13.1 Apparent kama muta in *majlis* during *muharram*, and in self-injury in rituals of other religions

A Shia *majlis participant* put it, “I guess I feel better when I cry. I feel closer to Allah and to the Prophet’s family” (Blomfield 2010:317). Muharram mourning together “allows the mourner to touch or communicate with the Prophet’s family (*ahl-e bait*), and to earn merit (*savab*) through weeping” (Bard 2010:162). Indeed, “many believe that the Imâms ([deceased] spiritual leaders and successors to Muhammed) and martyrs of Karbala are present during Muharram and, like Sufi saints, intervene on behalf of the devout” (Wolf 2000:82). Because some of the saints martyred at Karbala, especially the Prophet’s daughter, Hussain’s mother Lady Fatima, are felt to be present at *majlis*, the feeling of worshippers, as one Hyderabad participant said, is that participation in the *majlis* weeping “is a religious act in which I am not alone” (Pinault 1992:116; see also 123). That is, Shia weep in part at the joy of being rejoined with their illustrious and truly devout predecessors — who selflessly sacrificed themselves for the good of all true Muslims.

Furthermore, Muharram mourning will ultimately unite the mourners with their sainted dead in heaven—for such is the reward (*savab*) for meritorious mourning. Weeping will save the weepers from the fires of hell and, moreover, those who weep over the deaths of the Karbala martyrs will take their place in heaven right alongside those martyrs (Ameed 1974, Ayoub 1978). This is a part of the meaning of *majlis* mourning:

As the ritual draws to an end, people start to weep. They cry as they stand, beating their chests, or sit down and wail. Pakistani women beat their chests, whereas Iraqi women slap their faces as they stand in a circle chanting and releasing their sorrows. Women of the various ethnic groups shed tears on behalf of Husayn and his family, tears that are critical for salvation. Lady Fatima is a witness to the tears, and those believers who weep on her behalf are rewarded in paradise. The practitioners’ tears and pious actions will rescue them from hellfire, releasing those “in whose hearts is the weight of an atom of love for *ahl al-bayat* [the holy family].” (Blomfield 2010:313; quotation at the end is from Ayoub 1978:201, with brackets by Blomfield referring to Hussain’s martyred family.)

In sum, Shia *majlis* practices at Muharram constitute weeping as a meritorious action that consubstantially bonds worshippers with the direct descendants of the Prophet who willingly chose to die to preserve the true Islam. At Muharram, *majlis* weeping is expected, indeed required, to demonstrate true religious devotion. Along with their kama muta, many weepers presumably also feel an emotion of sadness/sorrow/loss about the martyrdom of Hussain ibn Ali, his family and followers. But rather than mere sorrow, the weepers emphasize that they feel a joyous CS ‘pride’ in their identification with the martyrs and with each other. They feel the
collective effervescence (Durkheim 1912) of belonging to and union with the immoral, transcendent socioreligious community that is Shi-ism.

In conjunction with weeping, another act of consubstantial assimilation further amplifies the bonds among majlis participants: synchronous chanting and rhythmic movement. Shia men (especially in public processions or mosques) and women (gathered out of sight, often in a home) share Hussain’s suffering and exhibit their devotion to him and his people by matam, rhythmically beating their chests (or, among Iranian women, their faces) in synchrony with each other in large groups as they sing the refrains of commemorative poems and sermons that evoke compassion for the sacred family (Pinault 1992:109). Younger men, especially, often beat hard and long, to the point of causing significant bruising. What is distinctive about matam as a kama muta driver is its simultaneous visual, aural, kinesic, and tactile aspects. The chest beater sees and hears other hit their chests at the moment that he sees, hears, and feels his arms move and feels the blows on his chest. Thus engagement in matam makes the worshipper’s body equivalent to the bodies of the other worshippers, indexically making their social selves equivalent. When the chest becomes bruised and the blows become painful, the worshipper feels an additional sensation that his pain is in a minor way equivalent to the pain that Hussain, his family and followers experienced when they were slaughtered at Karbala. In a number of Shia communities, young men take matam further, flagellating their backs with bladed chains and cutting their foreheads with swords; we will discuss this practice in the next Chapter. For the moment, we simply need to keep in mind that men performing matam feel the martyrs’ suffering through their own pain: the vigorous chest beating, forehead cutting, or flagellation enables the performers to share the agony of the martyrs’ wounds as they died. This is consubstantial assimilation: CS is indexically intensified when bodies are assimilated into one being.

