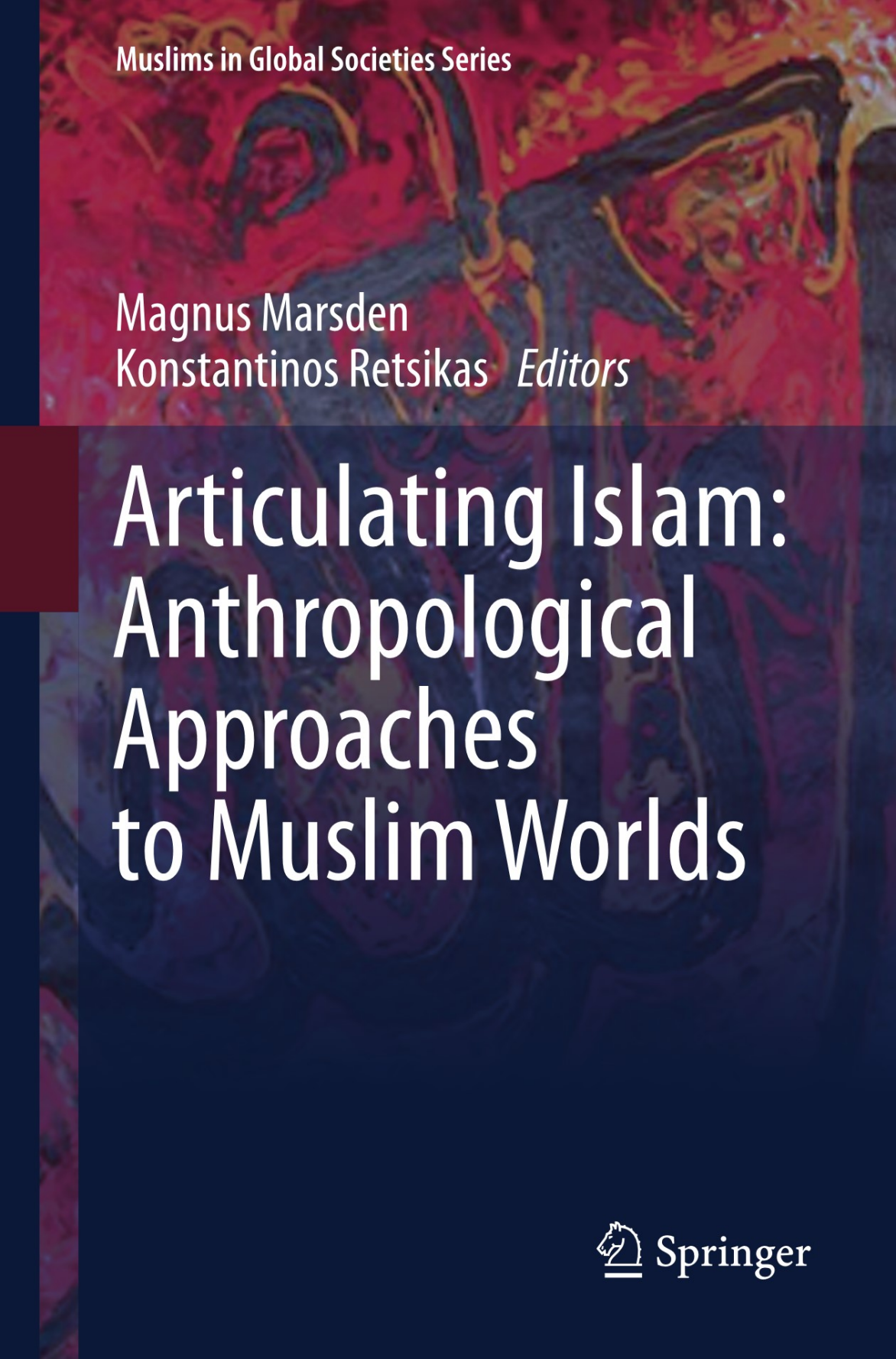
Muslims in Global Societies Series
Magnus Marsden
Konstantinos Retsikas Editors
Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds
Springer

Muslims in Global Societies Series

Volume 6

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Editors

Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds

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ISBN 978-94-007-4266-6 ISBN 978-94-007-4267-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3
Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg New York London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012951338

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Acknowledgments

This book is the outcome of a two-day conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies in July 2009. The conference was made possible by generous funding from SOAS and the Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre at Cambridge, and personal support offered toward the initiative by Prof. Graham Furniss and Dr. Anil Seal. The conference, entitled 'Thirty Years of the Anthropology of Islam: Retrospect and Prospect', sought to launch an in-depth investigation into the history of the development of the anthropology of Islam, with the aim of charting the sub-discipline's key thematic and ethnographic concerns and highlighting the comparative importance of anthropological work on Islam to scholarship within and beyond the discipline on world religion. Participants were invited to reflect on the emergence of the anthropology of Islam in relationship to the analytical questions that had driven it, and to the nature of anthropological scholarship on Islam in particular 'cultural areas'. In order to stimulate reflection on the relationship between anthropological work on Islam and the study of other world religions we also invited scholars who have actively contributed to the study of other world religious traditions, especially Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism: Simon Coleman, Chris Hann, J.D.Y. Peel, and Susan Bayly presented research papers and acted as discussants at the conference. The panels also included several scholars whose approaches to Islam and Muslims have been original, bold and innovative: Michael Gilsenan, Benjamin Soares, Heiko Henkel, Filippo and Caroline Osella, and Mahnaz Marashi presented papers at the conference, and while these are not part of the current volume, the influence of their work across its pages is clearly evident. In addition, the conference was injected with further scholarly rigour by the presence of Richard Fardon, Trevor Marchand, and David Mosse.

As we have come to realise, the publication of such an edited volume requires the efforts of many people besides the contributors and editors. This book has benefited much from the editorial supervision of Springer, and, in particular, the editors of the Muslim Studies in Global Societies Series who have responded with much speed and efficiency to our enquiries. In addition, Marleen Moore and Anita van der Linden have played a critical role in guiding the volume to publication. The comments and suggestions of various anonymous reviewers have helped us greatly

in revising the materials, especially in our attempts to formulate the introduction. K. Retsikas has benefited greatly from an Economic and Social Research Council award (RES-062-23-2639) that has provided time away from teaching and the opportunities this has offered for the purpose of co-writing the introduction. Magnus Marsden's contribution to the volume has been helped by a research grant from the Leverhulme Trust, as well as a period of sabbatical leave granted by SOAS.

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

Magnus Marsden and Konstantinos Retsikas

Articulating Islam

This book investigates the relationship between anthropology and Islam in a variety of different social and cultural circumstances. It has two main goals. First, it builds on a rich scholarly tradition that explores the ways in which religions are produced, reproduced and transformed in particular social and historical contexts. The study of Islam has already benefitted greatly from these perspectives, and, in this sense, we argue, needs not be considered distinct from scholarly approaches to the investigation of other religious traditions. We seek explicitly, indeed, to de-excepetionalize the study of Islam. This is an especially important project in the current context in which both Islam and being Muslim are often treated as essential and unchanging dimensions of the worlds of people of Muslim background.[1]

Secondly, the book's core chapters take the form of in-depth considerations of the role played by Islam in particular geographic locales. They seek to showcase the importance to such a project of exploring people's lives and the contexts – often changing and inchoate – in which these are played out in as a holistic way as possible. In doing such, the chapters demonstrate the varying ways in which Islam is deeply yet also diffusely embedded in everyday experience; sometimes being of central significance and at other times less important to people's lives. The ethnographic material and complexity these chapters showcase illuminate how important it is that scholars are careful and critical in their use of terms such as 'Muslim identity', 'being Muslim' and, indeed, 'Muslim' during the course of their analysis of Muslim worlds.

[1] On the nature of stereotypes of Muslims today, see Morey and Yaqin (2011). For anthropological approaches to Islamophobia, see Shryock (2010), Bunzl (2007), and Verkaaik (2010).

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_1,

The scholarly debates about the study of religion on which this volume builds are complex, multifarious, and inter-disciplinary. They converge, however, around questions that at first sight appear as being relatively straightforward: whether the focus of our study is Islam or being Muslim.[2] A complex body of work has developed in anthropology and related disciplines concerning the ways in which human subjects embody and reflect on cultural, religious, and historical schemas (Bourdieu 1993; Sahlins 1976). Many of these works argue that to distinguish between a religion in its abstract, cognitive or symbolic form and its material manifestations reflects binary distinctions – between the symbolic and real, cognitive and affective, belief and practice – which do not do justice to the full complexity of the worlds that people create and inhabit.[3] This debate has opened yet further questions for scholars to consider in their assessment of the role played by religion in the lives of their informants: how far is 'Islam' or 'being Muslim' always at stake in what people of Muslim background think, say, and do? Islam is now widely recognised by most scholars as being a complex and multidimensional religious tradition. Are scholarly attempts to understand 'being Muslim' equally reflective of the extent to which this too is an aspect of experience that is produced, reproduced and transformed in particular social and historical contexts and not simply a constant, empirically observable and analyzable feature of everyday life?

Systematicity and Articulation

The chapters of this volume build on a long tradition of scholarly writing that addresses the problems associated with treating religions as essential and unchanging. In the introduction, we develop the notions of systematicity and articulation to capture some of the ways in which Islam is both evoked and diffused in the lives of people of Muslim background and show how these processes unfold in mutual interaction with particular social and historic contexts. Our aim is not to provide a full historical overview of anthropological work on Islam[4] but to revisit older debates formative to the discipline's engagement with Islam and relate them to more recent concerns.

Systematicity refers to the efforts required and undertaken by Muslims to evoke Islam in the midst of particular historical and social contingencies. In broad terms, it refers to the types of connections and disconnections that people of Muslim background make in order to evince and eclipse 'the religious' as being a more or less central dimension of their lives. Systematicity, then, is something that people of

[2] See, for example, Marranci (2008), and Varisco (2005).

[3] A growing body of work, moreover, questions the cross-cultural value of the category 'belief' for understanding religion, see for example Coleman and Lindquist (2008), Englund (2007), Engelke (2007), and Ruel (1997).

[4] For recent overviews see Soares and Osella (2009).

Muslim background do and produce. Anthropologists and others who study Islam, however, are also involved in the processes through which Islam is evinced and eclipsed, given emphasis while also being diffused. This is because the ways in which scholars frame their arguments and create the representations that they do of Muslims leads some connections that Muslims make between their daily lives and Islam to be privileged, and others to be rendered less important. As a result, and as anthropologists working on other religious traditions have widely noted (e.g. Fuller 1992), scholars need to be sophisticated in the categories they use to analyse 'the religious'. More importantly, they must also be attentive to the varying registers in relationship to which 'Islam' is thought of, the overlaps that take place between these, and the consequences that such overlaps have for both influencing scholarly understandings of Islam, and the modes through which the Islamic is experienced and conceptualised by people of Muslim background. Theorists of modernity have recognised the need to explore 'the modern' as a normative ideology, philosophical orientation and an actual project taken up by social actors in particular contexts (e.g. Osella and Osella 2006). So too do anthropologists often encounter 'Islam' during the course of fieldwork simultaneously as an analytical category, a matter of theological debates and a so-called 'folk category'.

We also think that the concept of articulation is helpful for anthropologists to analyse the ways in which Islam is produced, reproduced and transformed in particular social and historical contexts. A long-standing body of scholarship building on the pioneering work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith has emphasised how far 'the religious' does not constitute a universal category of thought and action. It is, rather, continuously produced by means of its enmeshment with other fields of social life (Cantwell-Smith 1962). In relationship to the study of Islam, scholars from a variety of disciplines have explored with great sophistication the importance of understanding how texts and religious life in general are always embedded within social life, power relations and modes of authority (Asad 2001; Bierman 2004; Bulliet 1979; Eickelman 1978, 1985; Jalal 2008; Mottahedeh 2000). More recently, scholarship has added to such debates by showing that the texts considered as being important to the Islamic discursive traditions are 'not exhausted by' 'the founding texts' of the Qur'an and Hadith: they reflect, rather, the influence of local and regional influences and traditions (Ahmad 2011: 111; c.f. Kresse 2007; Bowen 1993: 10). All of these works, then, emphasise the social and cultural dimensions of the Islamic tradition's textual dimensions.

There is also growing recognition both of the extent to which the particular fields of social life with which Islam is enmeshed are multiple and contextually variable, and of how this multiplicity also helps to shape the ways in which Islam is invoked during the course of daily life. Such fields of social life might include, for example, anxieties over inter-personal relations and the testing times that episodes of illness herald (e.g. Alevi 2008; Burkhalter 2006), the challenges of colonisation and economic marketisation (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1990), the creation of national identities and state structures in expansive transregional contexts (Ho 2006; Kahn 2006; Edwards 1995), and modes in which relations

of religious authority are enacted, experienced and evaluated in transforming contexts (Eickelman and Anderson 1999). Islam's invocation and diffusion is best explored through the ways in which ideas, practices, discourses and debates that are thought of by their participants as being Islamic are inter-involved with such arenas of contemporary social existence. Rather than being treated as distinct in an *a priori* fashion, these fields of social life are also mutually constitutive of 'the religious' in particular settings. This approach to the study of the religious is as much methodological as theoretical: it provides scholars with a way of exploring how Islam is a dynamic interface between different dimensions of everyday life, rather than the stable essence against which these are to be compared, either by believers or scholarly observers.

Exploring such articulations between these fields of everyday life and Islam's multiple dimensions, reveals how 'the religious' is evinced in un-determined and un-expected ways. From this perspective, Islam is not studied for what it is, or what makes it unique or exceptional in comparison to other world religions: scholarly work on Islam, rather, like that on all other religions, is conducted to reveal broader human strivings to enchant and to foster the cultivation of curiosity and investigation of the world. It also forces recognition of the extent to which the scale of positions between Islam's evocation and diffusion in people's everyday lives is not the result of tactical acts of positioning by Muslims; they are reflective, rather, of the extent to which all expressions of the religious are mutually constituted in relationship to the quandaries and concerns of everyday social existence.[5]

The Anthropology of World Religions

An excellent and expanding body of literature concerned with the study of Islam has arisen over the past 30 years and more. Anthropologists working in Muslim societies once complained of the relative neglect of Islam as a central topic of investigation; in the current context, however, it is the analysis of Christianity that is said to be understudied (e.g. Robbins 2003).[6] The burgeoning anthropological interest in both Islam and Christianity has also stimulated a revived and cross-disciplinary interest in ideas about 'world religions'. Several works have demonstrated how the category 'world religion' – far from being a purely analytical term – is the inheritor of a particular history, reflective of its roots in nineteenth and early twentieth century Orientalism (notably, Masuzawa 2005). Pioneering scholars of religion sought to define, rank and classify 'world religions' in relationship to their success or otherwise at being 'universal'. These early works distinguished

[5] We would like to thank one of the Springer reviewers for helping us to develop this point.

[6] Cannell (2006) explains anthropology's neglect of Christianity as related to their historic proximity, stressing that many of the discipline's key concepts for studying religion have Christian roots and are, thus, ill-suited for the study of Christianity itself.

world religions from national or 'racial' forms of faith. Such modes of classification are, of course, closely related to evolutionary theory and its attempt to rank hierarchically different cultural and religious forms. They are also tied to conceptions of 'the universal' formulated by moral and ethical philosophers working within the Enlightenment tradition.[7] Islam, for some early scholars, did not do enough to demonstrate its universality – it was, in essence, a religion of 'the Arabs' – a Semitic religion similar to Judaism (Masuzawa 2005).

Such theories concerning the definition of world religions continue to be visible in ongoing scholarly debates about the Islamic tradition. Many of the questions that anthropologists have asked of Islam and Muslims in relationship to their attempts to understand world religions focus on the relationship between 'folk'/'popular'/'local' forms of Islam and 'high'/'reform-minded'/'book-centred'/'doctrinal' Islam.[8] These modes of analysis reflect a history of western thinking about Islam and other world religions that is premised on attempts to empirically evaluate the capacity of these to transcend registers of locality, nation and race, manifest themselves as being truly 'universal' and instil within those who follow them the 'point-of-view-of-the-universe'. The obvious theoretical problems with such work on the idea of 'world religions' has led some anthropologists to question the value of constructing distinct bodies of scholarship on Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and other religious traditions (Hann 2007). Rather than focusing on the study of particular 'world religions', they call upon scholars to investigate conceptual themes that transcend these traditions: the role played by mediation in religious life, for example.[9] This approach would pose a strong challenge to 'civilisational' or essentialising frameworks that treat different world religions as unique and coherent, either involved in patterns of conflict or synthesis with one another.[10] By focusing on themes important to the religious generally rather than to distinct or particular religious traditions, thematically-oriented work would sharpen the ways in which comparisons are made between different religious traditions, while also helping to fashion a more rigorous approach to understanding change and continuity within them.

While we are broadly sympathetic to such arguments, it is important to note that scholarly writing has sought to simultaneously address thematic issues in the study of religion and contribute to the wider understandings of Islam. Anthropologists

[7] On which see Williams (1995). Compare Laidlaw (2010).

[8] For summaries of these debates and their history, see Bowen (1998), and Osella (2008).

[9] We chose this dimension given the amount of attention – theoretical and ethnographic – it has received in recent work. See, for example, Mazarella (2004). Compare Meyer and Moors (2005), and Hirschkind and Larkin (2008).

[10] Here we would bring about the importance of work that recognises dangers not only with the clash of civilisations (Huntington 1996) argument, but also the supposed synthesis or mixing of such civilisations. For a critique of the use of the category 'syncretism' in sociological and historical work on South Asia see Mir (2006).

have focused on the relationship between texts and the contexts in which these are invested with meaning, spiritual significance, authority and power (Messick 1993; Masud et al. 1996). A growing body of literature has also questioned the extent to which academic ideas about world religions are above all else shaped by European thinkers. Historical anthropologists, for example, have explored the rich synergies between European debates about world religions and the responses these provoked not only in the Muslim world, but also in India and Japan (Aydin 2007; Bayly 2002, 2004a). These writings and other work in a similar vein demonstrate the type of contributions that the study of Islam can make to wider debates in the anthropology of religion, while, at the same time, also enrich ethnographically and conceptually the understanding of Islam and the body of inter-disciplinary work concerned with it.

Islam, Being Muslim, and the People of Muslim Background

Anthropological work focuses on both how and when Islam is a diffused aspect of the lives of people of Muslim background, and registered as being more of a central preoccupation. Michael Gilsenan emphasized the importance of contextualising the study of Islam not only in relationship to political economy but also social relationships: "To take any element on its own, or only in relation to other elements defined as 'religious'", he argued, 'would not reveal its social meaning. And we have to be prepared to find that religion is often only a very minor influence' (Gilsenan 1990: 19–20). Gilsenan's observation and other approaches to the study of Islam that were developed in parallel to it (e.g. Eickelman 1978, 1982; Hodgson 1977) stimulated an excellent body of ethnographic work that explores Islam and the nature of being Muslim from the perspectives of particular social contexts (e.g. Bowen 1993; Eickelman 1985; Lambek 1993; Launay 1992).

A lively set of debates that builds on this work and remains of much importance today concerns the forms taken by Muslim personhood. Many recent works have challenged the simplistic use of the term 'being Muslim' to explain the relationship of Muslims to Islam; they have documented, rather, how Muslims inhabit and create multiple forms of personhood during the course of their everyday lives. These forms of personhood might be premised on logics and understandings of the make-up of 'the self' relating to Islamic doctrine. Yet they are also defined in terms of cultural definitions of respect, or more transcendent debates about what humanity and 'the good life' entails. In some contexts, Muslims may seamlessly inhabit such multiple forms of self; in others, these different aspects of selfhood might stand in relations of conflict with one another (Marsden 2005; McIntosh 2004; Schielke 2009a, b, 2010). This body of scholarship is important because it powerfully contests the notion that Islam is invested with the capacity to shape Muslim selfhood in a deterministic way.

These debates about the importance of Islam to particular expressions of Muslim personhood have also led scholars to rethink their understandings of the processes

through which Muslims seek to directly fashion both their selves and wider societies in relationship to Islamic doctrine and teachings. Islam's changing significance to particular societies and contexts is not always best understood in terms of ideas of 'Islamization', the progressive percolation of religious ideas and modes of thinking to more and more areas of everyday life (Robinson 1983). Muslims might seek to 'Islamize' some fields of their lives, yet not others (e.g. Chap. 9 by Carey, this volume).

At a time when not only Islam but all of the world's religions are playing an increasingly visible role in public life, focusing on the multi-directional nature of such 'Islamising' processes allows for further reflection on Islam's complex relationship to modernity. The political scientist Humeira Iqtidar, for example, has recently used ethnographic material to document what she argues are the secularising effects of Islamist forms of thought and practice in Pakistan.[11] Iqtidar's study challenges simplistic understandings of Islamists, who, she argues, continue to be located by popular observers as existing in a realm outside of and opposed to 'the modern'. She also contests assumptions about the very nature of the domain of 'the religious' and its relationship to that of 'the secular' (Iqtidar 2011). Importantly, Iqtidar's contributions to these general debates about political Islam builds not only on the thematic issues addressed by anthropologists working on Islam: she also deployed ethnographic methods and material. Iqtidar's work, then, is testament to the wider significance of anthropology to the inter-disciplinary study of Islam and Muslim life more generally.

In the context of the so-called war on terror, and rising levels of Islamophobia, as well as support for anti-Muslim parties and politicians, *having* or *not* having to assert/reflect on the 'Muslim' dimensions of one's self has, however, become an increasingly permanent feature of the lives of people of Muslim background. Muslims are called upon to respond to critics of Islam by embracing 'moderate' forms of their religion or embodying 'Islamic' forms of piety. Even in the context of these pressures, however, anthropological writing demonstrates that Islam's articulation with everyday life is in no way static, permanent or predictable. Adeline Masquelier has documented the lives of young Muslims in Niger who are the children of local reformers and vocal supporters of Bin Laden yet also avid consumers of American popular culture (Masquelier 2007). In comparable terms, Benjamin Soares writes about 'Rastafari Muslims' in Mali. He documents the ways in which these people seek to contend with the context of structural readjustment that shape their everyday lives by developing unique forms of Islam that bring together Rastafari traditions with Islamic and Christian symbols (Soares 2009).

[11] Iqtidar's work builds on an expansive body of writing concerned with the ways in which secular states and political entities have sought to fashion the nature of the domain of the religious in a variety of different Muslim contexts (Asad 1993; Al Ali 2000; Jalal 1991; Mahmood 2004, 2006; Mamdani 2004; Osella and Osella 2009; Özyürek 2006; Rudnyckyj 2009; Tuğal 2009; Zubaida 2008).

The chapters in this book document other equally unexpected ways in which people of Muslim background come to deal with the pressures, tensions, and strains of life in many different types of settings across the contemporary world. In so doing, they underscore a key dimension of the broader approach to the study of Islam that we are advocating in this introduction. People of Muslim background do not just switch between different expressions of moral or Muslim self in relationship to the particular social circumstances in which they find themselves. Nor do they strategically chose to emphasise or 'back-stage' Islam's significance to what they are doing at any particular moment. Moral subjects, rather, are produced through their actual engagement with the changing and often contradictory quandaries of everyday life. Muslim selves, subjectivities and modes of personhood do not precede the varying fields of social life with which they interact: they are, instead, mutually produced by these fields, and continually emergent, unstable and contingent as a result.

Given the extent to which they are enmeshed within the unpredictable flow of the everyday, such processes are not, we think, amenable to analysis framed in the language of 'self-formation'. This complexity also raises important questions about the anthropologists' relationships to the people they study. Muslims react in complex ways to accounts written by anthropologists and scholars from related disciplines of the contested, socially mediated and variable presence that Islam plays in their everyday lives. For some, the tendency of anthropologists to dwell on the contradictory dimensions of Muslim self-presentation might appear to be little more than an accusation of religious hypocrisy on the part of their informants. For others, those scholars who emphasise the power of Islam to shape everyday life and the identity of Muslims flatten out important differences in belief and ideological position held by people in particular contexts. Several chapters in this volume address the complexity of conducting ethnographic work on Islam in Muslim societies in the current context. Morgan Clarke's chapter focuses on the complexity of his fieldwork experience in Beirut. He explores how conducting work on Islam and the law in Beirut led him perilously close to crossing boundaries that were considered by many of his informants as being inviolable. The types of boundaries that Clarke encountered are registered with significance in a very wide range of contexts where people of Muslim background live, yet they are acutely visible and vivid in the context of the Lebanon. This is because of the political organisation of the Lebanese state, as well as the country's highly pronounced religious heterogeneity. These boundaries are associated with religio-political differences between Sufis and reformers, and Sunnis and Shi'a, as well as modern liberals and people of faith. All these boundaries configure themselves in different ways in relation to the particular circumstances in which they are acted out.

Clarke initially sought to pursue an open fieldwork strategy in which he interacted with people in a variety of contexts and backgrounds, engaging with them in particular practices such as Sufi *dhikr* or ritual chanting sessions as he did. Ultimately, however, he writes how he gradually systematized his fieldwork practices – narrowing down the spaces in which he worked and the practices he jointly embarked upon with his informants. Clarke feared that his own boundary

crossing activities might be discovered by his informants, and place at risk his reputation as a fieldworker thereby also jeopardising his research. Clarke's chapter is an excellent illustration, then, of the ways in which Islam is systematised in a complex manner that involves the practices both of people of Muslim background and the experience and nature of ethnographic fieldwork itself. His work also illustrates complex overlaps and intersections between the models that scholars have used to analyse Islam, and the normative understandings of Islam that anthropologists encounter during the course of fieldwork.

Marsden's chapter also explores the complexity of studying everyday Islam in the equally heterogeneous religious and political context of northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. He describes, however, two different modalities for dealing with the heterogeneity he encountered during fieldwork. These modalities built upon his own informants' attitudes and approaches to the question of systematicity, and his attempts to learn from these. In Chitral, northern Pakistan, where he conducted work in a village that is home to Sunni and Shi'a Ismai'li Muslims, and a largely Sunni small town, he was not invited by his informants to participate in many forms of religious life, such as prayers or *dhikr* circles. There was, he argues, the lingering if unvoiced fear that he might shake the precarious balance that existed between the region's communities by plumping for one or other of the two forms of Islam found there. During research in northern Afghanistan, however, Marsden describes the process of being taught by his informants about the art of balancing competing dimensions of life, building alliances and affiliations with people of apparently opposing political and religious opinions, and holding any display of complete loyalty or commitment in suspended tension. These two different modalities of conducting fieldwork in heterogeneous contexts illustrate both how far Muslims address issues of heterogeneity and systematicity very differently according to the particular contexts in which they live, and also call upon fieldworkers to conduct their research in contrasting ways.

Systematicity and Islam

One of the debates that has led us to recognize the importance of systematicity to understanding the ways in which Muslims in particular contexts assemble Islam concerns, perhaps, the longest running analytical theme in the study of Islam – one or many (e.g. Bowen 1998; Bulliet 1979; Eickelman 2003; von Grunebaum 1967). As we have already noted, recent work on the concept of world religions has brought attention to this debate's problematic intellectual history. European scholars sought to organise world religious traditions into coherent and unified wholes. This, indeed, was critical to an intellectual change that reduced more complex, plural and socially-mediated conceptions of 'the religious' to that of 'religion' (Cantwell-Smith 1962). Such ideas, as we have noted above, were also subsequently appropriated by believers themselves. People of faith increasingly

identified themselves as 'believing in' a particular religious tradition; they also sought to purify 'the faith' from local accretions and encourage its followers to act and believe in accordance with textual and trans-local standards as opposed to their own 'folk' understandings; such ideas of folk traditions employed by reformers reflected the forms of analysis deployed by scholars of religion. In addition, as Susan Bayly has explored, in a variety of traditions and contexts, religious thought also came to be shaped by modes of thinking that made explicit comparisons between different religious traditions, and these were reminiscent of the emerging science of comparative religion (Bayly 2004b).[12] Such interactions between analytical attempts to understand Islam, and its status as a normative ideology or philosophical orientation are visible in the form taken by the institutions that are now central to the transmission of 'Islamic knowledge'. As several scholars have documented, South Asia's *din-i madari*s (religious colleges) were fashioned in the context of colonialism and in relationship to modern conceptions of religion and theology; these institutions and the idea of 'religion' central to them barely captured the complexity of forms of the Islamic sciences that were previously taught in the region sciences (Malik 1996; Metcalf 1982; Zaman 2002).

In the contexts of such overlaps between different registers of the term 'Islam', more scholarship has concerned itself both with understanding the plurality of religious traditions, and the ways in which religious concepts are actively deployed by people of faith and made to perform particular forms of conceptual work (Asad 2001; Cook et al. 2009; Laidlaw 2010). These works treat plurality as an inherent feature of the domain of 'the religious', and resist the temptation to assume that unity or internal systematicity are desires or goals that *should* automatically animate the followers of truly world religious traditions. They ask, rather, how far and in what ways systematicty is an important dimension of the thinking of believers in different socio-historic circumstances. What, for example, are the practical steps that people take to materialise such systematicity? How do Muslims think and behave in relationship to their own understandings of systematicity, often expressed in relationship to concepts of communal unity (*umma*) and divine oneness (*tawhid*)? Such an approach is markedly different from exploring what Muslims living in different contexts do and say and then assessing how far such material reflects and conforms either to an underlying unity of thought and belief in the Islamic tradition, or, alternatively, an absence of this. Anthropologists approach systematicity, instead, as an everyday practice; this is closely related to wider scholarly attempts to identify the circumstances and contexts in which systematicity is considered important and is actively promoted and cultivated, as well as those in which it fades from view and stops being relevant or a significant consideration. Such approaches also seek to gauge and understand the complex genealogies of the concepts used by Muslims as they embark upon practices of systematization.

[12] For comparable debates in relationship to the study of Buddhism see Southwold (1983), and Gombrich and Obyesekere (1988).

These are issues addressed by two of the most eminent anthropological contributors to the study of Islam: El-Zein (1977) and Asad (1986). El-Zein's approach was to favour multiplicity, or the recognition of many local islams as integral to a social anthropological analysis of the faith that also acknowledges Islam's embeddedness within varied historical and cultural settings. Asad's subsequent critique of El-Zein rightly pointed to the foundational role played by texts such as the Quran and the corpus of literature referred to as the Hadith or sayings of the Prophet, as well as the varying traditions of interpretation that have developed around these, in centring the faith around a stable core of themes and practices. For Asad, this core – in its discursive, textual and practice-oriented dimensions – formed the object par excellence of investigation. His approach to the study of Islam as a discursive tradition highlights the ways in which a set of well-defined and widely accepted foundational texts and interpretative techniques establish relations of continuity across time and give rise to particular formations of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Despite being subject to historical fluctuations, these remain recognisably Islamic. In reply to El-Zein's position that it was impossible to make Islam into a singular object of analysis due to its manifold historical and cultural expressions, Asad emphasises the expressions of coherence that he asserts are to be found in the traditions of discourse developed in Islamic societies. Asad also treats orthodoxy as a relation of power – of disciplinary regulation and subject formation – and many of his 'interlocutors' theorise the practices Muslims embark upon to make their lives morally and ethically coherent (Scott and Hirschkind 2006). Asad's combination of anthropology and textual scholarship highlights some of the ways in which both Islamic scholars and ordinary Muslims cultivate links between particular dimensions of their everyday lives and Islamic texts. It also gives insights into the ways in which doing such brings the faith into sharp focus, making it of central importance to particular contexts, ideas and practices. Interpretative, recitational and other forms of engagements with Islamic texts, especially the Quran and the Hadith, illustrate what we refer to as systematicity as an ongoing normative project rather than a given that is inevitably part of all world religions.

The importance of texts in terms of the opportunities and constraints they afford for bringing the faith into focus is clearly illustrated by Judith Scheele's chapter on Central Sahara. Muslims in southern Algeria and northern Mali underpin notions of difference and value with respect to social status through the writing, recitation, and display of *tawārīkh* (histories). Literally histories but more accurately genealogical accounts, *tawārīkh* span both vertically through time and horizontally through space to connect their bearers to the central figures of Islam, and, most importantly, the Prophet himself. In Central Sahara, Scheele argues, 'status distinctions appear not as superimposed ranks of a more or less flexible kind, but as questions of 'range': real and putative outside connections, that ultimately all make reference to and hence can be ordered through [...] a putative universal framework that embodies truth itself: the Islamic revelation'. Of course not everybody owns genealogical manuscripts and not everyone appears in them; the latter fall into the category of the 'rabble' of history – an anonymous mass whose position in Islamic salvation is precarious at best.

Scheele's chapter also acts as a reminder of some of the limitations of Asad's model: the making of sacred genealogical connections in Central Sahara is also inflected by new forms of difference and value, most notably those related to ideas of citizenship that have emerged in relation to the emergence of nation-states in the area. The post-independence period has witnessed subtle yet telling re-drawings of the genealogical networks and their textual inscription. Contemporary versions of the *tawārīkh* of Algerian Kunta downplay or simply invert their intimate past connections with Malian Kunta, especially since a group of them arrived as refugees from northern Mali to southern Algeria in the 1970s. These refugees are now perceived by their elevated and esteemed Algerian cousins through the lens of a logic posited not of Islam's genealogical encompassment but by the nation-state: this lens describes them as non-citizens, trans-border traffickers, and illegal residents of makeshift dwellings. These people live in socio-economic situations that are closer to the 'rabble' in terms of residence, occupation, and education than to those of people of genealogy or of faith. Systemacity is shaped and re-shaped, not only by the evolving traditions of Islamic textual imagination and interpretation but also by other logics – such as those of the nation-state. These other logics insert their own 'cuts' into the networks of religious and genealogical association yet do not subvert them completely (Strathern 1996).

The volume's emphasis on the constant, ongoing and incomplete making of connections and disconnections takes a further step in the overall project of unbounding Islam as a unique or exceptional object of analysis. It treats Islam's purported unity as dependent on the meaningful actions of people Muslim background, actions of systematicity that are undertaken in specific circumstances and towards specific ends. This is where our approach to Islam's heterogeneity differs from El-Zein's. El-Zein's recognition of the diversity of interpretation and practice of Islam as opposed to a theologically inspired project that assumes the existence of a truly universal and single Islam results, paradoxically, in sounding like a theological position itself. As Launay has noted, 'for anthropologists to assert the existence of multiple Islams is, in essence, to make a theological claim, one most Muslims would not only deny but, they rightfully argue, anthropologists have no business making' (Launay 1992: 5). Both positing Islam as whole and as fragmented are problematic starting points for the anthropology of Islam: such positions conflate anthropological and theological concerns (e.g. Robbins 2006).

Anthropologists, rather, should devote their efforts at tracing relations which at certain moments and contexts bring 'the religious' into being and at other times and situations diffuse it, rendering religious practices, ideas, and dispositions indistinct from social life more generally. This, indeed, is one of the key arguments to emerge from existing scholarship on the study of Islam in terms of understanding the social relations with which all forms of Muslim life are immersed and co-produced by.

There are also more explicitly theoretical and philosophical developments that underscore the need to emphasise the unbounded 'flow' of life experience and inevitable yet albeit precarious attempts to channel or structure this. Deleuze and Guattari and Latour, for instance, all share an explicit concern with the social as a tangle of empirical processes out of which differentiated yet intrinsically unstable

categories and identities emerge.[13] For Deleuze and Guattari, the raw material of social and physical existence is an open, chaotic yet vital flux that lacks consistency because of the impossibility of connections enduring long enough for forms to emerge as stable and durable (see De Landa 2009a; Albertsen and Diken 2003). Consistency or order emerges if albeit temporarily, because cuts are inserted into the flux of social existence: these cuts contribute to the 'stratification' and 'territorialisation' of the social in highly specific, regular and systematic ways (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 283–286). Yet this very process that sits at the heart of the production of bounded forms and recognisable identities is always subject to a reverse procedure, one that is intrinsically related to moments when a residue breaks away, thereby paving the way for a new and different phase of territorialisation to take place.[14]

For Latour (1993, 2005) the social is also a network of the human and non-human that is cut and arranged by interconnecting processes of assembly and disassembly. In his *We have never been modern* (1993), Latour describes modernity as a process of dual constitution. On the one hand, 'purification' involves the production of nature as separate from society, of objects as different from subjects, and of religious pursuits as distinct from social, political, and scientific projects. On the other, 'hybridisation' mixes what was hitherto separated into new forms emanating from linkages spanning the divisions. For moderns, Latour insists, purification is explicitly acknowledged and celebrated; hybridization processes are covert and silenced. Latour's arguments are important for the study of Islam, we suggest, because they help us to think about Islam's systematisation and dissolution as being part of a shared set of processes.

[13] Our simplified presentation of Deleuze and Guattari's work relies on a pragmatic and selective approach as it is impossible to do justice to the full complexity of their multi-stranded theory (1983, 1987). In separate writings, Deleuze has developed further the philosophical concerns summarised here; yet he has done so while changing his terminology in every one of his books. However, DeLanda, Deleuze's foremost exegete to an audience of both social scientists (2009a) and analytical philosophers of science (2009b), stresses the point that Deleuze's terminological exuberance is a well calibrated attempt towards the development of 'a set of *different* theories on the *same* subject' (2009b: 202; emphasis in the original). As such, this exuberance serves to uphold Deleuze's core philosophical stance which is to lay out a philosophy of difference that avoids reducing difference to identity. The potential this stance has unleashed in the social sciences has been recently explored in two edited volumes (see Fuglsand and Sørensen 2006; Jensen and Rødje 2010) and an ethnographic monograph (Retsikas 2012).

[14] Where Deleuze and Guattari begin from outlining a vital flux as the very condition of life in general, we take Islam to be an immanent dimension in the lives and deeds of peoples of Muslim background in the sense of always already being there, giving shape and being shaped by all aspects of everyday life from the minutiae of eating, sleeping, and working all the way to overt public concerns over the role of the nation-state or the forms the economy takes. We also take the view that this immanence rather than corresponding to an essence Islam has in and of itself and which, thus, forms the central preoccupation of the theologian, or to a 'thing' such as a text or a belief that is the explicit concern of the religious studies expert, is more productively explored from a social anthropological standpoint as a set of empirical processes. The processes in question are intimately linked with the ways in which Islam is both evinced and eclipsed as of central or lesser importance in ethnographically concrete yet culturally varied contexts and circumstances.

A further area of theoretical work that is helpful in our attempts to theorise Islam as emergent and unstable is recent anthropological debates about the analytical value of the concept of culture. Much recent anthropological scholarship has criticised models that treat cultures as unrealistically 'separate, self-enclosed and fundamentally non-comparable conceptual universes, whose integrity derives from their separateness and distinctiveness' (Laidlaw 2010: 65). Some scholars advocate that these are best replaced with more time-sensitive and open-ended models of 'historically embodied traditions' (Laidlaw 2010: 65). Others have developed the concept of an 'assemblage' to denote a 'product of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic. . .[it] implies heterogeneous, contingent, unstable, partial, and situated' (Ong and Collier 2005: 12).

