

4-1-2012

Symbols of Religious Identity in Jordanian Society

Piotr Narel

SIT Graduate Institute - Study Abroad, pnarel@luc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Narel, Piotr, "Symbols of Religious Identity in Jordanian Society" (2012). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. Paper 1274.
http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1274

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at DigitalCollections@SIT. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of DigitalCollections@SIT. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Symbols of Religious Identity in Jordanian Society

By: Piotr Narel
Academic Director: Dr. Raed al-Tabini
ISP Advisor: Dr. Muhammad Rayyan
Loyola University Chicago
International Studies, Honors
Amman, Jordan

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Jordan:
Modernization and Social Change, SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2012

ISP Topic Codes:

403 Religion
504 Cultural Anthropology
521 Regional Studies: Middle East

Copyright Release

The author hereby grants the School for International Training the permission to electronically reproduce and transmit this document to the students, alumni, staff, and faculty of the World Learning Community.

The author hereby grants the School for International Training the permission to electronically reproduce and transmit this document to the public via the World Wide Web or other electronic means.

The author hereby grants the Student for International Training the permission to reproduce this document to the public in print format.

The author hereby grants to the School for International Training permission to reproduce either electronically or in print format this document in whole or in part for any purpose.

Student: Piotr Narel

Student Signature (typing here acts as a digital signature): *Piotr Narel*

Date: May 30, 2012

Abstract

Upon noticing a trend of religious symbolism within Jordan, I began wondering as to why it was so common. Knowing that the majority of Jordan adhered to Sunni Islam, I was surprised that many Jordanians felt that it was necessary to indicate their religion through objects that identify to which religion an individual adhered.

I developed the hypothesis that the uses of religious symbolism within the country are due not to inherently religious reasons, but that they do serve individuals in other ways. The aim of my research was to discover what the reasons for this use of religious symbolism were. Also based on my preliminary observations, I hypothesized that the use of religious symbolism did not correspond to a higher degree of piety or religious sentiment among the individuals using the symbols.

I interviewed individuals who had background in religious studies and people who I would consider to be quite religious in their personal lives. By interviewing these kinds of people, I was able to gain an informed perspective on the religious basis for religious symbolism, as well as personal opinions and practices with such symbolism.

The conclusion of my research was a certain realization that I had overestimated the significance of religious symbolism within Jordan. I found that its use did not reflect on an individual's piety and it did not frequently function as a source of unity for Jordanians. Finally, I found that religious symbolism was frequently based on explicitly religious reasons and not, as I had expected, on ulterior motives of the people using religious symbolism.

I hope that the results of my study will result in more people within and outside of Jordan becoming more aware of the reasons and presence of religious symbolism in the country- something which might be frequently overlooked because of its overwhelming prevalence.

Introduction

Religious symbolism permeates itself within Jordan's society in many ways. Even a simple view of the skyline of Amman demonstrates adequately the importance and prevalence of religion because of the prominence of the mosques rising up above the other buildings. Walking down the street, one encounters countless veiled women- a practice based on religious reasons. But whereas many things that are religiously based may be considered symbols of religion in Jordan, many people also choose to demonstrate their religious affiliation or piety in ways that are not based in religion but are merely symbols of religious identity. These symbols which are ways of displaying ones religion are beyond what is expected of the religion itself, and may even be considered to be redundant because of the already overwhelming evidence of religiosity in Jordanian society. Exploring these generally unconscious reasons behind eagerly displaying religious symbolism in Jordan is the reason for this study.

The particular focus of this study of religious symbolism is on the objects and behaviors that have a primarily symbolic, rather than religious, basis. Whereas the *hijab* is a religious symbol that is argued and frequently considered to be part of the Muslim religion, many symbols of religion in Jordan may seem to be used merely for symbolism's sake. A Jordanian family that decorates the walls of their home with decorative Qur'ans, the names of Allah, and passages of the Qur'an in calligraphy are not doing so for explicitly religious purposes because these symbols themselves are not requirements of their religion, nor do they serve any explicitly religious function. The same can be argued for impractical prayer beads, certain articles of clothing, the use of the *miswak*, religious calligraphy, hanging decorations, audio recordings with religious messages, certain television programs, pictures of Prophets and saints, the prominence

of alcohol in Christian homes, and even prayer mats that are purposely on display rather than stored away when not in use.

My interest in the displays of religious symbolism within Jordan stemmed from my surprise at its prevalence, in countless different forms, with which it can be observed in the country. Before my arrival, I had read about religious symbolism and its use, but I generally considered such symbolism to be used primarily as a marker of identity. A work that I had read and was quite fond of argued that in Lebanon there was a “Lebanese identity crisis,” and that this lack of a national identity was what had “cultivated the exaggerations of communal identity that are performed daily through dress, language, and behavior . . . and public piety” in that country (Deeb 12-13). But unlike Lebanon, Jordan is a relatively homogenous religious society where 92% of the population is Sunni Muslim (“Jordan;” CIA World Factbook). It would not seem as necessary for most people in Jordan, at least from the dominant religious group, to feel the need to display their religious affiliation through religious symbolism as in Lebanon, because the prevalence of Sunni Islam would imply that one is a Sunni Muslim unless suggested otherwise. I began wondering what other motives there would be for the common practices of displaying religious symbolism and became determined to learn more, not only to discover the reasons behind these particular practices, but to gain a better understanding of how religion is practiced in Jordan in general.

I believe my research to be relevant to understanding the country of Jordan, the Middle East at large, and Muslims in general. In terms of the country, I think that Jordan in particular is greatly affected by the religion of its populace. The use of religious courts in the country is a clear indication of the importance of religion and how some religious beliefs are authoritative. Such a system establishes a duality between people who merely practice the religion and people

that may be considered to be experts in the religion. With my research in particular, I found that there was a very evident double-standard for the way in which religious symbolism in particular was conceived by people that were educated in religion or considered very religious and people that were not considered experts in their religion but were nevertheless pious. This double standard almost served to establish various classes of religiosity, which obviously has wider implications for the society at large. I thought that it was interesting that this double-standard was otherwise mostly unnoticeable, at least to me, outside of the realm of my specific research interests- which may be an indication as to the way in which religious symbolism permeates the society without most people's significant reflection on the topic. In terms of the region, I believe my research is relevant because it deals with symbols of Islam that are also heavily influenced by the cultures of the Middle East. Much of the research that I did on objects that toe the line between being religious and purely symbolic were present because they stemmed from cultural practices. It could even be said that some of the supposed religious symbols that I researched could be considered to be more symbols of the Middle East than Islam. In terms of Muslims, I believe that my research is relevant because of how it promotes consideration of practices concerning religious symbolism that is usually not questioned or explored deeply. During the course of my research, I found that there were discrepancies between how people considered religious symbolism if pressured to comment on it explicitly, and how they actually used religious symbolism in practice.