For everyone participating in majlis, devotional weeping accrues savab that affords enter heaven and taking one’s place right alongside the martyrs, so participants may be imagining this eternal togetherness. An act of consubstantial assimilation, weeping also assuages the thirst of the parched martyrs, connecting the weeper’s body to theirs. Hussain and his family, especially his mother, the Prophet’s daughter, are sensed to be present during majlis. Participants are moved to compassion as they listen to the sermons and poetry recounting the CS devotional altruism of the martyrs. All of these mutually amplifying aspects of majlis weeping and matam quickly intensify the weepers’ CS bonds with the martyrs—and simultaneously, with their co-participants in the event. Less directly, but importantly, these actions constitute intensification of their bonds with all Shia. These layered sudden CS intensifications afford kama muta.

Majlis weeping at Muharram is expected of Shia: it is what they are supposed to do, and most Sufis do it, often joined by other Muslims. Matam chest beating is also expected: everyone in the mass of participants is doing it, as they should. In other words, Shia majlis weeping and matam are ritualized action. However, “ritual” does not imply that people are insincere, ‘just
going through the motions,’ pretending, or merely acting ‘as if’ they ‘genuinely’ felt the emotion. For most people participating in kama muta drivers most of the time there is little or no conflict between what they are supposed to feel and what they actually feel. Rather, participants mostly engage in these ritual drivers with the desire and intention to experience the requisite emotions. Then engaging in the ritual, crowded together with many worshippers listening to and joining in the lyrics, tends to evoke the heartfelt emotion. Not always, not inevitably, and not immediately, but before long, apparently these integrated drivers usually evoke kama muta in many or most participants.

The conformation system of CS is consubstantial assimilation, in which participants experience their bodies as one, which can occur through intimate sex, giving birth, nursing, feeding, commensalism, cuddling, caressing, grooming, body modification such as circumcision or excision, synchronous rhythmic movement, marking body surfaces to resemble each other or wearing ‘uniform’ garb (Fiske 2004, Fiske & L. Schubert 2012). An especially dramatic way to constitute the identity of bodies is to shed blood together. Shared bloodshed in combat has the potential to bond warriors, and when warriors courageously accept wounds or death for their comrades, it seems those who are protected by such heroism would be likely to experience kama muta. In some cultures male or female genital modification surgery is done in groups of initiates who undergo the same surgery in a single ritual, painfully shedding blood side by side, and there are other kinds of initiation rites that incorporate shared bloodshed (Dulaney & Fiske 1994). Shared initiation experiences often create very strong life-long CS relationships, evincing participants’ devotion and commitment. So perhaps there is kama muta at some point in many initiation rites; we don’t know. In blood-brotherhood rites, two men (it’s almost always men) mix their blood and then ingest it together, forming intense life-long CS motives and commitments (Tegnaeus 1952), but we know of no accounts of the emotions these rites evoke. However, even when a blood donor does not see or know the recipient, donating blood often gives the donor a “warm glow” (Ferguson 2015) that may be kama muta. Shared pain is salient in boot camp, sports training and competition, dance, marathons and ultramarathons, martial arts, collective corporal punishment, and, above all, many kinds of subsistence activities and labor (on the latter, see Throop 2010). If any of these sorts of consubstantial assimilation suddenly intensifies a CS relationship, kama muta should often result.

In a number of religions, people engage in dramatic consubstantial assimilation practices of bloody self-mortification or self-mutilation. Some historical Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Native Americans, and others have caused themselves excruciating pain to corporeally connect in CS relationships with God (Glucklich 2001). The blood and the pain indexically unite the sufferers with divinity and, when collectively performed, with each other. While we have not yet located clear evidence that bloody self-mortification or self-mutilation practices evoke kama muta, it is nonetheless worthwhile to briefly survey them, in order to describe what may be a significant kama muta driver and thereby chart the potential location of intense kama muta motes that future research may confirm.
To consider this further, we may borrow some material from Fiske and Rai, 2015, *Virtuous Violence*. Early in the second millennium CE, monks in monastic orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans began scourging themselves; this practice gradually spread to lay Christians (Eller 2010:126–129). By the late Middle Ages, painful practices became integrated into everyday religiosity.