What such models of 'tradition' and 'assemblage' share is an emphasis on seeking to understand the belief, practices and values by which people live their lives in the light of these people's own ongoing efforts to live their own particular lives in the light of those conceptions. At the same time these approaches also explore the 'perceived problems and shortcomings' that people hold about the moral universes they inhabit according to the standards and criteria advocated by varying traditions or assemblages (Laidlaw 2010: 65–66; c.f. Ahmad 2011).

The concept of articulation adds another dimension to such attempts to place transformation and interaction at the centre of attempts to understand the beliefs, practices and values by which people live their lives. Systematicity is explicitly concerned with the efforts that social actors undertake in their attempts to deal with a myriad of situations and contexts. Articulation refers to processes of assembly and disassembly that are not necessarily the result of the conscious and intentional effort of actors or of the skills and habits they have acquired and cultivated. Articulation is closely related to the historical or processual production of arenas and strands of social life as separate and distinct from one another and to subsequent enmeshments, connections, and involvements across the instituted divides. Processes of articulation take place independently of the motivations and habits of social actors whatever or whoever these are, while nevertheless involving such actors in intensive and demanding ways.[15] Articulation allows for an analysis of intersections and trajectories of different arenas of social life, and also of the inflections that develop between these varying strands. The fore-grounding of Islam in the everyday lives and experiences of people of Muslim background might be partly a reflection of the active and conscious attempts on the part of Muslims to systematise Islam, yet it is also intimately related to these ongoing processes of the assembly and disassembly of different aspects of human experience.

Hann's chapter in this volume, for example, explores complex articulations between Islam and 'the market' in China. He shows that such articulations are informed by relations between Islam and other strands of life, especially ethno-linguistic politics. Hann's central concern is with the importance of rituals to

[15] The philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari endows such unstable aggregates with parts that are non-determined, self-subsistent and linked by what DeLanda calls 'relations of exteriority, so that a part may be detached from it and become plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different' (2009a: 10).

Muslim life in two Uyghur sites in Western China. The context, Hann emphasises, for his study is the liberalisation of the Chinese economy, and the very real increase of wealth that this has meant for people across the country, including those living in apparently remote regions of the Western China, officially known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Unlike post-Soviet Central Asian societies to the west that continue to be debilitated by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the politically instable Afghanistan to the South East, the market in this region has both lifted people out of poverty and forged higher levels and new forms of corruption, social differentiation and inequality. At the same time, the Uyghur region of China is also characterised by a very complex and sensitive political situation, which has contributed to the close regulation of the religious arena by the state authorities, as well as to major outbreaks of violence between Uyghur Muslims and Hann Chinese. In this context, Hann explores Islam's articulation with the market economy through a consideration of the ways in which objects move out of the arena of market transactions and into that of ritual life. It is tempting to see rituals of commensality in such a changing economic setting as a sort of romantic refusal or resistance of 'capitalism'. By contrast, Hann pays attention to the fact that rituals held in mosques involve important items of potential commercial value such as food being temporarily withdrawn from market transactions: such items are re-deployed for purposes of shared consumption and distribution. Communal rituals involve processes of presenting money as a gift, reconfiguring mediums of exchange and condensations of value into offerings for those who are considered as needy (see Parry and Bloch 1989). The highly uncertain, interchangeable and 'mobile' status of foodstuffs and money as both potential gifts and potential commodities allows people to continue to 'celebrate their traditional forms of community as best they can; they are making a gesture of solidarity in the face of overwhelming pressures which have transformed and threatened to destroy their *jämaät* several times over within living memory'. Islam's articulation, in this context is strongly connected to broader social processes concerning the expansion of the market. As Hann notes this also requires the people with whom he works to disconnect Islam from fraught domains of life, especially those informed by discourses of ethno-linguistic difference. The rituals he explores in his chapter, instead, are invested with significance as more universal expressions of 'Muslim solidarity' devoid of the divisive politics of ethnicity that lies behind much of the violence that has affected this region over the past decade.

Vom Bruck's chapter in this volume on the uses and potential abuses of photographs of women in contemporary Yemen provides another very good example of the processes of articulation at play. She tackles what is one of the most ubiquitous subject in the anthropology of Islam: the covering of women's bodies and the religious rationale that accompanies such practices of 'veiling'. In North Yemen, photos of women, especially those of the elite, are carefully guarded against unwelcomed male gazes in the same way that women protect the boundaries of their physical bodies by covering them. 'It is as shameful for an unauthorised viewer to see the photo of an uncovered woman as to see parts of her in her flesh', argues vom Bruck (Chap. 7, this volume). Authorised male viewing of women's

photos appears at first sight to be regulated by the legal categories of *halal* (lawful or legal) and *mahram*: only *mahram* male relatives (males with whom marriage is explicitly forbidden) are welcomed to look at photos. Part of the rationale behind these concerns with viewing relates to a series of attitudes found across the Islamic world that portray men, specifically non-*mahram* male strangers, as having sexual desires so powerful that they can be stirred up by merely looking at the photos of uncovered non-kin women as a woman's body itself. The result of the arousal of such desires might lead to men to pursue immoral courses of action.

Islam, however, does not exhaust the types of significance injected into photographs of women. The viewing, use and potential abuse of such photographs also feature in other strands of social life in which different sets of relationship are enacted. Viewing of photos and the screening of videos of ritual events, especially weddings, at all-women gatherings are explicitly promoted by Yemeni elites. They are evidence of status, of material and symbolic investment in the family's honour - viewings and screenings attempt to elicit the desired positive responses and judgments of viewers engaged in an inter-subjective game of status competition. Similarly, photos taken at professional studios with young women posing in the fashion of movie stars dressed in fancy dress, and heavily made up, emphasise rather than conceal an alluring femininity: these photographic presentations of the self are formed around trends reflecting both regional and global consumer lifestyles. Such studio sessions, vom Bruck argues, inculcate ideals of femininity while also allowing the photograph produced to contribute to the making of the subject portrayed. As Islam does not exhaust the social life of photographs in Yemen, so too does Islam recede into the background of Yemeni's lives in the specific contexts mentioned above: dissolution takes place in relationship to processes of status and consumption.

Locating Islam: Categories, Skills and Scales

A key recent development in the study of Islam has been a focus on the relationship between the geographical locales in which Muslims live, and the forms of the Islamic tradition they practice. Scholars have also explored how transformations in the geographic distribution of Muslims and the transformations these have fostered in their geographical imaginaries are also shaping the varying forms taken by Muslim identity formations. The chapters presented within also contribute to these bodies of writing, principally by offering perspectives on the nature of the Islam tradition and being Muslim from a diverse variety of locales. Some of the locales explored in the book, especially those concerning Central Asia and Western China, have only become accessible to fieldworkers over the past 20 years: studies of being Muslim in these contexts are opening new perspectives and raising complex questions about Islam's relationship to social life, politics and economic transformation within them, and elsewhere.

We build analytically on several recent collections of essays that have challenged earlier approaches which treated the Muslim world as being made-up of a 'core' in the Middle East, and a 'periphery' beyond this. Such a centre-periphery model, these studies show, fails to address Muslims' own understandings of the make-up of the Muslim world, and the complex interactions between the models they hold of it and their self-understandings (c.f. Manger 1999). It is, indeed, important for scholars to contest simplistic understandings of Islam's geographies as being made-up of 'cores' and 'peripheries'. Such ways of thinking about the Muslim world leave uncontested the problematic idea that particular parts of the Muslim world have distinct if not essential characters. They also do little if any justice to the complexity of Muslim thought in different historical and geographic contexts about the geographic configurations of the Muslim world (e.g. Bulliet 1979; Goody 2004; Hodgson 1995; Devji 2009). Chapters in this book build on these attempts to critically address Islam's sacred, secular and lived geographies. They explore 'culture areas' that have been of long-standing importance in the study of Islam from new perspectives and contexts of Muslim-life that are less well known to scholars of Islam in order to further redress the imbalances of earlier scholarship.

Several chapters focus on regions that are long central to wider attempts to theorise Islam: the East African coastal zone, Indonesia, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands, and the Arab-speaking Middle East, for example. Yet they explore Islam's significance to these contexts through ethnographic lenses different from those with which they have hitherto been associated. Morgan Clarke's contribution explores the Beirut not as a lone centre of religious education, for instance, but as a node important in wider transnational networks of Shi'a religious scholars within and beyond the Arab world. Chapters dealing with spaces in the wider Muslim world that while long recognized as historically important Muslim population zones have seen less sustained scholarly research often due to difficulty of access, including Rasanaygam's on Central Asia and Hann's on the Western Chinese fringe. Other chapters reflect on the ways in which the broader geographical contexts in which their particular studies of Islam and being Muslim are located challenge the conventional maps, geographies and images through which the Muslim world is often viewed. Scheele locates her ethnographic work not in North Africa or the Arab world but a wider Saharan space, Simpson maps his informants lives in the expansive realm of the Western India Ocean, while Marsden journeys with his informants as they make connections with their fellow Muslims not simply across the national boundaries of Pakistan and Afghanistan but also those of the 'culture areas' of South and Central Asia; these regional boundaries, moreover, are also invested with ideological forms of significance connected with the so-called 'Cold War' (e.g. Kwon 2011).

These varying perspectives complicate our understandings of the geographical horizons and imaginaries of people of Muslim background. At one level, they reveal the importance of these to shaping people's relationships with Islam. At another, they bring attention to the forms of skill, sensibility and aptitude for life that are important for the ways in which people of Muslim background negotiate the complex geographical contexts in which they live. Such forms of skill, they argue,

are context and scale-dependent and while inflected with religious ideas, not simply derivative of abstract belief or a region's particular version of the Islamic tradition.[16]

Kai Kresse, for example, explores the ways in which Swahili Muslims have responded to life in what he refers to as a 'double periphery'. Kresse deploys this concept to index the extent to which his informants are located on the edge of the predominately Christian Kenyan Muslim coast and of the Muslim *umma* more generally. His informants indeed say that they experience their place in the wider Muslim world as the recipients of charity or as religious students, especially in Pakistan, Saudi and Sudan (Kresse 2009). Kresse argues that 'exceptional figures' in the community develop skills of 'patience and endurance' in order to tackle the worldly problems they and their community face. 'This range of skills', Kresse argues, 'may be drawn upon fruitfully as a kind of arsenal of ideas and approaches with which to handle regional politics, ideological disputes and internal moral dilemmas' (Chap. 4 by Kresse, this volume). Kresse's chapter emphasises forms of sensibility that are religious yet also directed at the immediate and wider social and political worlds in which they are deployed – worlds that are shaped by inequality and political pressure. These are dimensions of Muslim life that are as likely to be experienced in European cities or Pakistan's mountains: emphasising the interface between religion and worldly skill and the way this is a dimension of life that relates to and is shaped by the particular geographic contexts people inhabit holds important perspectives for wider treatments of Islam and Muslim life.

Edward Simpon's chapter explores the manifest complexities in the relational universes of Muslims over time in an expansive arena that incorporates high levels of diversity and fragmentation. Simpson's ethnographic concern is with father-son relations in Gujerat. This is a long and important concern in the study of Islam: scholars have asked how far father-son relations reflect and build on Islamic history, and form a distinctively Muslim form of patriarchy (c.f. Combs Schilling 1990), or if this singular model of patriarchy conceals variation, diversity and fluidity in people's understandings of both kin and religious teaching.[17] Simpson's ethnography, conducted over a 10 year period, shows the complex ways in which Islam registers its significance to father-son relations in multifarious ways. Yet his ethnography also reveals how Islamic forms of commitment and deference to the authority of the patriarch are dissolved in other domains of life. While away from home at sea, for example, sons construct other types of selfhood that articulate very different moral concerns, ideas and aspirations. Focusing on an expansive space and charting people's highly mobile trajectories within it reveals the complexity and fluidity of practices of self formation, even when one of Islam's purportedly key moral tenets is at stake. Simpson's sea farers help us to see this complexity with special clarity because of the expansive scales on which they operate.

[16] For a particular astute critique of the tendency of scholar to categorize Muslims in relation to belief see Simpson (2007).

[17] For more nuanced treatments of this issue see Hammoudi (1997), and Kandyioti (1988).

Kresse, Marsden, Scheele, and Simpson, all connect broadly to issues of geography and scale: each of them challenges conventional categories of being Muslim – Sufi, reformist, marginalised Muslim, militant. One problem with some previous scholarship on Islam was not only the extent to which it treated such categories of being Muslim in a stable way, but also 'localized' them (Fardon 1990). In other words, there was a tendency for distinct regions within the Muslim world to be treated as being especially fruitful settings to study particular types of Islam and not others (c.f. Soares 2007). Senegal was a key context in which Sufi brotherhoods were studied; northern South Asia noted as an especially fruitful setting for work on Islamic reformism; and southern India and Southeast Asia were widely held to offer special insights into 'syncretistic' forms of Islam. In these ways, different types of Islam were geographically 'localized' in particular regions.

Such practices of localizing Islam have important political implications. Rasanayagam contribution to this volume documents how, in Uzbekistan, as across Central Asia's Muslim-majority societies, national political elites make decisions about the types of Islam they hold as posing a threat to future regional stability according to their understanding of the extent to which these are authentic or external to 'Central Asia culture'.[18] By critically addressing the relationship between debates in anthropology about 'the region' and the study of Islam, the chapters in this book take one further step in revealing the complex ways in which Islam, being Muslim and geographical imaginaries interact with one another.

Beyond Objectification: Islam, Modernity, and the Diffuseness of the Past

A further key theme in the study of contemporary Islam by social scientists concerns Islam's relationship to modernity. An impressive body of scholarship contests old yet influential models that depicted Islam as an inherently anti-modern religion. These works show, rather, how far modernizing transformations have effected much of the Muslim world, and, more particularly, also resulted in Islam's 'objectification'. Objectification refers to the process through which religion becomes exterior to everyday social life and experience and, resultantly, a formal and isolated feature of reflection and debate (Eickelman and Piscatorri 1996). In early writing in this vein, the objectification of Islam was predominantly associated with 'ideology': 'Islamism' and 'reformist Islam' represented modern ways of theorising Islam as an object distinct from the welter of everyday social life. More recent work, however, also explores how Islam is objectified in more directly 'material' ways: pamphlets, videos, CDs, and internet websites about prayer, ritual

[18] The point is made with particular reference to Africa by Soares (2000) and Central Asia by Khalid (2007).

and submission to the shari'a for everyday life, for instance, all point towards the ways in which religion is an exterior object of debate and reflection.

This work emphasises the importance of Muslim middle classes in driving and expanding such objectifying processes. Earlier studies often depicted Muslim middle classes as being frustrated by life in the postcolony and therefore more likely to support Islamist political parties, movements and even radical organisations. Newer works show that such Muslims no longer inevitably form an oppositional 'counter-public': the Muslim world's middle classes are rapidly forming, rather, a new Islamic 'mainstream', which is playing a powerful role in shaping broader discourses concerning the form taken by Islam in politics and public life more broadly (Roy 1998; Hirschkind 2006; Peletz 1997; Tuğal 2009; Kahn 2008; Kurin 1985; Hefner 2000). Muslim middle classes living in many different contexts have sought to harness and develop modern modes of educational practices and institutions, recognising how these allow them to fashion themselves as being simultaneously both modern and Muslim (Deeb 2006, 2009).[19]

It is widely recognised that such processes reflect articulations between people's strivings to be Muslim and the normative and philosophical meanings they associate with 'the modern', rather than indicating teleological forms of 'modernization'. People of Muslim background strive to be both modern and Muslim, and this is visible in the importance they attach to particular forms of knowledge and education, as well as in what they conceive as their specifically Islamic responses to 'neoliberal' economic forms and practices. Indian Muslim entrepreneurs and business elites in the Gulf, for example, use their wealth in order to contribute to the education and modernization of Muslims in ways that both builds on Islamic requirements to give, as well as colonial-derived notions of social responsibility (Osella and Osella 2009). In Indonesia, factories employ spiritual trainers to teach their employees about the spiritual importance of work according to Islamic teachings (Rudnyckyj 2009). These studies and much other excellent writing beside, theorizes Islam's articulations with modernity, challenging both the oft-assumed Judaeo-Christian cultural foundations of 'the modern', and the inevitable 'rationalization' of people's lifeworlds. By recognising the importance to business and entrepreneurship, for example, of both self-consciously 'modern' expressions of Islam and more Sufic-like forms of spirituality, they contest some of the key axioms of Weberian sociology that have come to shape the anthropological study of religion over the past century (c.f. Soares 2005).

In the light of more nuanced treatment of Islam's articulation with ideas of the modern, anthropologists are also attending to the complex relationship between Muslims, Islam and history: modernity, they argue, is only one among several aspects of such relations. Edward Simpson and Kai Kresse (2007) have, for instance, advanced a complex model for understanding history's importance to the lives and societies of Muslims in the Indian Ocean. Communities and

[19] Such processes are especially visible, for instance, in the form of religion and preaching advocated by the Turkish religious educational organisation Fatehe Gulen.

individuals, they argue, continually 'struggle with history', and competing understandings of Islam's influence on the worlds people inhabit become part of such struggles. Pandian and Ali have also provocatively suggested that the 'ways in which pre-modern traditions once viewed as deterministic justifications for ascriptive social orders may be understood instead as dynamic configurations contributing to ethical sensibilities' (Pandian and Ali 2010: 5). They ask how such sensibilities are 'sustained' in the present, documenting the ways in which 'dispersed fragments of moral discourse and ethical practice, remnants whose deep historicity may be submerged even as they insist upon vital forms of thought and action' (Chakrabarty 2000). Islamic practices of self-fashioning, for example, have long historical genealogies, offer templates for people to embody varying forms of ethical selfhood, and continue to be invested with varying forms of relevance, even under the conditions of 'secular modernity' (e.g. Mahmood 2004).

The ongoing importance of such 'remnants' and 'deep history' to the worlds that people of Muslim background create and inhabit need not be confined to the domain of the moral or ethical. The interface between Islam and history is manifested in a whole range of different strands of Muslim life. These might inflect peoples' everyday economic practices, social relations, and modes of evaluating political authority and commercial institutions. Work on the regional and trans-regional dynamics in Muslim settings such as the Indian Ocean (Ho 2006; Middleton 1992; Simpson and Kresse 2007), the Malay world (Kahn 2006, 2008), and the Sahara (Lydon 2009) all depict the ongoing importance to contemporary social orders, religious ideas and economic institutions of historical process that un-fold over the *longe durée*. These studies call into question anthropology's 'obsession with speed' (Ho 2006) and the emphasis that some scholars have placed on modern forms of globalization at the exclusion of older manifestations of global connectedness (c.f. Hopkins 2000). They historicize 'institutions, practices, cultural constructions' not because these represent 'age old cultural principles or instrumental political imposition', but, rather, as part of a broader attempt to furnish glimpses into 'the long term sedimentation of experience' (Guyer 2004: 172). Recognising the importance of these sensibilities and skills to people of Muslim background living in multifarious contexts also challenge the relevance of models that seek to explain the conditions under which religions are 'rationalised'.[20]

In his contribution to the current volume, for example, Retsikas builds upon the important observation of Howell and van Bruinessen (2007) that anthropological understanding of Islam's articulation with the contemporary cannot simply be confined to general pre-occupations with and anxieties over the modern, be these in the guise of Islamist political agendas or middle class piety. Instead, analysis of such relations should encompass the making and re-making of Sufi

[20] The difference between the emphasis we place on the importance of historicizing contemporary forms of Islam and Muslim life as well as recognising its capacity to intersect with modern transformations are very different from the importance Timur Kuran places on this (Kuran 2010).

currents of religious learning and praxis through a consideration of their dynamic reconstitution and resurgence in rapidly changing contexts. They should also rigorously consider the intellectual challenges a re-invigorated, deeply reflective, and highly literate and globalised Sufism presents. His focus is on Sufi-inspired healers in coastal East Java, Indonesia, and his chapter pays close attention to the deep history that informs modes of Sufi religiosity in Java and some of its textual sources. He is primarily concerned with the Sufi-based techniques utilised and employed by people who after years of painful practice have acquired the capacity to perform miracles having achieved intimacy with the divine and the non-human. The discourse that sustains and animates the attainment of such capacities and of 'cross-species' intimacy, is beyond the modern in the sense of it properly belonging to a very different problematic pertaining to the definition of the human, the divine, and their interrelationship. This problematic as a contemporary alternative to objectification is best manifested in that the posited centre of East Javanese Sufi-inspired universe is neither man as transcendental consciousness, nor God as an all-powerful yet immensely distant regulator. Rather, its centre revolves around the theme of achieving intimacy with the divine other and East Javanese mystics and healers emphasise acutely significant moments of voluntary self-annihilation and the consequent re-emergence of the self as a post-human hybrid. In this sense, the capacity for miraculous action is located neither simply 'in the human mind nor solely in the human body but rather in the interstices of the connections, the spaces defined by the relations, the co-constitutive intimacy of the self with the other' (Chap. 6 by Retsikas, this volume). Retsikas' considerations resonate closely with an expanding body of work by historical anthropologists.

Johan Rasanayagam's chapter in this book also exemplifies such an approach especially clearly. Rasanaygam focuses on the varying ways in which Islam and being Muslim are invoked as important to people in Samarqand city and Ferghana valley in Uzbekistan during the course of their everyday lives. As elsewhere in Central Asia, life in Uzbekistan is characterized both by a creative upsurge in identities and religious practices that has emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union yet also by state policies that closely restrict the role that Islam can play in public life. It is not helpful, argues Rasanayagam, to explore Islam in this context either as a bounded discursive tradition or an objectified form. This is partly because of the peculiarity of the setting – discussion let alone debate about matters of public political significance, including Islam, are monitored, regulated and surveyed by 'the state'.[21] The category 'Muslim' is open to ethnographic exploration in terms of people's everyday life-worlds and experiences, rather than as discourse or object. A focus on experience itself requires a consideration of

[21] Matthew Carey's chapter in this book also notes a similar absence of debate in a Berber society in High Atlas Morocco, although the absence of debate in this setting pertains only to Islam's relationship to the domain of politics.

processes that are unfolding and circumstances that are contingent. Rasanayagam's informants, indeed, bring together a remarkably diverse range of ways of understanding morality, religion and the self. These are both recognisable to many as 'Muslim' yet they are also mutually intelligible to varying others – Christians, atheists, the followers of new religions – who acknowledge shared forms of experience in them.

Rasanayagam's argument concerns a setting in which Muslims live alongside self-defined communists, Christians and the adherents of new religious traditions: it requires, therefore, a consideration of what underpins collective neighbourhood life there. In her reflections on the forms taken by being Muslim in Delhi, Das has also recently rejected the explanatory power of abstract *notions of* or *belief in* ideas of 'tolerance' and 'syncretism' to explain neighbourhood relations that cut across divisive boundaries of ethnicity and religion. The Delhi Muslims Das studies and the Samarqandis addressed in Rasanayagam's study, rather, pose 'questions of virtue' in relationship to being Muslim and Islam yet also their strivings to be good human beings:

> the issue is not that of belief or indeed of pragmatism but of a certain sensibility that, in a face-to-face confrontation, cannot bear to cause hurt to the person one is facing. This sensibility is in accordance with a very complex idea of being human (as opposed to being angels who never err) and of the question of who has the right to judge (Das 2010: 246).

Doubt, Inconsistency and the Stresses of Being 'of Muslim background'

Muslims living in very different settings talk about the importance to their lives and social relations of sensibilities that they explicitly code both as being human and Islamic. This demonstrates how far studying the moral and religious lives of people of Muslim background must also address their attempts – however successful, unsuccessful or negotiated – to live according to Islamic teachings, yet in such a way that gives full recognition to the fact that such strivings are not necessarily solely framed in terms of attempts to fashion a pure form of Muslim self. Such a perspective has emerged out of fieldwork with poor Muslims in urban Delhi and people in Uzbekistan who are still responding in their everyday lives to the stresses and strains of the collapse of the Soviet Union. These are the very types of Muslim voices that are all too often ignored or not captured in studies of modern, educated, middle class Muslims, or those who are active and committed members of Islamic purification movements. Such complex reflections on what it means to be Muslim need to be located in the context of wider trends that have affected people of Muslim background over the past decade – trends we briefly seek to bring attention to here.

The embrace of piety-minded forms of Islam is sometimes represented as being one of the key ways in which Muslims from a variety of backgrounds have sought to respond to and engage with the political and historic circumstances

ushered in by September 11th and all that followed. Attempts to craft perfect piety-minded selves, however, are only one of many processes concerning Islam's importance to Muslim life that is visible in the contemporary world. In his work with Muslims in Minangkabau, Indonesia, Gregory Simon (2009) documents how many of his informants complained of being unable to pray, saying that a pervasive sense of doubt pervaded their lives and this prevented them from praying with the required intentions. Gregory interprets this material not as evidence of some reverse process of Islamisation or even 'de-Islamisation' taking place (c.f. Courbage and Tood 2011). He points, rather, to the problems of assuming that all domains of Muslim life, even those as a central to Islam as prayer, will be worked upon by Muslims in the same way and with the same degree of commitment, regardless of the circumstances of people's everyday lives.

There might, indeed, be some domains of life that people of Muslim background actively seek to distance from Islamic principles and debates. Matthew Carey's chapter in this book concerns transformations in the role played by Islam in the everyday lives of Berber-speaking villages in the High Atlas area. These are transformations that Carey reflects upon having lived and conducted fieldwork in the village since the mid-2000s. Carey shows how in a whole variety of different domains of life, the Berbers with whom he worked have embraced reformist Islamic teachings that have penetrated into their region from Morocco's coastal cities. He also suggests that this is a process slowed in the context of these villages by the state's purposeful marginalisation of this politically sensitive region. So, in matters such as the veiling of women and the playing of music, villagers have readily and apparently without much debate embraced the reformist perspectives of locally influential young men who studied in madrasas down country before returning home to preach Islam and assert their authority as religious specialists. Yet it is in the exact domain of life to which so many other anthropologists and social scientists have turned to explain and analyse reformist Islam that Berber people consciously avoid using linguistic and moral terms that are explicitly Islamic: the domain of the political. An important reason for this, Carey argues, lies not in villagers' disinterest in 'Islamism' but, rather, the strength of their commitment to Islam as a shared source of moral authority which is located in a realm beyond question and debate. The political principles of village life, he explores, revolve around a shared commitment to open, vocal and even anarchic debate and discussion. If Islam were to be brought into the realm of politics then either its authority would force such open political discussion to be closed, or Islam itself would have to become the focus of irreverent debate. For these villagers, then, contesting a viewpoint made by someone on the basis of an Islamic position verges on the un-Islamic, and so they work hard to keep Islam outside of the domain of the political. Carey's recognition of the ways in which Islam's significance to daily life might be enhanced in some domains while being excluded from others, even in the context of the post-September 11th world, should stimulate further comparative work on the efforts that Muslims make to both integrate themselves within yet also stand apart from globally important trends within the Muslim world.

Conclusion

Anthropological contributions to the study of Islam have grown in significance and vitality over the past three decades. Focusing in ethnographic detail both on the circumstances in and practices through which Islam is invoked and diffused, as well as a whole range of positions between these extremes, has challenged the tendency for scholars within and beyond the discipline to treat 'being Muslim' as a permanent, essential, unchanging and uncontested premise of being. As the following chapters show, there are often instances in the everyday lives of people of Muslim background when 'being Muslim' is placed in a contested relationship with other identification markers. Taking account of such aspects of Muslim life reveals sensibilities, skills, dispositions and aptitudes that do not simply derive from Islamic texts or, indeed, scholarly debates about these texts. Nor, however, do these strands of Muslim life necessarily contest or stand beyond the Islamic tradition either. These are not, then, aspects of Muslim life that are un-Islamic or secular: they are, rather, fully implicated in all of the processes important to the lives of the people under study. Such sensibilities and strands of life might have an Islamic or a Muslim dimension, yet might also draw on other concerns, ethical practices, moral values, or cultural influences, such as the conceptions of humanity voiced by Das' Delhi informants. These sensibilities are critical to attempts by people of Muslim background to make their lives viable and rich in the fraught circumstances of the contemporary world.

Given the importance of Islam to the contemporary world, it is hardly surprising that exploring strands of Muslim life in which Islam's centrality is both less stable than often assumed and also not simply 'secular', has received less attention than the focus on the more explicitly 'religious' dimensions of Muslim self-understandings. The chapters in this volume seek to address this relative imbalance in recent writing on Islam. They favour talking about a multiplicity of potential identifications and identities that enrich people's lives, none of which is taken to be primary and/or essential, and seek to recognise the processes through which Muslims systematise and invoke Islam yet also diffuse it. As a venerable body of scholarship suggests, these are processes are important to a whole range of different religions and many other dimensions of human existence more generally. They are, however, especially visible in the lives of Muslims today, given the extent to which Islam is so often considered to be a religion, above all else, of exceptional coherence.

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Chapter 2
Shurafāʼ as Cosmopolitans: Islam, Genealogy and Hierarchy in the Central Sahara

Judith Scheele

Introduction

There has been much debate over the heuristic value of the notion of 'world-religions' (Masuzawa 2005), but there is one sense in which Islam can undoubtedly be seen as such: it proposes an explanation of the world in all its aspects, or rather, it reconstitutes the world as a visible sign and reflection of the quranic revelation as it unfolds in time and space. In Michael Lambek's words (1990: 26), 'the world *is* text'. Reading, recitation, study, and even the more mundane matters of life are reproductions, not of past actions or scholarship, but of truth, although, inevitably short of perfection, they always remain aspirational. Islamic history, inasmuch as it embodies the quranic revelation, is thus far more than an account of the past, but rather a template for the present and future not just in terms of individual ethical self formation (Mahmood 2001), but also in terms of further reaching social ordering and socio-spatial conceptions. Here I will show the relevance of such a view in the context of the Central Sahara, especially northern Mali and southern Algeria, with particular reference to one of the most long-standing ethnographic puzzles in the area: that of hierarchies and status differences that, with conspicuous underlying regularity despite remarkable local variation, run through all ethnographic accounts of the region.[1] I will argue that the reference to the universal framework of Islamic history that is used in local documents and oral accounts should not merely be discarded as a 'cover-up' of socio-economic differentiation and exploitation. Rather, it is integral to local notions of difference and value: status is understood to be

[1] For examples of this, drawn from a wide geographic range within the Western and Central Sahara, see Clauzel (1962), Bonte (1989), Casajus (1990) and Villasante-de Beauvais (2000).

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_2,

a reflection of 'connectedness' and of the proximity – genealogically, spiritually, intellectually and morally – that locals can claim to the central figures of the Islamic revelation, which is seen to encompass and thereby to give differential moral value to all aspects of life.[2]

Such claims to 'connectedness' are most effectively made through the production of texts, *tawārīkh* (literally 'histories', here used to refer to what we would call genealogies) that prove both the scholarship of their authors and their genealogical proximity to the central figures of the quranic revelation, and, ideally, to the Prophet himself. Prophetic genealogy is seen to encompass all of history, from creation to the final judgement (see also Ho 2006), thereby subsuming everybody else's 'history', in a truly cosmopolitan fashion: it is the point where *ta'rīkh* and history merge, providing a moral framework within which everybody finds his or her place. Although, throughout the Central Sahara, there seems to be general agreement on this overall scheme, the actual details of how exactly people and groups fit into it are hotly disputed. Attempts to pin down this implied 'universal order' and to fix it once and for all in writing are perceived as scandalous, and may cause public outrage; yet no claims are made that reject the validity of the scheme itself. And indeed, it proves to be remarkably resilient until today: with the advent of nation-states and the ongoing redefinition of Islamic legitimacy in terms generally glossed as 'reformist', alternative forms of social and moral ordering have made their appearance in the area, at times with great force. Most of these claim to transform notions of value as based on personal ties and connections into homogeneous, bounded and nominally egalitarian categories; from a local point of view, however, they tend to be perceived as replacing one set of publicly valorised connections with another, with varying success. Hence, what is at stake in such readings is less the validity of the underlying logics of such models – descent versus passports, for instance, or 'reformist' versus 'traditional' Islam. Rather, people aim to ascertain the respective moral worth of the connections they imply, and the possibility of encompassing them within their own *ta'rīkh*, within a world that continues to be perceived as the visible unfolding of the Islamic revelation.[3]

[2] This is not to claim that Islam is inherently hierarchical: on the contrary, it has often been seen as fundamentally egalitarian, within or beyond the state (see for instance Lindholm 1996). Rather, it allows for both tendencies, as it provides a language to express universality adapted to local preoccupations (see also Messick 1988). As seen below, the notional egalitarianism promoted by regional nation-states from the 1960s onwards hence brought with it its own reading of the Islamic revelation, one that as 'true' (and as locally recognisable) as older versions.

[3] This paper is based on 16 months of fieldwork in southern Algeria and northern Mali in 2006–2008, archival research in France, Algeria and Mali, and local manuscript sources. Research was financed by a Junior Research Fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, and a British Academy Small Research grant (no. SG-47632). The paper was written up while holding a post-doctoral fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford.

Saharan Hierarchies, Genealogies and the Islamic Revelation

The hierarchical nature of Saharan societies immediately struck French military observers when, in the late nineteenth century, they started on their long imperial venture south from the Atlas Mountains.[4] Whereas in the Berber-speaking areas of the north, they thought to have found examples of 'primitive democracy' (Carette 1848: 470), 'the classical Greek polis' (Masqueray 1886: 80) or 'a kind of savage Switzerland' (Daumas 1864: 232), the Sahara – and perhaps also changing political fashions and preoccupations in France – elicited descriptions echoing the European Middle Ages: feudal lords, exploiting vassals and serfs, extended their merciless hold over lands scorched by an equally merciless climate, infertile partly because of the disorder and 'sterility' of such a social system (Montaudon 1883, see also Gautier 1927). Others told the story of the Sahara in perhaps more 'modern' terms of racial opposition and exploitation: a 'white' race, divided into 'sedentary democratic Berbers' and 'fanatical nomadic Arabs', exploited jointly the 'miserable blacks' who nonetheless remained the only 'suitable work-force' that could resist the heat of the desert.[5] Yet the social organisation that the French military actually had to deal with proved remarkably resilient to any simple dichotomy or quantification. French censuses of the Saharan oases speak of such difficulties, and, ultimately, of their failure to comprehend local realities. Their categories change from year to year, from 'Arabs, Berbers, *harātīn* [freed slaves], and negroes [slaves]' in the first census established in 1900, via 'whites, *harātīn*, negroes' in 1901 to '*shurafāʼ* [descendents of the Prophet], *mrabtīn* [descendents of saints], Arabs, Zenata [Berber-speakers], *harātīn*' in 1933.[6] And where it nonetheless seems possible to compare figures over the years, the numbers given change so dramatically, with the overall population remaining stable throughout, that, short of demographic catastrophe and large-scale emigration of 'blacks' and immigration of 'whites', the only possible explanation seems to be that of categorical error, redefinition, and instability. Hence, between 1911 and 1933, in the Algerian Touat, a group of oases in southwestern Algeria, the overall percentage of 'whites' increased by 13–20%, in some places even jumping up by 50%, while that of 'blacks' dropped by up to 40%, with the overall population remaining remarkably stable.

[4] After taking the city of Algiers in 1830, the French army extended their conquest gradually along the coast, and south to the city of Laghouat, gateway to the Sahara, in 1852. They entered the Sahara proper with the annexation of Ghardaia in 1882. The Touat, the area we are mainly concerned with here, was not taken until 1901. Meanwhile, the French navy had started to push north from the Niger bend, reaching Timbuktu in 1893.

[5] On the fruitlessness of all attempts at 'scientific' racial classification, see Boëtsch and Ferrie (1993); for more recent examples of such attempts, see Coblentz (1967) and Chaventré (1983).

[6] See for instance the Note on the Tidikelt district, by Simon, 21/05/1900, and Census of the Tidikelt, 12/09/1901, both kept at the French *Centre d'archives d'outre-mer* (CAOM) in Aix-en-Provence, box 22 H50; Annual Reports of the Tidikelt, Census of 1906, CAOM 23 H102; Population Census of the Touat, 1911–1950, 23 H91; Census of the Touat in 1933, CAOM 10 H86.

Subsequent ethnographic research has (roughly) agreed on a solution to this riddle: what matters in local classification is status – noble, vassal, freed slave or slave – not 'race'; terms such as 'black' (*sūdānī*) and 'white' (*bīdānī*) similarly depend on status rather than appearance; such status further has to be understood not as immutable, but as flexible, negotiable, and a result of local power relations (Bonte 1989; Casajus 1990; Claudot-Hawad 2000). Yet, as the persistence, despite official and at times reiterated abolition, of slavery and associated forms of dependency shows, this flexibility remains in fact limited (Brhane 1997; Bonte 1998; Botte 1999). Studies conducted in southern Algeria (Capot-Rey and Damade 1962; Granier 1980; Guillermou 1993) as well as more recent research in Mauritania (Villasante-de Beauvais 1991; Leservoisier 1994) explain this with reference to unequal access to land and especially water: status thus appears as closely interlinked with property. However, such explanations fail to account for the continuing relevance of these categories in areas such as the Touat in southern Algeria, where agriculture has dwindled into economic insignificance (Bendjelid et al. 1999; Bisson 2004: 222–32). Dumont (1967) long since showed that hierarchies cannot be understood through an analysis of their parts, but only with reference to a larger whole. All the ethnographic and historical accounts cited above are based on local approaches to supposedly bounded phenomena; what if we look at them as part of a larger whole that encompasses not only the Sahara but the 'world' beyond, while remaining essential to the making of the 'local'? Status distinctions then appear not as superposed ranks of a more or less flexible kind, but as a question of 'range': real and putative outside connections, that ultimately all make reference to and hence can be ordered through, not a local or even regional, but a putative universal framework that embodies truth itself: the Islamic revelation.

In the Central Sahara, high status implies far-reaching connections, and thereby the possibility to move around freely, and to draw on a maximum of outside resources: the paradigmatic example here would be the *sharīf* or descendent of the Prophet, who has, as it is phrased locally 'cousins everywhere', and whose family is known to all. Inversely, low status – paradigmatically that of a slave – means immobility, due partly to a deficient legal status, but even more so to the putative absence of outside connections: by definition, slaves have no relatives (Lovejoy 1983; Meillassoux 1986). What is at stake, then, is not so much actual mobility (although this of course also matters), but rather the ability to publicly claim honourable outside connections: slaves much as *shurafā'* come from the outside, but whereas one set of connections is valorised – indeed, it is the most honourable of all – the other is erased from public conscience: slaves are re-baptised on capture, converted, and attached to their master's family; legally, their children will not be their own, but their (or their mother's) master's. This recognition, however, is necessarily bound to the local: a slave might be noble at home; and ultimately, all sharifian genealogies are based on *samā'*, hearsay and public consensus (Touati 1989, 1992; Powers 2002). Hence, claims to status evolve and are accepted in a delicate interplay between the local – or various localities – that affords personal recognition, and the universal, through the embodiment of

region-wide shared images of what *shurafāʼ* look like and how they act,[7] but also through physical 'proof' of their identities: written genealogies, that are locally more commonly referred to as 'histories' (*tawārīkh*).

