muir in Baghdad says the authorities were well aware of the dangers, as previous pilgrimages have been attacked.

Strict security measures are in place, but protecting vast numbers of people travelling on foot over large areas has proven exceptionally difficult, our correspondent says.

The dead include women and children, medical sources at Karbala hospital say.

A witness to one of the attacks, named as Khamas, told the Associated Press news agency: "After the explosion, people started to run in all directions, while wounded people on the ground were screaming for help."

However, he added that pilgrims would continue to head to Karbala: "It will not deter us from continuing our march to the holy shrine... even if the explosions increase."

No group has said it carried out the Karbala bombings, but correspondents say they bear the hallmarks of Sunni militants.

Adil Barwari, an aide to Prime Minister Nouri Maliki, told AP that the attacks showed the militants' determination "to undermine the new Iraqi government".

The government, which includes the country's major political factions, was approved by MPs last month, ending nine months of post-election deadlock.

The Karbala attacks came hours after a suicide bomber blew up his car outside police headquarters in Baquba, killing three and wounding about 30.

On Wednesday another suicide bomber in the city targeted a police compound, killing 14. And on Tuesday in Tikrit, the home town of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, a suicide bomber joined a queue of about 100 police volunteers and killed about 60 of them.

US forces formally ended their combat operations last August, ahead of a planned full withdrawal later this year.

### Case Study 3: Independent

This narrative introduces *Arbaeen* as the world's biggest annual pilgrimage and also refers to the Hindu pilgrimage of Kumbh Mela and the Islamic Hajj pilgrimage with approximately two million people. As it is clear from the beginning in the title and then in the text, the selective appropriation is on the danger of this ceremony. The narrator/translator highlights the danger that threatens the lives of millions of people, while threats from terrorist groups such as Daesh and other groups may be dangerous for only a handful of people on routes outside Najaf to Karbala. This selected part is embedded in the temporal and spatial context of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage and make the audience establish links between this event and danger. Despite highlighting the danger of terrorist attacks, this narrative reveals some other aspects of this event, such as where it refers to the number of pilgrims, "the city holds the Imam Hussein Shrine, which was the destination of an estimated 20 million people from 40 countries in 2013" or the part of Sayed Mahdi al-Modarresi's writing for the Huffington Post. In this way, the position of participants of the source narrative are preserved in the target one. As Labelling, according to Baker (2006), refers to any discursive process that involves using a lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative, the labelled items of this narrative include the event of *Arbaeen*, Karbala, Imam Hussein, and Sayed Mahdi al-Modarresi.

**One of the world's biggest and most dangerous ages is underway  
Shia Muslims are travelling near Isis-held areas of Iraq for Arbaeen**

Lizzie Dearden | @lizziedearden | Tuesday 25 November 2014 17:16 |

One of the biggest pilgrimages in the world is underway, with millions of Shia Muslims risking their lives to travel through Iraq.

They are making their way to the city of Karbala, 62 miles south-west of Baghdad, for the holy day of Arbaeen on 12 December - a journey that has previously been the target of numerous terrorist attacks.

Arbaeen marks the end of a 40-day mourning period following Ashura, the religious ritual that commemorates the death of the Prophet Mohammad's grandson Imam Hussein in 680.

Shia Muslims revere him as their third imam and mourn his defeat at the battle of Karbala, when he and his companions were killed and beheaded by Caliph Yazid's army.

The city holds the Imam Hussein Shrine, which was the destination of an estimated 20 million people from 40 countries in 2013.

The Hindu pilgrimage of Kumbh Mela, often held to be the largest in the world, sees more pilgrims but is only held every third year, while the Islamic Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca sees approximately 2 million people arrive every year.

Dozens of people died in last year's Arbaeen as Isis and other Sunni militias attacked devotees with suicide bombs and rockets.

Two car bombs south of Baghdad killed 24 people on 16 December, while suicide bombers attacked pilgrims three days later, leaving 36 people dead.

Isis, also known as the Islamic State, has declared Shia Muslims apostates and targeted them in its bloody campaign to establish a hard-line caliphate across Iraq and Syria.

Security is being increased around Karbala ahead of the pilgrims' arrival but many choose to make the 55-mile journey on foot from Najaf, near Isis-controlled areas.

Writing for the Huffington Post, theology lecturer Sayed Mahdi al-Modarresi described his experience of Arbaeen as a "tumultuous, yet peaceful gathering".

"An avalanche of men, women and children, but most visibly black-veiled women, fill the eye from one end of the horizon to the other," he wrote. "The crowds were so huge that they caused a blockade for hundreds of miles."

Some pilgrims chose to walk the entire 425 miles from Basra and Karbala over two weeks, he said, braving scorching sun in the day and cold at night, through terrorist strongholds.

"Arbaeen should be listed in the Guinness Book of World Records in several categories," he wrote.

"The biggest annual gathering, longest continuous dining table, largest number of people fed for free, largest group of volunteers serving a single event, all under the imminent threat of suicide bombings."

## Conclusion

This study was an attempt to examine the reframing of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage as a cultural translation by western media to see how the cultural memes of this ritualized multi-national narrative in the Islamic world are proliferated among the westerners by the mainstream media. The *Arbaeen* pilgrimage aiming to propagate values such as philanthropy, rightfulness and generosity is not a simple gathering but a cultural narrative that makes people look the world through the lens of social justice and human rights. As described in the discussion and analysis, it was reported in some cases that millions of marchers participated in the annual *Arbaeen* Procession in Karbala are said to come from over 60 countries. Hence, it is important how this narrative is reframed in world's top news agencies. Our analyses demonstrated that the *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is generally reframed on the basis of a preordained negative frame, and, in some cases, it is marginalized. In contrast to what is believed among ordinary people and what is reported by non-western media such as Iraqi and Iranian media, the *Arbaeen* pilgrimage is annually covered by world's top news agencies but the way they cover this international event is different from its prototext. Indeed, western news agencies reframe the narrative of *Arbaeen* pilgrimage through a cultural translation as a dangerous ritual particular to Shia Muslims with such associations as violence, extremism and sectarianism, which is totally in contrast with the memes of Ashura and Karbala events. Surprisingly, the *Independent*, contrary to other news agencies reported the *Arbaeen* pilgrimage almost neutrally.

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