Practically all the holy women of the later Middle Ages, nuns as well as Beguines [women in lay monastic orders] and laywomen, practiced the self-infliction of pain and welcomed divinely inflicted suffering. Men were equally zealous, with extreme cases such as Heinrich Suso, who carved a cross in his own flesh. (Cohen 2010:27)

Self-destructive religious violence . . . include[d] fasting or denying oneself particular foods, sleep deprivation, isolation or silence, enforced celibacy, hitting, cutting, scarring, piercing, burning, whipping, castration or amputation of body parts, holding awkward or painful poses, carrying weights, ingesting drugs or poisons, drawing the blood, and subjecting oneself to beating or torture and ultimately suicide or presenting oneself for execution. (Eller 2010:118)

In early modern England, pain was “a form of *imitatio Christi*, a key ingredient of Christian identity, and a source of mystical insight and transformation” (van Dijkhuizen 2009:207). By inflicting pain on oneself, one shared Christ’s sacrificial suffering: one’s body became equivalent to Christ’s body. Even as recently as nineteenth century New Mexico, Brothers of the Blood used a great variety of self-tortures: for example initiation into the Brothers of the Blood included having the emblem of the Brotherhood carved into one’s back (Eller 2010:127). Assuming that these bloody practices often abruptly intensified the participants’ feeling of union with Christ, it is plausible to imagine that participants experienced kama muta, but we have not been able to locate specific reports on the emotions that participants experienced.

Bloody religious rituals are not prominent in contemporary Christianity, but they are among Shia in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Bahrain, where young men engage in painful bloodshed practices that are more extreme homologs of the non-bloody *matam* synchronous chest-beating that we considered in Chapter 14. At Muharram, young Shia men do *zanier kea matam*—flagellate themselves with chains, some of which incorporate knives or razors. Many cut their foreheads repeatedly with swords or wound themselves with daggers (Pinault 1992:144). For Shia, this suffering is redemptive (Wolf 2000:84). Young Shia men inflict these bloody wounds on themselves

as a symbolic demonstration of love for Hussain with the purpose of earning rewards in Paradise; it indicates remorse at the community’s inability to prevent Hussain’s martyrdom and places men among those martyred with Hussain [at
Karbala in 680 CE. *Zanjir ka matam* expresses at the collective level the courage to endure persecution and at the personal level the “desire to demonstrate physically the willingness to suffer the kind of wounds which they would have incurred had they fought at Karbala” (Schubel 1993:93. Quoted text [corrected by ApF] is from Abou Zahab 2008:108–109).

To inflict such pain on oneself, joyfully sharing the pain of Hussain and his slaughtered family, is a proof of one’s love for them (Pinault 1992:103–105). To do *zanjir ka matam* and to bear the scars of doing it make a Shia man a paragon of Shia Islam (Bard 2005:155, 188; Howarth 2005:168–170). This self-mortification creates CS relationships at six levels, at least: It is an act of CS empathy for and identity with Hussain and his followers. Second, it marks Shia identity. Third, it distinguishes Pakistani Punjabis and others who perform it as ’true’ Muslims, marking their claim to be more Muslim than Arab Muslims (Chelkowski 2010). Fourth, the blood that young men generously shed in matam sacrifice is shed on behalf of the community as a whole, which the community appreciates, gratefully admiring the men who do it (Pinault 1992:124). Fifth, it joins together in shared pain, injury, and scars the flagellants in a community, and particularly those in a given parade as they bloody themselves and shed their blood on the streets of the community. Sixth, in some communities, such as Hyderabad, guilds organize the matam at each shrine, each having its allotted time and competing with each other to demonstrate their loving commitment, so that the self-injurious mourning marks the participants’ identity and solidarity with their particular guild (Pinault 1992:123). All of this may sometimes intensify these CS relationships gradually, in which case we would not expect kama muta motes. But if and when the pain and blood intensify any of these CS relationships suddenly, we should expect kama muta. There are fruitful potentials for fieldwork on the social emotions of these experiences.

In South Asia and elsewhere there are many religious virtuosos who perform dramatic self-injuries, but the sources we have seen do not make clear whether their acts intensify CS, either suddenly or cumulatively. Kama muta theory certainly does not imply that any sort of self-inflicted bloodshed or pain evokes kama muta; it depends on whether the act is meant to indexically intensify CS, and whether it does so suddenly. In contemporary or recent Sufi practices in Morocco and elsewhere in the Maghreb, individual mystics cut themselves severely, smash large water-filled ceramic vessels against their heads, pierce their cheeks, necks, or shoulders with needles; or walk on swords (Frembegen 2008:178). These self-inflicted injuries are supposed to perform union with Allah, but it remains a mystery whether these practices evoke the predicted kama muta in performers or their audiences.