These *tawārīkh* are held in much esteem throughout the region. They are carefully kept by families, or assumed to be part of other, more valuable collections; they are seen not only as accounts of the past, but as justifications and explanations of contemporary social orderings, or, more frequently, as indications of what everybody's position in the world 'really' is, that is to say, what it ought to be. But although such a scheme necessarily aims at completeness, not everybody has a *taʼrīkh*, and some *tawārīkh* are shorter than others. Hence, by their physical appearance and quantity alone, genealogies establish difference, between those whose position in the world is precise, unique, and known, and those who are subsumed in the anonymous mass of the ignorant 'rabble'. In the early twentieth century, one such 'rabble', the pre-Islamic 'black' inhabitants of northeast Mali, were described by the northern Malian scholar Shaykh Bāy as follows:

> As to the beginnings of the *sūdān* and the details of their circumstances in this land only God knows them, praise be upon Him. They are dead and with them died their stories (*akhbāruhum*), and all that is left are the ruins [of their buildings]. . . They were people who fate has obliterated, and not people who write and produce history (*yu'arrikh*) and remember their affairs (*yahfath akhbārahum*). They were like animals, all that was important to them was eating and drinking. . . And this is all that is known about them and we [who] research into the ancient histories (*tawārīkh*) of the Arabs, as to these base people, there is no benefit for us in knowing about them.[8]

Hence the relative presence or absence of genealogical records is in itself the result and thus the indicator of moral worth as expressed in the readiness to fulfil the duty of remembrance, ideally through the cultivation of the written word: knowledge, status and the written word are intimately connected.

Yet *tawārīkh* are not merely ranked by quantity: both by their form, as written and recited documents, and by their content, marked by frequent reference to figures known from Islamic lore, they ultimately refer to the larger framework of the Islamic revelation. It is important to remember here that this framework differs from genealogical writings in scope rather than in kind: as Ho (2006) has shown, the Islamic revelation can be read as the spiritual genealogy of the Prophet Muhammad, whose

[7] All signs taken to be important, as 'God will always find ways of making his chosen ones known to man'. Local manuscripts stress especially the 'fragrance' by which *shurafāʼ* can be recognised, even if they themselves are ignorant of their identity; dreams play a similarly important role (see e.g. *Muzīl al-Khafā*, manuscript communicated to me by the Bakraoui family in Tamantit). Again, much of this is about public recognition, or as Dakhlia (1988: 754) put it: sharifian genealogies can only provide an 'increase in legitimacy', not legitimacy in itself (see also Touati 1992: 20).

[8] Manuscript no. 2407/97 of the de Gironcourt Collection, held at the *Institut de France* in Paris. Shaykh Bāy was a Kunta scholar settled among the Tuareg Ifoghas in the *zāwiya* Téléya near Kidal. His influence extended throughout what is today northeast Mali, northwest Niger, and southern Algeria, especially the Hoggar mountains (see Marty 1920: 119–37, de Gironcourt 1920: 147–9, and the collection of documents kept in the Malian National Archives in Bamako (ANM), Fonds anciens, box 1D305).

birth was already contained in the creation of the world, and whose spiritual substance was transmitted through the ages, from one prophet to the next. Conversely, after his death, it lives on, providing the guiding line for the unfolding of Islamic history that can be told through an account of the spread of God's message along spiritual and kin ties. Prophetic *ta'rīkh* and history thus become one, the former necessarily encompassing the latter; and events and people take their meaning from their relation to this universal whole; a relation that can always be known in detail as it is inscribed into the order of things, if only the work of remembrance is carried out as it ought to be. Such a system is of its nature universal: everybody is, knowingly or not, part of God's creation and the order He gave it – including the visiting anthropologist, per force attached to ʿĪssa, the prophet of all Christians. Further, everybody's place in this universe is unique, and designations by groups – of brothers, for instance – are always but a shorthand, and by necessity fragile. As a result, everybody can be placed on the same canvas, if only their exact relations could be known: the ordering of the world becomes less a philosophical problem than one of textual criticism.[9]

Genealogical World History: Muhammad Mahmūd and the God-Given Order of Timbuktu

One such attempt to fix once and for all the order of the world within one unified framework was made in 1933 by the Timbuktu scholar Muhammad Mahmūd wuld Shaykh in his *Kitāb al-Turjamān*.[10] By then, Timbuktu's days of glory as a prosperous and cosmopolitan centre of trade and scholarship had long passed, but had by no means been forgotten. Although the French army had conquered the city in 1893, and severed most regional and trans-regional connections, although they had co-opted parts of its intellectual elites, and driven away or destroyed the rest, Muhammad Mahmūd clearly saw himself as a representative of a venerable tradition, and of a former and God-given social order that was about to disappear. He himself was a descendant of a prominent scholarly family from Arawān, a caravan relay 200 km to the north of Timbuktu, on the way to the salt mines of Taodenni. He liked to describe himself as the '*qādi* of Timbuktu', and was generally referred to as such in French archival documents, but his claims to the *qādi*-ship seem to have been largely illusory: he was indeed appointed *qādi* of the Ahl Arawān resident in Timbuktu, but he quarrelled soon after his initial appointment with the town's leading scholars and was dismissed (Lecocq 2010: 54). Nonetheless, among his descendents, Muhammad Mahmūd is remembered until

[9] This of course does not mean that Islam 'invented' the genealogical genre, and the universalising and relationist vision of the world it expresses: in most areas, genealogical reasoning seems to have predated Islamicisation. In the contemporary Central Sahara, however, they are inextricably interwoven.

[10] For more detail on the wider intellectual context in which Muhammad Mahmūd was operating, and the importance of racial and genealogical distinctions within it, see Hall (2011).

today as the last representative of a long line of scholars, and of a better and more 'civilised' world; while stories recounted of his youth draw on universal Islamic stereotypes of saintly figures: he knew the Qur'ān at the age of two, people say, and refused his mother's breast during Ramadan; grown up, his voice was 'as sweet as honey', and time in his company passed so quickly that weeks seemed to have been mere seconds of bliss, true 'glimpses of paradise'. It is difficult to ascertain today why and for whom Muhammad Mahmūd wrote the *Kitāb al-Turjamān*, but, as it was written in Arabic and in a consciously archaic style, and as it was copied locally by hand, rather than published, we can surmise that his intended audience was local, or perhaps to be found among his regional peers. Muhammad Mahmūd seems to have seen the manuscript as an integral part of his identity as a 'traditional' intellectual and *sharīf*, defending his world against encroaching disorder: hence, we can treat it both as a treatise on order, and as a sign and proof of legitimacy. Despite its archaic language, it stands apart from other local historical texts (*tawārīkh*) in that it does not espouse a purely genealogical form, but leaves much room to narrative history, thereby apparently striving for a different and perhaps even more complete encompassment of a world that is threatening to fall apart, or at least to slip out of his grasp.[11]

The full title of his 113-page manuscript, *Kitāb al-turjamān fī taʼrīkh al-saharā wa al-sūdān wa bilād tinbuktu wa shinjīt wa arawān wa nubadh fī taʼrīkh al-zamān fī jamīʿa al-buldān*, translates as 'The book of the translator / genealogist of the history of the Sahara and the country of Timbuktu and Shingiti and Arawān and small fragments of the history of all times of all countries'.[12] Despite the world-historical aspirations of the title, it mainly recounts the history of Muhammad Mahmūd's own ancestor, Shaykh Ahmad ag Adda, who, of sharifian descent, came to Arawān in the sixteenth century, established a settlement, and turned it into a trading hub and a centre of scholarship (see also Marty 1920: 239). The first 10 out of 16 chapters deal with the *shaykh*'s arrival, travels, deeds, descent and immediate descendents. Chapters 11 and 12 rapidly cover the years until the late nineteenth century; Chapters 13 and 14 describe the arrival of first Europeans, the French conquest and their 'ways of governing'; the remaining two chapters give an overview of the people of the Azawād and Arawān and their respective genealogies, and an account of traders and trade from the arrival of the Barābīsh in the early seventeenth century until today. Yet even for these later chapters, Shaykh ag

[11] This does not mean that such kinds of history were unknown in Timbuktu at the time, or had never been produced there: witness the *Taʼrīkh al-Sūdān* and the *Taʼrīkh al-Fattāsh*, of whose prestige Muhammad Mahmūd was certainly aware. Inspiration might also have come from the French historical and ethnographic notes, with which Muhammad Mahmūd was familiar enough to help produce some of them, see for instance his reports on southern Algeria kept in the French military archives in Vincennes (SHAT), box 1 H4754/3, and his close collaboration, in the 1950s, with the French administrator Marcel Cardaire (see Lecocq 2010: 52–8). Moreover, he clearly took at least some of the information compiled in his *Kitāb al-turjamān* from Paul Marty's (1920) extensive treatise on the region.

[12] The copy consulted is held at the *Centre de documentation et de recherches Ahmed Baba* (CEDRAB) in Timbuktu, MS no. 762.

Adda's genealogy remains the framing device: dates are given with respect to the *shaykh*'s lifespan, or that of future generation, even for apparently unconnected events, such as a list of the governors of Timbuktu. Events matter because and inasmuch as they impinge on the *shaykh*'s life, mission and family: even the Moroccan conquest of Timbuktu in 1591, generally taken as the beginning of a new socio-political order in the whole region, is mentioned mainly because of Shaykh ag Agga's role within it. Events that have no bearing on the *shaykh*'s family are omitted, or at best summed up very briefly: hence, while the first ten chapters deal with barely three decades, the following three centuries are reduced to a series of minor quarrels between warring tribesmen, covered in a few pages. 'World history' is thus subsumed within the one *ta′rīkh* that matters: Muhammad Mahmūd's own genealogy that not merely stands for but rather is coterminous with that of the Prophet Muhammad.

The last two chapters are perhaps the most noteworthy, in that they claim to provide a comprehensive description of 'all the people and tribes' that live in the Timbuktu area, and thus superficially seem to move away from the 'traditional' genealogical grid that, like beads on a string, capture only those who are already contained in the storyline before it unfolds. Hence, perhaps, also the rather unusual title of the manuscript, that purports to recount the history of certain places, rather than of specific people.[13] Yet even within this newly introduced territorial scope, the genealogical principle remains prominent: all contemporary inhabitants of the area are mentioned, not in a list, but rather according to their putative origin and descent. Ultimately, all of these origins refer to the Islamic revelation, or at least to people known from Islamic history or legend. Hierarchy and order is never made explicit, but rather taken to be inscribed in the kinds of connection established and the origins they relate: shades of meaning and value are given by reference to servile origins, relations of dependency, or descent through women. Hence, among the more noble of the '*sūdān*' are to be found the Wākarā and Sanagha and Wangara, descendents of three brother who were 'vassals' (*milk*, or property) of a Yemeni king, and who have since provided kings and scholars to the people of the *bilād al-sūdān*.[14] The Jinka, Saraka, Būbū, Tambir and Karnagā are the descendents of five pairs of twins, children of five daughters of Noah, born to

[13] The title of the *Ta′rīkh al-Sūdān* is perhaps best translated as the 'History of the Blacks' rather than as the 'History of the Sudan', as is now common; this conceptual shift from an emphasis on people to an emphasis on place is reflected in northern Mali by parallel political developments closely connected to French colonial ambitions, see e.g. Grémont (2005).

[14] Some of the names used by Muhammad Mahmūd are still recognisable as contemporary 'ethnic' categories, such as the Bambara. Others are now used as family names or *diamou*, encompassed within larger 'ethnic groups', such as the Wangara, who today define themselves as *shurafā′*, although the term probably initially meant 'Muslim trader': see Lovejoy (1978), Saad (1983), and Lydon (2009: 63–5). Other terms seem utterly obscure to me and others whom I asked. It is obvious, however, that the terms used by Muhammad Mahmūd to refer to 'tribes' (*qabā′il*) today refer to a whole variety of levels on which and ways in which people can be distinguished from each other.

him by a slave, and whom he authorised to migrate to the *bilād al-sūdān*. Finally, and of most lowly origin, are mentioned the Ham Tīn, Ham Wala, Sarbanar, Samshāk and Kam; descendents of five brothers, whose father was a smith in the service of the Christians, who had fled from the islands of the ocean (the Atlantic?) to Gao, married a slave girl, and eventually turned into highway robbers. Hence, despite the importance of remembrance, morality is written into descent, playing out, generation after generation, the universal order of the world: by combining various genealogical legends and by thereby making them compatible and commensurable, Muhammad Mahmūd pins everybody onto a universal grid of moral value, fixing their positions once and for all.

Muhammad Mahmūd remains a highly controversial figure until today. In the years leading up to national independence in 1960, he supported the establishment of a French controlled Saharan region in order to curtail the jurisdiction of the future Malian state in the area.[15] He was notorious for his 'racism', as expressed in his refusal to pray behind a 'black' imam in the 1970s; as a declared 'enemy of state', he spent most of the latter part of his life in prison (Hall 2011: 314). Although the *Kitāb al-turjamān* played no direct part in his imprisonment, it is frequently cited as a prime example of his 'racism', and is still understood to be subversive. The copy I had access to was communicated to me 'secretly', by the co-director of the Malian national manuscript centre, Muhammad Mahmūd's cousin, in my (Arab) lodger's house, and although promises were whispered that it should 'soon' be published – in Mauritania, of course, not Mali – local Arabs insist that it remains difficult of access.[16] Hence, as Shryock (1997) has pointed out for Jordan, any attempts to actually fulfil the implicit promise of genealogical reckonings – that they would paint a complete picture of the world if put together 'correctly' – is necessarily scandalous, as it attempts to put an end to the flexibility inherent in ongoing debates over relative moral worth and the truth-value of claimed connections. What is more striking here is the disproportionate reaction the *Kitāb al-turjamān* still elicits, both among Arabs and 'blacks', and this despite its obscurity, inaccessibility, and decidedly scholarly nature: this bears witness to the strong hold of genealogical logics on regional explanatory schemes linking the local to universal frameworks of truth. Tellingly, then, it is never Muhammad Mahmūd's method and overall framework that attracts criticism or even expressions of hatred, but rather his factual 'errors'. And indeed, although to my knowledge no further attempt has been made in the area to encompass local identities within one universal written and publicised scheme, the unwritten existence of such a scheme is never questioned. Meanwhile, genealogical endeavours remain popular, widely respected, and recognised as potentially containing the key to all 'true knowledge'.

[15] See Boilley (1993), Lecocq (2010: 52–8), CAOM AffPol 2258/5 and the French Military Archives in Vincennes (SHAT), box 1 H4754/3.

[16] This insistence is partly rhetorical: the manuscript can be consulted quite easily at the CEDRAB, as Bruce Hall clearly did (see Hall 2011).

Contemporary Conundrums: Kunta North and Kunta South

The appeal of a genealogical vision of the world, then, continues, even though other and equally universalising claims to patterns of ordering and legitimacy have made their appearance in the region: first and foremost, those of nation-states, and their concomitant categories, ethnicity and race. Conceptually, these notions are opposed to genealogical visions of the world. Both claim to be universal (everybody 'has' a race or a nationality, much as everybody has a position in a putative universal genealogical scheme, and those who do not quite simply 'fall through' the grids of recognition), but while notions of 'race' and national identity claim that within 'our' group, we are not merely equal, but also the same, and that people beyond group boundaries are fundamentally different, a genealogical vision of the world postulates gradual continuity of positional difference: no two people are exactly the same, but there are no radical breaks, and we are all different in the same way.[17] As a result, nationalism bears within it different notions of legitimacy, of the social as well as of the religious kind; and indeed, in many instances, it has at least nominally put forward a type of Islam that attempts to cut out mediation and intermediaries, that is to say, that aims to replace notions of differential proximity to God by mass access, thereby yet again questioning the hierarchical moral template established by authors such as Muhammad Mahmūd.[18] On the ground, however, the exclusive aspirations of nationalism often falter. One nationalism rarely ever resembles another, with state resources and wider regional connections playing a key role; more importantly, perhaps, conceptual replacements are rarely total, and newer visions of the world might easily be subsumed within more longstanding ones, especially if they have such remarkable powers of encompassment as genealogical schemes. Similarly, there is no doubt that racial distinctions were recognised and had some relevance in the area beforehand, but they ultimately remained subsumed within an idiom of lineage and genealogical connections (Hall 2011: 33, see also Hall 2005), until they were granted renewed power by the categories of national administration and international aid.

Today, the Central Sahara that provided Muhammad Mahmūd's intellectual frame of reference is divided by national borders that are generally taken to separate North and West Africa into distinctive 'regions' or even 'culture areas', and that cut across the kind of real or imagined trans-regional connections discussed above. Yet these ties have not been forgotten, and often remain central to local identities in more or less publicly acceptable ways, depending on national

[17] See also Dresch (2009). This vision is perhaps most familiar to European readers from the biblical vision of the world; for a discussion of its gradual replacement by 'racial' thinking in the very different context of India, see Trautmann (1997).

[18] This is often glossed as 'reformist Islam' (although claims for 'reform' of Islam as practiced at any given point in time seem to be as old as the Islamic revelation itself): for its history in Algeria, see Merad (1967) and J. McDougall (2006); for Mali, see Kaba (1974) and Brenner (2000).

policies, the centrality of the state and changing notions of religious legitimacy. In the Algerian Sahara, nationalism, largely infused with Islamic and Arab Middle Eastern imagery and backed up with oil-wealth converted into state payrolls and prestige, has had a forceful impact on local identities. Although concomitant claims for equality have often proven to be illusory, and although practically, older hierarchies have in many cases remained intact, this was only possible inasmuch as formerly dominant groups have managed to convert their prestige into access to state resources.[19] Reference continues to be made to noble descent, but such noble descent, here as everywhere, requires considerable funds to be manifest on a daily basis, in lavish hospitality and access to the visible *baraka* of contemporary wealth and status: four-wheel-drives, for instance, computers and electronic equipment, or influential positions in the local or even national administration that allow to confer favours. Conversely, local backing by influential religious families stabilises the at times precarious hold of the northern government over the oil-rich south; and on the ground, the Algerian administration has long been much less 'reformist' than its rhetoric would make believe (Hadj Ali 1992; Scheele 2007). As for genealogical reckonings more generally, the problem remains one of public recognition and circumstance. All connections are potentially welcome, and can be accommodated, but not all are to be mentioned at all times: the value of Moroccan ancestors, Malian cousins and close connections to state officials remains contextual.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the example of the Kunta. The Kunta are a large religious federation, who are today spread out between Algeria, Mali, Mauritania, and, to a lesser degree, Niger and Morocco; in all of these places and beyond, they have accumulated and maintained considerable religious prestige.[20] In northern Mali, the Kunta have long received payments of tribute from 'lesser' Arabic-speaking tribes (Marty 1920), tribute that was seen as spiritual gifts as much as 'taxes'. They have also been central to the organisation of trade (Génevière 1950; McDougall 1986); and they still maintain an influential position in contemporary trans-border traffic and trade throughout West Africa (Scheele 2009). In Algeria, the Kunta are less prominent, but their central settlement, Zaouiat Kounta in the Algerian Touat, is recognised as a place of *baraka* and scholarship. Its leading *shaykh* teaches a large number of students and followers, recruited throughout Algeria. On his rare trips to Adrar, the administrative centre of the Touat, he is greeted by crowds of people coming up to ask his advice or blessing, and sometimes stooping to kissing his hand. Nonetheless, the Algerian Kunta, like most religious figures in Algeria, propound notions of religious legitimacy that

[19] In the Algerian south, the struggle for independence (1954–1962) was largely one of equipment and transport facilities, rather than one of guerrilla fighting; and those families who controlled most resources then were able to convert these into political prestige that in many cases lasts until today.

[20] The Kunta have attracted considerable scholarly interest, too much to be summed up in a simple footnote, but see especially Marty (1920), Batran (2001), and Hūtiya (2007).

are in keeping with Algerian 'official' Islam, and indeed are keen to be recognised as 'proper' religious dignitaries, in Algerian rather than Saharan terms. Of course, their standard recited genealogy still includes reference to southern connections; but whereas, in the older literature, Zaouiat Kounta was described as a subsidiary settlement established by Kunta from the Azawād in what is today northern Mali, contemporary versions stress direct descent from Middle Eastern and North African ancestors, with the subsequent establishment of missionary 'colonies' further south.[21]

Since the 1970s, this genealogical reorientation has been both challenged and strengthened by the increased presence of Sahelian 'cousins' in southern Algeria. With a series of droughts, changing political conditions, and civil wars in the Sahel, large numbers of Tamacheq- and Arabic-speakers were compelled to leave northern Mali, and eventually settled in southern Algeria, often in places and near people with whom they or their families had some kind of connection.[22] Malian Kunta were among these refugees, and although some found shelter near Zaouiat Kounta, most clustered around the old mosque in the 'Sahelian' quarter of Adrar, aptly named Bani w-Iskut.[23] Those Kunta who remained in Mali, however, inevitably think of their cousins as living in Zaouiat Kounta, and this notion of 'rightful belonging' is clearly shared, although with little enthusiasm, by their Algerian 'family'. As one of the Malian Kunta recalls:

> I was curious about Zaouiat Kounta, I had heard so much about it, and especially I wanted to see their manuscripts, so I went out there and spoke to them. They were very cagey, very worried, especially when they saw that I was used to reading manuscripts and that I had some of my own. . . and they never let me see theirs. It was later that I understood why: they were afraid I would find my own name in one of their papers, and that I had come to claim my inheritance!

By no stretch of the imagination could such claims be anything but symbolic, but then this is perhaps the crux of the matter: what is at stake here are less fears about property, but rather worries about the 'proper' use of the genealogically transmitted *baraka* that is shared by all Kunta, and, even more importantly, about the written documents that 'prove' these connections.

This mutual embarrassment has to be placed into the larger context of southern Algeria, and its relations both with 'northerners' and their own Sahelian 'cousins'. Nominally, at least, Bani w-Iskut stands for everything that 'proper Algeria'

[21] Compare, for instance, the genealogies recorded by Marty (1920) and de Gironcourt (MS 2407/90 of the de Gironcourt collection held at the institute de France) with contemporary oral versions, and Hūtiya (2007).

[22] On the successive droughts, see Comité d'Information Sahel (1975), Ag Foni (1979), Ag Baye and Bellil (1986), Ag Ahar (1990) and Giuffrida (2005a, b). On subsequent political and military upheavals in northern Mali, see Maiga (1997), Ag Youssouf and Poulton (1998) and Grémont et al. (2004). For the rather scant literature on northern Malian migrants in Algeria, see Bellil and Badi (1993, 1996) and Badi (2007, 2012).

[23] Bani w-Iskut translates as 'build and shut up'. Very little has been published on Bani w-Iskut, but see Bisson (2004: 129–32).

is not: it is inhabited by 'foreigners' or 'fake Algerians' ('*algériens Taiwan*': Sahelians who have obtained Algerian nationality), it has no proper roads, houses or infrastructure, police or government, and economically relies on trans-border trade or other illegal activities of all kinds. 'Real Algerians' describe it as backwards, immoral, ignorant, and obscure; inhabited by irrational people in dirty rags, with 'lose morals' and pots of gold hidden under their pillows. These stereotypes echo rather too closely the image many 'northerners' have of the Sahara more generally, and southern Algerians are hence doubly careful to stay aloof from even the mere suspicion of identity. More often than not, such oppositions are expressed in terms of religious orthodoxy: allegedly, as Sahelians, the inhabitants of Bani w-Iskut are superstitious and engage in religious practices that can barely be called Islamic; 'southerners' are all the more eager to condemn such practices as they fear their efficacy as much as they worry about their own reputation. Nonetheless, many Sahelian families resident in Bani w-Iskut are well known for the 'services' they offer to 'real Algerian' middle class families, and middle class ladies who, when asked in public, would vehemently deny any knowledge of Bani w-Iskut, can daily be seen picking their paths through the rubbish heaps and feral goats and children that are characteristic of the neighbourhood. Such 'services' include ministering to the mentally ill, curing barrenness or sickness, clairvoyance, the interpretation of dreams and the fabrication of amulets, alongside more 'innocent' industries such as hairdressing and tailoring.[24] The Kunta are especially prominent here, as they are distinguished by their prestigious descent and *baraka*; a *baraka* that is well known to Algerians, if only because of the more publicly acceptable religious prestige of the Malian Kunta's Algerian cousins.

As long as the Malian Kunta stay in the 'underworld', both spiritually (secret practices) and physically (Bani w-Iskut), all is well; any attempts to go beyond this, however, and to step out into public life, are deeply resented. I witnessed one such attempt during the inaugural meeting of the national manuscript centre – the first of that kind in Algeria – in Adrar, in March 2007 (see also Scheele 2010). The importance of this meeting clearly lay beyond the actual business to be dealt with (of which there was little): rather, the meeting was taken as defining who could describe themselves as a 'manuscript owner' and hence a religious authority, recognised by their peers and by state officials. Among the crowd dressed in carefully ironed white robes and modern suits, one group of *shaykh*s stood out by their colourful garb, unkempt beards and wild hairstyles: the Malian Kunta, visibly shunned by all, but whose pockets were bulging with Islamic manuscripts. As soon as they had spotted my presence, they beckoned me to come over, showing me various letters sent to them from Timbuktu. Within minutes, another *shaykh*, soberly dressed in white, pulled me away: 'don't you waste your time with them,' he whispered, 'them and their scraps of paper – they have nothing to do with us,

[24] For debates over the legitimacy of such practices in Mali itself, see Soares (2005a).

they are mere sorcerers.' Yet there was no denying that these 'sorcerers' were his own cousins, nourished by the same *baraka* as himself; that they owned as many and as valuable manuscripts as anybody else, if not more; and, worst of all, that most of the Algerian manuscripts contained as many embarrassing notions and 'unorthodox' practices as theirs. In a sense, the Kunta found themselves in the same conundrum as Muhammad Mahmūd 70 years earlier: the written word threatened to establish an equivalence that could not be doubted, but that could neither be allowed to stand publicly. Both groups were painfully aware that they were drawing on the same frame of reference, on which their identity as religious scholars depended, and which they could thus not reject out of hand. Papers, much as genealogical claims, take their value from the fact that they are recognised; where people are too closely bound up, however, such recognition might be impossible to deny.

It is misleading, I think, to interpret the problem faced by the Malian Kunta in Algeria merely as yet another example of 'reformist' versus 'traditional', or 'text-based' versus 'person-centred' Islam. Neither of the two 'sides' questions the importance of texts as constituting personal religious legitimacy and as positioning them within and through a recognised network of connections. Rather, what is at stake, here as in the example of Muhammad Mahmūd given above, is the respective moral worth of such connections, and the question of who can more plausibly claim to encompass the other's Islamic legitimacy. The post facto adjustment of Algerian Kunta genealogical lore clearly bears witness to this: rather than attempting to cut out their Malian cousins altogether, they aim to redefine the exact nature of their relationship, and to rephrase it in terms of precedence and hence of containment; similarly, rather than deny the value of their manuscripts, they question their individual worth as 'incomplete copies' and claim that the 'real collection' of books is held in Zaouiat Kounta. More generally, evaluations of the respective moral value of genealogical and spiritual connections have shifted noticeably, especially with reference to a new influential player: the Algerian state that, due to its financial resources and hold over regional political institutions, is by now the main source of public recognition and social mobility in the region. It is with respect to the state, its categories and everything that represents them that the Malian Kunta are beyond the pale, as trans-border traffickers, 'refugees' and illegal residents of makeshift dwellings. Their religious 'unorthodoxy' is but one, albeit a publicly stressed, part of their more general 'immorality' and concomitant marginal position. In other words, we are still and again dealing with questions of status, expressed here in terms of access to recognised sources of truth and funds: one set of connections has partly replaced another such set, with different centres and boundaries. Notions of religious legitimacy have changed accordingly, through a gradual re-evaluation of desirable ties and various degrees of appropriate publicity. The Malian Kunta clearly understood this, as well as the necessity to broaden their own connections to include state institutions: hence, they took the risk of offending their own cousins by making their own claims public, and by thereby attempting to cut out any possible intermediaries between themselves and the current powers-that-be.

Questions of Orthodoxy on the Algero-Malian Border

Arabic-speaking families in northern Mali similarly increasingly 'fall through' more 'modern' idioms of identity and status as they have often failed to establish new sets of connections that matter, while older markers of their privileged position within the 'Islamic' scheme of things are gradually redefined and threaten to be taken out of their hands.[25] With the exception of the Barābīsh near Timbuktu, most Arabic-speaking tribes in northern Mali derive their status, and thus their identity as Arabs, from their privileged association with Islam.[26] Again, this is most frequently expressed in terms of descent, but this descent can only be proven and made real if it is lived on a daily basis, through exemplary behaviour, especially with regards to women, and a commitment to scholarship. 'Arab' and 'exemplary Muslim' are thus taken to be virtually synonymous,[27] and people who are Arab or *shurafāʼ* by descent and do not live up to such expectations are severely criticised and often redefined as 'blacks'.[28] Leading a life of Islamic exemplarity, however, is costly: it requires a house with high walls, behind which women are protected from curious onlookers, time and leisure for study, enough resources so that women can stay at home to teach the children the Qur'ān and Arabic, satellite television, costly veils, henna, and perfumes, and turbans for men, and ideally also servants. Yet the economic livelihood and prestige of most Malian Arabic-speaking families has been undermined by the redefinition of their close ties with the north, and the subsequent loss of most of their herds. With the exception of influential Timbuktu families, most Arabic-speakers in northern Mali have failed to established privileged links with the Malian state or international aid organisation that today provide the perhaps most important single source of outside revenue in the area. As a result, they derive most of their income from illegal trans-border trade that, although less stigmatised here than in Algeria, nonetheless is partly conceived to be illicit and therefore thought to jar with their religious vocation.[29] Some traders try to alleviate these difficulties by investing a large share of their profits in religious

[25] In northern Mali, nationalism has had much less impact than in southern Algeria, and many northerners, especially those who would see themselves as 'white' feel excluded from the Malian nation-state and have indeed repeatedly rebelled against it (see e.g. Lecocq 2010).

[26] Most Arabs in the Tilemsi in the north-east used to be classified as 'clients' of the Kunta, while independent tribes are either descendents of famous Mauritanian or Algerian saints and scholars or claim sharifian descent.

[27] Such a strong overlap between what we would call 'religious' and 'ethnic' identity is common throughout West Africa, see e.g. Bazin (1985), Amselle (1990) and Launay (1992).

[28] Such redefinitions are plausible because of the high degree of intermarriage in the area. Bilateral descent is also generally drawn on to explain such 'slippages': folk wisdom has it that, even if the non-Arab mother of a child is of exemplary morality, one or two generations later, the 'blood' will show: 'it's magic, *sihr*' as women say with a knowing smile, pointing to the veins in their forearms.

[29] For a more detailed description of trans-border trade and the moral quandaries it leads to, see Scheele (2009).

works and prestigious marital alliances, ideally with impoverished sharifian families. Sometimes, they finance missionary works: in other words, they attempt to make their current way of life acceptable by forging new and prestigious outside connections, either with local noble families or international Islamic scholars or organisations.

Much more threatening than the moral stigma attaching to illicit trade, however, is the current redefinition of Islamic legitimacy throughout the region. Malian Arabic-speakers claim 'closeness' to the Islamic revelation because of their descent, but also because of their knowledge of Arabic, that allows them direct access to the scriptures and means that they conduct all of their daily affairs 'conversing like the Prophet and his companions'. Yet by now, Arabic is spoken by many in Mali: half of all Malian school children attend not French-speaking state schools but rather Arabic-speaking private schools financed by Saudi Arabia or Libya, using material produced in Morocco (Bouwman 2005: 2, 4). This means not only that direct access to Islamic scriptures has been democratised, if not always practically, than at least notionally, but also that the Arabic spoken by Malian Arabs is compared to Middle Eastern standards taught in such schools and found wanting. More generally, Islamic scholarship is now more often than not proven by certificates obtained in Libya or Cairo, rather than by elaborate genealogies or personal *ijāzas*, while potential sources of religious legitimacy and truth that are available to most Malians have multiplied exponentially over the recent years, through television, cassettes, missionary activities from the East, and, more recently, also the internet.[30] Again, this has not led to replacement, but rather to a wider range of potential choice, making Arabs' claims to encompassment more doubtful. In northern Mali, such changes have been most dramatically reflected in the arrival of '*salafīs*', some who have come out of Algeria and made local converts among Arabic-speaking tribes in northern Mali, thereby directly challenging the influence of recognised saintly families and local *shurafā'*.[31]

In Western scholarship, there has been much debate over the real impact of 'radical Islam' in the area, most of which seem to imply that radical political Islam is an irresistible ideology, and that it is fundamentally at odds with the more 'tolerant' kind of Islam generally seen to be practiced in West Africa.[32] From a local point of view, however, these conflicts are not perceived as struggles between different 'kinds' of Islam, but rather, as struggles between different

[30] For a description of some such more recent developments, see Soares (2004, 2005b) and Schulz (2006, 2007); for a more historical perspective, see Sanakoua and Brenner (1991), Brenner (2000) and Kavas (2003).

[31] There is a history to these missionary endeavours (see e.g. Kaba 1974; Brenner 2000), which people locally trace back over centuries – the fifteenth-century Tlemcen scholar al-Maghīlī is a favourite example here.

[32] For discussions of this, see, for instance, Keenan (2005) and Lecocq and Schrijver (2007). Notions of a more tolerant 'black' Islam that would be fundamentally opposed to its 'fanatical Arab' counterpart go back to colonial times (Brenner 2000), but have proven to be extraordinarily resilient until today.

kinds of people: those who know their position in an overarching genealogical scheme, and those who do not. The criticism levelled by the *salafīs* at local religious families and in particular at their claims to legitimacy based on descent is explained by the jealousy of Shaykh Bāy's 'rabble' who are notoriously deprived of 'history': Malian '*salafīs*' and 'friends of the Algerians' are described with expressions also used to scorn other attempts at upward social mobility, such as 'unsuitable' marital alliances, of 'noble' women with parvenu cocaine dealers, for instance. However, some of the *salafī*s themselves, especially if they exhibit recognised signs of *baraka*, are venerated like saintly figures. Hence, a young Tamacheq lad from the Algerian border post of Timiaouine, who had been 'with the *salafīs* in the mountains', and who had – judging by his language used in his ravings – spent time in Algerian prisons, was generally declared to have 'gone mad' because 'he had read too much of the Qur'ān without eating anything'. Although the lad's behaviour was at times dangerous – once he tried to drive away with the truck, leaving us helpless in the desert – he was treated by all with great respect, addressed as 'Sīdī', or 'my lord', and his erratic pronouncements were pondered at length, not always, however, without bemusement. More generally, such new religious figures are incorporated into existing patterns of recognition. Even the 'Algerian' *salafīs*, people agree, will soon 'calm down', because, as is stressed with a knowing smile, 'in order to live here, they had to get married to Tamacheq wives – they will soon know where they stand': and indeed, as they have literally been 'attached' to regional grids of evaluation, they have – from a local point of view at least – ceased to be socially disruptive.[33]

This does not mean that the *salafī*s' 'message' is rejected, however: on the contrary, it is enthusiastically taken up in as much as it is part of Islam, Islam is one, and thus any 'true' Arab of worthy descent is inevitably its most suitable embodiment. Arabs proud of their religious descent are hence keen to incorporate these new sources of truth, and many have invested in trans-national missionary groups that political scientists would define as 'Islamist', and have often come to dominate them, through their financial resources, scholarship and eloquence, but also through the respect their names continue to command: they are especially fond of the *jamaʿāt al-tablīgh*, who have made great headway throughout West Africa (Janson 2005), and increasingly also in the Sahara (Gutelius 2007; Lecocq and Schrijver 2007). Further, satellite television has brought the Middle East much closer to home, in ways that are more easily accessible to Arabic-speakers than others, and religious programmes, as well as taped sermons and books, are eagerly sought after and seriously studied. Rather than as challenges to their religious clout, Arabic-speaking religious families welcome these new sources of truth as additional connections that enlarge and reinforce the ties that have always bound them, through history and the moral obligations that necessarily spring from it, to the

[33] This 'attachment' has also allowed local Islamict groups to establish a fragile alliance with Tuareg rebels in the area, and, with their help, to take over the three major cities of northern Mali in spring 2012.

centres of the Islamic world: they do not question, but rather strengthen, re-orientate and 'prove' their own genealogical pretensions, and the all-encompassing power of the universal historical framework that they, much as Muhammad Mahmūd before them, claim to embody.

Conclusion

In the Central Sahara, imaginings of the world are directly bound up with Islamic scripture, not as a past account but as a living text, re-enacted on an individual basis, but also through social imaginings and orderings. These 'orderings' are expressed in terms of genealogical and spiritual relationships, that, put together, carry the promise of a complete image of the world, past, present, and future, in which everybody finds their position, and thereby their moral value and fulfilment. Yet any attempt to fulfil this implicit promise of completeness, and thereby to fix hierarchies once and for all, inevitably causes 'scandal', as shown by Muhammad Mahmūd's mishaps. With the advent of nation-states and concomitant ideologies, alternative ways of constructing identity that are based on bounded categories and claims to equality rather than on personal connections and differential moral worth appear, at times with great force, cutting ties or relegating genealogical reckonings to the margins, or, in this case, literally to the state borders. Yet such links are still recognised, as shown by the threat as which Malian Kunta are perceived by their northern 'cousins'. Here, debates that appear at first as conflicts between different 'kinds' of Islam hinge in fact on genealogical struggles over encompassment, and on the respective moral worth of publicly claimed connections. Questions of morality and of correct reference to a larger whole also emerge in northern Mali, where 'Arabness' and spiritual legitimacy are intimately bound up with certain ways of conceiving the world, again as a set of morally determining relationships that are said to represent Islam – moral claims that are difficult to uphold in the face of contemporary economic realities. Further, Islamic sources of truth are multiplying in the area, questioning the privileged relation that Arabs claim to maintain with universal knowledge. Yet rather then rejecting them as such, most Arabic-speakers in the area keenly adopt them, as part of their more general claim to moral and intellectual encompassment: through their religious descent, they literally embody the Islamic revelation, and as much as the words of the Qur'ān cannot express untruth, they can also never be outside their reach and competence. What northern Malian Arabs, Algerian and Malian Kunta, and Muhammad Mahmūd, Shaykh Bāy and their peers alike do reject, however, is the 'rabble': those who, by their very nature, 'do not know who their fathers are', hence do not know where and how they fit, in the universe that does not represent, but rather is the living embodiment of, the Islamic revelation.