The major and obvious question I hoped to answer with my research was why certain Jordanians use religious symbolism for its own sake, especially because of the predominance of one religion in the country. But in addition to that question, I wanted to know whether there were certain implications associated with displaying religious symbolism, particularly whether

its prevalence gives an impression of greater religious piety to both the individual using religious symbolism as well as others who perceive its use and vice-versa (when one chooses not to display religious symbolism).

The scope of my research was limited to observations that I had made concerning religious symbolism, as well as interviews with religious people that I used not only to analyze their own opinions on their own personal use of religious symbolism, but to assess the practice of religious symbolism in general. I would consider the people that I interviewed to be qualified as individuals that are among the more educated and informed on religiosity because this way I was simultaneously able to interview them on their own personal habits and gain insight into what the general stance of their religion is on religious symbolism, whereas interviewing people not educated in religion would have resulted in only an analysis of their personal habits without a sufficiently informed opinion on what those habits mean for themselves and otherwise.

My initial hypothesis for my research was that the use of religious symbolism for purposes that are themselves not explicitly religious probably serves the individuals using them in a non-religious capacity. Rather than aiding in promulgating faith and religious beliefs, this kind of religious symbolism is more likely a way for individuals to identify themselves as proponents of their respective religions, or even merely as proponents of their respective culture- since the religion may be considered as merely a part of the former. These symbols may serve a merely traditional role- as their widespread and long-established use, especially in terms of the Middle East region, may be merely a traditional source for decoration and symbols of general identity.

I further hypothesized that the use of this kind of religious symbolism does not correspond to a higher degree of piety or religious sentiment among the individuals using the

symbols. Rather, I hypothesized that some individuals may use such religious symbolism in fear of being considered non-pious, and the reason for the prevalence of such symbols of identity is because of this fear and the potential tendency for the society to compete within itself to prove its piety.

One of the terms which I use extensively is “public piety.” This is a term that was established by Lara Deeb in her book *An enchanted modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. She identifies the ways in which piety in the community in which she researched was actively made to be visible. Personal beliefs were sought to be revealed to the public, thus establishing evidence of a person’s morality, but also as a way to reinforce other members in the community to be reminded of their religious duties through example. In the context of her book, Deeb focused mainly on how her interlocutors sought to establish piety in the public realm through their dress, activities, and preferred topics of discussion. In terms of my research, I focused on how physical religious symbols are used to establish this environment of public piety. I based much of my research on this theory of public piety because I believe the religious symbolism of Jordan to be similarly-motivated. As per my hypothesis, I believe that most religious symbolism does not reflect the piety of the individual to others, but is used merely as a source of identity. This would also explain why religious symbolism is so prevalent in Jordan- where one particular religious affiliation is already so dominant that it seems enough to render any symbolism as a source of identity to be redundant.

Though I like to think that the terms I use within the context of this research paper are relatively straightforward, I feel that defining exactly what I mean by these terms is important. In terms of “piety,” I use this word to signify how devoted an individual or group is to their religious beliefs, and how much these religious beliefs permeate their everyday life. Obviously,

I will attempt to refrain from interpreting whether one's religious beliefs are correct, or whether they correspond with the intended message of Islam.

Though I accept how religion and culture are inherently intertwined, in the majority of cases where I use the word "culture" I am referring to how it is distinct from aspects of religion that are based entirely on religious sentiment rather than a mix of culture (in Jordan- predominantly Arab culture) and religion. Again, I understand how the relationship between culture and religion is relatively impossible to separate completely, but specifically in terms of religious symbolism- I feel that it is possible to ascertain whether certain practices stem primarily from purely religious beliefs or more from other aspects of culture initially outside the realms of religion.

Most importantly, I must clarify what exactly I mean by "religious symbolism." Though I recognize the potentially multifaceted nature of the term, in the scope of my research, I am interested primarily in religious symbols that are physically displayed. Though many immaterial things may be understood to constitute religious symbolism, I feel the need to limit my own personal observations to physical objects. This is partly due because of my own limitations in terms of interpreting verbal and cultural symbolism because of my relative inexperience with the language and customs of Jordan, but also because I appreciate the explicit nature with which a religious statement may be made with an actual physical object. Obviously, the ability to narrow the focus of my study with such a broad topic is also an added benefit.

Literature Review

The greatest difficulty with my project is defining religious symbolism, not only to the people that I interview, but even to myself in terms of what I hope to accomplish with my research.

David Bastow, a Professor at the University of Dundee defines a symbol as “a sign which is semantically non-arbitrary,” he adds that “[a] sign is here taken to be a thing, usually a physical thing, which has meaning” (Bastow 559). I feel that though this definition is necessarily general, it suits my own perspective on symbolism that I use within the context of my research. Bastow purposely avoids analyzing what may be meant by “meaning,” because as he puts it- “[i]t is not relevant to my purposes to get involved in the philosophical debate about the nature of meaning” (Bastow 559). I agree with such an approach and believe that defining symbolism simply as something which is “semantically non-arbitrary” is the absolute minimum for a definition of such a difficult concept. Rather than attempting to identify the extent of how meaningful the semantics of a sign may be, Bastow rightly limits his definition to stating that a symbol merely has *some* form of meaning within its use as a sign.

In terms of religious symbolism, Bastow places limitations on himself that I myself do not necessarily consider to be necessary. One of these is to only consider things to be symbols so far as they are considered as such by the people that practice that religion (Bastow 560). In terms of my research, I believe that such a limitation, though unlikely to cause conflict, is not prudent. Considering Bastow’s own definition of a symbol, I believe that even if something is not considered a symbol by the religious community, the fact that anyone could consider something like this to be symbolic (even someone such as myself), means that this thing will inherently be “semantically non-arbitrary.” I do not anticipate a situation in which someone

would reject something as being symbolic, but considering the sensitivity of the topic, I will not completely disregard something as non-symbolic even if the person using it considers the thing to be lacking any symbolic sentiment.

In Bastow's work, he concentrates on the principal role of symbolism in religions. He argues that a symbol serves to "mediate between the believer (or potential believer) and the religious Focus" (Bastow 563). I find this statement to be particularly relevant to my work on religious symbolism in Jordan because of how it relates to the dominant religion in the country. In Islam, the fundamental tenet of the religion is submission to God/Allah. Suggesting that religious symbolism is a sort of intermediary between the divine "Focus" of the religion and the person practicing the religion sounds inherently adverse to the religion. In fact, such a view of symbolism, without any qualifications, sounds like one of the most forbidden practices in Islam—idolatry. This is a subject which I cover extensively during the course of my interviews, and my opinion on the matter changes drastically during the course of my work. At this point, I would simply disagree with Bastow's use of the word "intermediary" because it creates the impression that the symbol itself is what provides religious comfort to the person using the symbol. Based on what I conceived from my interviews, the religious symbolism of Sunni Muslims need not be considered an "intermediary." The use of a religious symbolism may be merely a reminder to seek guidance from God, not through the use of the symbol, but to God directly. Perhaps it could even be said that it is precisely the use of the symbol as an "intermediary" to religious "Focus" is the point of crossing over into a practice that is fundamentally forbidden in Islam.