Beyond the world religions and the Old World, extremely painful self-injury was crucial to several Native American religions. Olmec, Mayans, and Aztecs frequently pierced their own tongues, penises, and ear lobes to draw blood — often large quantities — to offer to the ancestors (Joyce, Edging, Lorenz, & Gillespie 1991; Trigger 2003:481). In order to envision
their personal guardian spirit, Native American men of the northern Great Plains inflicted extreme pain on themselves in the Sun Dance ritual. They had others insert sinews or pegs through the muscles of their back and later tore themselves loose by ripping the sinews through the muscles. On the first occasion when a man did this he aimed to identify and connect with a personal guardian spirit; subsequently, a man did it to contact his guardian and receive a communication, and special powers, from him. It’s not entirely clear to what extent in which cultures the relationship with a personal guardian spirit was CS and to what extent AR, but in some traditions CS with the spirit or at least the community was predominant. In particular, the Sun Dance was a focal ritual of Plains Indian cultures and, in one form or another, remains so in modern times. Traditionally, a man vowed to stage a Sun Dance in connection with plans to avenge a death, lead a hunt, or ask for abundant buffalo herds, seek shamanistic power, or heal others (Jorgensen 1972). The Sun Dance was often performed in times of collective suffering or danger; thus the Dance benefitted the entire community, and participants’ dancing was deeply appreciated. Participants danced together continuously for three days and nights without water or food; when a dancer collapsed he was understood to be receiving his vision on behalf of the community, a vision that would show a way to solve the collective crisis. I have not located informants’ accounts of their emotions at these moments.

In many tribes, men also performed solitary rituals with similar sociomoral aims. A Cheyenne man would go out early in the day with a helper to a lonely place on the prairie with a pole, where they would consecrate pins and a knife.

He is then tied to the pole by means of wooden pins driven through the flesh. All day long, after he is left alone again, he must walk back and forth on the sunward side of the pole, praying constantly, and fixing his eyes on the sun, trying to tear the pins loose from the torn flesh. At night the helper returns, and pieces of the torn skin are held toward the sun and sky and the four directions and buried. That night he sleeps on the prairie and gets his power. (Benedict 1922:5)

Seeking guiding visions, Dakota performed similar rituals, sometimes hanging by the cords for days, or passing a knife through their body and waiting silently for the vision. Dakota, Mandan-Hidatsa, Assiniboine, and Gross-Ventre also cut off finger joints and lacerated themselves for the same purpose.

In addition to simply establishing a relationship with a guardian spirit and proving oneself a man, men of the Great Plains constituted, redressed, or regulated many other relationships through vision quest torture.

Everywhere, even in those tribes where every man was expected to fast once in his life specifically for an individual guardian, the vision was sought also by the same means on continually recurring occasions — that is in mourning; as an
instrument of revenge on one’s enemies; on account of a vow made in sickness or danger for oneself or one’s relative; on initiation into certain societies; and as a preliminary to a war party. On all these occasions, the seeker ordinarily received his power or commands directly, without specifically acquiring a guardian spirit. (Benedict 1922:12).

Although Benedict was one of the founders of psychological anthropology, her account, drawn from Franz Boas’s field notes, contains few clues about the emotions of the participants in vision quest or Sun Dance. Men definitely performed the Sun Dance and sometimes other self-injurious rituals primarily to meet community needs, but Boas did not further elucidate the nature of the social relationship between the performer and his guardian spirit, or between the performer and his community. Did men performing these self-torture rites experience suddenly enhanced CS relationships with their guardian spirits, or was the relationship they constituted purely authority ranking? When men performed the Sun Dance to address a collective need, did they feel kama muta when they had the vision they sought? What about those who helped tie a man to a pole, who saw him return the next day with his wounds, or who watched Sun Dancers persevere for days through hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and heat until they collapsed? Did they feel kama muta? What were the emotions of community members witnessing these excruciating sacrifices for the collective good?