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Chapter 3
Death and the Spirit of Patriarchy in Western India

Edward Simpson

Introduction

Comparative ethnographic evidence suggests that patriarchy takes many forms and leads to various arrangements of authority and sanction. However, conceptions of patriarchy, which are often made to appear non-variable and all encompassing – almost as if an ideology – also occupy a central role in the way many South Asians describe their own methods of social organisation. The related concepts of lineage and descent as well as the genealogical inflection of knowledge and legitimacy have consequently also featured strongly anthropological writing on patriarchal societies. This chapter is a critical contribution to this literature, describing the form, and illustrating some distinct consequences of patriarchal relations among Sunni Muslims in Gujarat, western India.

The literature on lineage organisation and patriarchy is voluminous and I will not attempt to review it here other than to make the following general point. In the formative post-colonial decades of modern anthropology, formalist arguments about the structure, function and organisation of patri-lines, uni-lineal descent groups, affinity and segmentation were central to understanding the political dynamics, particularly of Muslim and African Societies (Barth 1961; Evans-Pritchard 1949; Gellner 1969). Then, scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) saw that lineage societies in North Africa had what he called 'officialising strategies' and

I am thankful to the editors of this volume as well as to Isabella Lepri, Peter Loizos, Jason Sumich, Malathi de Alwis and Steve Hughes for commenting on previous drafts. I am particularly grateful to Harald Tambs-Lyche for discussing inter-generational relations with enthusiasm and precision.

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_3,

'representational ideologies', which allowed people to talk about lineages in ways which were quite different to how they lived or 'practiced' them; in other words, what they said about lineages was not the not the same as what they did within and to them. Bourdieu, and others, focused on marriage and politics within lineage society in order to make this point. In contrast, my focus is on the freedom granted to those who survive the death of their fathers to 'represent' and 'officialise' their lineages – it seems to me, at least, that the analysis is necessarily of a different order.

In the years after Bourdieu's *Outline of a theory of practice*, there was a critical focus on the fantasy and convenience of continuing the Orientalist preoccupation with the lineage (from a large literature Ahmed 1980; Caton 1987; Dresch 1986 are representative). More recently still, and along with a new wave of kinship studies, the analysis of formal or ideal lineage structures has given way to a primary concern with what people actually do – over and above what they say they do – when it comes to marriage and descent reckoning and to understanding idioms and mechanisms of relatedness. Rather than seeing each of these phases of anthropological inquiry as separate and discrete or as epistemological revolutions which consigned the wisdoms of previous phases to the dustbin of intellectual history, in this chapter I draw on aspects of structural functionalism, post-colonial critique and the recent anthropologies of relatedness and inter-personal relations to think through patriarchy. I hope the debt to Bourdieu is obvious and that I do not need to spell it out further.

As a general principle for the practice of anthropology, reading across time seems to be apt and discerning practice, as the tendency to only cite the most recent works seems to imply that anthropology is endlessly and only moving towards an image of its own perfection. I hope the conceit of this position requires no further elaboration. The displacement of structural-functionalist reasoning may not be mourned by many students of anthropology today. However, it seems to me, as it has also done to others working in South Asia (Barth 1959 and his student Tambs Lyche 1995) that structural-functional modes of representation caught something of the essence of social life; there was, in other words, something ethnographic about it – and, it was, therefore, more than simply a theoretical expression of a particular intellectual moment. It hardly needs stating that there was always much more to see in a typical fieldsite than the structural-functionalist gaze allowed: there was, for instance, and of course, also contest, power, construction, and the now-ubiquitous operation of contingency. However, the initial fieldwork encounters I had in South Asia brought to mind most readily the 'representation ideology' of people's lives in ways similar to those written about my the structural functionalists of previous decades.

These days, anthropology is rightly careful, precise and self-aware of the effects of research and writing about others. But now, perhaps, we are too preoccupied with all that other stuff to countenance the idea that those who inform our research may well deploy their own modes of structural-functionalist reckoning (or what Bourdieu has called 'officialising strategy' and 'representational ideology') in the ways in which they think about aspects of their own societies. Those who inform my research were, after all, were part of the same colonial encounter through which ethnology became anthropology (in Britain at least), and it should hardly be

surprising that these experiences had an impact on their thinking as well as on that of anthropologists (as Dirks 2001 has shown).

For Muslims I know in western India, the ideology represented by genealogical discourse, itself, I will suggest, a kind of representational ideology remains ethnographically significant. The patri-lineal genealogy of Mohammed the Prophet is well known, and establishes him as the last in a line of prophets from Abraham and connects him to a broader political history of Arab societies. In relation to their own lives, many Muslims draw on the model of prophetic descent, as well as on the more intimate and complicated model of the Prophet's own family arrangements. Shades of relatedness among those who begot Mohammed, those who were related to Mohammed during his lifetime, and those who came after them, offer a rough guide against which Muslims may frequently think about relatedness and legitimacy. I will elaborate this way of reasoning later, but the ways in which a venerated and idealised model of relatedness (whatever the provenance) is held to order contemporary social life in western India by the people who live there also seems to be akin to what the structural functionalists were attempting to capture in writing.

In the academic literature, Mohammed's own rather complex kin arrangements, as well as the construction of his grander genealogy, has been shown to be politically contingent and selective, as well as to incorporate ambiguity and irregularity (Ho 2006: 147–151; Varisco 1995). Women are to be included in this genealogical scheme, not as capricious or convenient links in a chain, but to stress rights by alliance, in addition to those of grace (also Leach 1969). Rather than seeing such understandings of the Prophet's genealogy as apostasy, I am inclined to think these views concur very well with what Muslims I know in western India also hold to be the case: they are structural-functionalist in their presentation and description of actual social life but only to the moment when the contingencies of social life intervene, which they do often. In other words, although they can describe the structures of meaning underlying patri-lines, and may also use this logic when explaining who they are to others in the terms of to where and whom they belong, the theory is not commonly mirrored by practice.

In this vein, other writings on patriarchy have shown the role of wives, brothers and sisters in constructions of patriarchal relations of authority (Sanders 2000; Suad 1993, 1994), drawing our attention to contingency, variance and the idea that patriarchy is a collective endeavour and not just the work of particular men. The consequence is that genealogy emerges as something far more subtle than a schematic succession of fathers and sons dragging their feet in the sands of time. I take this observation as my starting point, rather than as my conclusion.

Despite these demonstrations however, which have clearly undermined the supremacy of the rule of fathers and sons in the narration of patriarchal genealogy, my ethnography leads me back to their relationship and to the role of death – in particular – in generating patriarchal formations. In western India, the concept of genealogy, as a form of inter-generational transmission, is a prominent trope through which society is organised. It is through genealogy that names, honour, grace, charisma, propensities, legitimacy and property pass or flow. Genealogy also

works as an explanatory mechanism for the presence and absence of lunacy, illness, hot-headedness and flatulence.

Genealogy, in the abstract, relies on the notion of inter-generational relations of a type which allow for the transmission things – both the good and the bad. History, knowledge as well as the other varied qualities of mankind, in the broadest sense, are seen to flow through great chains of beings. As the metaphor of descent implies, passage aided by gravity, the idea of a chain – ideally unbroken – suggests continuity, connectedness and strength. In what follows, I focus on the relation between links in the chain – on what connects them – particularly, as I have said, on the relation between fathers and sons and death. This focus shows that the genealogical passage is a painful one, characterised more by violence and rupture, than it is by strength and continuity.

In order to do this, I present two kinds of ethnography. The first presentation is based on an intensive period of doctoral fieldwork conducted for a period of 20 months or so between 1997 and 1999. I present a brief account of these findings as they appeared in monographic form (Simpson 2006a). The second ethnographic presentation has its roots in this first fieldwork, but is based on repeated visits to the field, some prolonged, over the decade and more that has followed.

Although the two kinds of ethnography are related and derived from working with the same people, the first is written in the ethnographic present (thus the title Fathers and Sons in the Ethnographic Present), while the second (Fathers and Sons in Time) takes longitudinal shape, tracing the lives of three sets of fathers and sons, and the consequences of the death of the fathers on the lives of the sons. I present the second set of ethnographic materials not explicitly to undermine the legitimacy of the first, but to show the consequences that a different perspective on the lives of the same people can bring to our analysis and understanding of inter-generational relationships.

Fathers and Sons in the Ethnographic Present

The town of Mandvi and the village of Salaya lie on opposite banks of an estuarine port on southern shores of Kutch District in the western part of Gujarat. From the sixteenth century, if not earlier, Mandvi was a departure point for pilgrims bound for Mecca, as the Hindu Rajput kings gave free passage as a form of tribute to their Moghul overlords. In the early nineteenth century, the port was a significant node within Indian Ocean and hinterland trade networks, Mandvi had a quayside slave market and regular Arab trading partners. Throughout the nineteenth and early half of the twentieth century, it was the port of embarkation for migrants destined for Bombay, East Africa, Zanzibar and Muscat. The resulting population is heterogeneous, claiming to be descended from mercenaries, slaves, traders, saints and warriors, including the armies of Alexander the Great. Consequently, none of the Muslims in Mandvi claim to be autochthonous; their origins, in a broad westerly

sweep, range from mainland Gujarat, Rajasthan, Sindh, and Punjab, to Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, 'Arabia' and 'Africa'.

For the sizable Muslim population of these settlements contemporary social order is primarily based on the strength of such origin claims to other antique lands and the racialised and cultural qualities they connote. Social hierarchy and community and individual prestige, although fiercely contested, are largely governed by an ordering of spaces and places that surround the Indian Ocean. Many Muslims here have castes, or at least forms of social organisation that closely resemble castes, but they call them *jamats*. The internal organisation of *jamats* is lineage based, lineages being hierarchically ordered within an encompassing *jamat*. Hierarchy takes many forms and is abundant. There is nothing particularly egalitarian here either inside or outside the mosque. Hierarchy is determined by the confluence of traditional status within the history of Islam, occupation, ethnic history, racialised concepts of purity and so forth. Through each caste run segmentary lineages, known as *ataks*, or *biraderis*. Fathers and sons form these lineages, and continue the names and the associations they commonly evoke.

Looking towards the Arabian peninsula from western India, as I do here, a large part of the local ethno-history of Islam is presented as a form of genealogy, of both 'biological' and elected (nominated or chosen) kinds. The travels, settlements and acts of Sufis, warriors and diplomats throughout the Indian Ocean are drawn upon to make genealogical histories for the local population: a society of mythographers. This 'history' is conveyed in a local idiom as well a colonial mode in which etymology and the rise and fall of empires plays a role. The travels of the descendents of the Prophet, his Companions and in turn their notable ancestors live on in the genealogical imagination.

In the eyes of my friends and informants, genealogy offers a language to describe both their own history and the theoretical organisation of kin – theory against which there is considerable deviation in practice (a point also effectively made by Dresch 1986 for other contexts). However, genealogy is not simply however a matter of registering successive instances of patri-lineal descent from a putative ancestor or place of repute. Genealogy often plays some role in determining who one marries, what one could inherit, where one lives, and who one might invite on pilgrimage. Although, as I have suggested, predominantly ordered on the basis of men, genealogy also commonly incorporates instances of feud, fiat, illegitimacy and other similarly normal things. Unlike many other groups in western India, those who inform this piece do not employ professional genealogists; rather, their reckoning is informal, and, as has been noted often elsewhere (Dresch 1989; Peters 1960), is generally limited to five or so generations.

My friends and informants in western India initially presented the logic of their social organisation to me in an exceedingly formalised manner, almost structural and certainly functionalist. One fellow, educated in school until the age of six, drew me a diagram of his descent group much as one might find in an anthropology textbook from an era when such things were included in such books. Their descriptions typically fixed people and their relations to one another, as they cast as concrete the structure and substance of relationships. As we will see however, the

sense of structure and permanence was a function of the moment, a snapshot of my own ethnographic presence.

When asked, many of my informants suggested that bodies carry various combinations of a finite range of the substances which make humans human. These substances can be transmitted diachronically (through lineages) through sexual reproduction and, to a lesser degree, synchronically through daily contact with other people and the substances of daily life. Both kinds of transmission influence an individual's propensity for particular kinds of profession and speech, as well as their perceptions, desires, postures and so forth. These substances continually act against individuals and members of other groups and transform the individual and, in a more general sense, the caste body. At the transcendental level, all combinations make up a continuous set of graded-ranked beings ranging from the divine through the human to the immoral and the inanimate. In this scheme, the body is regarded as the conjunction of 'reproduction' (as physiology) and 'morality' (as part of the physiological condition). The inherited substance of patri-lines broadly defines what you look like and how you are able to behave. The substances of genealogy are derived in the first order from the sacred history, geography and bodies of Islam; in the second order, they are derived from the historical and geographical content of the local landscape. In a strong sense, this is the ethnoscience of patriarchy.

The mechanisms of these relationships are explained in an explicitly Muslim idiom, rather than a language more generic to South Asia. People are formed from a soul (*ruh*) constituted out of two hierarchically ordered elements: a lower level (*nafs*) which dictates desires, potential for violence, and other base instincts, and a higher level (*aql*) which determines intellectual, spiritual, and moral faculties. Various combinations of these elements act against each other to form human mind and body actions. More generally, the distribution of these elements determines the attributes of the caste body and the distribution of castes in a loosely ranked hierarchy within the encompassing division between merchants and labourers.

Broadly, and rather crudely speaking, high-ranking scholastic and mercantile Muslims are seen as having a greater proportion of *aql* and a propensity toward *ilm* as discrimination, discernment, commerce, and the Prophetic ideals finds ultimate expression in the *barakat* (spiritual efficacy and abundance) of local saints. Conversely, those who are *nafs*-heavy, so to speak, are seen as having a propensity toward *maarifa* and base appetites, personal indulgence, and physical labour. Those with the highest concentrations of *nafs* are considered to be 'hot', while those laden with *aql* are considered to be 'cool'. Cool qualities are much harder to come by than the hot counterparts and therefore the lives of humans are ideally organised to perpetuate and preserve cool/pure essences. Purity of the soul is thought to be ensured by endogamous marriages of various kinds which preserve the qualities of putative ancestors of repute. Conversely, exogamy (which among my informants is rare) of varying degrees is seen as enlivening the base elements of the soul.

We might think of this scheme of the person as a pure ideology (as Jonathan Parry (1994) has done in other contexts) because it sustains and reinforces the static

order of social hierarchy. All of my early fieldwork in Gujarat was conducted in the interval when my friend's fathers were alive and father and son lived together. There certainly appeared to be substance to the idea that a lineage had a distinct and enduring character back then. The lineage appeared in father and son interaction and in their descriptions as a relatively static social order, and as an ideology that denied the louring chaos of unregulated human life. The father and his son were able describe others and locate themselves in relation to others in terms of lineages, schisms and segments. Each lineage had a name, typically that of a notable ancestor, profession, village, region or ethnic group. The lives and habits of the fathers and sons I knew gave their lineage a distinct identity and style, associated with particular places, forms of dress, language, physical appearance, patterns of residence, diet, philanthropic activity and so forth.

After my doctoral research I have returned to Gujarat often. At first, what I saw was a gentle erosion of the certainties I had earlier given to the ethno-science of lineages. More recently, however, these certainties have disappeared with something of a rush – not because I was wrong earlier in any simple sense but because I now see other things. To give an illustrative example, two sons (brothers to each other lest we forget) had fallen out at the time of their father's death. As a consequence, they had separated names, property and day-to-day interests; there was, in other words, a tangible segmentation which subsequently had consequences for who their own sons and daughters could marry. I was able to map this division out, and, at the time, it seemed clear and unambiguous. However, the diagram I drew in 1997 is now the equivalent of a sepia photograph in which the subjects are dressed in long forgotten costumes. The moment of segmentation I recorded then has simply disappeared and the sons of the two feuding patriarchs, one of whom is dead and the other nearly so, have arranged themselves in a host of ways that make nonsense of the logic inherent to the diagram I had drawn. Today, the moment of feud – which, in my ethnographic present, resulted in physical and emotional segmentation – plays no role in their structural or functionalist accounts of their current or past conditions. As I discuss in the following section, the certainty of the relationship gives way and changes with the passing of time.

Fathers and Sons in Time

In the Mediterranean literature, Murphy (1983) has argued that honor and masculinity lead to disputes between fathers and sons. The tension of this cultural conundrum, what we might think of as the desire for attachment and the impossibility of attachment, leads to socially sanctioned patterns of behavior through which sons and fathers avoid each other; it also leads to a clear preference for uxorilocal residence. Without wishing to anticipate my own conclusion in full, when we look at fathers and sons in time, then the spirit or ideology of patriarchy engenders two clear tensions in the social lives of my informants, and these have consequences for the ways in which we can think about inter-generational

transmission. The first is between individual interest and collective action: a son aspires to be a father, while having to remain subservient to his own father for the collective good. The second tension is generated by the difference of behaviours called for within a patriarchal father-son relationship and outside it. Inside, there is decorum and subservience on the part of the son; outside, the son must behave competitively and oppressively to others in order to thrive in a competitive and acutely hierarchical society.

In my approach to these matters, I have been particularly influenced by John Borneman who has written about the death of fathers as an anthropological way of thinking about the end of political regimes (2004) and about father-son entanglements in Syria (Borneman 2007). Also influential has been Katherine Pratt Ewing (1997) who has written on saints and disciples with a similarly Lacanian lens trained on Lahore, Pakistan. Michael Meeker (1989) has evocatively described the first tension outlined above in relation to the politics of cattle keeping in East Africa. Abdellah Hammoudi (1997) has provocatively described the second as the cultural foundation of Moroccan authoritarianism. I return to their contributions at the end, but particularly to that of Hammoudi.[1]

Michael Gilsenan (1996), writing about Lebanon, describes narratives of different styles for different orders of a patriarchy, finding ambiguity and intermittency as the structuring forces, rather than concrete, in the patriarchal narratives of the young. In his analysis, fathers are destabilising figures, and the spirit of patriarchy is open to constant question. The continuing power of fathers places sons in the permanently false position as liars, as they make claims on their ancestors for status and honour. My ethnography varies from Gilsenan's only to the degree that the narratives of patriarchy in western India are largely, as I have already suggested, cast in the concrete, using a structural and functionalist trope and the pervasive logic of genealogy, to impose order on the chaotic. Ambiguity and intermittency only surface clearly through longer-term anthropological observation and increased intimacy and not typically in the self-representation of my friends and informants (this might also be the case in Gilsenan's work but we are not explicitly told so).

This second ethnographic section of this chapter turns to focus on three men and their changing relationships with their fathers. In 1997, one of them, who I will call Hameed, had a father and one son, he also had a wife and a daughter; the second and third, Rasheed and Zap, respectively, had fathers but no sons or wives. Time has taken all three fathers away. Hameed now has three sons, two daughters, and a wife, and after a decade of travel has settled in the house where he was born; five children is enough, he has said. Rasheed is now married, the father of two sons, and moved from Gujarat to Bombay. Zap has a wife, and after nearly 10 years of moving, is also back to the exact place where his life began.

[1] It is perhaps worth pointing out that most of the scholars quoted in this chapter work in regions other than South Asia. With few exceptions, there has been little research of this nature conducted in Muslim contexts in South Asia. One of the secondary, but unelaborated, aims of this chapter is to engage with other regional traditions in anthropology, dragging ideas from across the western Indian Ocean and allowing them to rub against the South Asian ethnography.

All three are Hanafi Sunni Muslims, who grew up on the coast of Gujarat with the traditions of the sea set on their brows, albeit in different ways. Hameed's family build, own and sail wooden cargo ships in the Indian Ocean. Rasheed started life as an apprentice sailor, but has gone on to do other sea-related things further afield. Zap's family are Saiyeds, *pirs*, or saints, and attend to the religious and spiritual needs of many local Muslims, many of whom are seafarers.

Of the three, Hameed is the wealthiest and most politically influential. In the 1990s, his family owned two ships, one of which subsequently sunk, uninsured, due to negligence of an undisciplined crew (I was never sure if this was due to unruly sons betraying a patriarchal captain, or a weak captain disinheriting his crew, an analogy which gains significance later). In the 1990s, Rasheed was a sailor on the dhows. He worked briefly for Hameed's family in the mid-1990s, although I am unaware of any relationship between them today. The three men are now all around 40 years old and each is relatively successful in their own terms.

Hameed

When Hameed was young, his father captained a ship and was away much of the year. The rhythms of the sailing season structured Hameed's life, its breaks and absences were formative in his most intimate relationships. He can recall the silence in his house, the sadness of his mother, as the fleet left port after the last monsoon squalls had quietened, then, he would feel a fleeting sense of liberation, and a lighter heart, at the departure of his violent and unforgiving father. Then, 9 months later, when the ships returned there were floods of gifts, tears and arguments. His father prospered, he smuggled, and, in the face of some quite violent local conflict, decided to send Hameed to a faraway English language boarding school.

In the holidays, Hameed returned home to work in the shipyards. In his teens, he accompanied his father's ships to Dubai, more as a holiday than as a working passage. Then, Hameed wanted desperately to be part of the shipping world, to experience the highs and lows of adventure on the high seas and life in foreign ports. He did not want to be schooled in Latin verbs and the bible. The sailors seemed exuberant about life. Hameed felt envy of the friendships they formed, and felt excluded from the fraternity. He also resented their intimate and effective relations with his own father. He has said that it seemed easier for others to get close to his father through work than it was for himself, in any circumstance. At home, he compensated for the feeling of exclusion by working hard and by learning to swear alacrity and verve, and behaving like a seafarer. He got eventually got into trouble and his father sent him to a local healer, who, among other things, bled the malevolence from him by repeatedly gashing his chest with a razorblade.

By the mid-1990s, the relationship between them had settled into a routine, although odd gaps were occasionally visible between an eminent, illiterate and violent father and between an educated and dutiful son. The sense of duty was

perhaps interwoven with love, but cemented by the wisdom that without his father Hameed would literally have nothing; he could only grown in his father's shadow. They oversaw work in the shipyards, the father, along with other fathers, spending most of his days in a small shelter beside the yards, moving occasionally to inspect and intimidate. Hameed's father in particular moved through the shipyards with a cloud of sons and clients around him; he was an important man. His son, along with other sons, remained mostly outside.

Their public relationship in this setting was ritualistic, the son not speaking to his father casually, and when he did so with an almost formulaic respect; the father only issuing the son with rhetorical statements, orders, and reprimands; but occasionally, also, warmth and guidance; the relationship was a performance – about appropriate language and posturing – at which they became conspicuously adept. I knew, for example, Hameed then as a heavy smoker, but he never lit up or discussed cigarettes in the presence of his father. Not simply because he was afraid to share the secret or weakness of his addiction, but because the idea of taking pleasure or becoming intoxicated before a father was inappropriate. He made his workforce partake and understand this division of himself as they would alert him if his father was lumbering down the path so he could dispose of the evidence in time.

Hameed's father retired from making long sea voyages and the captaincy of the vessel fell to Hameed's elder brother, a man with the stature and temperament of an ox. By now, Hameed had finished his schooling and had successfully dropped out of college in Bombay. For around 5 years, Hameed moved restlessly between apartments and business in Bombay, Dubai and Mandvi. He was always on the move, always appearing busy. Hameed's father controlled the money, and entered into collective enterprises with other senior men, but Hameed often appeared by association to be wealthy and he was introduced to a fashionable and affluent set, on the fringes of both the Bombay film industry and international organised crime. He would hop on and off ships and planes, and often drive the 16 h from Mandvi to Bombay without warning and on the flimsiest of pretexts. I would often turn up to meet him at a prearranged time only to be told he had gone here or there and would be back in a few days or weeks.

While it is possible that Hameed disguised the real reasons for his manic travel, I think he travelled largely for the sake of it, manufacturing excuses in order to be mobile, to escape the weight and proximity of the relationship with his father. His father had very clear ideas about how things were to be done. Hameed often disagreed but never found a way to change his father's mind and the crafted performance of their relationship in the shipyards crumbled, at least for a while.

Gradually, after his father retired altogether from the business, Hameed's relationship with his father began to ease. He began to find legitimacy in his father's eyes, accompanying him on local political missions, and establishing a shared vocabulary of trust. They were often seen together in public, and if his father was overseeing work in the shipyards, Hameed was certain to be close by, taking over the supervisory role when his father retired for a long nap in the afternoon. He gave up his manic trips, not overnight but quite rapidly. It was then his elder seadog brother who felt alienated and jealous and eventually moved his family into a separate house in the

same village. Now, when I visit Mandvi unannounced, most unlike the old days, Hameed is the only one of my close friends likely to be at home.

Over the years we have slowly become friends. At first, he was sceptical about my motives as a researcher, and I was perturbed by his occasional threats of violence when he felt my questions too demanding. I had known him for a year before he invited me into his house, which overlooked the shipyard where we both passed many of our days. He invited me for a meal at a restaurant after I had known him for about 5 years. We also met socially in Mumbai twice in the same year. In the seventh year after our initial encounter, he introduced me to his mother in the shadowy cool of the courtyard at the centre of his enormous house, which he shared with an extended family. In all of these years of increasing intimacy outside the confines of a doctoral-length spell of fieldwork, I never met Hameed's wife, she lived secluded from strange men; this was his father's lore.

Between my visits in 2004 and 2006, Hameed's father died. In their house, it felt, quite literally, as if some great pressure had been released (there was grief too), the place had been decorated, new gardens and rooms had appeared, and I was able to meet many of the women I had only infrequently heard about over the last decade as they moved around inside the house freely. Outside, in the shipyards, we sat in the hut, while Hameed's sons buzzed around outside ordering the work on the ship (at least when they were home from their elite English language boarding school). It felt, quite literally, and rather uncannily, as if Hameed had become his father.

Hameed now wears clothes and beard in the style of his father, a particular style and not just the style of men of a certain age. He treads the paths through the shipyards his father walked in the past, memories and movements have shifted his stoop and gait which now also resemble those of his father. Ten years ago or more, I could tell them (father and son) apart in the river estuary from a very long way off, they stood tall quite differently. Now, and without wishing to overstate the point, it is difficult to tell them apart even though they are separated by death.

Hameed has told me that in the past he had taken the behaviour of his father to be foolish. He often felt quietly ashamed of the illiterate and hot-headed man; he had heard some of the unflattering names commonly used to refer to his father in the bazaars and teashops of the town. Now, however, faced with the burden of some of the responsibilities his father had carried, Hameed is beginning to realise how utterly wise his father's populism was. It is of course too late for Hameed to tell the dead man in person, so he has turned to a spiritual intermediary in the hope the message can be passed on, his father's desire to communicate with the dead was something Hameed had always been most embarrassed about in his own father's religious practices.

In 2010, Hameed told me how he had financed the construction of a rest house for the afflicted at a shrine in the North of Gujarat, where his father had once been a patient. He told me about the good things his father had taught him. How, for example, it was good to listen to the young for they could bring new ideas into old lives. Of the many things Hameed's father might have been, a man of quiet wisdom with time for the youth he was not – not at least in the 2 years of my own ethnographic present, but, perhaps, he had become so in the years of his failing

health, and almost certainly has become so in death as Hameed has continued shape his life while in conversation with the father he knew.

Hameed's father, as with his father before, spent all of his life on or near the sea as a sailor, captain, smuggler and merchant. The only picture of him on display in patriarchal house today shows him seated rather uncomfortably on a horse, not like a sailor, but like a king.

Rasheed

I first met Rasheed in a teashop popular with sailors in 1997. He was wearing heavy gold jewellery, acrid bootlegged aftershave and counterfeit branded jeans. He walked with a swagger; he was, then, a man of brash confidence. Over the years, he has introduced me to many of his sailing friends and acquaintances. Their seaborne lives are transnational, the working season taking them to Mumbai, the ports of the Gulf States and Somalia; with the squalls of the annual monsoon, they return to Gujarat for 3-or-so months. Aside from adventure and opportunity, the life-style of prolonged but temporary absences brings with it profound problems of longing, belonging and questioned authority.

Of the three sets of patriarchal relations discussed in this chapter, Rasheed's experiences and problems are perhaps the most typical of Muslim men in the region. There is much there is to say about his life – his courage, resourcefulness, and extraordinary thoughts on adversity – but here I restrict the narrative to the consequences of his apprenticeship as a sailor and his acquisition of wealth for his relationship with his father.

On the streets of Mandvi, Rasheed seemed to expand and grow after a season at sea. He found comfort in familiar teashops, the slightly damp atmosphere of the town and the distinctive taste of the municipal water. He brokered deals, and relished involvement in both diplomatic and violent dispute resolution. At home, however, some of this confidence seemed to ebb from his manner. He had recently brought a house and had invited his mother, father and two younger brothers to move from the hovel in which he had grown up. From the outset, it was clear that it was Rasheed's house, arranged as he liked it, and filled with his possessions.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, this arrangement never worked well. His father was a daily wage labourer, and a poor man by any standards. Clearly undermined and unsettled by the unfamiliar confluence of influential money and devolving patriarchal authority, he never properly moved in. In the new house, his father often looked out of place and frequently seemed uncomfortable. He appeared as a lodger might within the routine intimacies of the household. He preferred to walk to the other side of town early in the morning to his old house for the toilet and bath.

Without wishing to speak ill of the dead, Rasheed's father was a hot-headed and frustrated man; he was also violent and spiteful in a way that I have found to be rare in Gujarat. He was big and strong, and clearly quite adept with his fists, perhaps practiced from sparring with Rasheed's mother's sharp tongue and

Rasheed's cheek. There was often tangible rage in their household, although mostly silent. There were jealousies in many directions, but despite the palpable animosity, I never heard Rasheed speak angrily to his father. As he often spoke rather roughly to many of those around him, including his mother, the level of will, duty, fear (or some combination thereof) in his controlled silences often impressed me.

In public, he behaved with respect when in his father's presence. In private however, behind the closed doors of *his* house, Rasheed would move rather carelessly around him, sometimes I saw him turn his back to his father, and I often saw him leave the room when his father was speaking. These small acts of defiance were not careless, but calculated and deliberate – a salient commentary on the state of a relationship to a third party such as myself. The distain of such actions was louder than words. There was also the palpable joy and satisfaction that Rasheed took in paying for his own lavish wedding at the expense of his father's pride.

Rasheed's father had sold his son for a bond on his labour when he was young. As improbable as it may sound, Rasheed did not know he had been sold until many years later. He had assumed, he said, it was his father's influence that had got him work in the shipyards, rather than his father's impotence. This discovery marked Rasheed deeply. In some ways, by doing this, the father had sold his son to another father, a theme to which I will return at the end.

Bond repaid, and now a young man, Rasheed worked for a decade for the same master. He transformed in the masculine world of seafaring, as he learned to appreciate the rigid patriarchal hierarchies of the crew. He earned respect and became one of his master's men, loyally lending, fighting and doing on his behalf.

At sea, sailors/sons – who are also often new fathers themselves – might fondly imagine family life at home. What they imagine is often romanticised, and they are often disappointed and frustrated by reality upon their return. Relations and realities of all kinds often sour, divorce is common, and sailors find the routines of their own households to rub against their seafaring grain. Sailors are caught in a powerful cycle of nostalgia and longing at sea and frustration and the need to escape when at home. Over the years, the repeated trauma of failed reintegration forces sailors into the company of non-kin equals (not always, but more often than not).

Another consequence of the demands of the seafaring life is to take the sailor into forms of society of his own making, outside the influences of their fathers. For sons younger than those discussed in this chapter, maritime society is, for most of the year, a fatherless society. The prolonged absence of a father, and the perennial difficulties associated with his return, inevitably affects the ways in which father-son relations are worked out in the later life. For the maturing sailor however, the demands and tugs of two patriarchal hierarchies – those of the house and the ship – are almost impossible to reconcile. For Rasheed, and the many hundreds of men like him, becoming a sailor is in many ways like having two fathers (*genitores* and *pater*) as his loyalties became enmeshed with those of his new patron; yet, the strange allure of their familial fathers nearly always reclaims sailing folk in the end.

Eventually, Rasheed jumped from his master's ship, quite literally. He has documented his subsequent travelling career in a number of scrapbooks of pictures

and collections of travel memorabilia. I am always moved by these collections, they reveal frailty and raw honesty. They tell of his early desire to escape, for a life at sea, full of ambition and vitality, cinema tickets from Bombay proudly mounted alongside pictures cut from foreign magazines of expensive cars and designer watches. Without wishing to speculate too wildly, there is something in the textual way these scrapbooks are presented that stands in stark opposition to the illiteracy, poverty and parochial aspirations of his father.

As Rasheed gained further experience at sea, he was able to earn increasingly large and regular salaries; he became a consumer, like those pictured in his earliest scrapbooks. He lost his virginity to a Russian prostitute in Dubai (it was a mark of considerable pride for him that she was a white woman); he developed a taste for whisky; he also learned how to transport goods into India without paying import duties. As the sailing seasons passed, Rasheed became wealthier, his status increasing exponentially with each return to Mandvi as he was able to bring more and more of his own constituency-building trade goods from the bazaars of Dubai and to start manufacturing his own webs of influence. Eventually, as we know, he had enough capital to buy a new house.

Later, when he started to work on oil supply vessels off the coast of the Emirates, he collected images of shopping malls and ships at anchor in Dubai, these he combined in collages with commercial prints of the famous Sufi shrine in Ajmer and various mosques and pilgrimage sites in Saudi Arabia. Later still, when he started agency work on supply vessels in the North Sea, he took pictures of supermarkets and the high street in the Scottish town of Aberdeen.

In the early years of our friendship, Rasheed married a woman of his own choosing, against the wishes of his parents. His choice was oddly conservative, a distant cousin from Bombay with a college degree (and therefore hypergamous in a sense). She came to live in Mandvi for a while, but did not or could not get along with Rasheed's parents. Rasheed and his wife moved to Bombay, and he went back to sea, stepping ashore again for a few months when his wife gave birth to their first son, and again for a long stretch when the second was born in 2004.

Subsequently, he has worked for an agency that takes decrepit ships from various parts of the world on their last voyage to their final resting places in the ship-breaking yards of Chittagong and Gujarat. The work is as hazardous as it is lucrative, and because of its distinctively shady nature the skeleton crew often spends many weeks waiting in odd hotels in odd parts of the world for their charge to be decommissioned. Rasheed recently showed me his album of 3 weeks in Rio and his self-authored English-Portuguese dictionary, which included the words hello, fine, rice, meat, condom, prostitute and the phrase 'can I kiss you'. He seems to have had a fine time in Brazil, finding many similarities between there and India, and taking some pleasure in the fact that one of the best-selling beers in that country is named Brahma, the same name as a Hindu god.

Our friendship moved from Gujarat to Mumbai. In the city, I have never heard him talk about his father, other than when I explicitly asked after him. Two years ago, my phone rang in London and a frail and thin voice in mourning said: 'Edward, my father is dead. A heart attack'. The father had died suddenly and

Rasheed was shocked. There was no longer even time for the fantasy of making the living relationship better. Rasheed was in a foreign port and could not make the necessary arrangements; he could not bring about the tidy end to the affairs of his father; he could not pray before his body, nor put him in the ground. These tasks are the duties of sons, duties Rasheed very much wished he had been able to perform.

More recently, however, and Rasheed would, I think, acknowledge this claim, there has also been a sense of elation and escape, as if some form of happiness has been given by the quick death and vanishing of his father. Unlike Hameed, Rasheed will not yet mimic the ways of his father, although he sees the shape and texture of his father's hands in his own. He is now talking of moving back to Gujarat.

Zap

Zap's family live in a shrine, amid the graves of their own genealogy. In the mid-1990s, an average day would bring a steady stream of visitors. They would come to pray in the modest mosque, to seek an audience with Zap's father or to ask with coconuts and incense things of the dead. As Saiyeds – putative descendents of the Prophet, and high-ranking as a consequence – their genealogy links them directly to the sacred geography and history of Islam. As descendants of the Abdul Kadir Jilani, a famous and venerated scholar and preacher of the eleventh century, they stake a particular claim in his propensity for knowledge and judicious reasoning which has been transmitted to them through genealogy.

Zap's father presided over the shrine with silent authority (things were not always quiet in the shrine because exorcism can be noisy). Within its precincts, I never heard his legitimacy questioned or his figure shown disrespect. He had a prodigious reputation and people came from afar to spend time in his shadows and to request advice. He held court in a covered area at the entrance to the shrine complex. There, Zap would wait on his orders, hand and foot. I never heard Zap either interrupt his father or initiate a conversation with someone else when his father was speaking. Zap was submissive, his own body acting out his master's wishes and words as he carried to and fro water, legal documents and religious cures. He was often dressed in long once-white robes, left unwashed for many weeks as a sign of his otherworldliness; he covered his head before his father, at least when there was an audience; he moved in the shrine with gentle confidence of pace and gesture which was almost calming of itself to observe. This was not a cowering submission purchased only with fists and slaps but the professionalised enactment of grace and decorum that had been years in refinement. Their relationship too was one of silent performativity.

Although true of both Hameed and Rasheed, in Zap's case, being a son before his father and a man when his father was absent led to remarkable differences in behaviour. With his father, there was the weight of genealogical history; daily life was about the transformation of sacred history into a public reputation. Without his father, Zap dressed and walked quite differently, jeans, upright and aggressive;

he would also talk for hours with insatiable curiosity. The tone of his voice sharpened, his words took on a critical and sometimes sarcastic edge; he also used different words, not just vulgar ones, away from his father, which allowed him to talk of business, music and sex – things that had no routine place in the public life of the shrine. He was sometimes sceptical of the claims made for the potency of his genealogy and for the elevated status of Saiyeds. In contrast, he talked of a life away from the shrine, living alone with a future wife, perhaps working as a computer programmer.

In 1998, or thereabouts, Zap's father died suddenly; purportedly in his 80s, he was buried in the shrine complex. Custodianship passed to Zap's eldest brother, who had a strong knowledge of the Quran and of jurisprudence, but who had yet to cultivate the charismatic authority and postures of his father. However, not long afterwards, he suffered head injuries in an unfortunate accident. At the time, Zap was studying commerce at a local college and it then fell to him to leave his studies and to take over the shrine.

He tentatively took on the role of advising visitors on moral and legal matters just as his father had done. In the past, the wishes of supplicants represented by coconuts, incense and charms littered the graves. Zap slowly banned such practices, considering them to be superstitious. He erected signs in the shrine instructing people how to behave properly. As weeks and then months passed, the routines of the shrine became quite literally his routines: he ate, rested and offered counsel in its shadows. The atmosphere and language in the shrine began to change as he gradually put into practice his version of morality and correct Islamic practice; this was his first rebellion, alongside which, in his private living quarters there was a great investment in technology and decoration. The spartan conditions of his father's dominions were now filled with colour, electrical things and furniture.

Despite his efforts however, visitors and revenues began to diminish. Zap found running the shrine stressful, he was seemingly not very good at it – or perhaps his new regime did not chime well with the tastes of clients inherited from his father – either way, he lost weight, hair and respect. As the months passed, the behaviour of his eldest brother grew erratic as his head injury began to heal. In what Zap saw as a deranged state, his brother announced plans for Zap's marriage to a Hyderabadi cousin. After the weeks of argument, Zap ran away to Dubai, this was his second rebellion.