This incompatibility with most religions is probably the greatest fault of Bastow's work on religious symbolism. Judging by the lack of reference to Islam in his work might mean that he is simply not aware of the added complexities that religious symbolism may have (as I hope

to explain with my work). In fact, the way in which Bastow draws heavily from Hinduism and Christianity suggests that his way of viewing religious symbolism can only be reasonably considered in religions that are very lenient with polytheism (referring to the Trinity in Christianity). His final points express the issue of the validity of a religious symbol which I conclude is impossible in Islam (in terms of what I have deduced from people I have spoken to in Jordan), as it is necessary to forego attributing religious validity to something that is merely an object, and (obviously) not directly related to God.

One potential explanation for the prevalence of religious symbolism within a relatively homogenous population may be that the religious symbolism promotes the sense of community that strengthens the sense of homogeneity and perpetuates the strength of the majority. Religious symbolism may thus be merely a way, albeit unconsciously, to maintain the unity of religion within Jordanian society. Rais A. Khan who writes about Arab and religious nationalism writes that “[t]he traditional view is that Muslims are Muslims because they order their lives according to divine law” which is why it is so hard to use Islam as a means for political unity (Khan 362). In regards to religious symbolism, it could be argued that religious symbolism serves to create a sense of unity within the community by displaying that individuals have at least a sense that they are living according to divine law.

This theory has a certain fallacy; however, in that both in the Islamic or political unity that Khan writes about, as well as the proposed unity that religious symbolism may contribute to Jordanian society, Islam has too many sectarian divisions to constitute a truly strong uniting force. Even within Jordan, which has a Sunni majority, there are differences in how people understand religious symbolism. Some are even influenced heavily by sects of Islam outside of the country. I was very surprised to find that some within Jordan are influenced, or at least

agree, with the Wahabi ideas regarding religious symbolism which reject the idea that any form of religious symbolism should be displayed within the home (speaking specifically about calligraphy). Even outside the realm of attributing certain practices to sectarian differences, the different interpretations of such a simple matter of religious symbolism proved to be so varied in my research, that I certainly agree with Khan's conclusion that Islam is an unreliable source for unity, who also mentions the way in which sects such as the Wahabis have "debilitated Islam as the basis for Arab [in my case-Jordanian] unity" (Khan 363).

Eric R. Wolf, who wrote a comparison of society and symbols between Latin Europe and the Islamic near east makes an effort to point out differences between the cultures, but also reveals some striking similarities. One of the things that he comments on which pertains to my research on religious symbolism is the way in which he believes that both early Christian and Muslim institutions "served to include in religious practice groups of very different cultural background and orientation, villagers who could syncretize local beliefs with the demands of the *tariqa* (path), as well as urban occupational groupings" (Wolf 293). Wolf writes specifically about Islamic *ribats* and Christian monastic organizations that rapidly attempted to convert populations that had distinct cultural practices into Islam. Generally, the desire to rapidly convert populations was what led to such institutions, present in both Christianity and Islam, which sought to mediate the difference between the existing culture and the necessities of the Islamic religion. In terms of symbolism, there are multiple cases that I have noted in the course of studying the practices of religious symbolism that suggest that this period of rapid conversion was what resulted in many of the religious symbols that are used by Muslims in Jordan today.

Especially in terms of relating Christianity and Islam, Wolf comments on the way in which there was a trend that developed in the near east and Mediterranean of incorporating the

female into religious symbolism. In terms of Christianity, this was the increased use of the Virgin Mary in pictures, language, and other depictions. In terms of Islam, this was the way in which the feminine terminology began to refer to the body of faithful Muslims- *umma* (Wolf 297). The relationship of the feminization with symbolism from the aspect of Christianity is obvious. In Christianity, the figure of the Virgin Mary may be prominently displayed in religious symbolism; this is something that I have observed in the Jordanian Christian community as well. In Islam, the relationship with symbolism is different in that depictions of all Holy people (and some believe all people) are forbidden. But in Islam, the feminization of religious symbolism is evident in a different way. Religious symbols for women are more prominent than for men. As a researcher who wrote on Islamic religious symbolism in the western world wrote, “The most prominent disputes over religious symbols in the public sphere have involved religious headcoverings—one of the most immediately obvious demonstrations of one’s faith” (Barnett 1). Thus, relating this back to the work of Eric Wolf, it might be considered that women themselves may be considered, at least in Islam, to most significantly symbolically represent the dominant religious trends of their community. Essentially, women may be considered living symbols of their religion. Though this goes beyond the scope of my own research on religious symbolism, especially considering that I am refraining from covering the topic of the *hijab*, I believe that Eric Wolf’s analysis is interesting to consider here.

Directly related to Eric Wolf’s theories on the way in which women have been increasingly considered to be symbols of religion are Lara Deeb’s ideas about public piety. She writes that one of her goals is to explore “publicly performed piety.” According to Deeb, “it is women who claim center stage in this process, as women’s practices and morality have often been constructed as necessary to collective identities” (Deeb 5). Like Wolf, Deeb considers the

development of women as representative of religion to be a recent development. Women in the area where she conducted her research are considered to be essentially to the construction of what she calls the “enchanted modern” (Deeb 5). Though Deeb focuses on forms of symbolism that are not directly related to my research- that is, she identifies many forms of symbolism that are not physical- she does also frequently mention what she refers to as “the sight” of public piety in her community (Deeb 50). When Deeb writes about the community which she researched in Beirut, the one which she considered to have the highest prevalence of public piety, she wrote that “[t]his public piety appeared in the higher prevalence of women who wore Islamic dress and the *hijab* than in perhaps any other part of the country, and certainly in the numbers of women in Iranian style ‘*abayas*’ (Deeb 51).

More specifically to my limited research of religious symbolism is what Deeb writes about the “pervasiveness of certain images” within the community she researched (Deeb 51). Deeb writes that “For many, the iconographic salience [...] claimed and defined the space of al-Dahiyya as belonging to their community. Through these visual signifiers, al-Dahiyya was claimed as a place for the Shi’i Islamic movement and a place within which (a particular) piety would be nurtured” (Deeb 52).

The fact that Lara Deeb is writing about a Shi’i community bears implications for the religious symbolism that I have observed in Jordan. As mentioned before, I was quite surprised upon my arrival in Jordan to find that religious symbolism is so prevalent. Whereas in Shi’i parts of Lebanon, religious symbolism (especially portraits of religious leaders) is not forbidden, Sunni Islam is much less lenient in terms of iconography. Even regardless of the stance of the religion towards religious symbolism, I thought it was quite unusual that in Jordanian society,

where the society is relatively homogenous in terms of religion, there would be a collective need to display religiosity in the public sphere.