Do Christian flagellation; Shia *zanier kea matam*; Native American performance of the Sun Dance and guardian spirit quest; Olmec, Mayan, and Aztec bloodletting; or self-mortification in other religions evoke kama muta? Does non-bloody but painful asceticism evoke kama muta? Mortuary and funeral rites in many cultures also involve painful bloodletting, injury, or amputation of fingers (Fiske & Rai 2012). Do these occasion sudden CS intensification with the deceased, the ancestors, deities, or among the mourners? Metaphorically, I would give me right arm to know the answer!
13.2 Kama muta in Sufi worship in California, Paris, and Morocco – without knowing the language

Here is a UCLA undergraduate anthropologist's report from her participant observation over the course of ten weeks:

I’m agnostic, though vaguely familiar with Shiite Islam. But I wanted to study Sufism, to see whether kama muta occurred, so I went to a Sufi mosque in Southern California. Dressed all in white, as this mosque requires of everyone, I was guided to my seat among the other women; men were on the other side of a low wall. As the light was absorbed by the darkness within the room, I felt all the thoughts racing through my head evaporate. All around me was a soft white—this dreamy bright white. Everything felt enchanted, mystical, and nurturing. For now, I needed to put aside the worries and anxieties about my participant observation and everyday life that were clouding my mind. I needed to gently escape these thoughts in order to attain a state of clarity and relaxation. As the room fell silent, the whispering voice started again. This voice was surrounding me—I could not quite identify where this voice was coming from—was it coming from above, around me, or within me? All I knew was that this voice was pleasant, that this voice was peaceful, that I felt tranquility. The voice was of a female, slowly murmuring words in Farsi—a language so close to my heart—in an unintelligible manner. Somehow, by some mystical force or prior agreement, everyone joined this voice in unison—as if they all knew. I must have known too, because I found my voice amongst theirs. I did not think too hard or question my motives, I just let my spirit revel in the bliss, in the euphoria of togetherness, of peacefulness, of longing. I intermittently closed my eyes, and suddenly felt a rushing wave of energy all around the room. I realized that around me, there was movement. White-clad bodies now harmoniously swayed from side to side, their heads tossing and turning—tracing the figure eight trace of infinity, moving to the infinity. I allowed myself to be carried away by this bliss, I allowed myself to think of infinity. All I could think about in my mind was infinity—this feeling of perpetuation, of life, of wonder. At once, I thought about everything and nothing at all—I thought about how complex and yet simple life is, how complex and simple the movements were—and I felt in awe. What was happening? The boundaries I had constructed—those of a curious researcher—had slowly disintegrated as I discovered more about myself, I turned inwards. I didn’t know what I was singing—Huu huu huu. Hame jaa Esgh [Everywhere love], Huu huu huu. In unison, the voices all sounded the same—they all carried a hauntingly beautiful depth, but once I listened more closely, I realized how unique each one of those voices were. I identified the voices next to me—the lady on my left was chanting loudly, her voice strongly breaking with the Hu hu hu. The woman in front of me, her voice was a softer whisper—she
lightly sang the *huh hu hu*, but even then her voice would raise and lower—like the waves of an ocean. I stared straight ahead, into the white Arabic script inscribed on the walls which absorbed my entire gaze—for a second, these words all made sense to me, everything made sense. I felt in awe, like those times I would be in the Cologne Cathedral, the dewy smell of antiquity, cold air, and the warm fire of the candle lights reminding me of the wonders of humanity, of the world, of the supernatural. I felt myself tapping my knees with my palms in time with the other women’s tapping, thinking of infinity. Infinity, infinity, I closed my eyes and I saw infinity. I felt infinity, I wanted to feel infinity. The rhythm of the women around me was consuming me, I felt at one with them. I felt especially connected to the woman to the right of me, who earlier looked towards me for signals of movement. I felt empowered, I felt like I belonged. I stopped trying to think, stop trying to let the contradictions of my life in that moment consume me. I tried to shatter the thought of the night before, as I was sitting in the colorful and loud Cabo Cantina singing karaoke to Britney Spears, the smell of stale beer filling the atmosphere. Being in this space now, the comforting cushion of the carpet beneath my knees, the too-fresh air of the mosque, the otherworldliness of the lights—and the subtle lack of bright colors which was peculiarly inviting into this enchantment—this contrast between the bar and the mosque. I could not escape this contradiction, and for a few moments, no matter how much I wanted to let go, the thoughts were consuming me—as if I was laughing at myself, questioning myself, what are you doing? Who do you think you are? I started singing with a passion as the voices around me raised—I sang more deeply and passionately than ever before. It was a stark contrast to the night before, when I was disenchanted with the lyrics and wanted the songs to end, for then I had felt no sense of self-realization, no sense of self-reflection. This was different. I didn’t want this to end, no. Not now—not now when the pieces of the puzzle all came together, if just for those few precious moments. What if infinity was in all those moments, those moments where I felt closest to myself? Infinity, infinity, infinity. It was as if Infinity was my God—and somehow It wanted me to continue these movements, as if It was guiding me somewhere—as if It wanted me to experience this. I sang—this time deep from within. Infinity, infinity, I thought about my parents—I was singing for my parents—what if they could live forever? What if we could have all those moments forever? I let go of my parents, I let go of those thoughts. When I let go of them—I felt a hollowness in my chest, but a hollowness that was as nebulous and light as the mist. I do not know whether I felt this because I was releasing myself from those thoughts, or whether I felt moved because I was shocked and saddened by my realization that I was actually letting go of my parents. I felt deep love for my parents, but in those moments I felt a throbbing in my chest, as if I could let go of my parents because they would be okay. I felt grateful for everything, as if I was thanking this supernatural other for life—for allowing me to be here. The hollowness in my chest deepened. I took comfort in
the voices of the ones around me, I felt that they were experiencing the feelings that I was—even if they weren’t. *Huu, huu, huu.* I could hear that each one of those voices too suffered, loved, grieved, laughed. But now these voices were different, now these voices were elevated. I generally hate to sing, but I loved to sing here—as if I was welcomed to sing, as if my voice gained this otherworldly quality. I felt rooted and connected here, to gravity. Tap, tap, tap, tap, I kept tapping my knees in the collective rhythm. This made me feel oneness with the others—I felt connected to the women around me, I felt like a fragment of something much greater—yet at the same time I felt that this greatness was all within me.