He made the journey to Dubai on a local ship, an identity card given to him by a ship owner who had been a client of his fathers. He remembers the 6 days at sea with utter fondness, the larking, sleeping under the stars with the engine throbbing beneath him against the swell of the waves, the abundance of fish to eat, and the loud Bollywood songs played loudly to huge skies. He had no responsibility or work onboard and left the vessel in port when loading got underway. He felt a freedom from the earth he had never imagined possible and still laughs loudly when he recalls taking his sea legs to land for the first time and found it hard to walk.

As I got to know him more intimately in the later years of our friendship, it became clear that he had dreamed for years of going overseas to work. His father

had however forbidden him on the ground that wage labour was undignified and his absence would reflect badly on the local standing of the family. In the aftermath of his father's death however, international migration became a way out of a marriage he did not want, a means of escaping the shrine and avoiding conflict with his brother as they struggled to establish the new norms of patriarchal authority during uncertain times.

In Dubai, Zap's dreams turned sour, and he lasted only a few weeks before returning home. According to him, it was too hot in the Emirates and his pay too low for his skills. I suspect he was treated badly and something unpleasant happened to him. Some years later, with the protection of hindsight, he recalled how he had sobbed on the phone to his sister, he felt homesick to the bone. His father had been taken away from him by God and now his remaining family had been taken away from him by desires for money, and what he had thought to be freedom. He had always wanted to escape, but now his father had gone there seemed, quite literally, little to escape from. But, he said, he had had to escape to know this.

Today, Zap continues to live in the shrine and to manage the property of the estate. However, his major pastime is now his own business, through which he has distanced himself from the manipulation of charisma in the shrine. This is the third and most consequential of his rebellions because unlike the first two contraventions of his late father's rule, the third is a rejection of the charisma of genealogy and thus the foundation of his own social status and the spiritual economy of the shrine. Unlike, Rasheed and Hameed, Zap does not yet have sons of his own, despite investment in fertility treatment, if this treatment is successful he may well retreat from his latest rebellious position.

The Spirit of Patriarchy and the Gift of Death

There is abundant anthropological literature on the ritual complexes which mark the passage from infancy to childhood, childhood to adolescence and adolescence to adulthood. These rituals are often marked by formal rites of dislocation, disassociation and symbolic or real rupture. In situation described in this chapter, in advance of the death of the patriarch there is an additional slow rite of passage, which coincides roughly with the period before sons become fathers, and fathers die. In this nameless ritual, fathers and sons separate. They have at their disposal the entire Indian Ocean to ensure this separation to such striking and deliberate effect.

In the three cases I have discussed there are obvious differences: Hammed left before his father's death and now mourns him through the re-enactment of his father's life with his own; Rasheed also left before his father's death and is now beginning to see it is possible to return now that his father is no more; Zap wanted to leave before his father died but was forbidden to do so, he eventually left in the wake of his father's death, only to discover that the main point of escaping no longer held him with the same weight. In the first two instances, we might plausibly

see the separation as a rehearsal for the real imminent death, or, alternatively, as a way for sons to adventure before they take over the sedentary responsibilities of patriarchy. While I would not entirely discount either possibility, there remains more to be said about the mechanisms of patriarchy, as a lived relation, which will shed further light on this profound, yet oddly nameless, rite of passage seen in the lives of all three men.

The ethnographic material presented here suggests that relations between fathers and sons exist as part of the broader world of big-manship and patronage politics. These are relationships premised on the broad cultural importance and persistence of structural inequality and the gradation of hierarchy. The father ideally attempts to retain a monopoly on strategic decision-making and arbitration, made possible, perhaps, by an ever present threat of violence and control of resources; this monopoly remained intact in Rasheed's case despite the sale of his labour. The master in the shipyard or at sea, or in a shrine, is also surrounded by an entourage of disciples, sons of sorts, who cannot achieve success without some kind of authorisation which only he can give.

In this maritime and Muslim society there is the promotion of a particular kind of patriarchal spirit (a galactic polity) which makes notables or big men. A notable begins to emerge only when he has obtained the agreement of higher masters after visiting regularly, exchanging favours, giving evidence of good and loyal services, as well as devotion and obedience. In a sense, the processual structure of such a relationship gradually diminishes the gap between pure master and impure servant. The servant or son is forced to reflect on the perspective of the master in order to prove loyalty to this perspective, in the process he learns to see his own world from his master's point of view. However, as we have seen, the son can never become the father while the former lives and is in good health, and a fully self-confident succession is only possible when the master dies or ails. These requirements inevitably force sons and disciples into positions of prolonged ritualised and rhetorical submission.

Submission, as I have also touched upon, is imbued with particular ethical, linguistic, aesthetic values (performances often referred to *adab* or *adat* in the literature, Metcalf 1984). Through oppression, ways of being are apprehended, modes of just talk and thinking with a clean heart are repeated and internalised, and, gradually, communities of skilled and faithful sons come into being. As all three of my examples show, and despite deep animosity, the father, in a sense, is the figure of holiness and legitimacy. However, at the same time, the father is a source of violence and oppression in the eyes of the son. The father is able to move between these positions without recourse to rituals of transition, nor however, does he appear to experience contradiction. The son too, it follows, experiences the press of holiness along with violence, and legitimacy along with oppression. It also then follows perhaps that the connections between fatherhood and sovereignty – such as those evoked so poignantly by the picture of Hameed's father astride a horse – resonate with this conclusion.

In Hammoudi's (1997) analysis of authoritarianism in Morocco, father-son, master-disciple, and authoritarian regime-governed relationships are premised on the same diagram of patriarchal power. While this model might over-state the

structural equivalence of the three orders, as a heuristic device there is something enduring and important here which finds its way through the literature from Ibn Khaldun to Weber and his disciples. For instance, in Trevor Marchand's (2001) comparison of the orders of apprenticeship and Sufism, which builds on these scholarly traditions, craft apprenticeship, master-disciple relations and father-son relationships are also cut from remarkably similar cloth.

At the beginning of my research in western India, the fathers of Hameed, Rasheed and Zap were alive and well. Hameed also had ships, apprentice shipbuilders and crew; Rasheed was becoming an apprentice shipbuilder in order to become a sailor; Zap lived in a shrine in which his father entertained spiritual disciples of his own. In this world, the domains of religion, apprenticeship and politics are empirically and intrinsically linked. I have discussed these connections with Zap who recalled (but could not provide titles) hagiographical literature in which the disciple must consider his master as his father, and put the obedience he owes to the former over that which he owes the latter. When the initiation has been completed, disciple becomes master, and the two can no longer cohabit.

As with Hammoudi's analysis then, among coastal Muslims of western India there is little difference (but there are differences, see Simpson 2006b) between the ways a disciple relates to his master and a son relates to his father: the hierarchical patriarchal diagram prevails. These kinds of relationships entail similar kinds of submission, interspersed with outbreaks of disobedience, which, may, in turn, lead to heart rendering separation or violence. In these sets of relationships there are double standards and two different kinds of behaviour expected, especially in the case of the oppressed. The son has to be agreeable and modest in the presence of the father or master, while, at the same time, appearing virile and domineering in relation to others outside his father's sight. So, in a sense, religious and familial ethics appear as replicas of one another, each reinforces the other, and both require the qualities which define individual will and noble ambition.

In the longer-view, in western India the spirit of patriarchy plays itself out as sons become fathers, fathers become retiring grandfathers and then die. These overlapping transitions shift the structures of responsibility and power within domestic groups. They also alter the horizons of experience and depth of responsibility for those that survive. Individual transitions in the role and status caused by the death of others influence what is known, what can be known about the world, and transform how the living think and act in relation to one another. Death, in particular, changes the relationships between the living – not only broadening contemplative horizons, but by altering the social and imaginative structures of reciprocity and power. Connections between living people are actively transformed through the deaths of others. Living people may have public thoughts it was not possible to have before, say, when the patriarch was alive. The living might, for instance, appear to have changed their minds about things in quite dramatic ways following a patriarchal death. Hameed appeared to spear-head a revolution against the regimes of female seclusion in the wake of his father's death. He did not of course suddenly change his mind about the sense of *purdah*, but once the patriarch,

his father, was dead the culture of the house was his to influence in negotiation with its other occupants.

When put together, the two main sections of this chapter suggest that patriarchy – here, primarily, depicted as relations between fathers and sons – can be productively seen as a lived relation, as well as an abstract and ideological one, which exists in the present, and is given form by the nature and substance, as well as the theory, of relations between and across generations. In terms of the abstraction, there is a standard narrative to explain patriarchy in this context. My informants initially gave me the words of this narrative and gave evidence of their own lives the fixity and surety of the influence of inherited substance of the qualities of their patriline. In this, they were quintessentially structural and functionalist. When viewed over a period of time exceeding a doctoral research visit however, the limits of this standard narrative become clearer as one sees relationships transform and realises just how influential death is on the living.

As paradoxical as it may sound, death appears to play a greater role than birth in the way patriarchal relations are worked out. In the normal run of things, a son may have many sons but only one father. While all men die, a son's father has never died before, the event and its consequences are therefore unique and dramatic. The birth of sons is relatively commonplace, it follows that sons are relatively easy to come by. Fathers, in contrast, are scarce and once lost are impossible to come by again. The violence and aggressive patriarch is – at least in the eyes of the son – a limited good in the strictest sense. One can make mistakes with sons and not lose all because there might always be other sons to take their place, but the same carelessness cannot be shown with fathers. In an acutely hierarchical society, this state of affairs places sons in a position of perpetual vulnerability, and thus in such as condition of great dependence.

Seen in this light, from the son's perspective, the modesty and respect that are put to the service of a irreplaceable father are quite different to those qualities he must adopt in order to appear virile and successful in the eyes of a expandable mass of humanity. This contradiction – a life of doubled standards – as we have seen, forces every individual to encase within himself two modes of being (and there may well be others), which are in a permanent and difficult tension. At home, this is manifest in realms inside and outside the father's influence, and, in a broader sense, by leaving the father and going to sea (home and away). Here, Hameed – smoker in his own masculine world, non-smoker in the world of son-hood – is a particularly effective instance which speaks for many other less tangible ones.

What I have been struck by over the years is what happens to the second self of the son, first when the son leaves home for self-willed exile, and then secondly, when the father dies: in each instance that self grows. The second self, which I see have seen so clearly mature in the lives of my three friends, is kept under pressure and (more or less) sublimated, at home, but articulated first at sea or in travel, and arises forcefully as soon as separation from the master or the father is accomplished. The death of the father gives rise to the full expression of that self. The birth of that self however is accompanied by the pain and pleasure of the death of one's one and only father. The liberation of the self in this version of patriarchal society is not a matter of personal growth honed on voyages of discovery, but can only under

normal circumstances be born of death. The patriarch is a man marked by death, a gift he will certainly pass to his own sons.

Afterword

It is worth pointing to one of the peculiarities of the moment in which my three friends found themselves fatherless. All three are the second sons of their fathers, but all three have inherited the patriarchy, rather than the first-born sons. In each case, the eldest son was set up to follow in the ways of his father, Rasheed's brother Sukhet, like many of his relatives, become a baker; Zap's brother was to follow the charisma of father into the shrine, a plan disrupted by injury; Hameed's elder brother followed in the wake of his father onto the ships. In contrast, and for varying reasons, all three second sons received a formal education (less so in Rasheed's case, although he can now write in three languages). Most obviously, their literacy and confidence have allowed them to engage with the economy and opportunities of neo-liberal India. They have deposed their brothers, re-defined the attributes of their genealogy, and converted dutiful fear and loathing into confident and warm memories of the patriarch. They took over the burden of patriarchy because they were best equipped to do so. The traditions of genealogy and lineage made way for those who could best maximise profit, make political gains, and negotiate with the realities of a rapidly changing country. These particular conditions notwithstanding, the marginalisation of the first born son from his father's estate, and the succession of the second son to the title, is, however, I suspect, far more common than the anthropological literature currently indicates.

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Chapter 4
On the Skills to Navigate the World, and Religion, for Coastal Muslims in Kenya

Kai Kresse

Introduction

Recently, the point that 'there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam' has been pushed by my colleague Samuli Schielke (2010: 2). He argues that an over-emphatic focus on Islam and religious concerns in recent research on the Muslim world has obstructed more and more the view to understand adequately the complete scope of dimensions that shape people's lives in their specific and complex realities as human beings. Aiming at such a grasp of an overall picture, however, should remain our goal as anthropologists. I share this basic concern. However, I think the problem raised is not inherent in the idea of an 'anthropology of Islam' as such (following the take of Asad 1986), leading to a sub-field of anthropology that pursues a legitimate research interest in investigating particularly those forms and aspects of social action that Muslim actors themselves qualify as linked to Islam, as a normative frame of reference that can, and often does, provide orientation (and motivation) for their behaviour. Rather, the problem occurs when researchers do not concern themselves with the contextualization and interrelation of Islam to other possible and applicable frames of reference that also play significant roles in people's decision-making and conduct in everyday life. This may then result in the neglect of other dimensions of people's realities that are part of – and often a much larger part of – the complex lives that people live. Anthropology has to be able to reckon with the multi-layered and diverse settings of daily lives that people engage in, and to acknowledge the fact that their conduct and engagement to a large proportion may not be dominated – or even significantly shaped – by reference to religion. Thus the view on religion, and Islam in particular, should not obstruct

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_4,

or reduce our perspective on people who happen to be Muslims in their full scope and capacity as human beings. Rather, it should help us tease out a more complex and nuanced perspective on the variety of contexts that they are engaged in.

Along similar lines, Benjamin Soares and others (Otayek and Soares 2007; Soares and Osella 2010) have recently made a case for a revised approach to the anthropological study of Islam – more precisely, the study of politics in Muslim contexts. They suggest the French term *Islam mondaine*, rendered as 'Islam in the present world' (2010: 11; following Otayek and Soares 2007: 17), as indicative of such a perspective. The authors elaborate that the term '*Islam mondaine* does not privilege Islam over anything else, emphasizing instead *the actual world* in which Muslims find themselves', and they argue that employing it helps to avoid 'narrowly instrumentalist analyses of the relation between Islam and politics' as well as reductionist approaches casting 'the politics of Muslims to an epiphenomenon of Islam or the micropolitics of ethical self-fashioning' (Soares and Osella 2010: 12; my emphasis). Now, while I go along with this argument generally, I wonder if 'Islam in the present world' is indeed such a useful qualification, both of Islam and of the point made here about studying it, given that the expression refers quite simply to the existence of Islam in the contemporary world (and the contextual multitude of interpretations this entails). Perhaps the ambivalence of *Islam mondaine* is better captured by the English term 'worldly Islam', as indicating both the presence of Islam in the contemporary social world as well as a common 'worldly' orientation of Muslim actors in their everyday scenarios (as opposed to an ostensively 'religious' or 'pious' one). Thus the benefit of using *Islam mondaine* or 'worldly Islam' lies in noting a kind of contextual presence of religion in the background of people's everyday life, one that accompanies the worldly interests and experiences of people who happen to be Muslims. This goes along with anthropology's ethnographic mission, to capture the specific, complex, and diverse 'worldly' contexts in which the people whom we study live – a disciplinary goal also emphasised by Michael Jackson who dwells on this term, 'worldly', while advocating a phenomenological approach (1996). It is along these lines of concern for ethnographic adequacy, which is indeed a concern raised by Schielke, Soares and others too, that I will keep this term in play for the purposes of this essay, to be taken up again in the conclusion.

My discussion here, of a few examples of individual Muslims from the Swahili coast during the colonial and postcolonial periods, relates to these considerations and picks up on different connotations of the term 'world'. The link between my figures for discussion lies in their worldly engagement as Muslims, a practically oriented concern with social and political issues of their respective life-worlds. The illustrations below remain rather brief and sketchy, but they may illustrate the point that Islamic discourse and Muslim practice as performed by engaged individuals in the Swahili context are connected to (and also directed at) the 'world' in two significant ways: firstly the more immediate social world around them, and secondly the wider global world to which, on various levels, social connections have existed for a very long time, through networks of trade, kinship, and religion. For the purposes of this article I take it that the social engagement of these Muslims might rightfully be qualified as following such a sense of mundane or indeed 'worldly

Islam'. This expression emphasises people's concern with worldly matters, stating that Muslims' engagement within their life-worlds and the wider world in mind at the same time, is indeed not *apart* from Islam but *a part* of it.

This resonates with the common Swahili expression *dini na dunia*, religion and the world, which seems to separate and at the same time combine religious and worldly matters as two distinct spheres of social engagement. While the phrase marks the two as different from each other, it also links them up together, and can be used to convey that proper (religiously informed) learning and understanding provides guidance to follow the right way in Islam as well as in social life – as, for instance, in the sub-title of an educational pamphlet discussed further below (Mazrui 1955).

Below I argue that the particular pool of knowledge, experience and skill from which individual Swahili Muslims can draw as a resource for their actions is shaped and accentuated through their (somewhat disadvantaged) positionality on the margins of *umma* and state. Yet this exposure to the long-ongoing experience of dominance from external forces that set the parameters for the political and religious community from the outside, can lead to patience and endurance – instead of just inactivity and frustration (a sense of which is prominent within the community) – as sources of know-how, resilience and strength that can be drawn from in order to tackle the practical obstacles and pressures that Muslims are facing as individuals and as community in a wider framework. However, we should also keep in mind that those people who manage to develop and cultivate such qualities as creative resources under adverse circumstances are exceptional in comparison to ordinary coastal Muslims on the whole. Their knowledge, resilience and social engagement is only representative for the Swahili Muslim context insofar as a particular set of social and historical constellations provides individuals the opportunity to develop themselves as such personalities who then take it upon themselves to speak up for the coastal Muslim community, or address and mediate certain matters on their behalf. Thus they illustrate a certain potential of social engagement and handling of affairs that is specific to the region and the (awkward) positionality of coastal Muslims within it and within a wider socio-historical context, at different historical points of time.

The emphasis and direction of what is illustrated below also differs in each case: the first example of Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui (d. 1947), a distinguished Islamic scholar, social reformer, and community leader, illustrates a strong self-critical perspective on the community that points to a disciplinary and educational path providing a possible way out of social difficulties. The second example, sketching out the pathway of the biography and career of another prominent Swahili Muslim intellectual, Sayyid Omar Abdalla (d. 1988), as teacher, administrator and mediator in the services of the colonial government, illustrates elements of flexibility, open-mindedness, adaptability and the ability to mediate between (specific and diverse) colonial, regional Muslim and personal interests. And the third example, of two younger men hosting a radio programme on a recently established Islamic radio station, illustrates how engaged and (self-)educated laymen of the younger generation can, through effort, discipline, and effective communication, become central to the ways that arguments and discussions within the coastal Muslim community are shaped.

Within the Muslim world and beyond, we can observe, in different regional and religious contexts, specific patterns and ways in which people, in their performances of everyday life, respond to the variety of social pressures and constraints that they are exposed to. These dynamics affect their self-perception, self-presentation and conduct, in public as well as in private. The Swahili coast is a long established part of the Muslim world and yet still seen, in different respects by local and external Muslims, as being on the 'periphery' of it. At the same time it has constituted the social centre and the point of reference and origin for an expanding and internally diverse regional East African Muslim community. Here, I am trying to explore, through historical and contemporary case studies, how the relations to external pressures and expectations affect and shape social and individual behaviour of Kenyan coastal Muslims within the community. What I am concerned with here is the positionality of coastal Muslims in Kenya, and particularly the ways in which being situated on the margins of both the Muslim world and the (post-)colonial state informs and underpins self-perception and social action. This challenge leads people to social engagement in response, picking up on skills that themselves are shaped by this positionality on-the-margins and involving a remarkable extent of knowledge and awareness about 'the wider world' to which the Swahili coast is connected. These skills, signifying a well-informed and open-minded attitude – if you want, a 'cosmopolitan' one – are brought into play when addressing issues of social and political concern for coastal Kenyan Muslims as they negotiate their status as religious and political actors in internal discussions. Below, I discuss three examples to illustrate these points: two Islamic scholars (one under British colonial rule, one experiencing both the colonial and postcolonial era) and a couple of engaged young makers of an Islamic radio programme for the local Muslim community. As a common leitmotif across these examples we can see how 'having the wider world in mind' informs and orients processes of discussion and decision-making among coastal Muslims on the Swahili coast. I will first specify the setting in more concrete terms before presenting the selected examples.

'Kenyan' and 'Muslim' on the Swahili Coast

Among Kenyan coastal Muslims, there is a strong sense of ambivalence on matters of belonging to the wider social world in religious as well as political terms. As Muslim citizens, they have encountered discrimination and suspicion by the state and its authorities, long before the efforts of an American-led 'war on terror' that Kenya participated in pronounced these aspects even more (see Seesemann 2007; Nassir 2008). This makes many of them feel regarded as outsiders or second-class citizens by the Kenyan state and the demographic majority of upcountry Christians who have dominated government since Independence from Britain in 1963. As African Muslims, or Muslims born and bred in Africa (of diverse ethnic backgrounds: South Asian, Persian, and Arab, next to African), they are particularly sensitive to instances of discrimination and belittlement as 'lesser' Muslims by their

Middle Eastern peers who, they feel, commonly regard themselves as culturally superior and better educated. Thus in the two relevant larger-scale social communities within which Kenyan Muslims are embedded, they experience a sense of tension. This places them on the margin of both larger groups of which they are members by definition, the *umma* and the state. In consequence, this creates an awkward and troubling scenario for the coastal Muslims concerned, who are cast as insiders and outsiders at the same time, people who do and do not belong. This is reflected in their sense of self, and this ambivalence of belonging for Kenyan coastal Muslims plays an important role in the ways in which people behave and act in everyday life. It also feeds into a historical continuity of political dependency. Over the last four centuries, ultimate political rule over Swahili coastal towns was exercised by external powers, notably Portugal, Britain, and Oman, who then put in charge rulers and administrators, drawing for support from the available quantum of local citizens to assist in running the affairs in their name. Thus over a long stretch of time, coastal Muslims have had to become used to dealing with external political domination. Yet being subject to and having to accommodate external rule also conflicted with their own sense of being the regional historical bearers of civilization (*ustaarabu*) and religion (*dini*) in East Africa, with direct connections to the wider Muslim world.

This ambivalent positionality of coastal Muslims in postcolonial Kenya may be called a 'double-periphery' (Kresse 2009). The term characterizes how coastal Muslims in Kenya are situated within the postcolonial state: experiencing the effects of policies by an adverse 'upcountry Christian' government while at the same time navigating the global politics within the Muslim world. Here, I want to engage more specifically with the thought of how this way of being positioned vis-à-vis dominant social powers and pressures in terms of firstly the *umma* (as a sphere of envisaged religious and normative unity that is constantly contested) and secondly the state (as a sphere of secular power and political control that seeks to suppress all contestation), leads to a broad scope of experiences and exposures which, in turn, create potentials and possibilities of engaging with specific issues that are part of one's local experience with the wider world in mind. In other words, I am interested in the idea that dealing with the challenge of being situated on a double-periphery, for local Muslims individually and also as a group, can result in the development of a range of skills that shape an open-minded and 'cosmopolitan' attitude and conduct – as people are acting in the contexts of their daily lives while 'having the wider world in mind'. This range of skills in turn may be drawn upon fruitfully as a kind of arsenal of ideas and approaches with which to handle regional politics, ideological disputes and internal moral dilemmas.

Below, I list and discuss some ways in which individuals in this position respond to and tackle this challenge. As their resource for this, I am convinced that the scope of exposure and the range of experiences that Kenyan coastal Muslims draw from play an important role. I seek to understand how these may feed into different layers of knowledge and registers of practice that they draw from and use in their everyday lives, both among their social peers, and also vis-a-vis members of other groups. These layers and registers qualify the unique position out of which they experience,

perceive, and then shape and negotiate, their immediate social world in relation to the wider world; and how they situate themselves, and others, within it, discursively as well as performatively. Hereby, being situated on the Islamic periphery may in some respects also constitute a kind of 'privileged locus', as Lambek indicated for Muslims on the island Mayotte (Lambek 1990: 26). Their particular range of exposures and experiences may, in response to being positioned on the double-periphery, feed into the constructive development and creative use of a well-informed and historically tested perspective. This, in turn, draws from diverse cultural and linguistic registers of knowledge that inform and help social actors to build up skilful and flexible ways of addressing and negotiating the problems facing the residents of such peripheries. To characterize their overall ability or skill to draw from such diverse registers of knowledge and experience in response to a diverse scope of specific situations on the ground, the term 'cosmopolitan' may be useful (despite its current fashionable and often superficial use) because it illustrates how local actors perform their everyday lives while having the wider world in mind. They appropriate knowledge and information from the outside world, adapt it to their own frameworks, parameters and needs, and use it creatively in the way they handle social pressures and build their lives, for themselves and their peers.

Is the periphery, then, and the Islamic periphery in particular, an arena where 'knowledge' is seen as particularly valuable and sensitive, in relation to – and possibly in contrast with – the supposed centres of relevant schools and traditions of knowledge, and possibly also in relation to power? While this question cannot be answered easily, it may be worth pursuing. Indeed, ethnographies on other regions of the Muslim world outside the so-called 'Islamic heartland' – e.g. the island of Mayotte (Lambek 1993), rural Indonesia (Bowen 1993), and northern Pakistan (Marsden 2005) – have highlighted some ways in which local actors deal flexibly and creatively with multiple (partly competing and partly incommensurable) traditions of knowledge, and how cultures of debate and intellectual discussion are important to everyday life. I will address these matters by means of brief ethnographic and textual examples from the British colonial and recent postcolonial periods, looking at individuals, texts and social dynamics on the Kenyan coast, mainly in Mombasa, an old Swahili town which is also Kenya's second largest city and East Africa's biggest port.

Historical Background – 'under external control' and Not 'in charge' at Home

The Swahili coast has been hosting Muslims from as early on as the eighth century C.E. (Horton and Middleton 2000: 49) and networks of Muslim traders in competing coastal city-states shaped the 'golden times' of Swahili trade and influence in the western Indian Ocean, before the arrival of the bellicose Portuguese in the late fifteenth century (Pearson 1998). The Portuguese, driven by imperial, missionary

and pecuniary motifs (Strandes 1961), constituted the first of a historical string of external groups who came to politically dominate the coastal region and its ports. Others in line were the Omani Arabs, and the British (and Germans, for colonial Tanganyika before 1918). This tradition of political dependency upon externally situated powers on the Swahili coast was continued – at least in the perception of coastal Muslims – after the end of the British colonial period, when African rulers from upcountry took over. Historically, these 'upcountry' people (*wabara*) who were mostly Christian were seen as adversaries by the coastals (*wapwani*), who had not been in full charge of their own affairs for a long time and thus had to deal with alternating instances of external domination during different stretches of the colonial and postcolonial experience. Specific antagonisms and alliances existed during each of the phases, and the relationship to the Muslim rulers was categorically different to that with Christians, as a common bond of religion created closer proximity and made longer-term processes of social integration possible: the Omanis, like other incoming Muslim groups (Hadramis, Baluchis et al.), over time became part of Swahili society. This constitutes part of the historical background to a scenario that Kenyan coastal Muslims have been situated in since well before Independence. Politically speaking, they have been on the periphery of the administrative units or spheres of influence that they were part of, and administered by, for a long time.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of the fact that coastal Muslims are on the periphery of the postcolonial Kenyan state is their (often experienced and much talked about) difficulty in obtaining official documentation, especially passports and the national identity cards that every citizen is by law required to carry – which leads to regular police controls around the country whereby policemen 'charge' a certain 'fee' from all those without ID in order to be released from custody. Here, one often hears complaints that Muslim applicants for IDs or passports are required to submit not only their own birth-certificate (which suffices normally) but also those of their parents and grand-parents. This demand can rarely be met (not least due to the lack of complete provision of birth certificates), so that often bribery is the only way to such a document. Based on such experiences, they feel discriminated against as second-class citizens in Kenya, and this view of them as supposedly lesser citizens is also projected in other instances of public discourse and administration.

For a better possibility of comparison with other Muslim contexts, further details about the internal diversity of the Muslim community should be mentioned. The dominant majority group here has been Sunni Shafii for centuries. Religious leaders are either *sheikhs* or *sayyids* (*masharifu* in Swahili, families linking their descent back to the Prophet Muhammad), often belonging to long-standing Hadrami networks (of the Alawiyya *tariqa;* see Bang 2003). These consist of scholars and traders with long-term roots in the region, while there is a constant flow of incoming and outgoing members between the Hadramaut, the Comoros and various parts of the Swahili coast. Other relevant Sufi branches in the region are Qadiriyya and Shadiliyya. Significant minority groups are the Ibadhis from Oman (especially with the move of the Sultanate to Zanzibar around 1840), and the Shii groups of Ismailis,

Ithnasharis (recently grown in size through African converts) and Bohras, as well as other Muslim sub-groups of sailor and trader communities from across the western Indian Ocean, especially South Asia (see Salvadori 1989).

Between Worlds, Regionally

Being situated between different kinds of cultures, ethnic groups, economic systems and religious and political forms of authority and control – and thus, being pushed or obligated into a mediating role of corresponding sub-varieties – has been a continuous feature of urban communities on the Swahili coast. Hereby, they are 'facing both ways' (Parkin 1989), toward the trading communities of their Arabic- or Gujarati-speaking Muslim peers across the Indian Ocean on the one hand, and on the other toward the communities of hinterland allies, the Mijikenda, who provided labour, military support and a potential pool of future citizens and dependents. This has been documented historically and discussed from diverse angles in relation to different ethnographic perspectives, regional contexts and historical periods (e.g. Willis 1993; Parkin 1991). For the contemporary Kenyan coast, recent research on the Boni on the Northern Swahili coast (Faulkner 2006), and on the relations between the Giriama and the Swahili in Malindi, a port-town not far north of Mombasa (McIntosh 2009), shows and analyzes in context the intertwined negotiation of ethnic, linguistic and religious identity on the coast and hinterland. In both cases, the urban-based Swahili Muslims are seen (and in part resented) as privileged counter-parts who are economically better off. They are portrayed as well-versed in their linguistic and religious knowledge as well as in business strategies, and thus present pathways of opportunity to financial and social independence (beyond the reliance on family networks), as assimilating the urban-based Muslim community is easily possible. Swahili Islamic and trading networks in the Boni and Giriama areas thus connected these groups of historical hinterland-dwellers to the wider world outside, and in turn they affected and shaped their existent social worlds in economic and religious terms. This continues to be an ambiguous relationship for both sides, as the connection and mediation has brought to the fore a set of chances, dangers, and sensitivities. Within the northern Swahili region, these studies attest to an ongoing and complex historical relationship between long-term neighbours, one that includes mutual antagonism as well as interdependence. Becoming Muslim, marrying into the urban-based community and cultivating one's linguistic abilities in Swahili in a pronounced way, leads to membership in the urban community. But even if processes of 'Swahilization' and 'Islamization' here seem interlinked, there is no homogenous Muslim community that the new converts would immediately be part of, but a loosely united diversity of competing groups and strands – situated in the specific dynamics of particular urban communities themselves.

For the Swahili coast, I am tempted to speak of a parallel between the respective regional, national, and transnational frameworks applicable to the coastal Muslim

community: one could perhaps say that in the same way as their presence and mediation affects and afflicts these social groups living on the periphery of the coastal 'Swahili world' (the Boni and Giriama), the Swahili Muslim townspeople are themselves (as I sketched out) affected and afflicted by forces that are seen as external but at the same time constitute units to which they belong as well (Kenya, the *umma*). Feeling dominated, politically by the presence of the 'upcountry Christian' state, and in terms of Islamic ideology by externally coined reformist critique and missionary activities (partly initiated and funded from Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, or Iran), the ambivalent relationship to these bigger forces in wider frameworks to which one belongs is, for individuals, reflected in a combination of reluctance and reliance. Possibilities towards connections and engagement with the wider world are opened (e.g. Islamic education in the Middle East, political participation and representation), but largely on the terms of those offering these possibilities (scholarships, or administrative positions). For individual actors in their specific circumstances and decision-making processes, taking this on board and anticipating the demands, constraints and limits within which they would be able to fulfil their own aspirations and desires, and at the same time creatively using these markers of restriction as a potential that, rightly approached, can be used to make one's argument and build one's own way toward the aspired positions, is the challenge that needs to be handled and balanced.

'Between worlds', Globally Speaking

On a macro-level, looking at the global social relations within the wider Swahili-speaking community through its networks (including those from coastal Kenya), a similar scenario to that of the regional level, of being situated between different worlds, can be seen. As migrants, temporary or long-term, many families have relatives living abroad, in the West (UK, continental Europe, or North America) or the Gulf states, people who left as students or job-seekers of various kinds. Having brothers, uncles, aunts or cousins living in these economically powerful regions creates opportunities of migration and economic improvement for oneself (and one's immediate and wider family network), and the consciousness about these opportunities even by those family members who could not travel themselves, boosts their confidence and the range of practical opportunities to improve their own lives. The scope of experiences and the range of information gained in these countries, then (whether by first or second hand), informs and increases the varieties of knowledge and practice that individuals draw from in their everyday lives.

Something similar applies, again – just as in technologically well-connected urban regions all over the world – to the ways that new media are used, especially by the younger generation, as sources of information and means of communication. Over the last decade in Mombasa, for instance, internet access has become easy, reliable, and affordable to a broad scope of citizens who can use a sizable number of public internet cafes (open to both genders without separation) from early mornings

until late at night. Many entertain email-relationships to friends and family members in the countries and regions mentioned above, and the use of websites for socialising, but also for education and information on politics and religion, and other practical matters, has become a relatively wide-spread phenomenon. A large range of Swahili-speaking websites exists, on almost any kind of topic. Next to music and social networks, websites by locally and globally competing Islamic networks are also popular. Texts, as well as audio-and video-recordings of lectures by leading Swahili Islamic scholars can be found. Overall, the internet is being used broadly and by many people, for private and professional ends, in worldly and religious matters. As elsewhere in the world, its use covers and shifts between education and flirtation, news and politics, Hollywood and Bollywood, football and other sports, and many kinds of chat-rooms and social networks. As in most urban centres around the world nowadays, people are online and connected to images, people, and institutions from elsewhere through the new media.

Swahili and Arab Worlds: Religion and Language

The characterisation of Swahili Muslims as situated on a 'periphery' of the Muslim world, vis-à-vis an Arabo-Islamic heartland, has to be qualified, as the region is of course part of a long inter-connected 'global world' of Islam (Loimeier and Seesemann 2006). While simple oppositions between centre and periphery are always problematic, focus on the translocal character of Islam has shown how Islamic networks span across regions in ways that do not always privilege the Arabic peninsula. For the western Indian Ocean, both the importance and the dynamic character of Islamic networks (historically the Hadrami, but also Omani and South Asian ones; today e.g. Saudi-Arabian, Iranian, and Pakistani ones) can only be understood with regard to a variety of factors that include religion, next to trade, kinship, and politics (for historical perspectives, see Bang 2003; Freitag 2003; Reese 2004; Simpson 2006; Salvadori 1989, 1996). On the Swahili coast, well-established links to the Hijaz but also other littoral Muslim communities have facilitated pilgrimage, education, and trade. To illustrate closeness between the Swahili and Arab worlds, we can, for instance, look at a prominent East African Islamic scholar of the early twentieth century, Sayyid Ahmed bin Sumayt (d. 1925; see Bang 2003). Born in the Comoros, of Hadrami background, and based in Zanzibar, he travelled to the Hadramaut, Mecca, Cairo, and Istanbul for several years of higher education, gaining an impeccable reputation over there. Later on, his close friend, Sheikh Abdallah Bakathir (d. 1925), followed his footsteps and earned the recognition of the Mufti of Mecca who sent him on teaching and mediating missions to Java and Cape Town (Farsy 1972: 25–29). Such examples prove an active integration of East African Islamic scholars into a global network of interactive *ulama*. Talking about them in terms of centre-periphery does indeed only make sense to a certain extent and as a matter of degree. Yet in contemporary local discourse among Swahili-speaking Muslims – and also traceable in Swahili

Islamic writings since the 1930s – a heightened sense of difference to 'Arab' Muslims comes across, of both admiration and rejection.[1] Over the course of my fieldwork, people often told me how they had found 'Arabs' (those based in the Middle East) prejudiced and arrogant in their behaviour towards 'Africans' or local 'Arabs' of the Swahili coast. Several of my friends and acquaintances in Mombasa had personal experience of visits or working stays in the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, or Saudi Arabia, or they knew directly of friends and family who had been. They recounted that instances of mistreatments and discriminatory behaviour towards visitors and labourers from the Swahili coast (and other foreigners) by Arabs over there were common (though sub-differentiations according to countries and specific situations were important too). Often, I was told, passports would be taken in possession by the employers before work could begin, and were kept as a 'security' so that workers were bound to stay with the respective employer, even under bad conditions. This could lead to underpayment or even the denial of wages, as foreign lower-level employees were practically without legal rights or representation and treated without concern. When people told me such stories, they would make a contrastive remark, relating the lack of proper minimal consideration and respect for fellow human beings (and especially fellow Muslims) here to the explicit demands of hospitality and humility by Islam. Implicit here was the expectation that Arab Muslims, if anyone, should respond to such demands better and more completely than others, being, after all, from the core region of Islam and native speakers of Arabic. – Yet I also know of young coastal men who gained relatively well-paid jobs in the Middle East and felt respected; after their return, these people often use their acquired savings to invest in the founding of a small business back in East Africa.

Among ordinary Muslims on the Swahili coast, knowledge of the Arabic language is often associated (or even equated) with knowledge of Islam. Therefore, fluent speakers of Arabic are often seen as more learned and thus more advanced Muslims. For instance, the returning graduates from institutions of higher learning in the Middle East often impress fellow Muslims with their acquired Arabic language skills. In speeches, they may often use more and longer Arabic quotations and expressions than usual (from the Quran and other Islamic texts), and thereby risk losing their audiences who would usually not understand Arabic. And while many of the ordinary Muslims seem impressed by the supposed demonstration of Islamic expertise through verbal performance, others (especially among the older generation) resent such performances which they see as boastful shows which have little to do with substantial knowledge of Islam. In these circles, I repeatedly heard the mocking comment that for those returning youth from the Middle East anyone who could speak passable Arabic was already a 'sheikh'. Such comments played

[1] Such difference is not usually associated with coastal East African Muslims with ethnic Arab background (Hadrami or Omani) who have become integrated into the Swahili context over many generations while keeping their transregional networks active. It might be associated however, with some of the East African scholars returning as 'Arabised' from their periods of higher education in the Middle East.

upon the (mistaken) assumption of equivalence between Arabic language and Islamic knowledge, and they implied that alongside an over-emphatic concern for language, an appropriate sense of recognition of substantial Islamic education had actually diminished. I also heard from some Swahili Muslims who had gone to study Islam in the Middle East in the past that they had felt treated as Muslims of lesser value, too. Thus, on whichever side of the argument coastal Muslims in East Africa stand, there is constant pressure upon them to prove themselves as properly knowledgeable Muslims (knowing the Quran, knowing Arabic, knowing proper manners) in order to be accepted by others, and to accept each other, as 'good Muslims'.