This is what led me to review Lara Deeb's work and try to apply her theory on public piety to Jordan. Whereas according to Lara Deeb, the religious symbolism within the community which she researched strengthened the public piety of that community in relation to the rest of Lebanon, and Beirut, I considered the possibility that in Jordan, it is the country (and more specifically- the city of Amman) which attempts to strengthen its own sense of collective religiosity on a wider scale. Even though religious conflict between groups is not as common in Jordan as it is in Lebanon, I considered the possibility that Jordan is merely trying to assert its religiosity on a wider scale. After all, Jordan borders Israel, and the Middle East in general is constantly in conflict with the westernization and modernization that comes from the west; among other things- it would seem by the displays of religious symbolism that Jordanians want to assert their faith firmly to counteract against external forces. I considered that perhaps the diversity of Jordan (and especially Amman) may also contribute to this tendency of reaffirming religion through religious symbolism. Whereas Lara Deeb's Lebanese community made considerable efforts to display their public piety to distinguish themselves from the surrounding neighborhoods and various other faiths, Jordanian public piety may be a way of uniting the various regions together. Especially in Amman, where there is a considerable Palestinian population which considers itself distinct from the Jordanian, the shared Muslim faith is a point of unity. Public piety, such as religious symbolism, strengthens this unity.

These considerations that I took from reading Lara Deeb's work, as well as my own personal observations on Jordan greatly influenced my opinions on the purposes of religious

symbolism. I was very eager to prove my hypothesis in this way. Unfortunately, my research did not necessarily confirm this point of view. I comment more on this in the following pages.

Body of Paper; Methodology

My overall research experience was one of being humbled. I entered into this research period feeling fairly confident that I had a relatively firm grasp of religious symbolism within Jordan and that my formal research and interviews would simply confirm what I had observed informally during the course of my stay in the country. My research paper topic, in one form or another, was already planned in the first couple of weeks of being in Jordan- thus I had a long period of time where I was frequently observing and considering the religious symbolism that I saw throughout the country. With the background I had gained from reading about a similar research study in Lebanon (I am referring to *An Enchanted Modern*- mentioned in the Literature Review section), I felt that my findings would lead me to many of the same conclusions with slight modulations considering the different setting and focus. As I mentioned, I was humbled by how what I considered to be a relatively straightforward analysis of specific religious symbols within Jordan could result in such a complicated conclusion.

I struggled to decide how I would go about conducting my research considering that I was interested in the common view of religious symbolism. Initially, a survey struck me as the most accurate way to gauge the general perspective on religious symbolism within the country, but I was turned off from this idea for a number of reasons. Most significantly, I found, and continue to find, difficulty with explaining to religious scholars and anyone interested in my research, to what I am referring when I use the terminology “religious symbolism.” In the context of a research paper where I have the opportunity to explain my position and specify my

focus, I do not feel that my terminology is a problem. In the context of conducting research, however, I find that it is very difficult to get my ideas across in the limited amount of time that is usually granted for the purposes of field research. Compounded with this issue was the fact that I was interested in personal reasons for using religious symbolism, but with the frequent absence of understanding about what exactly was meant by this, I did not feel that I would be able to gain much insightful information from a survey. The final reason that I did not use a survey was due to a point that was brought up when I discussed my research topic with students in my class. They brought up a very obvious point, to my embarrassment. One of the main reasons I hoped to use a survey was to gauge whether religious symbolism correlated with a higher degree or feeling of piety. Though I considered some methods of gauging piety or feelings of piety (such as asking about frequency of prayer, frequency of attending a spiritual place), I realized that it was quite artificial to gauge an individual's spirituality, or even feeling of spirituality from a survey. Also obvious to me now, was how awkward of a question this is to answer for an individual- perhaps even more-so if that individual is indeed pious. In my research, I found that individuals who I would consider to be the most pious that I came into contact with were actually the least likely to consider themselves as such. Indeed, it seems that a greater degree of piety would actually correspond to a lesser degree of considering oneself as pious because of the importance of submission to a higher power, a certain realization that much is yet to be learned, and overall modesty that accompanies studying religion (especially in terms of Islam). To replace gauging piety in Jordan, I analyzed some information that was gained from a lecture that I attended on feelings of religious sentiment in general- without attempting to correlate it against religious symbolism (at least in the context of a survey).

The method of research that I chose was to conduct interviews with individuals that had religious backgrounds. Though I was interested in gauging public opinions and perceptions on religious symbolism, I found that interviewing people who did not have religious backgrounds was not the most effective use of my time. The first interviews I had were with people that I identified as making use of religious symbolism on their person, but I found an underwhelming lack of true consideration for what this religious symbolism meant. I found that the two initial interviews I conducted resulted in little relative insight to my research, and I was overwhelmed by these individuals' sentiment that I should ask these questions to a person with strong religious background rather than themselves. I decided that such was probably a better approach, and I decided not to use the first two initial interviews in writing my work. The only truly interesting thing that I surmised from these two initial interviews was how eager these interviewees were to defer to someone else to analyze a religion of which they considered themselves to be part. I also had had ideas of interviewing other participants to vary my results, but I found that analyzing the five different perspectives of five men who were more or less equal in terms of education was much more enlightening than if I had sought radically different perspectives from radically different levels of education and background.

Interviewing religious scholars proved to be the most effective way of researching the general trends of religious symbolism because these scholars had their own personal convictions about using religious symbolism themselves as well as what generally should or should not be accepted in Islam, as well as what this religious symbolism means. With the exception of my advisor, all of my interviews were conducted in a campus setting. I interviewed two Professors from the Shari'a school at University of Jordan, one Professor from Al-Balqa` Applied University in Amman, a graduate student whom I met at the library at University of Jordan, and

my advisor- Dr. Muhamad Rayyan who has multiple degrees in Islamic Studies and whom I interviewed at his office.

My interview with Dr. Hasen from al-Balqa' Applied University was easily arranged because of his relationship with my host family in Amman. I was eager to ask about the background of many of the religious symbols I was studying because of his education in Islamic history. I had the added benefit of interviewing Dr. Hasen in his place of employment, as well as (for better or worse), being in the company of a number of women that worked for Dr. Hasen in his department at the university. The presence of multiple people in the room during my interview had its pros and cons. Because of comments made by people other than Dr. Hasen, I had to be very careful to frequently confirm whether what was being said was indeed what he himself thought on the matter. Additionally, I had to make an effort to retain some degree of structure by asking questions directly addressed to Dr. Hasen because he was the subject of my interview. On the pros side, of which I saw more, was the fact that Dr. Hasen, being the most educated in Islam in a room of 3-4 people, felt that he could speak with authority on matters of religious symbolism. Without the one-on-one setting, it felt like Dr. Hasen was more comfortable commenting on what other people should and should not do in terms of religious symbolism. This was because Dr. Hasen could comment on what he thought of the other two women's practices with religious symbolism, as well as his own.