At once, the woman to the right of me lightly tapped my hand—perhaps by accident—and I became sensitive of my surroundings again. I started to think again. I continued Sufi *zikr*, the physical and mental practices of remembrance, with the women around me, but I had lost my rhythm, I was too distracted now. My eyes were wide open, but the feelings within me were still light. I desired to go back to those moments before, but despite this I still felt relaxed and calm. After a few minutes, the voices started lowering, the singer too, her voice was fading into the silence, and the movements synchronously slowed, dwindled, halted. I felt a slight dizziness, as if the mosque was slightly moving, gravitating around my core. As silence fell over the room again, I took a deep breath, wanting to crystallize this feeling of love and gratefulness. I closed my eyes.

Similar practices evoke kama muta among Sufis in other places. At events in Morocco and Paris, Sufi women following the Boutshishiyya path participate in similar experiences of ḥāl, evoked, as in Egypt and elsewhere, by *dhikr* chants of the names of God together with *inshad* singing.

The repetitive and gradually accelerated rhythms of the chants, the vigorous vocalizations, the swaying of the body, the clicking of the prayer beads, all these elements contribute to an experience of transcendence – called *al-hal* in Arabic, a mystical “state” of union with the divine that takes different forms of expression. During the weekly regional ceremonies that I have been attending for years, this transcendent state usually takes place during the *dhikr* section. At the international meetings however, the [*inshad*] songs were definitely the primary catalyst for a state of divine inspiration. (Kapchan 2009:72).

The repetition of the names of God [*dhikr*] is common among all Sufi groups.

The women are seated in a circle on the floor. They begin chanting vigorously: *Allah, Allah, Allah, Allah.* . . . All of a sudden, one of the women — let’s call her Fatiha — breaks with this rhythm. She calls out *Allah* loudly. It is almost a scream.
She has broken with the rhythm of the other chanters, and is now punctuating their repetitions with short, staccato exclamations. . . . She is in al-hal, the state. Now things "heat up", so to speak. Another woman breaks from the rhythmic repetition moaning Allah in long tones over the voices of the others. She rocks back and forth. Meanwhile some women in the group have risen in their chanting by a half-tone. . . . Although the goal is to chant with one voice, the women are in fact producing an aharmonic, chromaticized melody, creating over-tones as well as counter-rhythms as they go into al-hal . . . One hal brings on others . . .

Some women perform loud cry breaks, others chant in long tones over the rhythmic faster chanting of the group, the voices of others receding into a whisper, or making a melismatic crescendo into a wail. . . . The Sufis are listening closely to each other for "ecstatic cues" when performing the dhikr . . . .