Tackling *umma* and Colony: Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui

One major regional school of Islamic thought has openly contested and rejected claims that the knowledge of Arabic could be equated with the knowledge of Islam, or that Arabic could be the only language of religious teaching and instruction. This follows the thinking of Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui who initiated the systematic use of Swahili as written and printed language of Islamic education. A so-called 'coastal Arab' of Omani descent, a student of Sayyid Ahmed bin Sumayt, and a member of the Mazrui clan which had ruled Mombasa between the 1730s and the 1830s, he was the leading figure of a regional East African movement of Islamic reform from the 1930s, and was himself inspired by the writings of Muhammad Abdu and Rashid Rida and his influential journal *al-Manar* (Mazrui 1980: xi). He used Swahili to publish regular Islamic pamphlets that contained critical commentaries on social developments within the coastal Muslim community with a view to British colonial rule and the wider Muslim world. Addressing coastal Muslims in their own language he sought to increase their critical consciousness as well as their general and Islamic education. For the latter, the knowledge of Arabic ultimately did indeed remain a crucial tool. In a text called 'The Arabic language and Muslims' (*Lugha ya Kiarabu na Waislamu*) written around 1930, using Swahili language in Arabic script as part of the weekly circulated double-sided sheet of paper called *Sahifa* (Arabic for 'page'), Sheikh al-Amin emphasized the importance for all Muslims to learn Arabic properly, as a means to acquire the necessary Islamic knowledge for proper guidance (*uwongozi*). He characterised Arabic as God's gift to *all* Muslims, as a unifying language that did not belong to Arabs only, before going on to lament that 'the dire straits that we are in today are to a large part due to the fact of not knowing Arabic, and because of this, we have reached a state where we understand neither religious nor worldly matters anymore' (Mazrui 1955: 22). With regret he points out the 'stupidity' (*ujinga*) of a Muslim who prays and does not know what he says, or who recites the Quran 'like a parrot' (*kama kasuku*), without any understanding. By starting *Sahifa*, a selection of whose articles was published and reprinted twice between 1944 and 1955 in a small book with the title *Uwongozi* (Guidance), Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui had introduced

Swahili as a mediating language to disseminate Islamic (and general) education to a wider public – yet in this particular text he also anticipated future times when all Muslims would be sufficiently trained in Arabic so that the need for this kind of Swahili writing would cease. A highly influential Islamic scholar in the region, he was also an important social critic who in his pamphlets raised critical questions about the colonial regime, Christian missionaries, Western values – and also his own community. He resented the fact that Muslim school-children should know the history of the British Empire better than Islam, and be more knowledgeable about 'civilization' (*ustaarabu*) in Western than in Islamic terms.

Sheikh al-Amin can be seen as a role-model for a kind of regional cosmopolitan perspective grounded in the knowledge of Islam and society, and inspired by diverse and overlapping backgrounds. Perfectly bilingual, in Kiswahili and Arabic, yet wary of politics and the institutions of power, he endorsed the pursuit of modern science and technology as part of general education among Muslims, for their own intellectual and social development. This is well illustrated in the education of Sheikh al-Amin's own son Ali – now a world-famous professor of political science and African Studies based in the USA – who was sent for secondary school and university degrees in the colonial centre (with stations in Huddersfield, Manchester, and Oxford; Mazrui 2006: xi) before returning to East Africa as professor at Makerere University in Uganda, one of the former pearls of East African higher education from the colonial to the early postcolonial times.

In another pamphlet reprinted in the *Uwongozi* collection, called 'How are we imitating the Whites?' (*Namna gani twaigiza Wazungu;* Mazrui 1955: 6–8), Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui voiced a sharp critique of coastal Muslims for imitating particularly the bad habits of the British colonial expats, such as drinking, flirting, dancing, idling, and also engaging in sports such as golf and football. In contrast to such, as he saw it, meaningless or irresponsible behaviour, he observed some of the good and recommendable features of conduct among the British (good discipline, focus on education, hard work, technical training and engineering) being picked up and made useful by upcountry Africans. These were often Christian converts, historically regarded by coastal Muslims as less civilized and more 'backward' in cultural and educational terms. Now, as Sheikh al-Amin castigated coastal Muslims for copying the bad habits of the colonials while their upcountry adversaries were cleverly picking up on useful aspects, he already pointed at a potential future political scenario in which coastal Muslims could loose out to better qualified and more diligent upcountry Christians (which indeed came to ring true after Independence).

In conclusion, he put particular emphasis on the recommendable aspects in which the 'whites' (*wazungu*) educate their young women to responsible and knowledgeable mothers, care-takers, and cooks – and he encouraged these points for imitation. As we can see, Sheikh al-Amin demonstrated sensitivity and a critical eye for both the dangers and promises emanating from contact and exchange with Western colonials for the future of Coastal East African society. And he sought to get his points across to his Muslim peers in clear terms and a widely accessible manner.

Tackling *umma* and (Post-)colony: Sayyid Omar Abdalla, 'Mwenye Baraka'

Another important regional Islamic scholar example who mediated between Western and Swahili society, though in the later colonial period, is Sayyid Omar Abdalla (d. 1988)[2] from Zanzibar, locally known also as 'Mwenye Baraka' (The Blessed One, Owner of Blessing). He was successful in pursuing a twofold pathway of both secular and Islamic education, which was made possible through the support of the colonial administration. In fact, he is labelled a 'colonial teacher' in a recent comprehensive study of Islamic education in twentieth century Zanzibar (Loimeier 2009: 400). While he was a student of the Sufi-oriented scholar Sayyid Omar bin Sumayt, one of the most highly regarded *ulama* on the East African coast and son of the famed Ahmed bin Sumayt, he also went to Makerere University in Uganda, a premier site of higher education in British East Africa, to study biology (1939–1942). He qualified as biology teacher, and went to teach in Zanzibar at 'Dole', a Teacher's Training College. Later on, he went for further studies in Arabic and Islamic Law at SOAS in London (1952–1954), and in Philosophy in Oxford (for a BPhil degree, from 1961 to 1963), financed by the Zanzibar Government. The goal was to prepare him to head the newly founded 'Muslim Academy' back in Zanzibar. This he did from 1954, after returning from London and, on his way, having conducted *hajj* in Mecca and benefitted from an extended educational visit in the Hadramaut to maintain good relations within the established Alawiyya networks.

While running the affairs and teaching at the Muslim Academy, he continued to travel: next to many trips within the coastal region, he undertook educational visits to Hadramaut and Nigeria (there he established a direct link between branches of the Qadiriyya *tariqa*, while attending a conference on Islamic law; Loimeier 2009: 405–6). In 1963, he graduated from Oxford with a BPhil dissertation on 'The concept of felicity in medieval philosophy'. After the bloody revolution in Zanzibar in 1964, he was imprisoned for 2 months before being released by the revolutionary leader Karume himself (apparently because he had taught a number of revolutionaries). In 1968, he was again personally released by Karume after being imprisoned for coordinating the interests of local *ulama* vis-à-vis the revolutionary socialist government (Loimeier 2009: 407). Following these difficulties, he moved to the Comoros where his mentor Sayyid Omar bin Sumayt had become *mufti* in 1967. There, he was appointed a teacher of English for the French colonial government, on the condition of mastering the French language; for this, he was required to live a year in Paris, which he did in 1971. On the Comoros, he also taught at his own mosque, and was appointed as ambassador of Islamic affairs in 1975, before becoming a widely travelling representative of the Muslim World League. As an adept and flexible intellectual and an admired teacher who was good in dealing with people – remembered indeed as

[2] My account here is based on both Loimeier and Bakari, and on conversations in Mombasa and elsewhere about him, especially with Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir.

'man of the people' (*mtu wa watu*, in Swahili) – he was an important mediator between different social and educational worlds, bridging the Franco- and Anglophone colonial systems and the Swahili context. By example, he inspired young coastal Muslims to develop their own critical faculties in engagement with a large range of religious and secular sources and texts.

He was multi-lingual to the point that he was 'at ease in Kiswahili, Shingazija, Arabic, English and French' (Bakari 2006: 366). Through his widespread travels (in Africa, Europe and America) and teachings he worked hard toward 'transcending local, racial, national and ethnic boundaries' as a peaceful mediating figure (Loimeier 2009: 408) between parts of the world that, through the colonial system, were linked to each other yet at the same time seemingly disconnected and at odds with each other. Having lived while moving between different social worlds and political regions, he died in 1988 on the Comoros, of diabetes. In retrospect, one can say that he both benefitted from and used the colonial apparatus and its demands for qualified local Muslim leaders, teachers, and administrators. In fact these demands initiated and shaped his career path – as he was drawing from two intersecting life-worlds based on diverse normative frameworks and educational demands: the European colonial one (of Christian roots and secular orientation), and the coastal East African one (of Islamic roots and worldly character). Despite the fact that he himself had undergone and benefitted from modern secular education as well as the traditional regional Islamic schooling, 'he played a significant role in defending the traditional approaches to Islam and the legitimacy of Islamic mysthicism as an integral part of Islamic intellectual legacy' (Bakari 2006: 368). This is also reflected in his honorary title with which he is remembered in East Africa: 'Mwenye Baraka' means the 'Blessed One' or 'Owner of Blessings'. This title can also be read to highlight his kindness and goodness to people a round him; people remember him as generous and gracious, interacting well with people of any rank and kind and making them feel at ease.

Among the Swahili elders (*wazee*) people continue to remember and admire both Sheikh al-Amin Mazrui and Sayyid Omar Abdalla, for their stance of advocating the combination of both Islamic and secular knowledge as part of a proper and overarching education. This is a legacy that is continued prominently today among large parts of the coastal Muslim population.

Tackling *umma* and Post-colony: On *Radio Rahma*, the 'Voice of Mercy'

Changing the focus in terms of historical period as well as media, we now turn to the ways in which radio stations have recently been used by Muslims as discursive platforms to negotiate internal divisions, debates, and conflict. Set in a situation of post-9/11 politics in Kenya, in which Muslims are often treated as potential suspects of terrorism by the government, coastal Muslims present a vulnerable

minority needing to prove their loyalty to the state (Seesemann 2007). What I found remarkable in the efforts of a couple of young Muslim radio makers who I got to know quite well was the dedicated way in which they tried to use and shape a local Islamic radio station as a means of constructive (and unifying, if also controversial) debate within the *umma*.

Picking up on the relaxation of media laws after the change from President Moi to Kibaki at the turn of 2002–2003, the son of a recently deceased well-known coastal politician opened a small Islamic radio station in Mombasa. The station began by broadcasting recitations of the Qur'an and religious poetry during the month of Ramadhan in 2004. This was well-received within the Muslim community, and the owner felt encouraged to establish a complete broadcasting programme, consisting of news bulletins, discussions and phone-ins, as well as educational broadcasts, quiz shows and brief advertisements by local businesses, apart from the ongoing element of religious recitations and Islamic music.

Here I focus in on a phone-in programme dealing with current social and political issues regarded as important for the *umma* by the makers, two young men in their late 30s or early 40s. They had managed to build up a reputation for their programme by successfully engaging a regular and active audience, men and women of different ages who called in or sent text messages to contribute their questions and comments. The two men I will call Saidi, a man whom I knew well from my previous fieldwork, and Ali, who was one of the few full-time employees of the radio-station (and whom I got to know well during many conversations). Ali was one of the two or three main moderators of *Radio Rahma*, and he was on air during early morning, afternoon, or evening hours, depending on the broadcasting schedule. Apart from the joint programme with Saidi, he also moderated quiz shows and advertising phone-ins, and he ran an evening show ranked around the discussion of social issues concerning the Muslim community, giving voice to representatives of local youth initiatives one time and interrogating a local politician on his record another. Ali was well educated in Islamic and secular terms, and spoke Arabic and English well, apart from Kiswahili. Stemming from the coast, near Mombasa, he had moved to Nairobi where he completed media training courses and worked for Kenya's first Islamic radio station, *Iqra Radio*, before joining the *Radio Rahma* team.

Radio Rahma became very popular with local Muslims of different age and gender over the first years of its existence. When listening in to the programme during several visits between 2005 and 2007, I witnessed a vibrant and steady participation from listeners in phone-in programmes, with men and women of different age groups (and educational backgrounds) contributing engaged comments and questions, complaints and suggestions to carry further the queries and discussion initiated by the makers. Ali contributed to the success story of Radio Rahma in no mean way, it seems to me. He was able to bring in a rare and well-balanced combination of abilities that qualified him perfectly for the job as moderator in a radio station that was Islamic but also worldly in outlook, and wanted to be in touch with the thoughts and feelings of ordinary Muslims in their everyday lives. Apart from his education and verbal skills, he was truly gifted in the art of relating to people, with

an air of politeness, seriousness and respect. Yet he was also flexible and able to adjust, when need be, to create a sense of sincere encouragement for callers for whom it was hard to talk and express themselves, or to assert an authoritative position vis-à-vis people who were either taking too long or violating the rules of politeness and proper expression. He had a pleasant voice and carried himself somewhere between statesman and sportsman, between journalist and scholar, as everyone's potential friend and interview-partner.

Ali's co-moderator of the show and its main initiator was Saidi. He did not have previous radio experience or media training before going on air, but he too brought in a mixed background of qualities that contributed much to the interest and positive feedback that their programme generated. As a former musician he was used to perform in front of audiences. He was a good speaker who employed simple rhetorical skills to much effect: speaking slowly and clearly, in short sentences and able to focus in on a few keywords that would stick in the minds of the audience. He was known within the Muslim community for his previous initiative to start off a kind of independent social consciousness movement among young Muslim men a few years back. Then, as a religious layman, he had given regular public speeches in local mosques, criticising the Muslim establishment for not showing engagement and solidarity for their disadvantaged ordinary peers, and criticising common Muslims for not standing up for themselves to improve their circumstances. His contributions to the radio programme were inspired along such lines of social and political engagement. Saidi had also travelled extensively in East Africa, and lived in difficult circumstances (among poor, desperate and hungry people). Based on these experiences, he had a good way of addressing and speaking out for the disadvantaged, pointing at social problems that were otherwise often kept hidden. Saidi had also built up a reputation among local Muslim youths of speaking up against established social divisions of tribalism (*ukabila*) and religion (especially through *madhhab*) that he saw obstructing the perspective for social progress.

What made Saidi popular on *Radio Rahma* is the programme in which he appeared twice a week during two morning hours, next to Ali who acted as moderator and facilitator. This revolves around the discussion of pressing, contentious or sensitive issues to the Muslim community, selected and introduced by Saidi. The format is such that Saidi starts off with a brief prepared speech on the topic, after which the listeners are invited to contribute by asking questions or airing their views. Practically oriented broadcasts I listened to included a critique of the Mombasa City Council for letting the water hydrant system deteriorate, leaving hydrant locations unmarked and broken water-pipes in disrepair. Saidi highlighted that such neglect caused serious health risks and problems to use the hydrants in an emergency. During this programme, people phoned in to provide concrete information about where in Mombasa repairs and demarcations needed to be done. This had an almost immediate effect, as I saw a day or two after that broadcast when city council workers were marking hydrant locations in bright yellow paint at different locations in the Old Town.

Over time, Saidi and his host Ali tackled a number of controversial topics by phone-in discussions, stirring up or re-igniting public interest and debate. Among

such topics were, to name just a few: a critical look at the economy of the Kenyan coast and how (which in Saidi's eyes had been misused by the upcountry government); the sensitive historical question of how and why the coastal Independence movement of 'Mwambao' had failed in the early 1960s (discussed with one of its former representatives); how social life and educational awareness on the Kenyan coast compared to other Muslim regions in the world (discussed with a Kenyan Muslim professor living in Turkey). Their programme became something of an institution within the Muslim community of Mombasa. Several initiatives on matters of local politics and social well-being were sparked off through them, and both were regularly approached by private people, businessmen and local functionaries for further or information. Saidi made it clear from beginning that he would be able to back any statement he makes by documentary evidence, and many people of diverse status and background found this impressive and reassuring, while for members of the criticized Muslim establishment this constituted a source of worry and concern.

Taking Stock: Comparative Aspects

In terms of a general attitude, we can speak of an historically grown open and convivial Islam on the Swahili coast, one that has at all times been connected to the shifting wider trends of Islamic doctrine and ideology within the Muslim world – and affected by them (recently, for instance, sharp ideological attacks by so-called 'Wahhabi' and Salafi reformists have been prominent in public discourse). At the same time, the Muslim community has largely been open towards other, incoming, conceptual frameworks and beliefs, and accommodative to local customs and traditions. This characterisation is not meant as a simplification or even homogenisation, for the internal diversity of Islamic factions and sub-orientations is remarkable, deriving not least from the multiple ethnic and regional backgrounds along the western Indian Ocean that were integrated here. The last decades have seen such an increase of internal rivalry and ideological confrontation among Muslims that the general features of openness and conviviality seem in danger (as in other parts of the Muslim world too). Yet these features, borne out of the multiple and complex historical, ethnic, and regional underpinnings of Muslim society on the Swahili coast, were the ones that made possible and sustained the long ongoing co-habitation of Muslims with non-Muslims (and Muslim others).

Let me pick up again on the term 'cosmopolitan' used above. While I am skeptical of the recent inflationary uses of the term (see Simpson and Kresse 2007: 15), I do find it useful to characterise an attitude of engaging oneself locally that draws from the available resources of worldly knowledge and knowledge about the world – with the wider world in mind, so to speak – even if partly as a result of (possibly adverse) historical circumstance and social pressures. This, I think, is common on the Swahili coast, also and significantly due to the fact that the social world is and has been situated 'between worlds', in close relation to a variety of other

worlds by which it is influenced and in which it is partaking. These may themselves exist in a relationship of fundamental social tension (as the Muslim world and the Kenyan state) so that enduring and mediating this tension, or facing it and dealing with it, is a task that coastal Muslims have to face in their daily lives. My point here was to show how the historically existent double-challenge for local Muslims, of being subject to, and of having to respond to the (often conflicting) demands of *umma* and state, amongst other detrimental effects also encourages (or even pushes for) the development of particular skills of navigating the world (including the use of knowledge, language, and educational resources). Employing these appropriately, some remarkably adept and resilient people manage to address pressing social problems in a constructive manner which might well be called cosmopolitan. Such an attitude addresses both sides of demands and pressures on the double-periphery by drawing flexibly from the diverse range of available sources and resources.

Coastal Muslims in Kenya have been negotiating such demands of *umma* and state by accommodating them within the wider universe of regional Islamic discourse and practice, with all its internal contestations. I have illustrated my case with some historical, textual and ethnographic illustrations that are ranked around historical individual personalities. In conclusion, I would like to raise a comparative question for discussion: whether this kind of pattern (or should we call it 'potential') may also be observable in other regional contexts around the Muslim world, for instance in South-East Asia or South Asia, which are socially framed by similar constellations – a long history of Islam, of confrontation and co-habitation with non-Muslims, of imposed colonial and postcolonial order with structures that both constrain social practice and provide opportunities for exposure and development.

My wider argument here was about a kind of cosmopolitan sense of perspective being developed (or at least encouraged) by design, in terms of the external and internal pressures put upon local Muslims to prove themselves at the same time as 'good Muslims' (including good knowledge of Islam and Arabic) and 'good citizens' of a decidedly non-Muslim (and for many Muslims seemingly 'anti-Islamic') state which had initially been developed as a British colony and continues to be characterised by some of its features. The challenge has been to prove oneself in the face of such adverse constellations, as deserving members of both communities at the same time. This may in some ways be a contradictory agenda, precisely because the demands of the 'secular-Christian' state (itself a bit of a paradox) require distance from any explicit Islamic agenda and rhetoric while Islamic commitment demands negligence of (or even resistance towards) matters of the secular state.

So from the outset and through the set-up, coastal Muslims face a balancing act when trying to tackle the demands put to them. Thereby, their acquired knowledge and education, their use of language and verbal capacities, and the ways in which they are socially embedded in the community, are the recurring *topoi* within Swahili Islamic discourse. The coastal Muslim community, through its spokespeople and representatives, struggles against the impression of being of minor importance and on the margins of *umma* and state. In doing so, coastal Muslims draw from the long-term exposure to and experience of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity that underpins and characterises Swahili society. We cannot

here go deeper into the historical dynamics that have shaped the coastal cities, largely by integrating newcomers from the outside (see Kresse 2012). But the resulting presence of social diversity in its multiple dimensions in the immediate urban neighbourhoods of course has created more mutual exposure to the ways that others live – Muslims or non-Muslims. We know that such exposure can lead to an increase of social animosities and an outbreak of open conflict between the respective groups, as much as to a boost of mutual understanding. In the Swahili context, too, such a breakdown of the precarious social balance has happened before. Apart from early historical battles between rivalling coastal city states and their communities, the so-called 'Likoni clashes' in 1997 were an instance where existent tensions between ascribed 'insiders' and 'outsiders' – *wapwani* and *wabara* – led to violence, including some dead, many wounded and thousands of displaced people (HRW 2002). While this was then an orchestrated and successful attempt to stir instability and violence by the governing party, in order to divide residents, dispel oppositional voters and thereby secure re-election, the precarious social balance may be disturbed and toppled in different ways, from within and from the outside. Yet for the continuation of peaceful social cohabitation and interaction to be a (possible) reality, the balance needs to be kept stable. This spells out a general task for social communities around the world, pointing also to competing forms of cosmopolitanism, parochialism and tribalism existing uneasily and side by side on the same social terrain.

Conclusion

I have here described a certain social (historically grown) scenario within which people, through exposure to a scope of influences, are pushed or driven to develop performative abilities of acting with a wider world in mind. Socially, a rather open and convivial form of Islam has dominated over time – this has been challenged and threatened, but not overturned (until now). Individually, social actors who become engaged in facing the double challenge of the pressures of *umma* and state, develop their specific skill of navigating the world accordingly. The German term '*Weltgewandtheit*', I think, aptly captures this in one word, signifying the knowledge or skill of moving appropriately in the world, or to tackle worldly matters well. This is an ability that individuals acquire and shape through a combination of talent, knowledge, experience and engagement with the world. In the examples above, we have caught brief impressions of how a few remarkable individuals have made use of the available sources and resources (of knowledge and experience) at their disposal to deal with worldly matters as part of their particular Islamic conviction. Through their social engagement, they acted as advisors, spokespeople, role-models or mediators for their social group. If this skill of *Weltgewandtheit* indeed captures an aspect of cosmopolitanism, it can be understood to build on two complementary aspects, an openness to the wider world (*Weltoffenheit*) and a pool of experience of it (*Welterfahrung*), as I have argued elsewhere (Kresse 2012).

These observations also speak, I think, to Peter Mandaville's description of trends of 'Islamic cosmopolitanism' in European contexts. He discusses Fethullah Gülen and Tariq Ramadan as providing viable and fruitful pathways of a civil Islam, which in different ways engage Muslims as responsible citizens in a wider public arena (the state) that is not at the forefront defined by Islam. Mandaville highlights 'pluralism and social civility' as key features characterising such 'Islamic cosmopolitanism' (Mandaville 2005: 320). He emphasises that these features could be key for fruitful and open-minded religious and political engagement within the Muslim world, and by extension, between it and the West. Here, I have pointed, from the perspective of my observations from the Swahili coast, to a regional example where pluralism and civility exist and intertwine too, possibly along similar lines. This may provide stimulation and food for thought for further comparison, both across regions and conceptual approaches – with Robert Hefner's work on 'civil Islam' (2000) in Indonesia as another obvious reference point, for instance.

Perhaps a few thoughts on the social actors described above are in order, in terms of the representative character and the exceptional position they hold within their respective Muslim communities. In their engagement, they go beyond the established confines of social groups, to invoke, in different ways, a sense of larger social unity for the benefit of their own community. As leading figures addressing social pressures and powerful external adversaries (as well as internal ones), they stick out. In contrast, many coastal Muslims are often seen to have succumbed to the established political paradigms and social circumstances that seem to work against them. Many ordinary coastal citizens are Muslims who have not managed to resist external pressures but become disillusioned as to their political future; this illustrates the gloomy picture on the Kenyan coast more widely.

The cosmopolitan attitude discussed here is not inherently linked to Islam, but, as I have tried to show, grows out of the conditions of experience that shape people's lives individually and socially, as a potential for actual practice that some individuals then do pick up on. The *umma* as global community of Muslims provides one possible frame (among several) of connecting, of being socialized and integrated into a wider social community that goes beyond people's immediate experience. The adjective 'cosmopolitan' might seem a difficult term, not least due to the fuzziness that has come about through a wave of references to it. But it might still be an appropriate adjective when qualifying the ways in which some individual Muslims (on the Swahili coast or elsewhere) address and negotiate matters of concern to them in social interaction with others, whether as leading-figures or ordinary people, in debates and discussions or through other means of communicative performance.

These concerns may be linked to or shaped by religion, politics, or other frames of meaningful social interaction. As far as the sources and references involved within these processes draw from and refer back to interpretations of Islam while the concern is sensitive to (or revolving around) worldly matters, by addressing social problems in everyday life, matters of moral conduct, or political issues relevant to the Muslim community, we may say that the actors described here engage in the negotiation of common social, moral and political problems through Islam (or their interpretation of it).

Picking up again on Soares and Osella's argument for *Islam mondain* as a paradigm of approach that is flexible and inclusive, particularly in terms of a social and cultural model and reference point for orientation (Otayek and Soares 2007: 19), I have suggested it might indeed make sense to speak of mundane or 'worldly Islam' when looking at examples such as discussed here. In the end, this would also mean, wary of the initial caution with which I started this article, to make sure to include enough 'world', the lived experience of social actors with a view to their hopes and expectations, in our ethnographic and conceptual investigations. Being able to capture much of the 'world' in which people live, rather than initially focusing too much on 'religion', is surely a good thing when trying to understand human beings (who happen to be Muslims) in their respective social contexts. *Dini na dunia*.

Acknowledgements Fieldwork that informs this article began in 1998 (13 months) and continued in regular shorter visits between 2004 and 2010. Funding by the following institutions is gratefully acknowledged: DAAD, SOAS, University of St Andrews, DFG, ZMO and the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). I am particularly grateful for ongoing conversations with Sheikh Abdilahi Nassir, Stambuli A. Nassir, Hassan Mwakimako and others in Mombasa, and with Mohamed Bakari, Abdilatif Abdalla and Roman Loimeier – and for Magnus Marsden and Kostas Retsikas for inviting me to participate.

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Chapter 5
Beyond Islam: Tradition and the Intelligibility of Experience

Johan Rasanayagam

Introduction

At the end of my field research in the summer of 2004 in the village of Pakhtabad, located near Andijan in Uzbekistan's portion of the Fergana valley, I sponsored a *mavlud*, a ritual of commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's life. I wanted to express my thanks to those in the village who had helped me most in my research. My departure coincided with the 4 months of the year in which *mavlud* are held and because their staging has become a popular practice in the village, it presented an ideal way to end my stay.

When Uzbekistan became an independent republic in 1991 following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was a surge in interest and engagement with Islam. There has been a riot of interpretation and exploration not only concerning what it means to be a Muslim but also expressed in the emergence of a variety of Christian and other religious or spiritual groups. Although mosque attendance has decreased since the peaks immediately after independence, a number of men of all ages regularly attend at least the main Friday prayers. Ritual events such as *mavlud* have become common. Visiting the tombs of Muslim 'saints' has increased, as has the practice of healing and prophesy with the help of spirits (Rasanayagam 2006a). An important development has been the spread of knowledge of the sacred texts and interpretations of what constitutes correct Muslim practice based upon them. The expansion of the number of madrasas, albeit under the control of the quasi-state Muslim Board of Uzbekistan, has meant that more young men, and to a more limited extent women, are able to obtain a formal Islamic education. Popularised interpretations and advice on how to lead a Muslim life have become readily

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_5,

available. Affordable, locally printed texts in Uzbek are on sale in many bookshops, on street and market stalls, and at many of the larger mosques. A significant number of individuals have also been able to undertake the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

At the same time, the post-independence government has sought to regulate tightly religious expression and to assert a monopoly of interpretation over what constitutes legitimate religious practice. It has attempted to subordinate Islam within its construction of a Central Asian national and spiritual tradition, the 'golden heritage' which forms the central element of its Ideology of National Independence, intended to replace Marxist-Leninism as the legitimating ideology of the new state. Within this discourse Islam is not treated as a universal Truth which transcends culture and national boundaries, but is localised within the government's conception of indigenous culture and tradition. 'Good' Islam is portrayed as culturally authentic, tolerant of other religious traditions in the region, and non-political. 'Bad' Islam is alien in origin, antithetical to Central Asian spiritual values, and politically motivated. Interpretations of Islam not endorsed by the government are labelled as extremist and 'Wahhabi'. An atmosphere of existential vulnerability pervades everyday religious practice where the label 'Wahhabi' has come to represent anything which does not fit into the category of established 'tradition' and which might therefore make those associated with it a potential target for the state security services (Rasanayagam 2006b).

It is in this environment, on the one hand subdued and fearful, and on the other innovative and creative, that individuals develop understandings of moral and Muslim selfhood. This chapter explores lived experience as the ground for moral reasoning. Moral reasoning is not confined to reflexive deliberation over objectified values and discourses. It also emerges from the ongoing flow of life and immersion in a social and material world. Moral selves, which might be understood subjectively as Muslim selves, emerge through an individual's participation in a household and community, through fulfilling obligations to marry of and settle children, through bodily experiences of illness and healing, and through successes or failures in pursuing life projects. The experiential quality of moral reasoning is all the more apparent in Uzbekistan, where the suspicions of the post-independence government have inhibited the vociferous and public debates over what constitutes 'correct' Islam, the struggles to define 'orthodoxy', which are so evident in most Muslim societies.

A focus on experience as the grounds for moral reasoning suggests a shift in how we approach Islam as an object for social scientific analysis. It moves us away from adopting Islam itself as the global analytical object within which we seek to accommodate a diversity of interpretation and practice. Understandings of moral selfhood arise from the contingency of particular lives and are therefore diverse and often contradictory. To the extent that Islam becomes an object, it becomes so within the narrative development of a moral self. From an encompassing object of Islam, a focus on experience directs us to look at the question of intelligibility. How are lives rendered intelligible to selves and others, so that productive interaction and communication is possible despite a diversity of subjective understanding. This chapter explores experience as the grounds for intelligibility, an intelligibility which in fact extends beyond specifically Muslim self understandings.

The guests at my farewell *mavlud*, who were exclusively men, since a *mavlud* is gender segregated, included the long-standing imam of the village's Friday mosque appointed by the Muslim Board, a number of *qori* (reciters of the Qur'an) and others known for their knowledge of scriptural Islam, the mullah of our neighbourhood mosque who has no formal Islamic education and who has also in the past been its *oqsoqol* (literally translated as 'white-beard', an *oqsoqol* is the neighbourhood community leader), many of the neighbours and colleagues of my host in the village, as well as villagers whose ritual events I had attended during my field research. The *mavlud* incorporated a festive meal which is typical for collective ritual events. The guests sat around a *dasturkhon*, a cloth spread on the floor on which were placed rounds of flat-baked bread, nuts, soft-drinks, fruit and sweets. The *qori* and the imam took turns in reciting verses from the Qur'an, after which a meal of *osh*, a rice pilau made from mutton and carrots cooked in cotton-seed oil, and a mutton and potato soup, was served. This was prepared by a cook employed at most neighbourhood ritual feasting events, using large cooking cauldrons communally owned and stored in the neighbourhood mosque.

The participants at the *mavlud* were all people I had worked with in exploring Islam and Muslim practice in the village. They have developed their own personal understandings of Muslim selfhood and would have understood what was going on in the *mavlud* itself in very different terms. For example, a tray was positioned at the centre of the *dasturkhon* amid the food, on which a bowl of salt and *issrik* was placed. The latter is a dried plant which is burnt to produce smoke that is variously considered to act as a disinfectant or to bring good fortune. Many of those present would have understood these items, and the food, to absorb the blessing or merit from the chanted recitation of the Qur'an, that would pass on healing or good fortune to those who consumed them. At other *mavlud* I had attended, a bowl of water was also placed at the centre and drunk by participants at the end, or small pebbles were counted out while a communal *zikr* was performed, the repetition of the name of God and phrases such as *lā ilāha illā allāh* (there is no God but God). These stones were to be placed later on the graves of deceased relatives. The former *oqsoqol* and neighbourhood mullah had told me that a Muslim is required to recite the profession of faith a certain number of times during his or her lifetime, and that after death friends, neighbours, and kin make up for omissions at occasions such as this. Some of the more scripturally oriented participants reject this sort of interpretation. In conversations with me during my time in Pakhtabad they have criticised much of village practice as un-Islamic tradition and asserted that every Muslim is individually responsible for their actions before God. In Friday sermons the imam of the Friday mosque has criticised the practice of healing or prophecy through the mediation of *jin*, but recourse to healers who work through spirits is a common practice in the village, even engaged in by some of those who attend Friday prayers at his mosque. The wife and mother of my host both regularly visit such healers, and his mother has spirits of her own and practices in a small way as a healer herself.

Such a diversity of intention and interpretation is of course not unusual and has been commented upon by a number of anthropologists working in Muslim societies. John Bowen, for example, has argued that an ambiguity of exegesis,

an 'economy of professed ignorance' (Bowen 1993:318) allows Muslims with conflicting understandings of Islam to participate as co-members of a community. Participants at a ritual event can have differing intentions and understandings of what is going on. The host of a ritual feast may see it as part of a transactional relationship with ancestral and other spirits and privately dedicate it as such, while 'modernist' ulama who recite verses from the Qur'an at the event can ignore this and see the event purely in terms of offering prayers to God (Bowen 1993:229–250, 1997).

The guests at my farewell *mavlud* were certainly aware that their own practice and understanding of Muslim selfhood may not be shared by others. Participation within a shared sociality and the ambiguity of exegesis described by Bowen no doubt play their part in enabling harmonious interaction. The repressive political atmosphere in Uzbekistan also discourages a too public questioning of the practice and interpretation of others. State discourses exhort citizens to be ever on the watch for signs of religious extremism in their neighbourhoods and anyone who criticises 'traditional' practices too vociferously as un-Islamic opens themselves up to the charge of being a 'Wahhabi'. However, the mutual engagement of villagers in a ritual like the *mavlud*, their participation within a shared sociality more generally, is more positive and productive than a passive tolerance of difference. It is enabled by the intelligibility which arises from shared models for action and experience.

The remainder of this chapter is located mainly in my second research site, the city of Samarkand, where I worked in 2003 and 2004. It explores the experiential nature of moral reasoning, and the intelligibility of experience, through a 'conversion' narrative and through a number of experiences of illness and healing. Illness is a site where the moral quality of experience is particularly evident. While healing occurs within shared models for experience, these are located within diverse narratives of moral self, some of which are framed as Muslim, but others not.

An Islamic Revival Narrative

Abdumajid-aka is a lecturer in mathematics at Samarkand State University and director of a secondary school, who was in his late 50s at the time of my field research. He was born in Samarkand, the seventh of eight surviving children. His father was a builder and carpenter and Abdumajid-aka described him as semi-literate (Rus: *polugramotnyi*) because he only read the Latin script. Despite this, he was respected within his *mahalla* (neighbourhood) because of his wide breadth of knowledge gained through life experience. His father did not perform the five daily prayers (*namoz*), praying only occasionally, and neither of his parents instructed him in religious observance, or even discussed Islam with him. Abdumajid-aka said that they were afraid that his school or other state authorities might have found out about it since it was forbidden by law during the Soviet period to encourage children to observe religious practice. He attributes his knowledge of Islam as a child, such as it was, to his mother who performed the *namoz* regularly at home and often read the Qur'an. She had not attended state schooling but as a child she had for a number of

years taken part in a class for girls given by a *bibikhalfa* (this is the Tajik term for the female religious practitioner). There she had learnt how to recite the Qur'an and had memorised a large part of it, and learnt the appropriate recitations for ritual events such as funerals, weddings, and the *bibiseshanba* and *bibimushkulkushod*, women's propitiatory ceremonies.[1] She had never practiced as a *bibikhalfa* outside her own household, however, as her husband had not allowed it.

Abdumajid-aka described the awareness of Islam which he gained through childhood as something which he gradually became steeped in (Rus. *propityvalis'*). He knew there was a God because his of mother's regular prayer, and from daily ritual actions such as pronouncing *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm* (Ar. In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate) before every meal and *omin* at the end. However, he said that he understood this in terms of 'tradition' rather than a conscious religious commitment, just as he wished his Russian neighbours *Khristos voskres* (Rus. Christ has risen) at Easter time. His parents had arranged for him to be circumcised when he was 6 years old, something which was near universal among the indigenous population in Soviet Central Asia, even for Communist Party officials. However, he recalls that the ritual and accompanying celebration (*sunnat to'y*) was more what he considered a traditional than a religious event, something done to fulfil societal expectations.

Abdumajid-aka described how this unreflective stance changed during his time at university in Samarkand in the late 1960s where he attended the inevitable courses on philosophy, political economy, and atheism. He described this as a period when he started to develop his intellectual thinking and he frequently makes reference to his analytical, rational approach to reasoning. He found the Marxist materialism he encountered in his courses convincing, and went through a period in which he no-longer believed in the existence of God. He described how over time this changed and how, paradoxically, the more he studied philosophy the more he pondered on the nature of God. He has eventually arrived at his own particular understanding of the divine that he emphasises results from his independent conclusions from books he has read, his experience and his critical reasoning. He sees God as a universal or absolute consciousness (Rus. *mirovoi rasum*). He believes that all living things exist on a particular level of consciousness. Humans have a greater potential for developing this than animals, and between humans and God, the absolute consciousness, are beings such as the angels. His conception of the divine is not bounded within Islam, however, but encompasses all religious systems:

> I image God as . . . complete understanding that has to bring order into our disorder. This may be by the help of different religions, maybe through Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, or Baha'ism. I liked their constitution. I think that in the future religion will develop in such a way it will develop general social principles for conduct in society. Religion first develops for a certain group of people, and then gradually becomes a kind of constitution for all humanity, which people accept in their spirits. It won't be important to

[1] For an account of female rituals and religious practitioners in Uzbekistan see Kandiyoti and Azimova (2004), Peshkova (2006), Louw (2007), and Fathi (1997, 2006).

> pray in a mosque or a church etc. The principles of behaviour will be important. Religion was a carrier of ideology and in the future this will be the case as well. This ideology will direct people, a general ideology, not like the state ideology which changes. Religion lasts longer than government ideology. The conflicts between Arabs and Jews, and in Northern Ireland has to find a solution, because the time is ripe. Each era has its own religion. The principle of tolerance is in every religion.