The interview that I had with the graduate student at University of Jordan was arranged by my advisor. The interview was very helpful because of his contemporary knowledge of Islamic schools of thought and because of his own developing opinions on Islam. Unlike the professors whom I interviewed, this student was more open to considering various possibilities of how the use of religious symbolism may be interpreted. He was also very honest about his

own personal use of religious symbolism, which was not based on habits as strong as would be seen with the older men. The only obstacle I had with this interview was to have the interviewee focus on taking the role of interviewee rather than student because as a student he was more likely to focus on how he would write the research paper himself.

The interviews that I had with two professors who taught at the Shari'a school at the University of Jordan were with the aid of a translator. They were arranged by going to the Shari'a school and asking for interviews with professors that had open office hours. These interviews were difficult because the language barrier, even with the aid of the translator, was quite difficult to surpass because of the relative complexity of the ideas that I was trying to have translated. To overcome these obstacles, I focused on making my questions as simple and as straightforward as possible, as well as focusing on a few key concepts that I had used for all of my interviews prior to these.

There were a few things that I had planned and did in all of my interviews so as to have a sense of comparison between all of them. As I considered all of these men to be pious individuals, I conducted the interviews by carefully observing the setting in which I was to take note of religious symbolism. I would carefully explain my topic in the best way I could- usually most effective was listing off the kinds of physical religious symbols in which I was interested, and only then would I comment or ask about the interviewee's personal use of religious symbolism. I would ask what kind of religious symbols the individual used (if any or if he considered these to be religious symbols in the first place), and what these meant to him. Once this part was complete, I would move to asking about what those specific religious symbols *could* mean to other people. The last parts of the interviews were specific to the interviewee's

comments earlier in the discussion, as well as mentioning what I had been told by other people I had interviewed to see if that would hazard a response.

To protect the identity and integrity of my interviewees, as well as my work, I was very careful to explain at each interview what I was studying, where I was studying, and the details of my particular research. Though I suspect that had I attempted to refrain my explaining myself at the outset of the interviews, I could have produced different results because of the way in which my entire topic itself seemed to cause strong opinions, I felt that explaining myself was better for maintaining the integrity of the work and interviews, as well as maintaining complete openness with the participants so as to improve their comfort and be able to explain themselves on their own terms. In terms of avoiding misquoting or misunderstanding an interviewee, a tactic which I used potentially to a fault was repeating the same blatant questions if the answers seemed to not agree with the interviewee's more general opinions. Because of the language barrier, there were a few occasions where it seemed like the interviewee had said something extreme, which would have been quite helpful in terms of including such an opinion in my paper, but which I wanted to make sure that it was actually what the participant would have said had there been no language barrier. It was not unusual for me to repeat the same question three times, in three different ways, if the answer was especially surprising.

Findings

I came into this research project with big expectations. Though I had a hypothesis that I was relatively confident would prove to be, in some way, valid, I was anticipating learning a lot about perceptions of Islamic practice in everyday life. My focus on religious symbolism was due to the fact that I noticed this frequently as evidence of the importance of religion, in one way or

another, of the people in Jordan. Though I hypothesized that the physical objects that have a religious implication that Jordanians use may serve a non-religious function, I still believed these objects to reveal a great deal about common religious practices, whether or not they could be said to be truly religious-based. These beliefs are what led me to exploring this particular topic more.

The greatest lesson I learned from my ISP was that I had been largely mistaken about the significance of religious symbolism. Though I received varied responses about what religious symbolism could signify, or what specific practices could be mistaken, or what specific practices were actually religiously based, ultimately I have come to terms with the fact that the religious symbolism within Jordan does not bear very significant implications about religiosity, public piety (an enhancement of the sense of religious community), or specific religious beliefs. This conclusion is rather blunt and difficult to accept, but it is nevertheless what my research undeniably suggests.

My initial hypothesis- that religious symbolism serves individuals in non-religious ways was hopeful. I had the very strong assumption that the common trends of religious symbolism meant that the true religious reasons for this symbolism were most likely lost. I believed that if the uses of religious symbolism by Jordanians were truly based on personal religious convictions, that the practices of using these symbols would not be so common. Most religiously symbolic objects that Jordanians use are common practice. There are very few that are used by only a select few people. This suggests that the practice is merely copied by others, rather than based on individual religious inspiration. If the uses of religious symbolism were based on personal convictions of the individuals using them than it would be far less likely those certain practices would be so common.

An example to illustrate my point would be the common practice of hanging prayer beads from rear-view mirrors in vehicles. Prayer beads in Islam serve the explicit purpose of counting exaltations of God as a form of prayer. Hanging these objects from a rear-view mirror of an automobile is thus not only not using this religious object for its intended purpose and, furthermore, using this object for a purpose which seems distinctly non-religious and even, perhaps, sacrilegious.

By hanging the prayer beads from a rear-view mirror, one could make the argument that the individual doing this is foregoing the proper use of prayer beads and using it merely as a display- a kind of testament to the person's religion. The real religious significance of the prayer beads disappears, and the only significance that is left is one of displaying one's religion. Of course, with such a viewpoint, one could also make the argument that using the beads in this way demonstrates adequately how one is actually not religious because of the way in which they use the beads for an unintended purpose.

A different assumption one could make would be to say that the person using the prayer beads in such a manner is acting almost sacrilegiously because they may be attempting to derive a sense of protection or spiritual guidance from a physical object- which is something that in Islam is forbidden.

These are the kinds of possibilities that I considered about this specific practice before my research. I did not think that it was likely that there could be any other option. As far as I was concerned, using an object with a specific religious purpose in an unintended way could mean only that the person was using this object for a non-religious purpose (a sense of identity derived from displaying one's religion) or for a purpose that may be religious, but wrong (as in the person that derives a sense of spiritual protection from the object itself).

I was quite surprised to find, however, that one of my interviewees defended the practice of hanging prayer beads from a rear-view mirror by explaining his own habit of doing so.

Sadique Pathan, a graduate student of Shari'a at the University of Jordan, said that he hangs his prayer beads on his rear-view mirror when he enters his vehicle. He uses his prayer beads in the intended fashion, but likes to hang them from his rear-view mirror when he is in his car. Sadique Pathan told me that his habit of hanging the prayer beads from his mirror give him a sense of religious comfort when he is driving. He said that the beads are a reminder to him that there is a higher power with him, that with all things in his life- God is with him.

Though Sadique Pathan's reasons for using this symbol are difficult for me to understand, I have no doubts as to the validity of his own personal religious convictions behind its use. It is certainly understandable, in his particular case, why it would be comforting to be reminded of the ever-presence of God in the setting of a vehicle. Being in a vehicle means that one is transient, going between two places in a zone of unfamiliarity where the feelings of spirituality may not be as strong as when one is in a place where one feels comfortable and secure. By hanging his prayer beads from his rear-view mirror, Sadique Pathan is reminded that regardless of where he is going, or where he is coming from, the presence of God is with him.