The names of God are easy to repeat. And it is in this section that people go into al-hal . . . People stay in synch until they go into al-hal, at which point the improvisation begins—counter-rhythms, over-lays of long-tones on top of the ostinato of the group. . . . The occurrence of al-hal sparks a kind of chain reaction wherein women's sporadic exclamations, their swoons and cries, respond to the exclamations of others. . . . After three hours, the wadhiña [liturgy] ends with a prayer, the women kissing each other's hands and saying, Allah y-qbal, may God accept [your prayers]. (Kapchan 2009:73–74; final brackets in original)

In many of the events in Paris and Morocco that Kapchan describes, many — perhaps most — of the participants do not understand Arabic, though, like some other non-Arabic-speaking Muslims, they may be able to recognize and even recite long passages of sacred texts and songs. The rapture they achieve in ḥāl kama muta with God and the “sentiment of Sufi community” that results (Kapchan 2009:80) do not depend on explicit declarative understanding of lexical semantics. It is the immersion and participation in the sounds and movement that evoke ḥāl kama muta.

In contrast to the classical Sufi texts that highlight tears and other sensations, these contemporary accounts say very little about the bodily sensations involved. However it is notable that Kapchan (2009:72) reports that when she participated in these events, she felt her chest buzzing — perhaps a variant of the feeling that many others describe in kama muta. And, “After three days of intense singing with the Sufis in Morocco, all I needed was to sing the songs again in my head in order to awaken the deep feelings of love and ecstasy that these songs evoked in the group” (p. 82). In a personal communication (28 April 2015), Kapchan indicated that participants definitely shed tears and wept, and she observed them “choke up.”
noted that cry breaks are ubiquitous. A cry break is a momentary vocal break in a note, a pause and then resumption of the tone; it sounds like a sob, or the singer holding herself back from starting to cry. It is common in American country music. This seems to be the musical indication of *being choked up* or *having a lump in the throat*. It may also be related to the pause in breathing and deep breath that are often an aspect of kama muta motes.

The most prominent Sufi kama muta drivers consist of singing or reciting texts, or reciting the names of god (*dhikr*), while moving in rhythmic synchrony. As in some other religious and non-religious kama muta drivers, explicit linguistic understanding is not necessary for inducing kama muta; recall from Chapter 12 Braud’s (2001) account of his imitative participation in a Russian Orthodox service whose liturgy he did not understand. Until the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholics universally attended masses conducted in Latin, which hardly any of them understood. Yet no doubt many worshippers experienced kama muta on occasion. In many temples, Jewish services are conducted largely in Hebrew; though not all participants are fluent in Hebrew, presumably some experience kama muta sometimes. Many devout Muslims can ‘read’ the Arabic Qur’an out loud with little or no understanding of what the text means, while a great many more memorize the Qur’an’s verses—sometimes the entire Qur’an—without understanding a word of Arabic. African madrassas typically teach students to memorize the Qur’an without any concern about the students’ Arabic comprehension as such: students generally can’t understand the passages they memorize. Likewise, some Urdu-speakers who know no Arabic nevertheless teach the Qur’an, either vocally or through phonemic text-reading. Yet even without any knowledge of Arabic, simply reading, reciting, or hearing a beautiful recital from the Qur’an nonetheless often evokes kama muta in the reader or listener, or the person reciting text as a sequence of memorized sounds (Andrabi 2014). These Muslims’ encounter with the word of Allah, together with their experience of reading or hearing precisely what Muhammed said, makes them feel closer to Allah – and more identified with their sect, or with all Muslims. When this suddenly comes on, they may weep, feel chills or goosebumps, feel a sense of cozy unity with the congregations and unity in Islam. They feel that they ‘belong’. "I had goose bumps, chills running down my spine, tears rolling down my face and the fuzziest feeling ever in my heart" (Andrabi 2014:25). One Urdu- and English-speaking woman in Southern California who teaches the Qur’an without knowing any Arabic said

> I’m not numb when I recite; in fact I’m the total opposite. I even cry sometimes! Knowing that what I’m reciting is the speech of God sometimes gives me the chills. The Arabic calligraphy is so beautiful, reading it soothes my eyes. In a way it’s like meditation, especially when someone with a beautiful voice is reciting. I definitely cry then! If something that you can’t even understand makes you cry, imagine how powerful it is. If I knew what was being recited, I would probably be shedding buckets. hahah. I’m best if I stick to my translations (quoted in Andrabi 2014:19).