At the same time, Abdumajid-aka places himself firmly within an Islamic frame, and recounted the process through which he came to develop an active commitment to Islam. He blames the breakdown of his first marriage in 1986 on the director of a state enterprise and Communist Party member who, he recalls, made him critical of the hypocrisy of professed communists who said one thing and did another. He contrasted this with the support he received at the time from his sisters who are active Muslims. Moreover, by the early 1990s he began, in his words, to 'find his place in life'. He became director of a secondary school, remarried and established a second family. He became well-known and respected in Samarkand, and he was elected chairman of his *mahalla* committee in 2003. As *mahalla* chairman, he plays a leading role in organising and managing ritual events within his neighbourhood such as funerals and weddings. He attributes his present, well-established position in part to his belief in God. The early 1990s was a period in which there was a general awakening of interest in Islam in Uzbekistan, and an unprecedented availability of religious literature, and he recalls obtaining books in 1996 on the ritual prescriptions of Islam and on how to perform the daily prayers. During the month of Ramadan that year he had a dream in which he was attending an *iftor*, the breaking of the daytime fast, in a relative's home. His nephew, who is the imam at a prominent mosque in Samarkand, was present in the dream and so was an old man with a white beard and turban who invited the guests to pray after the meal, saying that those who had not performed the ritual ablutions (*tahorat*) should in any case join in, but should remember to come prepared in future. Some time later he mentioned this dream to one of his sisters, a *bibikhalfa* who officiates at women's ritual events, who told him that the dream was significant, and advised him if he found himself in a similar situation in the future, he should perform the prayers. The next year, the situation did in fact occur during an *iftor* gathering, and Abdumajid-aka has performed the daily prayers ever since.

Abdumajid-aka's understanding of Islam and moral selfhood has arisen from the contingency of his life, his experience of bodily disorder and healing, as well as his study of books and his self-consciously intellectual reasoning. His past experience of illness contributes to this process and is reassessed within his present understanding. Abdumajid-aka recalled how in the late 1960s, when he was a university student, his brother was afflicted by what he referred to as 'inflammation of the trigeminal nerve' (Rus. *vospalenie troinichnogo nerva*) around his eye which caused half his face to be paralysed. His brother was a senior university lecturer at the time and was able to access good doctors through his network of contacts. However, despite attempting a number of biomedical treatments the problem was not solved. Eventually, one of his relatives suggested that they go to a healer called Qori Najmi. This healer recited verses from the Qur'an over Abdumajid-aka's brother, hit him with his prayer beads to expel the evil spirits, and blew upon him

(an action referred to as *suf suf*). He told them to come again early the next morning, because his first breath of the morning was the strongest. After four of these treatments, the facial paralysis disappeared. Abdumajid-aka visited this healer on a number of occasions in the following years, including in 1974 when his baby daughter was suffering from sores on her scalp and fainting fits which were not responding to hospital treatment. They were cured after a number of sessions with Qori Najmi. I frequently came across similar accounts of partial facial paralysis during field research which were not responsive to medical treatment, but which were cured by recourse to healers who recited verses of the Qur'an over sufferers or who worked with spirits.[2]

Abdumajid-aka adopts a detached, rationally analytic stance in his reflection on his experience of illness and healing.

> Qori Najmi has Islamic learning, but he's educated not in the madrasa, but in a *qorikhona*,[3] where they learn to read texts out loud. He only has a surface knowledge of Islam, not as deep as he would have received from a madrasa education. He has no medical qualifications, so he does not know how his healing works. He thinks that when he reads a prayer, God allows him to heal people. However, in actual fact, in my own opinion he has a very strong biopole which is able to influence the biopole of other people. Because he continually prays, he fills himself with energy. There is energy which is in the universe, which he uses. When he performs the prayers early in the morning, he receives this energy and then gives it out, so the first person gets more of this energy than the later ones. He notices this but explains it as his first breath being stronger. The person sitting before him only thinks of getting better, and is completely subordinate to the healer. They are attuned to each other, and then Qori Najmi stimulates the internal potential energy which exists in every living thing. This is written into the genes. There is a blueprint for how the organs of the body should work.

He claims that he no longer takes medicines when he feels ill, but instead relies on prayer. In a state of prayer, he believes, a person directs himself entirely towards God, asking for healing of a particular part of their body and this awakens the internal reserves for self-renewal and healing which are present in all organisms. Thus, people who pray regularly are healthier, and he feels much healthier himself, no longer suffering from chronic liver and stomach problems as in the past. In addition, he asserts that undertaking the ritual ablutions (*tahorat*) five times a day before prayer imposes a regime of hygiene and cleanliness which helps to maintain good health. This 'scientific' or 'modernist' understanding of the beneficial effects of the *tahorat* contrasts with a view held by many others that the state of ritual purity it provides acts as a protection against the malign influence of *jin*. Moreover, his assertion that healing comes from a person's internal reserves, and that a focus on God in prayer stimulates this innate potential, contradicts the view of many Muslims that healing comes directly from God.

[2] These descriptions recall a condition known as Bell's palsy, which often clears up by itself after some time without biomedical treatment.

[3] This is a school, which might be attached to a mosque or may be in the house of the teacher, where students learn how to recite the Qur'an.

Culture and Experience

Abdumajid-aka's idiosyncratic interpretation is one which would not be shared by many others in his *mahalla*, but his self-representation as a good Muslim is nevertheless readily accepted. He prays regularly at a major mosque in the city near his home and is on good terms with the chief imam of Samarkand city, who is a member of his *mahalla* committee. As chairman, he plays a leading role in many of the Muslim ritual events in his *mahalla*, organises funerals, weddings and other life cycle events of households in his neighbourhood, and he attends those in neighbouring *mahalla*.

Abdumajid-aka's self-presentation as a Muslim is supported by his performance of Islamic practice; fasting during Ramadan, attending the collective Friday prayers, and participating in life-cycle and calendrical rituals associated with Islam. However, his productive engagement with others is enabled by more than a discrete and tactful silence on potentially controversial issues. His conception of Islam and moral selfhood arises from models for experience and action that he shares with others in Samarkand, in Uzbekistan and in Central Asia more generally. These models are apprehended within personal moral narratives which develop out of the contingency of individual lives and they may, or may not, be framed in terms of Islam. His dreams are readily available to him as direct encounters with the Divine or spirit agents, although he does not have to understand them solely in these terms. Similarly, his recourse to Qori Najmi arises from shared models for illness and healing.

Anthropologists describing the experience of illness have sought to capture how conceptions of wellbeing and disorder and strategies for treatment are produced within locally salient cosmologies, understandings of the nature of the person and the environment, and about interaction with human and non-human entities (Good 1994; Roseman 1990; Wikan 1989). Robert Desjarlais uses the term 'aesthetic sensibilities' to describe the 'tacit cultural forms, values, and sensibilities – local ways of being and doing – that lend specific styles, configurations, and felt qualities to local experiences' (Desjarlais 1992:65). Aesthetic sensibilities pattern how people make sense of their lived word, their bodies and their social environment. These anthropologists are broadly concerned with how perception and experience arises within a culturally shaped lifeworld.

Clifford Geertz has addressed this using the concepts of worldview and ethos (Geertz 1973:126–41). The former refers to the 'picture of the way things are in sheer actuality', concepts of nature, self, and society held by a group. The later is the moral and aesthetic quality of their life. Geertz's approach can be critiqued for presenting a picture of culturally distinct groups, bound within symbolic meaning-making systems that shape how their members perceive and act in the world, so there are distinctly Moroccan or Indonesian Islams (Geertz 1968). Perception and experience are not simply produced by cultural scripts that are mechanically followed. Local cosmologies, histories, and models for action afford possibilities for particular qualities of experience, ready-to-hand objectifications that are creatively worked within the narrative understandings of an individual's life. Notwithstanding the criticism of cultural essentialism, Geertz directs us to look beyond the

analytical frame of Islam, to an examination of the nature of culture and experience, if we want to investigate how individuals develop moral selves which happen to be subjectively understood as Muslim and also productively interact and communicate from very different subjective positions.

Certain conditions of disorder and their treatment are understood to be beyond the competence of biomedical intervention and are referred to as *eskicha* (the old ways) or *musulmonchilik* (Muslimness or Muslim ways). Such disorders are commonly associated with contact with *jin*, with sudden fright or shock, or sorcery attack. The facial paralysis of Abdumajid-aka's brother is an example. Another very common condition is referred to as a 'fallen heart', the symptoms of which are typically lack of energy, strength and motivation. Sufferers of this category of illnesses adopt a number of treatment strategies. They might visit the tomb of a saint to make a sacrifice, recite the Qur'an, and wash themselves in water from an associated sacred spring. They might seek out healers who work with spirits, or visit a *qori* who can recite the Qur'an over them. Typically, sufferers and their families turn to a combination of treatments, including the state biomedical system as the case of Abdumajid-aka's brother illustrates. Healers themselves employ different healing techniques, working with herbs, spirits and reciting verses from the Qur'an, so it is impossible to draw clear distinctions between different types of healer.

These models for illness made recourse to Qori Najmi intelligible for Abdumajid-aka in the past. As he has developed a more considered and active engagement with Islam he has re-assessed this experience. His understanding of what was going on in the healing process is now very different from how Qori Najmi himself would likely have understood it. During my research both in Samarkand and Pakhtabad I encountered a number of healers who worked with spirits, recited verses of the Qur'an over sufferers, used herbs, or employed a combination of these strategies. All had personal, idiosyncratic interpretations of how their healing worked and of the nature of their spirits that, furthermore, were not always shared by their patients (Rasanayagam 2006a). Differing understandings do not prevent a mutual and productive engagement and efficacious treatment. Action and experience remains intelligible however it comes to be objectified in personal life narratives.

Despite the wide variation in individual practice and cosmology, healers and their clients participate within a shared tradition of healing. Tradition in this sense is not a bounded and fixed body of knowledge and practice, handed down from generation to generation, perhaps incorporating elements from other traditions with the passage of time. Healing practices constitute a tradition in the sense that they draw upon models for experience and practice which are recreated anew in the lives of healers and their patients. A number of features are common to most healers I encountered. Disorder is associated with the action of spirits and healers are able to expel these spirits, perhaps through the power of the Qur'an or using spirits of their own. The healing ability is something passed in the 'blood', so that all healers I encountered presented themselves as descending from a line of healers, even if the last ancestor-healer was a figure from the distant past who bestowed the healing ability in a dream. Healers generally discover their vocation through suffering from a persistent illness and are identified by another healer as someone with their own

spirits. This healer often becomes their teacher and guide who authorises their practice by giving them the *duo*, or blessing and permission, to practice as a healer. This can also be achieved though a dream encounter with a 'saint', a prominent historical figure, or an ancestor. Undertaking a *chilla*, a period of fasting and isolation, is an important ordeal undertaken to achieve healing and also to gain control over the spirits. During the *chilla*, or in dream encounters, healers might miraculously learn to recite the Qur'an in Arabic, or in visions receive some of the tools of their practice such as a copy of the Qur'an or a knife.

These features do not constitute a script and they are not all present in the practice of every healer. They are models for experience, that make available particular qualities of experience, and are creatively reworked within an individual's own narrative understanding of their lives. A striking feature of healing in Pakthabad is how it acts as a forum for debating what it means to be a good Muslim and the nature of legitimate Islamic practice. Imams trained in Uzbekistan's madrasas and others who adopt a scripturally oriented understandings of Islam generally criticise healers who work with spirits as charlatans, ignorant of true Islam. Healing can only come from God and they generally endorse the practice of reading from the Qur'an as a means of asking God for healing. Almost all healers I encountered, however, laid great stress on the fact that they were working in 'God's way'. Some saw themselves as missionaries, recalling the population back to Islam after the years of Soviet enforced atheism. Their cosmologies and spirits reflected this. Whereas some villagers, including some of their own clients and neighbours, described them as working with *jin*, and referred to them using the terms *bakhshi* or *folbin*, healers themselves rejected these designations. *Bakhshi*, they asserted, work with *jin*, which they stressed was not permissible in Islam, while their own spirits were *otakhon* (ancestor spirits) sent from God to do good work. Many of the healers understood themselves to be proper Muslims precisely because of their spirits which were sometimes Muslim 'saints' who taught them Islamic knowledge. Many also incorporated the Qur'an and prayer into their practice.

This concern with locating healing practices within 'proper' Islam was much less pronounced in Samarkand. The healers I encountered in and around that city did not have any reservations about accepting the designation *bakhshi* and did not stress the Islamic purity of the spirits they invoke to the same extent, although Islamic imagery was present in their cosmologies. During my stay in one of the old districts of central Samarkand, my landlady organised a healing session for her daughter which they held in my house compound. The daughter had been having recurring problems with her legs and in the past had not been able to walk. Hospital treatment had not helped, but treatment by a *bakhshi*, who lives in our street, has proved effective. This *bakhshi* inherited her healing ability from her mother and had learnt her practice through dreams. She calls her ability to a gift from God and opened the healing session with the phrase *bismillāh al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*. She then went on to invoke a number of spirits, Islamic figures such as the prophet Daniel (whose tomb is in Samarkand) as well as the spirits of fire, air and water to take away the illness. She passed wads of cotton wool and chunks of bread over the

patient's body as she did this, and then used a knife to cut away the illness. The cotton wool was soaked in cotton seed oil and wrapped around small sticks to be burnt. We went outside into the courtyard, where the *bakhshi* cut the comb of a cockerel and dabbed the blood on the patient's forehead and hands. She formed a square on the ground using the cotton wool candles, set light to a bunch of rags, and waved these over the head of the patient. These were then placed on the ground and the patient stepped over the fire three times. My landlady explained that the illness would pass into the cockerel and the fire.

When we discussed this treatment some weeks later, my landlady recounted her own experiences of illness. When she was 18 she had suffered from a similar problem with her legs. The condition was cured by a *bakhshsi* who instructed her family to slaughter a goat. The *bakhshi* placed the blood of the goat on her and wrapped her legs in the skin. The meat was made into a soup and fed to the neighbourhood. The landlady recounted how one of her sons had fallen into a coma for 3 months when he was also 18. The landlady was instructed to sit a *chilla*, the period of fasting and isolation, for 3 days, by a healer she referred to as a *fulbin*. This healer performed a ceremony, also involving the blood of a cockerel, and they organised a *bibiseshanba*, a ritual and feast held by women to invoke spiritual aid in overcoming illness or some other problem. In the course of her *chilla* my landlady recounted how she was visited by the spirit of her grandfather in a dream, who gave her an old book written in Arabic. She had studied Arabic as part of studies at Samarkand State University, but after this dream she was suddenly able to read it well. The book had been in the house and had belonged to her grandfather, but no-one had paid much attention to it before. She understood the illness to be caused by her grandfather to force her to read the book. When she did this, her son regained consciousness but still could not speak. They called some *domla*, men known for their religious learning, to recite verses from the Qur'an over her son, after which he recovered his speech. They told her to continue reading from her grandfather's book, and gradually her son fully recovered. She said that she continues to read from the book daily.

Shared models for illness, healing and dreaming give rise to the experience of Abdumajid-aka, my landlady, and the healers and their patients I encountered in Pakhtabad, but they are recreated afresh in individual lives. In contrast to the situation in Pakhtabad, my landlady and the *bakhshi* on our street in the old district of Samarkand made no attempt to stress their own Muslim purity. Islamic references were invoked, but so too were clearly non-Islamic spirits and imagery. In Pakhtabad, villagers now encounter scripturally founded interpretations of Muslim practice on a more or less day-to-day basis, through attendance at Friday prayers, collective events such as weddings where preachers are sometimes invited to speak (see also Hilgers 2009:95–110), and in interaction with fellow villagers, a number of whom have some degree of Islamic learning or have made the pilgrimage to Mecca. In Pakhtabad, conceptions of moral selfhood have increasingly to be framed in relation to correct Muslim practice, however this is interpreted. Experience is apprehend within a moral narrative which has as its telos the development of a specifically Muslim self, and this is played out in experiences of illness and

healing and the associated spirit cosmologies. Such concerns seem much less prominent in Samarkand. Imams in Samarkand do condemn rituals women hold like the *bibiseshanba*, and healers like *bakhshi* and *folbin*, but my landlady and her healer felt no need to frame themselves as correct Muslims. The *bakhshi* on my street acts as the neighbourhood *khodimchi*, a woman who helps in the organisation of household feasting occasions such as weddings and circumcisions. Her status as a *bakhshi* does not preclude this.

The moral frames available to individuals in Samarkand are much more plural than in Pakhtabad, perhaps understandable given that it is a large and diverse urban setting rather than a village. Shared models for experience extend beyond understandings of specifically Muslim self and community, and I came across a number of converts to Protestant Christian groups in Samarkand. Other groups included the Baha'i, the Krishna, and innovative groups have appeared that mix ideas from Islam and other philosophies with local practices such as the veneration of ancestors, recruiting members from both the indigenous and Russian speaking populations.[4] During my research in Samarkand I came across one such movement established by a figure I can best refer to as 'the Teacher'. His 'School of Life' seems to draw upon numerous religious and philosophical traditions, including Sufism, Christianity and Hinduism.[5]

A central element in his teaching is the idea of healing. Physical and mental suffering, tension in interpersonal relations, and failure in life in general are caused by the negative energy resulting from personal dissatisfaction and wrong-doing. Individuals need to change their attitudes, express love towards those around them, and ask forgiveness for their own sins and those of their ancestors. Fatmakhon is part of his small circle of dedicated followers. She is now retired, was born in Samarkand, and studied journalism at a higher educational institution in Dushanbe in the late 1960s. After graduation she returned to Samarkand, married and had children, and worked as journalist and school teacher. She described how she had suffered continually from a young age from a condition she described as her heart being squeezed (Rus. *menya serdtse szhimalos'*). Doctors were unable to do anything about it. When she was about 17 years old, she had a dream in which she was presented with the Qur'an, indicating that she should study it and become a *bibikhalfa*. She was initially embarrassed about doing this because she thought that this was just something that uneducated women did in order to make a little money. At the same time, her family were active Muslims and she had performed the *namoz* (Muslim prayers) regularly from the age of 7. Four years previous to our meeting

[4] One of these is the Aq jol movment in Kazakstan described in Jessa (2006).

[5] This emphasis on the movement being a school rather than a religion echoes the recollection of a Sri Chinmoi centre for spiritual education by a novice follower of Sufism in Samarkand. This was established in the city during the perestroika years. It was part of a worldwide network of such centres which were founded by the Indian mystic and philosopher Sri Chinmoi, who was himself a follower of the teachings of the Sri Aurobindo. It is possible that the Teacher was influenced by the ideas of meditation and self-revelation preached at this centre.

she had been put into a 3 day *chilla* to cure her condition, during which she miraculously became able to recite the Qur'an in Arabic, although not to understand its meaning. After this she became a *bibikhalfa*, reciting the Qur'an at women's ritual occasions and she also began to heal people using the Qur'an. She described her healing abilities as a gift from God which she did not understand, but she was not able to heal her own condition. A year after becoming a *bibikhalfa* she attended the Teacher's classes and he put her into another *chilla* in order to ask forgiveness for her sins, which cured her affliction. Since then she has stopped performing the *namoz* and instead performs a ritual intended to invoke forgiveness of sins developed by the Teacher himself. This mimics some of the movements of the *namoz*, such as bending down to touch the head on the ground, and chanting in Arabic *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (There is no God but God).

The pattern of illness and search for healing which Fatmakhon experienced is a common one shared by the Abdumajid-aka and the others I encountered. A number of individuals who had joined Protestant Christian groups had recounted similar illness experiences, eventually finding healing through membership of a Christian church. Whereas Abdumajid-aka has apprehended this experience within a personal moral narrative of Muslim selfhood, this *bibikhalfa* has developed an alternative frame provided by the philosophy of the Teacher. This does not prevent her from taking prominent roles within rituals which other participants perceive as Muslim. Fatmakhon claimed that during the ritual occasions at which she officiates the women welcomed the advice she gives in response to the participants' questions, passing on some of the Teacher's ideas about the causes of suffering and the need to seek forgiveness, although she avoids those teachings which the women would find too outlandish. The model for illness and healing is shared by all those described here and their individual experiences are rendered mutually intelligible within it, even if this experience is apprehended within individually particular moral narratives.

Intelligibility and Tradition

The subfield that has come to be known as the 'Anthropology of Islam' formed around an ambition to develop Islam as an analytical object that is located in the lifeworlds of Muslims. An early concern was the search for an analytical frame capable of reconciling the diversity in the lived practice of Muslims with the idea of Islam as a universal phenomenon, with a coherent textual basis and historical heritage (Eickelman 1982; Geertz 1968; Gellner 1981; Manger 1999). Talal Asad's paper 'The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam' was an important contribution to this effort, which established the concept of discourse as a central term for analysis. Asad suggested that Islam as an object of study should be approached as a 'discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations . . ., and the production of appropriate knowledges' (Asad 1986:7). For Asad, a tradition consists of discourses.

> These discourses relate conceptually to *a past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and *a future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through *a present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions). (Asad 1986:14)

In more recent years attention has turned from this global object to an examination of what might broadly be referred to as Muslim selfhood. A productive move has been to explore the cultivation of pious or ethical Muslim selves. Notable in this regard has been the work of Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind who explore the efforts of individuals to cultivate in themselves appropriate desires, dispositions and emotions through self-conscious work upon the self (Hirschkind 2001, 2006; Mahmood 2005), and also Laura Deeb's discussion of public piety and what she calls 'authenticated Islam' among the Shi'i population of Beirut (Deeb 2006). The efforts of Muslims to fashion themselves as authentic Muslim subjects in complex, modern settings, where multiple Muslim and secular identities circulate, have been examined, for example, in the context of individual choices over body-covering (Brenner 1996; Werbner 2005), or the ordering of public and private space (Henkel 2007).

In response to the emphasis in some of this literature on ethical and moral coherence and the directed work of self-discipline on the part of an engaged subject, some anthropologists have in recent years recalled attention to the everyday lives of 'ordinary' Muslims. The moral is no less present, but this work emphasises ambivalence of everyday experience, its incoherence, and failure to live up to the ideal, where boundaries between different ways of being Muslim are not clearly defined (Marsden 2005; Schielke 2009; Simon 2009). This work speaks to the varied body of anthropological investigation of Muslim societies which locates the formation of Muslim selves in experiential lifeworlds. A prominent example is Katherine Ewing's psychoanalytically inspired discussion of the way Pakistani Muslims negotiate between multiple Islamic and non-Islamic discourses. She argues that individuals do not adopt fixed and coherent identities with reference to one or other ideology. Lived selves are always in motion, constituted within a dynamic narrative grounded in an individual's life experience and in relation to multiple Others (Ewing 1997). Other anthropologists have explored how Muslims negotiate conceptions of selfhood, often in situations of conflict or crisis, through experiences of spirit possession (Masquelier 2001; McIntosh 2004), encounters with Muslim 'saints' in dreams or at their tombs (Edgar 2006; Louw 2007), or through the experience of illness and suffering (MacPhee 2003).

I have followed this move to locate the development of moral selfhood in lifeworlds and experience. I seek to address the intelligibility of practice and experience that enable productive engagement and communication, despite different understandings of what it means to be a Muslim. A focus on experience, in fact, encourages us to reframe our analysis away from Islam and specifically Muslim understandings of selfhood, that has been, for obvious reasons, the central concern of the subfield of the 'Anthropology of Islam'. Individual understandings of moral selfhood (which might or might not be understood as Muslim) arise out of ongoing, contingent experience but at the same time they remain mutually intelligible. This is the problem

that Asad addresses in his idea for an anthropology of Islam. However, rather than approach Islam as the primary analytical object within which diverse practice and interpretation needs to be located, it is also productive to focus on intelligibility rather than boundaries, on what makes the diverse practice of Muslims and non-Muslims in a particular locality mutually intelligible so that productive communication and interaction is possible without insisting upon uniform understanding and interpretation.

Asad has attributed his concept of tradition to the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre is interested in the problem of the incommensurability of rival moral positions in modern Western society (MacIntyre 2007). He argues that the premises on which rival standpoints are founded are different so that there can be no common evaluative framework within which rational agreement can be achieved between differing standpoints. In the absence of rational criteria, an individual's choice of a moral position is personal and emotive. What is important for our purposes is the concept of a tradition in MacIntyre's work, key to which is the idea of intelligibility. An individual life is intelligible to subjects and others within a coherent narrative which begins with birth and continues to an end at or beyond death. In turn the behaviour and intentions of individuals are only intelligible within what MacIntyre calls a 'setting', historically situated institutions, practices, and social milieu. The anthropologist Michael Carrithers develops a similar idea when he describes sociality as the innate propensity of human beings to interpret the speech and actions of others as 'unfolding stories', in terms of what the subject imagines to be the plans and intentions of others immersed within their own plots (Carrithers 1992). Plots, actions, and intentions can only be mutually intelligible when they are located within shared institutions, histories, and practices and share conceptions of possible futures and ends. As MacIntyre puts it, an individual's story is embedded in the historically developing story of the communities from which the individual derives his or her identity.

It is the historical nature of narrative identity and understanding, situated as it is within a shared setting, which is captured by MacIntyre's concept of a tradition:

> What I am, therefore, is in key part what I inherit, a specific past that is present to some degree in my present. I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognise it or not, one of bearers of a tradition. . . . practices always have histories and . . . at any given moment what a practice is depends on a mode of understanding it which has been transmitted often through many generations. And thus, insofar as the virtues sustain the relationships required for practices, they have to sustain relationships to the past – and to the future – as well as in the present. (MacIntyre 2007:221)

A living tradition in good order does not imply that all those located within it share identical interpretations of history, present circumstances, or even ends worth pursuing. It is an ongoing argument precisely about the goods which constitute the tradition, but one which is conducted in mutually intelligible terms by those who engage in it. This is what Asad aims to capture in his suggestion that Islam should be studied as a discursive tradition. The debates and struggles to fix authoritative interpretations of the past and visions of an ideal Muslim life and community are conducted with reference to accepted sources of authority, histories and sacred topographies. All these provide the grounding for the mutual intelligibility which allows genuine debate.

However, I would like to focus on the intelligibility of a tradition rather than its boundedness, and extend the notion of intelligibility beyond these cognitive modes of reasoning over objectified discursive constructions of Islam. Intelligibility also operates at the level of immediate, subjective experience, in ready-to-hand models which make possible particular qualities of experience. The repressive political situation in Uzbekistan, that restricts the public circulation of competing discursive constructions of Islam, makes this all the more apparent.

The setting, to use MacIntyre's term, within which Muslims in Uzbekistan are immersed includes the local models for experience such as dreaming and illness I have described above. It includes the day-to-day sociality of participating fully and appropriately within a household, arranging for the marriage and settlement of children, or contributing to community goals. It also includes sources of authority and histories which have resonance for Muslims everywhere, such the Qur'an as divine revelation and how this revelation is lived in the practice of the Prophet Muhammad. It includes historical figures, prominent Sufi masters and Islamic scholars such as Imom Bukhoriy (d. 870), the compiler of Hadith of the Prophet, or Baha' al-Din Naqshband (d. 1389), founder of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order. These figures are incorporated within individual moral narratives in diverse ways. The government has coopeted these figures as carriers of the culturally authentic golden heritage to which the nation is returning. For many, they are evoked as scholars and scientists, proof that the Qur'an is a textual representation of a divinely created universe, the study of which produces knowledge of the material world. For a young imam in Samarkand who was a descendant of the locally prominent sixteenth century Naqshabandi shaykh Makhdum-i Azam, his ancestor and other Sufi masters were embodiments of a direct mode of access to knowledge through an inner experience, attained by perfection of character. For many of those who work with the help of spirits, these figures come to them in dreams and visions and confer knowledge and healing power, sometimes passing on physical objects such as a Qur'an or prayer beads, although they are often condemned as charlatans or as misguided by many imams trained in Uzbekistan's madrasas.

Similarly, experience is constituted within models for ritual practice which make explicit reference to Islam such as celebrations and commemorations surrounding birth, marriage and death, and also communal ritual occasions such as *mevlud* gatherings celebrating the birth of the Prophet, *iftor* gatherings breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan, or *khatmi qur'on*, where the Qur'an is recited for the benefit of a deceased relative. These are also understood by participants in diverse ways as I have alluded to in the description of my farewell *mavlud* in Pakhtabad. The same is true for other models for experience, such as obtaining healing through the recitation of the Qur'an. This might be subjectively understood as imploring God to grant healing, as calling upon the aid of the angels which stand behind each letter in the Qur'an, or as Abdumajid-aka believes, as activating the inner energies with all living beings possess. Individuals hold diverse understandings of what is going on as experience is apprehended within personal moral narratives which produce different understandings of moral selfhood. At the same time, the practice of different individuals remains mutually intelligible, arising as it does from a shared setting.

MacIntyre and Asad see a tradition as the limit of intelligibility. Meaningful dialogue and argument are possible within a tradition, but difficult or impossible across traditions because different traditions are founded on different premises and evaluative frames. For Asad, Islam is itself such a tradition, but a focus on experience as a site for moral reasoning takes us beyond specifically Muslim understandings. The setting in which individuals are immersed includes models for experience, histories, social institutions, and the sociality of participation within a household and community. It provides possibilities for experience which is apprehended creatively within diverse narratives of moral selfhood. These may be Muslim but do not have to be, and at the level of experience they remain mutually intelligible.

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Chapter 6
Becoming Sacred: Humanity and Divinity in East Java, Indonesia

Konstantinos Retsikas

Introduction

In a much celebrated, and for good reasons, book Saba Mahmood (2005) has analysed modes of ethical self-fashioning among Egyptian Muslims who are active participants of so-called 'piety movements'. By means of employing Foucault's (1985, 1988) later writings on ethics as aesthetics and Asad's (1986) definition of Islam as a discursive tradition, Mahmood's fine ethnography of an urban women's mosque movement consistently and effectively critiques a central assumption in many feminist and secular-liberal writings on the question of Islam and gender. In particular, she persuasively shows that Western liberal and liberationist discourses that 'locate agency in the political and moral autonomy of the subject' (2005: 7) grossly misrepresent the sense of selfhood these young, middle-class pious Muslim women actively cultivate and promote. In order to better grasp the processes at play, Madmood relies on Foucault's later concern with how individuals come to constitute and understand themselves as subjects. The techniques of self mastery her informants engage in range from specific styles of dress and speech to patterns of financial and household management. According to Mahmood, all these practices taken together constitute 'public arenas of Islamic pedagogy that is critically structured by, and serves to uphold, a discursive tradition that regards subordination to a transcendent will (and thus, in many instances to male authority) as its coveted goal' (2005: 3).

The 'cult of the self' model of subjectivity has however some serious drawbacks. The obvious advantage is that of bringing reform-minded Muslims into the fold of 'modernity', that is in line with 'modern' pre-occupations with reflexivity, objectification, rationalisation and the discovery of truth about one's identity. However as

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_6,

McNay has argued with regards to Foucault's work, it nevertheless 'replicates rather than disrupts some of the central features of the [Western] philosophy of the subject [. . .] remain[ing] within the fundamental dynamics of [a location] which posits an active self as acting on an objectified world and interacting with other subjects who are defined as objects or narcissistic extensions of the primary subject' (1994: 153). In other words, the privileging of the relation of the self to the self both downplays and leaves as unproblematic relations with others *as subjects*, bypassing the inter-subjectivity of relationships, and the constitutive role that encounters with alterity play in the always unstable, highly contingent, and fundamentally fragile project of becoming or acquiring a self. With regards to Mahmood's own work, this privileging largely effaces all traces of presence and action by human others the piety movement constitutes itself in relation to, including rural traditionalists, urban secularists, and the urban poor. In addition, it reduces relations with the divine to an interiorised modality of fear of punishment as a motivation for the undertaking of moral action (2005: 145). In this regard, submission by pious Egyptian women to the divine will becomes quite paradoxically in Mahmood's book evidence of an absence of a relation as it is cultivated by a carefully self-choreographed fear.

The present paper argues for the need to go beyond self-mastery accounts of Muslim subjectivities, whether 'reformist' or 'traditionalist' ones, and foregrounds the relation between divinity and humanity as fundamental in any undertaking towards an understanding of the formation of a sense of self amongst the faithful. Drawing on material from East Java, Indonesia, I shift attention to the pulsating nature of the distinction between humanity and divinity, noting its contractions and expansions, and emphasise the modes of communication with and reception of the divine into the human as articulated by devout, 'traditionalist' and Sufism-inspired Muslims who, as a result of undertaking religious regimes of ascetic practice, have come to acquire the capacity to heal. I discuss the often objectionable bodies such people endow themselves with, while highlighting the dangers ascetic practices are associated with, and the moral ambivalences that surround those equipped with healing powers. In the case of East Javanese Sufism-inspired Muslims I know best, I argue that their subjectivity is animated not by the motivation to submit to a transcendent will, but rather by the desire to achieve intimacy with the divine. This intimacy is mediated by the experience of a kind of death that results in the annihilation and subsequent empowerment of the human.

The practices of intimacy recounted here are located within Sufi traditions of religious piety and have deep historical roots in the nineteenth century, and particularly, in the Javanese courts' deployment of Sufi doctrines and themes for the purposes of rule legitimacy (Ricklefs 2007; Woodward 1989). However, beginning in the late nineteenth century, such practices have been subjected to reformist critiques that in common with other parts of the Islamic world (see Ewing 1997; Rasanayagam 2006) accuse 'traditional' healers for sinful conduct, namely for contravening the doctrine of monotheism (*tawhid*), branding them as bad Muslims or even non-Muslims and calling for the revision and/or abandonment of such practices in line with a return to 'pristine' Islam.

As a response, my informants as well as others of similar outlook around the Islamic world, emphasise that their capacities are given from God and that He works through them. Taking my lead from this defensive positioning, I argue that Sufi-inspired Javanese asceticism is dedicated to shifting the dimensions of the distinction between the human and the divine from the fixity of an insurmountable ontological difference into a fluid, inchoate and indeterminate intimacy that allows for the experience of divine otherness within the human self. Indeed, the whole processes of intensification of religious practice and transformative empowerment amounts to a concerted effort in making such a shift of dimensions possible. This in turn brings about a breaching of boundaries and the contraction of the space separating the creator from the created, allowing in the end for the evincing of the divine in the world.

The paper also casts doubt on a widespread assumption in the anthropology of Islam that recognises reformist Islam as compatible with 'modernity' while relegating Sufi concerns to the category of 'tradition'. Writing in the heyday of modernisation theory, both Gellner (1981) and Geertz (1960) traced the emergence under colonialism of novel forms of religious devotion to the anticipation of modernity. Such forms in their articulation with nationalist politics and the demands of the market were promising to eliminate and/or reform age old 'traditions' that were antithetical to emergent forms of social and economic 'rationality'. However, as Howell and van Bruinessen have recently argued (2007) not only did the dual critiques of Sufi-related religious devotion by modernists and modernisation theorists alike not bring about the decline of Sufi practises, but a re-constituted and re-invigorated Sufism came to efflorescence in many modernising contexts across the Islamic world, especially among the middle classes since the 1980s. In other words, the 'Islamic revival' commonly associated with the many variants of Islamic reformism is a phenomenon that actually involves a renewed interest in the mystical side of the faith as well.

Here I wish to go further than Howell and van Bruinessen and argue that in East Java the embodied subjects Sufi-inspired modes of religiosity create are already beyond the 'modern' (cf Latour 1993). To this end, I employ Donna Harraway's (1991) cyborg as a figure that is good to think with. The purpose of this ethnographically arbitrary cross-reference is to show that the bodies healers are endowed with are proximate to cyborgs in the sense of both been assemblages consisting of parts that belong to distinct ontological orders. As assemblages, cyborgs transgress the boundary between the human and the machine, and healers creatively combine the human and the sacred. Moreover, both figures are deeply unconcerned about dictates for unity, coherence, totality, and singularity. The subject positions they inhabit are constituted in and through difference that finds neither resolution nor integration into a higher order of foundational identity. Both cyborgs' and healers' particular modality of existence makes them intrinsically capable of performing actions with an efficacy that is beyond the capabilities of those singularly and indivisibly human, i.e. the monadic, alienated subjects of 'modernity'.

The Body's Sacred Otherness

Michael Feher, in his introduction to the influential *Fragments for a History of the Human Body,* raises a question that is a central pre-occupation of the comparative study of religions: what kind of body, he asks, do people 'endow themselves with – or attempt to acquire – given the power they attribute to the divine? A practical question, since it amounts to asking oneself what exercises to do to resemble a god physically or to commune sensually with him' (1989: 13).

Following Feher and writing with respect to the Charismatic Catholics in the United States, Thomas Csordas begins his exploration from the position that 'the sacred is an existential encounter with Otherness that is the touchstone of our humanity. It is a touchstone because it defines us by what we are not- by what is beyond our limits, or what touches us precisely at our limits' (1994: 5). Part of Csordas' efforts is dedicated towards showing how the figure of Jesus corresponds to a cultural objectification of an irreducible and universal condition of human existence, the otherness of the self. This otherness is grounded both in the dual status of the body as a subject *and* an object, and in its partial co-extensiveness with the person. This is how he puts it:

> 'this essential otherness originates in the limitations of our physical being that leave us with a sense of inescapable contingency, in the autonomic functioning of our bodies that insistently goes on without us, but which implicates us in anything that happens to our bodies, and in the possibility of seeing ourselves as objects from the perspective of another. The body is thus a hidden presence or an alien presence, a 'latency thanks to which anything else can be or become patent' [. . .]. The deity as imaginal actor is a benevolent objectification of this preobjective sense of alterity' (1994: 158).

Leaving aside for the moment the secular pre-suppositions that informs his take on religious objectification, Csordas' analysis revolves around three key postulates; firstly, that a theory of the self should be grounded in embodiment; secondly, that the self is inter-subjectively constituted; and thirdly, that the notion of inter-subjectivity offers valuable insights into the relation between the self and the sacred. In this regard, the sense of the sacred as a radical 'not myself' both reflects and amplifies our existential paradox, that is our partial separation from and yet intimate connection with our bodies.

In parallel to concerns with the universals of embodiment, Csordas' phenomenology of religious experience is also attentive to cultural and historical specificities. The Charismatic healing practices are carefully related to three 'psycho-cultural' themes which are habitual both to the U.S. society and the Charismatic context; these themes, namely spontaneity, control and intimacy are in turn located within an overriding sensorial orientation towards visual imagery. Religious imagery and personal memories are re-worked by Charismatic healers so that healing is achieved. The latter's efficacy rests with the healer making the patient realise that the divine Jesus was always already there with him/her. 'This fundamental 'withness', writes Csordas, [. . .] [which is] associated with the alterity of the self, is incorporated as a disposition of the sacred self' (1994: 164). The immediacy of 'withness' both

manifests and multiplies the grounds of difference on the basis of which the human is (re-)constituted by refracting the partial otherness of the body onto the surface of the contingent and undetermined 'withness' of the divine.