One important clarification to make about Sadique Pathan's habit of hanging prayer beads from his rear-view mirror is to say that he, rightfully so, was very adamant about saying that his use of the physical object of the beads does not mean in any way that he sees the beads themselves as some form of God (as may be the case with religious symbols in other religions). Sadique Pathan's use of the prayer beads is a reminder of God's eternal presence, rather than a requirement for His presence itself. Sadique Pathan believes that God is always present and watching over him, but the beads serve to remind himself of that point- especially in the setting

of his vehicle- which is transient, frustrating, and frequently dangerous. The beads serve to remind him of his direct relationship with God, they do not serve as a proxy to Him.

I was taken aback by Sadique Pathan's explanation of his habit of using this particular religious symbol but I, and Sadique Pathan himself, doubt that most people that hang prayer beads from their rear-view mirrors have such well-thought out religious convictions about their use of religious symbolism. Though in the case of Sadique the reasons for using this form of religious symbolism are religiously-based, we both agreed that it would be unlikely that everyone who uses this object which may be conceived symbolically would do so based on the same conclusion. By virtue of being based on individual belief but simultaneously being very common, it is to be expected that many individuals who use this form of religious symbolism do so not because they reached the same conclusions and religious comfort as Sadique, but because they copied the practice from observing others doing the same thing.

Nevertheless, Sadique Pathan's explanation made me reconsider the possibilities about the common practices of religious symbolism. Even besides Sadique Pathan's personal explanation, it seems relatively expected that one who is pious would seek religious comfort in a setting which is as frustrating and dangerous as driving can be. Though it may still be unlikely that most, or even many, of the people that use religious beads by hanging them from their rear-view mirror consider their use very significantly, the fact that this is a common practice is understandable, given Sadique Pathan's own personal and valid explanation. Though it may be true that many people are merely displaying their religious affiliation, or copying a common practice, I found that the potential reasons for this practice seem to be religiously-based and valid. This sentiment is something that was reflected in many of the religious symbols that I had set out with researching.

The use of the *miswak* proved to be something that is commonly believed to be a part of ablutions as a form of further cleansing of the body before performing prayers, something which Dr. Hasen of al-Balqa University as well as Dr. Muhammad Rayyan of University of Jordan confirmed that is a tradition that stems all the way from the times of the Prophet, as evidenced in the Hadith. I had assumed that this practice had been adopted directly from the Arab culture, which despite being partially true, does not detract from the religious significance that it adopted during the times of the Prophet.

The wearing of *thob* by men on Fridays is a practice that I found to not have too much religious significance. My assumption that there may be a religious connotation to wearing the *thob* is only partly true- insofar as it was the clothing worn by men during the time of the Prophet, and thus, naturally, has some real religious significance to someone who sees the life of the Prophet as an example of the way life should be lived. More than to signify a certain modesty, however, the *thob* is a comfortable piece of clothing which is socially acceptable in Arab countries especially on Friday- when Muslims in Jordan do not work. In Saudi Arabia, where the practice is much more widespread, it seems like the biggest factor is not religious but practical as well- because of the harsh climate in the Arab peninsula, as suggested by Dr. Rayyan. I did observe a number of people at the Shari'a school at the University of Jordan who chose to wear such attire on an everyday basis, but I do not consider the practice to be so religiously-oriented as to be an explicit symbol of religion or religious piety. This is also due to the fact that I have observed Christians wearing *thob* and many others who had no particular interest in displaying their religiosity through this article of clothing. Additionally, the *thob* is more likely to be viewed as a symbol of region than religion- as evidenced by its widespread use in the Jordanian Badia. Finally, none of the people whom I interviewed at the Shari'a school or

elsewhere wore the *thob*, at least at the time of our interview, suggesting that its use by some of the students at the Shari'a school are at least not due to its adoption as a symbol of piety, but perhaps as a way to distinguish oneself from the rest of the student body.

Yet another thing that I assumed to be at least partially due to Arab culture was the practice of growing out one's beard. Dr. Hasen of al-Balqa University suggested that this should be a practice adopted by very religious men, but he himself did not do so and did not consider this practice to be very important to maintaining a high degree of piety. Dr. Rayyan explained on more than one occasion that he himself chose to not regard the practice as carefully as he did when he was younger, citing that its importance was obsolete in the grand scheme of living a religious life and he would prefer to demonstrate his religious affiliations in different ways. Dr. Haeel abd al Hafeeth and another Professor of Hadith at the Shari'a school both did not display prominent beards, though it was explained by the latter Professor that such a practice was recommended by the Prophet to distinguish Muslims from other communities. My impression was that the practice is not very prominent among religious scholars because of the belief that it only applies in a true Muslim community, which, at least according to Dr. Rayyan, is non-existent in today's world. Again, I was surprised to find that this practice is based on real religious tradition stemming back to the time of the Prophet, however, I did not find this to be a strong object of religious symbolism because of the lack of regard that it was granted by the religious scholars that I interviewed and its relative obsolescence in the context of today's world where fashions may be varied and the prominence of a beard is unlikely to be a strong indicator of religious preference.

The use of prayer mats as a possible religious symbol was denied by all of my participants. According to them, prayer mats would be unlikely to be considered a symbol of

piety if displayed prominently in the home. Specifically, the prayer mat is only used as a way to assist prayer and is absolutely not a requirement for its performance. The prayer mat, as explained to me by Dr. Rayyan, developed from the Ottoman culture because of the tradition of weaving as well as the tradition of thorough cleanliness. The only requirement for prayer which the prayer mat assists with is ensuring that the location of prayer is clean, but if a location is already conducive to prayer, then the mat is obsolete. Thus, the prayer mat seems to be based on real religious beliefs but not important enough to the practice of being a Muslim to be a significant religious symbolism. Though I would maintain that because the prayer mat is not necessary to perform prayer, displaying it prominently would almost certainly frequently function as a symbol, none of my interviewees were very enthusiastic about this interpretation. The impression I got from the Professor of Hadith at the Shari'a school who preferred to be anonymous was that prayer is the least indicative of whether or not someone is a good Muslim because it is the easiest act of Islam to perform. Proof of piety is much more significant when the proof is based in acts that are difficult to perform.

The use of calligraphy was probably the most controversial topic among my interviewees as a subject of religious symbolism. Dr. Haeel abd al Hafweeth and the anonymous Professor of Hadith had strikingly similar opinions on the matter which I found quite surprising. Both of them considered calligraphy displayed in the home to be merely decorative without any religious significance, symbolic or otherwise, whatsoever. While their adamancy was frustrating for the purposes of my research, it does seem to have a message in itself. Because both these men adamantly considered calligraphy to have no religious significance whatsoever, it suggests that they believed that this was the only proper and correct way to address calligraphy. In accordance with this view, it would seem like these men did not consider religious symbols in general to

reflect at all on religious piety or lack thereof. Specifically in terms of calligraphy, Dr. Hasen, claimed that religious calligraphy is displayed in a home as a source of comfort for the inhabitants, as well as visitors, that the home is a location of piety, where *jinn* are unlikely to set foot. The calligraphy thus may be said to serve as a religious symbol, but one that has a surprisingly religious purpose. This viewpoint, however, was not agreed with by any of my other interviewees. Sadique Pathan pointed out that some strict interpretations of Islam (such as the Wahabis in Saudi) might argue that calligraphy can be a form of idolatry- as the person admiring the calligraphy will be admiring the calligraphy for its own sake rather than appreciating the inherent beauty of the Qur'anic verses which it portrays, In his own view, one that is seems to be generally accepted, however, Sadique Pathan believes that calligraphy is not contrary to religion as long as the person appreciates the fact that the calligraphy is merely a form of a specific message given by God, rather than as a proxy to Him. Since this is obviously something that is hard to judge by others, it is up to the individual to determine whether they are acting in accordance with their religion when they display calligraphy in their home. Dr. Muhammad Rayyan was the only interviewee to point out that the practice of writing verses of the Qur'an on walls of the home is something that stems from the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Though decorative calligraphy is a later practice, it made me consider that calligraphy may be interpreted as merely an evolution of the specifically religious practice advocated by the Prophet. As such, it becomes very difficult to judge whether calligraphy can be considered a religious symbol or more of a real religious practice. I found it quite interesting that the answer to this question is quite confounded nowadays but it made me far less confident in considering prominent displays of religiosity within the home to be considered displays or symbols of religion rather a purely religious practice.

My hypothesis on the lack of religiously-based reasons for the religious symbols that I was particularly interested in was thus not supported by my research. I did not find any of the practices of religious symbolism to have any purely non-religious capacity. Though the misuse of symbols most likely happens, the actual symbols all seem to bear valid religious purpose. What struck me much more during the course of my research was how much these practices were based in religious beliefs rather than as ways of identity affiliation or as culturally integrated practices.

My second hypothesis- that the use of religious symbolism does not reflect levels of piety in the individuals using the religious symbolism was confirmed, but not in the way that I had expected. Rather than being confirmed because of my belief that strong displays of religion were somehow inherently non-religious, because of the lack of modesty that would characterize these displays and the eagerness to affiliate rather than abide by the religion itself, my hypothesis was confirmed merely by the fact that religious symbolism did not seem to have much recognition as an indicator of piety by anyone with whom I spoke. I greatly underestimated the extent to which Jordanians themselves disregard religious symbolism as any indicator of true religious beliefs. The sentiment that acts of piety rather than any displays of it were more important was repeated by all of my interviewees and religious symbolism in general did not seem to be regarded as much more than an accessory to religion with little significance.

Though I understand that my scope might be relatively limited considering the high level of religious background that my interviewees had, I did ask about the common opinions that they were familiar with. None of the interviewees seemed to think that any Muslim would be impressed by the religious symbolism displayed by another person, and, at the very least, they

would consciously know that being a Muslim is not dependent on such displays but completely independent of them.

The potentiality of religious symbolism being a tool for enhancing a sense of “public piety” in the community was also negated through my research. Though Dr. Muhammad Rayyan did speak more liberally about the possibility that religious symbolism may make Muslims feel more united in the absence of a true religious community based on the tenets of Islam, he made no indication himself that this is the intended use of religious symbolism or that it is effective at creating this unity in Jordan as it was successful in other places (the example he gave was of Muslims in Chechnya). From his understanding of the religious practices of Jordan, it would seem that if religious symbolism did create a sense of a Muslim community among Jordanians, this would be an unintended effect of its use within the country. Religious symbolism seems rather to be something that exists through a variety of reasons that are indiscernible based on individual cases.

Conclusion

Taking my findings and interpreting them against my previous beliefs on the role of religious symbolism leads me to conclusions that are different from my hypotheses. Based on the opinions and knowledge of my interviewees, I have come to terms with the fact that religious symbolism does not carry the significance that I ascribed to it at the outset of my research. None of my interviewees considered the use of religious symbolism or lack thereof to have any kind of implications about the individual using these religious symbols.

My interviewees all used religious symbolism themselves, but when asked about these, they rarely gave an indication that they had ever seriously considered its use. Dr. Haeel abd al

Hafeeth claimed that all his articles of religious symbolism had been merely gifts, and that this is the primary reason why he chose to display them in his home- out of the perceived obligation to appreciate a gift.

The Professor at the school of Shari'a who preferred to be nameless argued that "all Jordanians are Muslims" (speaking no doubt about the majority rather than being ignorant of the Christian population) and therefore he felt no need to display his religiosity through religious symbolism, but he did not disagree with its use either as he considered it to be purely a source of decoration without any religious significance.

Dr. Hasen considered religious symbolism to have a purpose as making individuals feel comfortable when entering the home of a fellow Muslim because the visitor would be informed that they are in a safe space of pious individuals where *jinn* would not enter by virtue of the hosts displaying their religiosity. However, Dr. Hasen considered this practice to only be relevant to common, rather than highly religious, people. He mentioned that a highly religious person such as himself should only decorate the room of his study with religious symbolism and not in general within the home. The assumption was that a highly religious man should not need to be reminded that he should be pious and that his spirituality should be evident without needed to display religious symbolism within his home to visitors.

Sadique Pathan alone spoke significantly about the meaning behind his own purposes of religious symbolism but his reasoning only came as a result of being challenged by me to explain his behavior with a religiously-based explanation which suggested that he usually does not consider the matter very significantly, either for his own purposes or as a way of judging or identifying other Muslims.

Dr. Rayyan claimed that he was unsure about the ultimate benefits or drawbacks of practices of religious symbolism and that his use own personal use was usually limited to gifts from individuals. He alone identified a practice of religious symbolism that was common but he considered to be negative- and that was of decorative or mini Qur'ans that are not used for reading. He considered the Qur'an as being somewhat sacrilegious to use as a symbol or decoration because it is only supposed to be considered as a tool for containing the revelations of God rather than as a symbol of the religion itself.

Another finding that I had based on my interviews that made me consider the uses of religious symbolism within Jordan more positively was the fact that the religious scholars whom I interviewed, although they did not always consider the religious symbols in Jordan as significantly or with the same regard, they all tended to agree on certain religious symbols that were based on mistaken or wrong premises. Dr. Rayyan and Sadique Pathan both mentioned that some religious symbols from cultures outside of the Arab world, such as hanging religious verses of the Qur'an around the neck, should be forbidden. All also had no confusion about the prohibition of certain religious images that are forbidden specifically in Sunni Islam- such as images of people or animals, especially when formed by calligraphy. Such images are not prohibited in Shi'a Islam and something which Lara Deeb identifies as religious symbolism in her community in Lebanon.

The fact that all my interviewees at least shared in common opinion what forms of religious symbolism were distinctly not allowed in Islam demonstrates that there is not necessarily ignorance of the fact that how the role of religious symbolism within Jordan should be used may be wrong. Because of this, it is understandable that certain types of religious symbolism are very common within Jordan- because they are at least known to not be forbidden.

Though the specific reasons for using certain kinds of religious symbolism and the background of this religious symbolism may not be commonly known, it would seem that there is at least a common understanding that not everything may be used as a religious symbol because its use is ultimately dependent on the religion itself.

Ultimately my research into religious symbolism only proved that my interest in this topic was drastically misguided. I had expected to develop a theory on the role that religious symbolism serves within Jordan and I had found only that I had greatly overestimated the extent to which it is granted significance by Jordanians. With this insight, I realized that it was fruitless to consider the extent to which religious symbolism may be considered to be a reflection of piety or an enhancement of a sense of community through displays of public piety. My ideas about the potential for religious symbolism to be contrary to religion, especially Islam, was also unfounded because I realized that almost all of the religious symbols I specifically looked at did have a religious basis and that the use of religious symbolism was much more stringent than it initially appeared from my personal observations.

My misguided foci were most likely misjudgments on my part about the way in which Shi'a Lebanese religious practices (as in Lara Deeb's *An Enchanted Modern*) could be related to a similar phenomenon in Jordan. I had overemphasized the extent to which the theory of "public piety" that Lara Deeb forms about her community in Beirut could be reflected in most Muslim communities- as in Jordan. The religious symbolism of Jordan proved to be much more closely linked to real religious practices rather than attempts at modernizing the religious community through an emphasis on public piety.

Study Limitations

One of the main shortcomings of my ISP was the assumptions that I had made going into the project. As I had mentioned before, I began my ISP with a fairly firm expectation of what my results would be. This was not only due to the fact that I made assumptions based on personal observations within society prior to actively researching, but also because I was familiar with literature on the topic and quite fond of the existing theory of public piety, which deals with what religious symbolism means in a community. Perhaps if I had approached the topic with less of an idea about how it may potentially turn out, I would have had less holding me back in determining the true nature of religious symbolism in Jordan. As it was, whenever I approached the topic of what I thought religious symbolism might serve in the community to my interviewees, my ideas were usually rejected. There seemed to be a certain adamant denial among the people I spoke with that there was anything significant about religious symbolism in Jordan.

Another limitation of my study is how my focus inevitably shifted to a study of Sunni Muslim practices with religious symbolism without much regard for the Christian population within the country. As a scholar of Islam and not Christianity, I was understandably much more interested in Muslim practices, but I feel that my research could have been enhanced by an exploration of Christian religious practices within the country. Additionally, because of the inherent leniency of Christian symbolism (iconography is more accepted) and the more limited community of Christians within the country, I actually feel like the hypotheses I had at the outset of my research pertaining to public piety would have applied more directly to the Christian community rather than the general population of Jordan. It certainly appears, in retrospect, that my main literary influence to my research (*An Enchanted Modern*) dealt with a community that

was much more similar to the Christian community in Jordan rather than the general Muslim community.

Recommendations for Further Studies

My research could be greatly expanded upon by expanding the definition of religious symbolism that I use during the course of my research. Since I dealt with physical objects, which I falsely believed to have limited religious basis, I avoided exploring the much more controversial topics of the *hijab* and other obvious religious symbols which would probably have elicited many heated responses from my interviewees.

Another limitation that I placed on myself, which could have been removed for the purposes of expanding on the research, would be to not limit religious symbolism to its personal uses. As I hope to have demonstrated through my research, most religious symbolism within Jordan is not, as I had expected, to be based on strong personal religious convictions. This means that analyzing all religious symbols could reveal more about the mentality behind these practices by the community in general rather than individuals.

A way in which my ISP could be expanded on would be by including a detailed analysis of Christian symbolism. Additionally, an analysis of Christian symbolism exclusively may have been more conducive to developing interesting insight into the role that symbolism may play in a religious community.

Primary Resources

Anonymous Professor at School of Shar'ia, U. of Jordan. Personal interview. 22 April 2012

Hafeeth, Dr. Haeel. Personal interview. 22 April 2012

Hasen, Dr. Ammam. Personal interview. 12 April 2012.

Pathan, Sadique. Personal interview. 16 April 2012.

Rayyan,, Dr. Muhammad. Personal interview. 25 April 2012.

Bibliography

- Barnett, Laura. Canada. Library of Parliament. *Freedom of Religion and Religious Symbols in the Public Sphere*. Publication no. 2011-60-E. Ottawa, Canada: Library of Parliament, 2011. Print.
- Bastow, David. "The Possibility of Religious Symbolism." *Religious Studies* Vol. 20, No. 4 (1984): pp. 559-577. Print.
- Deeb, Lara. *An enchanted modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. Print.
- Deeb, Lara. Rev. of *Contesting Rituals: Islam and Practices of Identity-Making* by Stewart, Pamela J.; Andrew Strathern. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (2006): pp. 111-113. Print.
- "Jordan." 2012. CIA World Factbook. 20 April 2012
<<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html>>.
- Khan, Rais A., "Religion, Race, and Arab Nationalism." *International Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1979): pp. 353-368. Print.
- Wolf, Eric R., "Society and Symbols in Latin Europe and in the Islamic Near East: Some Comparisons." *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 42, no. 3 (1969): pp. 287-301. Print.

Appendices

Sample Interview Questions

Can you talk a little about the religious symbolism that you use? This can be anything that identifies your religion that you use in your home, your place of employment, or automobile.

Do you agree that certain objects with religious symbolism are used more for their symbolic meaning than actual religious use?

If so, what purpose do you think that these religious symbols serve?

If not, do you think that these objects have some symbolic aspects in addition to religious purpose?

Why do you think that people feel the need to display their religion through religious symbolism?

Do you think that some religious symbols are used merely because they are part of tradition (even outside the realms of religion)?

Do you think that the use of religious symbolism suggests that someone is more religious?

If not- does the use of religious symbolism suggest something about the person using the symbolism?

Do you think that religious symbolism enhances a sense of a community among people that affiliate themselves with a certain religion?

What do you understand to be the history behind the following religious symbols: the *miswak*, prayer beads (specifically when used as decoration), prayer mats, calligraphy displayed in the home, hanging decorations with the names of God, decorative Qur'ans (not used for reading), the *thob*, growing a long beard, and religious hats.

Consent Form

Symbols of Religious Identity in Jordanian Society

Piotr Narel, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, United States
School for International Training—Jordan: Modernization and Social Change

Please read the following statements carefully and mark your preferences where indicated. Signing below indicates your agreement with all statements and your voluntary participation in the project. Please ask the researcher if you have any questions regarding this consent form.

I am aware that this interview is conducted by an independent undergraduate researcher with the goal of producing insight on habits and norms of religious symbolism within Jordanian society.

I am aware that the information I provide is for research purposes only.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity upon request, and that upon request the researcher will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participation in this study.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study, but a copy of the final study will be made available to me upon request.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my name and position in the final study.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use my organizational affiliation in the final study.

I [do / do not] give the researcher permission to use data collected in this interview in a later study.

Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Participant's Printed Name

Thank you for participating!

Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:

Dr. Raed al-Tabini, Mokhtar Bouba, SIT Jordan Academic Director

Telephone (962) 077 7176318

Email: {HYPERLINK <mailto:raed.altabini@sit.edu>}