In what follows, I am implicitly drawing upon Csordas' study to highlight both differences and similarities across our respective cases. The similarities are partly related to the fact that Charismatic Catholics and Pentecostal Christians put a lot of emphasis on practices of consciousness transformation and of the experience of the immanent presence of the divine. This emphasis carries an unmistakable parallel with Sufi pre-occupations and concerns save of course for the fact that Sufis and Catholics belong to distinct religious traditions. In order to make some of the differences between the two cases apparent, I am claiming that Sufi practices as enacted in East Java employ distinct 'psycho-cultural themes' to the Charismatic ones. The themes of intentional asceticism, temporary death, and empowerment are central in the acquisition of the capacity to heal in Java. At the same time, these themes are located within an overall sensorial orientation that privileges *rasa*, meaning touch/taste/feeling (see Retsikas 2007b).

Kaleidoscopic Refractions

The people I am working with live in Probolinggo, a provincial town on the coast of East Java, Indonesia and identify themselves as 'mixed people' (*orang campuran*), claiming to be neither Javanese nor Madurese, but the outcome of their inter-involvement. In other publications, I have traced this 'mixing' to a series of demographic movements that took place throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, movements which are directly associated with the transformation of East Java into a sugar economy by the Dutch colonial power (Retsikas 2007a). The migrants' sense of themselves was subject to intense transformations themselves partly the result of inter-ethnic marriages, facilitated by the fact that both groups profess Islam, and partly the outcome of patterns of exchanges of food, prayers, and ancestors that depend upon people living in ethnically inclusive neighbourhoods. Today the descendants of these migrants conceive of their bodies as composites, made up of both Madurese and Javanese parts and sensibilities which are made manifest in their ability to converse fluently both in Madurese and Javanese languages, while often switching between them; in their preference for staple meals consisting of mixture of rice and corn with the latter stereotypically related to Madurese and Javanese diets respectively; and in the oscillation that characterises recently devised 'mixed' styles of dancing between slow and elegant parts, on the one hand, and parts which are overwhelmingly fast and furious, on the other (Retsikas 2007b, 2010a).

The theme of becoming sacred that I explore here is embedded within a social and historical context in which difference as an aspect of everyday life has a profound and irreducible immediacy and materiality. I have argued elsewhere that my informants' mixed sense of self despite resting on a combination of

complementary yet formally opposing principles is not organised into a stable singularity. The sense they have of themselves is rather animated by an oscillation, a to-and-fro movement between the twin limits defined by the subject positions of ethereal refinement (*halus*, itself associated with 'Java-ness') and relative coarseness (*kasar* which is associated with 'Madura-ness') (2007b). This oscillation is set in motion by the tensions generated by the embodiment of both Javanese and Madurese 'qualities' which are understood in a relational way that is, as processes that require activation and elicitation by the presence and actions of other subjects. Similar tensions, oscillations, and elicitations sit also at the heart of gendered conceptualisations of the subject as androgynous, and of sociality as predicated on intensive processes of becoming-kin *and* becoming-enemy (Retsikas 2010b). The theme of becoming sacred I explore here is therefore nothing but a kaleidoscopic refraction of a wider conceptualisation of the subject as internally differentiated and always in motion (Retsikas 2012). Such a conceptualisation is moreover embedded within the particular historical experiences that have come to characterise this 'community' of people.

The deepening of the Islamic consciousness is part and parcel of this history too. Parallel to developments in other parts of Java, the peoples of Probolinggo have participated in an ongoing process towards greater Islamisation (Hefner 1987). The process in question is not so much about a teleological tendency towards greater conformity to modes of religious orthopraxy and orthodoxy that emanate from the Middle-East as about deep public concern and heightened individual apprehension regarding the faith. These concerns and apprehensions manifest themselves in public debates and arguments which subject matter ranges from the appropriate forms of (female) attire and permissible modes of medical treatment to issues regarding the future direction of national economic policy and the broad outlines of political party support via questions over whether the dead can hear the living and whether rice is animate or not (see Bowen 1993).

Starting from the nineteenth century, colonialism and Islamic reformism have had a profound impact on the rural society of Java through bringing to an end what Ricklefs (2007) calls the mystic synthesis, i.e. the creative combination of Javanese understandings of Sufism and distinctly local, pre-Islamic beliefs the courtly centres had fostered (see also Woodward 1989). In the late nineteenth century, the disempowerment of indigenous courts, the new forms of economic extraction, and the new system of education the Dutch put in place worked in tandem with the critiques of Islamic reformists who castigating a whole range of practices as non-Islamic contributed to the emergence of *kejawen* Javanese. The latter by stripping their rites of Islamic elements proceeded to invent a distinct, non-Muslim religious counter-tradition that lives to this day (Beatty 1999). The fragmentation of the community of the faithful also saw in the early twentieth century the formation of the category of 'traditionalist' Muslims. The latter came to be broadly represented by *Nahdlatul Ulama*, an organisation that defends Sufi traditions and ancestral practices through fusing them with *ulama*-based Islam and which promotes Islamic scholarship through its unique network of Koranic schools that span the countryside. In the decades following independence, the tendencies towards increased differentiation

reached an apogee with the enmeshment of religious variants in political party competition over votes and culminated in the anti-communist purges of the mid-1960s. Following from this period, under the authoritarian New Order, the formal de-politisation of Islam and the achievement of a broad consensus over the nation's 'development' allowed not only for the vociferous polarisation of the past to dissipate, but also for major and minor religious organisations to engage in propagation activities that sought to Islamise Javanese society rather than the Indonesian state. At the same time, the New Order extended its generous support to non-political Islamic activities through an intensive programme of mosque-building, hajj-organising, financial support for independent Koranic schools, and aid for the establishment of institutes of higher Islamic learning. In the late 1990s these developments proved instrumental in the New Order's demise when the economic crisis made the re-working of relationships between rulers and ruled imperative. Since then, the process of Islamisation has continued unabated as the era of *reformasi* has witnessed the re-appearance of political Islam on the scene, inclusive of some violent, *jihadi* manifestations (Sidel 2006), the development of a 'market Islam' to suit the demands of neoliberal reforms the country is undergoing (Rudnyckyj 2009), the ongoing negotiation of gender equality within an Islamic framework (Robinson 2007), and the concomitant proliferation of voices and interests that claim to represent 'authentic' Islam.

Up to recently, Islamic modernism has made some significant inroads in Probolinggo especially among the affluent, professional and educated middle classes of the town centre with *Muhammadiyah*, the country's largest reformist association, claiming a membership of close to 10,000 (out of a population of more than 210,000). However, in the city's agricultural periphery where I have carried out most of my fieldwork – amongst peasants, small scale traders, and low level civil servants – ordinary Muslims are well within the orbit of the influence of the traditionalist *Nahdlatul Ulama* with religious teachers (*kyai*) and Koranic schools (*pesantren*) dotting the landscape with potent centres of authority, learning and leadership. Partly due to the critiques of modernists and partly due to the accelerated process of state-led modernity, a series of practices which were in the past conventionally associated with popular Islam have mostly disappeared from everyday life. Among those are: offerings to and festivals surrounding shrines dedicated to powerful place spirits (*danyang*) that Beatty (1999) has so evocatively described as persisting to the south of Probolinggo (see also Wessing 1995), ritual practices that appealed to Dewi Sri as the supernatural owner of rice fields and controller of the fertility of crops that Headly (2004) has found as central in nineteenth century Java, the presentation and distribution of personal items belonging to dead relatives that informants remember as integral to rites of commemoration in the 1960s. Underlying these transformations have been acute religious disputes that as in other Islamic societies across the world (Metcalf 1982; Eisenlohr 2009) involved accusations of grave misconduct with *kejawen* and traditionalist practitioners been rebuked for engaging in 'idolatry' and 'polytheism', and thus for violating the universal law of Islamic monotheism or *tawhid*.

There is plenty of evidence however to suggest that modernism has not ushered in a great transformation in terms of a radical shift in conceptualisations of divinity,

of the place of the human, and of their interrelationships; at least not for all Muslims, not in all contexts. In particular, Hefner has argued that Islamic modernism with its emphasis on scriptures as the single most important authority in matters of belief and worship and its drive towards personal transformation, inward piety, self-discipline, and direct individual accountability to God, has effectively 'desacralised domains that previously fell under the spell of magic and spiritual technique, and relocated divinity to a higher more abstract plane' (1998: 156). In other words, the rationalisation of religious belief and practice in Islam has resulted not so much in a wholesale disenchantment of the world as in a 'distancing of spiritual agency from all tangible immediacy, and its relocation to the domain of an all powerful, but also more remote Allah' (ibid.). What follows is largely an account of how three 'traditionalist', Sufism-inspired Muslims in Probolinggo currently respond to the modern(-ist) rigidly drawn distinction between the human and the divine as they seek to communicate with Allah, bringing themselves closer to Him so as to achieve intimacy and acquire knowledge.

Crossing Zones

Illness, accidents, and misfortune pervade everyday life in Probolinggo as much as other places in the world. Dealing effectively with these often necessitates recourse to as much biomedical knowledge and techniques available in state and private institutions as to 'traditional' healers designated as *dukun* and/or *kyai*. The latter's knowledge (*elmo*), remedies and practices are informed by close engagement with the faith as the ultimate guide to salvation both in this life and the afterlife. *Elmo* is generally considered to be a kind of knowledge and a substantive power[1] that originates in the non-human zone that includes Allah, the angels, the dead, and an assortment of spirits ranging from benevolent *jinn* to malevolent *setan*. In broad terms, *elmo*'s acquisition requires intensive modes of communication with the entities that populate that zone of the unseen (*alam ghaib*) and the reception of gifts as evidences of human selfless devotion and achieved intimacy with the sacred. The capacity to heal is one such gift and is commonly attributed to contact with Allah, the angels, or other benevolent dead and spirits.

In the Quran the dimensions of the distinction between the human and the divine are set out. Humans are amongst Allah's creations; however, they have been appointed as His steward (*khalifah*), a position that couples relative superiority with an immense responsibility. God as the creator of all life and death far exceeds

[1] Writing with respect to Javanese conceptions of power, Anderson argues that power is 'an existential reality [. . .], that intangible, mysterious, and divine energy which animates the universe' (1990: 22). As an invisible substance, power (*wahyu*, Jav.) can be looked for, absorbed, and accumulated through a variety of mystical practices, the performance of specific rituals, and accumulation of sacred objects (see also Keeler 1987).

them both; human beings, in contrast, are bound to birth, growth, decay, and demise. Specific Quranic passages provide descriptions of God through listing many of His attributes such as merciful, compassionate, eternal, and supreme. However, as many informants stressed, such descriptions are more akin to approximations rather than accurate renderings of His essence as absolute knowledge of the divine is held to lie beyond the capabilities of human beings. The concept of monotheism (*tawhid*), that is, of Allah having no partner makes apparent a further difference; whereas Allah is one and indivisible, humans are numerous and form an admixture of separate and separable elements.[2] Moreover, Islam which means submission to the commandments of Allah as set out in the scripture defines humanity as bound up with the obligation to obey them.

Yet, as Ernst notes, 'another theme that attracts close scrutiny [by the faithful] is the intimate relation of closeness that can exist between God and humanity' (1997: 41), and Muslims in Java as elsewhere (Hirschkind 2001) reserve for the human heart a special role in efforts to approach God. The divide that separates divinity from humanity is thus imagined as capable of being bridged. This bridging has also received extensive textual treatment and ritual elaboration and is usually portrayed as involving a double movement that recognises as much a downward prophetic revelation as an ecstatic saintly ascension. The crossing of the human into the zone of the divine is often communicated in a series of themes stressing humans' sharing intimacy with God, the human longing for nearness and union with Allah, and the total annihilation in divine presence (Schimmel 1975). These themes have been distinctly developed within the traditions of *tasawwuf*, literally meaning the process of becoming Sufi.

Building on Chittick's definition of Sufism as 'the interiorisation and intensification of Islamic faith and practice' (1995: 102), Julia Howell shows how this board definition allows us to recognise two most important things: firstly, 'that devotional practices and religious concepts associated with Sufi traditions are often employed by Muslims as spiritual enhancements of their everyday lives, even when they are not undertaking a mystical path of dramatic personal transformation in the hope of direct experience of the divine', and secondly and consequently, that the study of Sufism as a study of a specific stream of devotion should 'encompass Sufi mystics independent of Sufi orders (*tarekat*) as well as those practicing within them' (2001: 702).

At the centre of 'tranditionalist' Islam in Java sits a major concern over drawing oneself nearer to Allah as a fundamental aspect of the effort required to be a

[2] The composite nature of human beings is manifested in many ways. Humans are said to consist of a *jasmani*, the corporate body, and a *rohani*, the immaterial, eternal soul. The *jasmani* is held as made of clay, itself consisting of four different elements (*anasir*), that is, soil, water, fire and air. While the *jasmani* and the *rohani* are tied to each other during life, they become separated upon death. A further component, the *nafsu*, variously understood as both vital energy and earthly desires play a key role in connecting the *jasmani* and the *rohani*. The *nafsu* are in turn four: *nafsu aluamah*, *nafsu amarah, nafsu mutma'inah*, and *nafsu sufyah*.

Muslim. 'Traditionalist' piety is intimately related to the recognition of the *syariah*, and especially those aspects of it concerning ritual performance and family law, as the basis of Islam. This basis is often though considered as the minimum requirement and thus, as inadequate in and of itself vehicle for the full realisation of personal devotion. The extensive complex of supererogatory devotion as the necessary supplant to the *syariah* is provided by *tassawuf* itself defined both as a distinct philosophical tradition and a set of popular practices. In Java, Dhofier (1980) refers to the popular aspect of *tasawwuf* as the *zuhud* complex.[3] It consists of an intensification and interiorisation of religious practice beyond the obligatory, the formal and the external that finds expression in the frequent recitation of the Quran, participation in *pengajian* (study groups), the performance of recommended prayers and recommended fasting, the practice of *dhikir*, and pilgrimage to the graves of saints. As Woodward (1989: 117) argues, for those willing to dwell further into the faith, joining a Sufi order and undertaking a series of more intense austerities and particular intellectual training is the next step along a continuum whose ultimate aim is the achievement of closeness with Allah.

Contracting Death

I first met *kyai* Salahuddin in 1998 when was a 48 years of age father of 3 children, and a local Islamic scholar who along with offering instruction to the basics of the faith to neighbourhood kids, was also deemed capable to deal effectively with a variety of problems. The latter ranged from marital disagreements and parental concerns to both minor and serious physiological conditions such as stones in the kidneys and the bladder, diabetes, and even cancer. His capacity to heal was acquired in the context of events that unfolded over the last two decades of his life beginning from the time he was a senior student in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Pasuruan and Madura, and continued with his initiation in the *Qadiriyah wa Naqsyabandiyah tarekat*.[4] The most profound of these events was marked by an extreme case of testing of his religious devotion and was

[3] Modernists object to the *zuhud* complex on two counts; firstly, because in their opinion, it is supported by 'weak' Hadith, and secondly, because it detracts attention from one's duties to this life as it is overly pre-occupied with blessings (*barakah*) and the afterlife.

[4] Prominent among the objects decorating his living room were portraits of religious figures arranged in two separate lines, one related to the *pesantren* of Sidogiri (Pasuruan), and the other to the *tarekat*. Such portraits functioned as the always necessary 'proof' of his spiritual genealogy (*silsilah*), authorising the authenticity of his religious knowledge via the establishment of legitimate links of transmission. For more details of Qadiriyah wa Naqsyabandiyah's presence in East Java see van Bruinessen (1995).

accompanied by the suffusion of his heart with divine light. This is how the *kyai* himself narrated his experiences:

> My name was Yatim. Back then, [1991], I was tortured for 99 days. That happened when I was already married for nine years. The torture involved my *batin* [inner self]. My *batin* did not recognise my wife, my parents or children. I became oblivious of the world, feeling as if I was to die the very next moment. All I did for 99 days was to stay indoors, being quiet and reciting Allah's name. I was bathing seventeen times a day and feeding myself with leaves. In my *batin* nothing except Allah mattered and His name was active. I had forgotten all about my wife and parents. In my heart, I could see the way that leads to Allah. . .I could see all the people. It was then that the light struck me again. . .*struum*!!! like an electric current. . .it entered me. . .My *batin* became full with understanding and *elmo* (power/knowledge). Later on, a lot of people who did not understand what had happened to me were paying me a visit. I did engage them in conversation and their difficulties immediately entered me. . .in my *batin*, I could sense (*rasa*, taste/touch/feel) the difficulties they were facing. They were there, in my heart. That was because of the *elmo*. This *elmo* is called *elmo mahrifat*. It allows me to see their *batin*. . . to see if they are good, pious people or evil, to see their intentions, their thoughts, their character. . . immediately. . .*shreed*!!!. . .enters here [pointing to his chest].

Kyai Salahuddin's narration of the conditions that allowed for the bestowal of the gift of performing miracles rests on the evocation of central tenets of Sufism that he studied in the *pesantren* and practiced as a deputy of *Qadiriyah wa Naqsyabandiyah*. His claim to having achieved *mahrifat*, the highest station of Sufism, brings him into the fold of sainthood and several people in his trans-local entourage certainly saw him in this way, often describing him as 'a friend of Allah' and a 'specialist in mysticism'. As he himself explained, *mahrifat* is to bring the path that leads to God to its conclusion, to realise the objective; it means 'to vanish' (*hilang*) or 'die' (*meninggal dunia*), and through one's death 'to approach' (*mendekati*) Allah, to unify with Allah (*menyatu sama Allah*).

The theme of temporary death as integral to achieving unification with Allah is central in al-Ghazali's (1058–1111) work. One of the greatest jurists, theologians, and mystics of Islam whose texts are widely used in Javanese boarding schools, al-Ghazali defined the 'orthodox' way of reaching unification as resting on (self)-annihilation (*fana*, Arabic), 'the nullification of the mystic in divine presence' (Schimmel 1975: 144, see also Elkaisy-Friemuth 2006). As Zoetmulder (1995) argues with respect to Ghazali, this unification is neither thought of as a permanent merging of God and human that produces a third entity of a single, indistinguishable identity, nor is it understood as an event partaking to beings that belong to the same ontological plane. Rather, annihilation occurs in a space marked by ontological difference and as an experience, is limited to the human person. It necessitates a voluntary self-emptying and self-concealing, that is, a temporary eclipsing of the human achieved through careful supererogatory devotion, painful ascetic discipline, and deep reflective concentration. The eclipsing of the human allows in turn for the evincing of the divine, a miraculous arrival that more often than not takes the form of a beam of light descending upon the faithful. In this regard, it is important for me to stress that neither for *kyai* Salahuddin nor for Ghazali does annihilation result in the human becoming identical or equal to the divine as it is

held that it is incapable of superseding the distinction between the creator and the created, the being by itself and the being by another. In other words, difference is both given and maintained in the face of and despite unification.

In Java, ascetic practices are commonly construed as a test of the sincerity and intensity of one's faith and are held to lead to the contraction of the space the distinction between the divine and the human occupies. However, the contraction has a circumscribed temporality for it is bounded by the singular event of the reception of divine light. The contraction therefore partakes of the moment it is achieved, it is both fleeting and transitory; it is cancelled the very second it is reached. The acquisition of the capacity to heal follows both from annihilation and the subsequent re-emergence of the space between the human and the divine as progressively expansive, increasingly wide. Separation re-instates itself. The expansion of the space that came to be momentarily zeroed onto itself follows the re-introduction of the annihilated into the human domain. In that respect, *Kyai* Salahuddin construed the services performed to humanity as intrinsically bound to his separateness from Allah, commending that

> People come here because they are suffering. [Whether they are healed or not] does not depend on me. It depends on Allah. If Allah wishes for them to be healed, they will be. If He does not, they won't. I am just putting in the effort, the one who determines [the outcome] is Allah.

Not One

The *kyai*'s body is of a particular kind for it is marked by surplus and excess. It is excessive for it is a composite of human and non-human parts and members held together by networks the continuous performance of religious disciplines fosters. The breaching of boundaries the reception of divine light into the human body heralds instigates processes of becoming-other-than-before with the latter being neither singularly human nor identical to the divine. In this respect, I argue, the healer's ontology is proximate to the ontology of cyborgs.

For Haraway (1991), cyborgs are cybernetic entities, part machine, part human organism, with the former acting as 'prosthetic devices, intimate components, friendly selves' (178) that extend human capacities beyond the ordinary. Their constitution rests on contradictions and tensions with cyborgs populating technologically advanced worlds in which the tightly organised enclosures the project of Enlightenment established have given way to multiple and unstable connections which straddle porous divides. At the heart of Haraway's conceptualisation therefore lies an understanding of the post-modern subject as post-human, and of

the relation as the primary and minimal unit of analysis.[5] Being neither simply machines nor solely human, cyborgs correspond to assemblages that allow Haraway to foreground difference as the condition of possibility of the subject. At the same time, they allow us to privilege 'partial connections' (Strathern 1991: 36–41) as a productive way of thinking about associations characterised by intensity and incommensurability which carry certain parallels with those of religious experience.

As a figure good to think with, Haraway's cyborg overcomes a series of familiar dualisms that animate much of Western epistemology (nature and culture, non-human and human, body and mind, woman and man). Appeal is here made not to the logic of combination for such logic perpetuates the very oppositions it tries to overcome, but to the logic of partial connections. A cyborg is not a whole for it is permeated by internal division and external irony. 'Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true' (1991: 149). New possibilities open up for cyborgs are built on the grounds of establishing and maintaining connections between parts which despite remaining distinct in terms of their ontology, manage to work well together.

The extension of the machine through its coupling with the human, and the augmentation of the human through its pairing with the machine result in an expanded set of capacities. The powers of the cyborg are comparable yet not commensurate to the powers of healers. The contraction of space furnishes for healers new parts and with them an ability to do things the singular and the original can not achieve. The attachment of the other on the self makes the other into a dimension of the self without denying its separateness. This is a mode of unification without unity which very much depends on maintaining a multiplicity of circuits across the divide in working condition. The contingency of these circuits displaces the urgency for identity totalisation and favours unstable becomings which as the following example makes aptly clear are often deeply dangerous.

[5] More recently, Harraway (2003, 2008) has applied much of the same line of thinking to human-animal relations, challenging conventional biological wisdom and demonstrating that the human and canine are companion species having emerged and co-evolved along each other in the transversal domain of 'natureculture'. The becomings companion species are involved in do not cancel their contingent differences out but rather amplify them through the various claims humans and dogs make on each other. She is quite critical of a conception of animal rights as the generous extension of human rights to non-human animals, asserting that 'in a relationship, dog and human construct 'rights' in each other . . . Possession – property – is about reciprocity and rights of access. If I have a dog, my dog has a human' (2003: 53–54).

The Snake of Knowledge

Pak Uddin was smallholder farmer in his late 40s who was also locally renowned for his ability to heal any kind of illness related to blood circulation problems through performing massage (*pejet*). His capacity to heal was the outcome of the incorporation of otherworldly power that took the dramatic form of a snake (*olar*) entering his body through the navel. In the past, Pak Uddin used to make a living through collecting materials in landfills for re-cycling, working long hours in hazardous conditions yet making barely enough for his family to get by. His prospects did not look particularly good as he had not managed to finish primary school and his wife was also of a poor background, selling vegetables in the market. However, in his prayers, he longed for a better life. This wish and his religious devotion were put to the test by a shadow (*bejengan*) that was 'send by Allah'. Pak Uddin was visited by the shadow several times, always on Thursday evenings when spirits and the souls of the dead are held to roam around. During these visits, the shadow subjected him to beatings and instructed him to perform massage, demanded the undertaking of multiple ascetic regimes including the repeated recitation of specific parts of the Quran (*Surat Fatir* and *Surat Rahman)* and fasting for 40 days, and handed him a *becaan* (incantation). In their last encounter, the shadow asked Pak Uddin

> 'Are you brave enough to receive a long animal? If you are sick, I am sick; if you are bitten, I am bitten'. 'I do accept it', I said. After a while, I saw a very long snake coming towards me. I was scared. I said to the snake 'Hey snake, if you are good, please enter'. The snake came closer and wrapped itself around my body. I felt I was dying for its grip was tightening. At that time, a black cat passed by and the snake set me free. It then moved to my belly. . .from my belly, it entered me. Next day, I went to the *kyai* to ask him what it all meant. 'Yesterday, I saw a cat and a snake. What's the meaning of it all?' 'The snake is *elmo* (power/knowledge). . . it entered your body. It is already inside you. The cat is the Prophet's favourite animal. You have to show respect. Do not worry. It was a trial till the *elmo* was given to you', the *kyai* replied.

Succumbing to higher authority willingly and without fear, receiving beatings without complaint, fasting for 40 consecutive days, and engaging in intensive and tiresome recitations that go beyond the obligatory and the formal are technologies for the reconstitution of the human and its redefinition as participating in the sacred. Ascetic exercises of this kind allow for the instigation of new forms of sociality, this time with non-humans. The intensity of this sociality brings about the contraction of the dimensions of the distinction between the human and the non-human and creates an intimacy which seizes the human with the tightness of the grip of a snake, bringing forth eclipse and temporary death. Pak Uddin, in a similar fashion to *kyai* Salahuddin, feels close to or like dying. Contact is accompanied by annihilation that in turn opens up a door for the evincing of the non-human. Finally, the gift of healing is a sacred addition to human constitution, an attachment destined to become an integral part of a new form of life.

Pak Uddin professed that the snake in his body alerted him to the presence of disease in the patient through the release of electricity, and asserted that it was the

snake that was guiding his hands in performing massage. His powers however embodied and sacred were also subject to detachment both through commoditisation and inheritance. Some years ago, Pak Uddin had been approached by neighbour of his and accepted him as an apprentice in exchange for a substantial amount of money. The apprentice spent several months observing Pak Uddin massaging his clients, subjecting himself to the same regiment of fasting and praying the master healer maintained. In the end, he did learn how to massage but, in Pak Uddin's words, 'he could not heal people... his massage was not as efficacious as it should have been'. This was not so much for lack of diligence on the part of the apprentice as for certain constrains involved in training as an educational technique. 'It is nearly impossible to be taught *elmo*. *Elmo* is in the body and his body did not know *elmo*', Pak Uddin explained.

Bodies that already share certain parts with those of healers are in prime position to be *elmo*'s future recipients. In this instance the separation of *elmo* from the healer is anticipated to be realised within the moral realm of kinship. The passing of *elmo* to one's descendants qualifies it as a form of inheritance (*pusaka*) with the actual transfer taking place at the very moment of the healer's death. In this regard, the *elmo* is often imagined as detaching itself from the healer's body together with, or through, his very last breath. The willing offspring who in Pak Uddin's case is his only child, a daughter, is expected to receive the *elmo* through inhaling her dying father's last breath. Their relation as being of 'one blood' (*situng dereh*) is construed as a condition that is both necessary and sufficient for *elmo* working well together with the new recipient, that is, with the same degree of efficacy as before, provided of course that the purity of the daughter's intentions and depth of religious devotion will be at least equal if not greater than her father's.

Javanese Whispers

Pak Sukoco was a relatively young man, married with two young children, who had many 'special friends', claiming to 'own' (*endik*) at least 40 spirit familiars after having successfully completed an equivalent number of trials. Each of the jinn Pak Sukoco had at his disposal had particular powers, and some were stronger than others. Some were male, others were female. As a suggestion of their benevolent Islamic character, Pak Sukoco asserted that his female jinn smelled of flowers while the male ones of incense – malevolent spirits, antithetical to Islam, are said to stink of putrefaction. In addition, some were dressed in long, white robes and turban, originating from the Middle-East; others preferred to wear *sarong* and *kopiah* (black rimless cap), an indication of their archipelagic origins in Muslim communities. The spirits were widely taken to be the source of Pak Sukoco's *elmo* and every time he summoned them through incense burning and secret recitations, they would reveal to him what to others was hidden: the location of a stolen motorcycle, the roots of conjugal disharmony, the reasons behind entrepreneurial misadventures, the causes of miscarriage. Revelations of this sort entailed spirit

familiars ‘whispering in [his] ear’, he said. Through inaudible to others whispers, spirit familiars would also dispense secret knowledge about the kind of ingredients needed to make this or the other *jamo* (herbal medicine), the particular section(s) of the Koran deemed effective for bringing about this or the other outcome and the number of recitations required, the gifts appropriate for appeasing the affronted souls of dead relatives, the actions required to ensure that a marriage proposal was accepted or for a house move going smoothly and without accidents.

Pak Sukoco narrated that he had acquired his first spirit familiar named Aisha, a female spirit from Yemen, while he was a student in a Koranic school in the Lumajang area. The *kyai* heading the *pesantren* had a reputation for being a specialist in *elmo* concerning befriending spirits, and the young Sukoco confided his desire to acquire such an invisible friend to his teacher. The first step towards achieving this desire involved a 40 day period of fasting, followed by a night long stay in a cemetery while reciting a specific invocation the *kyai* had supplied him with. According to Pak Sukoco, the aim of the trial was to teach him to be brave in the face of death for had he stopped reciting and ran away, he would have not only proved himself unworthy but he would also have been struck with insanity. Encountering ghosts was soon followed by practicing contemplation (*dhikir*) while being submerged in the waters of a lake. There the young apprentice was visited first by a snake, and then by a beautiful, half-naked woman calling him to give up *dhikir* and join her instead. Pak Sukoco asserted that these were the forms the spirit he was seeking to befriend had taken up in testing the strength of his character and religiosity. The final test took place in the forest of Tiris. There Pak Sukoco fasted, meditated, and remained immobile for 3 whole days while fighting the attempts of Aisha to lure him into committing dreadful deeds (‘incest and murder’) for the sake of riches. In the end, Pak Sukoco asserted, Aisha ‘was defeated and recognising my superiority, became my servant (*khadam*). Now she carries out my wishes and instructions’.

As well as being a servant, Aisha was according to Pak Sukoco, his spirit wife (*istri halus*). Like the Sultans of Jojgakarta of old who maintained intimate sexual relations with Nyai Roro Kidul, the Spirit Queen of the South Ocean, as a precondition of ensuring the fertility and welfare of their realm (see Wessing 1997), Pak Sukoco would every so often visit Aisha in the forest of Tiris in his capacity as her husband. Their symbiotic yet highly unstable in hierarchical terms relationship was punctuated by Aisha’s frequent demands for gifts of appreciation, perfumes and silk clothes in particular, Pak Sukoco bought and stored in his bedroom. As for his other spirit familiars they too were making periodic demands; Ismail, a male, tall, and slender spirit from Sumatra was fond of being fed boiled eggs, while Muzadi liked listening to popular music on the radio and as a result there was always music coming from the healer’s house.

As a healer, Pak Sukoco was part of a heterogeneous assemblage of human and non-human agents all interacting within a domain characterised by intense exchanges and an intimate knowledge of each others’ desires. While his case did not involve the permanent attachment of non-human parts through being constituted anew in penetrative encounters, his extraordinary capacities were similarly traced to the

fostering of uncertain, contingent relations that cross ontological divides. In matters of healing, Pak Sukoco and his spirit familiars formed a network of powers founded on difference. Social relations across difference fore-grounded the augmentation of agency with healing surging from the excess and the surplus that assemblages of this kind are characterised by.

Returning to Origins/Reclaiming the Future

If, as I have argued in the introduction with the necessary admixture of provocation and seriousness, 'traditionalist' Islam in Java is always already beyond the 'modern', where, the question arises, is it located exactly? Moreover if the anthropological search for the 'modern' inclusive of the 'alternative modern' is an exercise we need to be wary of for its very framework and problematic implicitly extends and unwittingly facilitates a political programme of subject and polity re-structuring in accordance to the dictates of universal democratic marketisation, what does the ethnographic case of Muslim healers' lives in a small town in East Java offers us by means of intellectual resources so as to disrupt its authorising of knowledge and to disturb its marching towards the 'end of history'?

Returning to the early Foucault and his prediction at *The Order of Things* (1970) of 'the death of Man' could be a fine origin point for the post-humanist project with its philosophical cum historical critique of the privileging of the autonomy of the human subject construed as individual consciousness and singular will. Further down this genealogy, Haraway's cyborgs (1991) and Latour's actants (2005) offer in a similar fashion radical reconfigurations of the post-human subject. The radical figure here is of subjects emerging from their enmeshment in dense networks that advancements in technology and experiments in laboratories foster among heterogeneous elements comprising of parasites, microbes, machines, animals, artworks, and humans. This recent rethinking of the place of the human in Western academy as a part of a contingent, technically stabilised, and dissoluble set that is constituted by relations, is comparable to the case of Muslim East Java where intensive encounters with the unseen, the immaterial, and the sacred result in humans being intimately and internally linked to spirits, animals, and the divine itself. Whereas in the first case, relations which were previously strictly regulated through enclosure and domain making now proliferate in new directions with such a force that make the recognition of 'naturecultures' unavoidable (Harraway 2008; Latour 1993), in the other case, similarly multivalent, open, and uncertain relations with the sacred other have always and already animated a diffuse and decentred understanding of the human. In this vein, it is only fair to say that they, the villagers of East Java, are already part of a future we are only beginning to anticipate.

In this future, the 'death of Man' through ascetic exercises corresponds to a necessary condition for the re-constitution of the human as integrally connected to the non-human. Such connectivity marks in turn the points of an unstable and ongoing symbiosis out of which springs the capacity to act upon the world with a

renewed force. Agency in this instance is situated neither simply in the human mind nor solely in the human body but rather in the interstices of the connections, the spaces defined by the relations, the co-constitutive intimacy of the self with the other. The excess becoming sacred encapsulates is about the labour involved in bringing about the contraction of the space occupied by the distinction between the human and the non-human. The contraction entails two reciprocal movements; on the one hand, the care and love that Allah shows for the most esteemed of his creations, and on the other, the religiously cultivated human desire for closeness with Allah and the practical contingencies of suffering that press for immediate alleviation. The universe my Muslim interlocutors inhabit is therefore neither commensurate to the human-centric one of European Enlightenment nor equivalent to its imagined opposite, the religion-centric universe of Medieval Christianity that has become the yardstick for understanding the Islamic world in lots of writings both within and without anthropology. Rather, the universe inhabited is a rhythmic, pulsating one which dimensions fluctuate in accordance to centripetal ebbs of contraction and centrifugal flows of expansion. At its core lies the space of death, the zero of human annihilation with all the fullness of the relation.

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Chapter 7
Self-Similarity and Its Perils

Gabriele vom Bruck

Introduction

> Photographs do not explain; they acknowledge.
> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*

Discussing the 'explosion in portrait photography' which provided a detailed representation of the 'Occident's' colonial conquests, the art critics Chevrier and Saǧne (1984: 47) contend that in so far as a photograph reduces geographical distance, it also reduces psychological distance. Such a claim, if empirically verifiable, might have pleased those colonial authorities whose conquest of parts of North Africa more or less coincided with the first public presentation of the daguerreotype in France in 1839. France's civilising mission was to 'assimilate' conquered populations to some degree to the colonial power, which in turn encouraged scrutiny of their female subjects in paintings and photography, often carried out by foreigners. However, this activity was rather ambivalent because representations of women tended to place emphasis on their otherness.[1]

Places such as Egypt, Constantinople and Palestine became the earliest cultural laboratories for practitioners of photography soon after its availability in Europe (Graham-Brown 1988: 36; Lemke 1999: 238). However in North Yemen, safe from European encroachment, photography was neglected.[2] Even though some members of the elite – including the ruling dynasty – cherished photography and

[1] The best known work on this subject is Alloula (1986); also Simpson Fletcher (1998); Lemke (2004: 35–38, 214–220; for a critique of Alloula, see Ferrié and Boëtsch 1995). Some authors have explored contributions by non-European photographers (Graham-Brown 1988; Sheehi 2007).

[2] The first photographs were taken by Auguste Bartholdi (1834–1904) who took pictures of the Tihama in 1856. He was followed by Turkish officers who often prioritized buildings such as schools and army barracks over people (Wolf-Dieter Lemke, personal communication 2009).

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_7,

possessed cameras, there was only a weak nexus between status display and image production.[3] Photos of holders of power conveyed a sense of the authority of their office, but they were never publicly distributed.[4] Photos of 'families' (sg. *usrah, bayt*) which were routinely produced in early twentieth century Cairo and Beirut were even less common than portraits.[5] Yemeni 'families' typically comprised large households of three to four generations and for the most part, men were not photographed in the company of women. 'Family photography' focused on those who happened to be present when a particular person's picture was taken (Fig. 7.1).

Many people had reservations about photographing women – and some still do – because they were not to be seen by male 'strangers' (*ajanib*, sg. *ajnabi;* those not in a degree of consanguinity that rules out marriage).[6] As a friend, the daughter of a prominent governor, explained, 'it was '*ayb* (indecent, disrespectful) to take photos of women. I have only one photo of my mother and her brother which was taken in the 1960s. When she married my father in late 1950s,

[3] In Yemen photography might be seen in the framework of a more systematic focus on recording which began in the twentieth century, involving measures such as codification of shari'ah law, registration of legal documents and changes in schooling (see Messick 1993). In the late 1950s Yemeni Imamate, the police cadets, aeroplanes and tank assemblages photographed by Ahmad 'Umar al-'Absi (b.1898) were to propagate its efforts at reforms and modernisation. Several decades earlier, Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid had similar ambitions (Lemke 1999: 246–7). Towards the end of WWI al-'Absi worked with an Indian who had a studio at his house in Aden. In the 1940s al-'Absi took pictures of the Sultan of Lahj and later of Imam Ahmad. He was the first Yemeni photographer who ran a studio in Aden and later in Ta'izz. After 1962 his son 'Ali became the personal photographer of the first republican presidents 'Abdullah al-Sallal and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Iryani.

[4] Politicians' use of their own photographs and statues became commonplace after WWI in Turkey and Arab nation-states (for example, Wedeen 1999; Navaro-Yashin 2002). This was for the dual purpose of strengthening bonds of loyalty with their subjects and reinforcing control by way of their omnipresence. On the Arabian Peninsula, the Saudi ruling dynasty could not resist having their portraits publicly displayed in spite of 'Wahhabi' aversion to image production (only God can produce a human). In Yemen, the ubiquitous display of politicians' images in public and private places has been indicative of changing styles of rule in so far as these men have in person been far less visible and accessible than their predecessors. With respect to the Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi's 'disembodied career' and final moments, Igor Cherstich (2011) writes: "When trying to understand what happened, it is important to remember that filming and photographing the colonel's battered body was not only an exhilarant act of rage. For many Libyans it was also *touching* the intangible" (emphasis mine). According to Cherstich (personal communication 2011), "it is quite ironic that the body was finally buried in a secret location. It is almost like Libyans traced the body of the ghost (and killed it), and then (once al-Qaddafi finally gained a body) got rid of it." The camera captured that process, documenting a gruesome spectacle.

[5] On those metropolises, see, for example, Baron (2005: 82–101) and Sheehi (2007). Dostal (1983: 257), studying the San'a market in 1971, listed only two photography workshops. However, it is likely that some were located in what became the new parts of the city after the revolution of 1962.

[6] Some women had their picture taken before embarking on pilgrimage to Mecca. However, visual identification was not required by the authorities until later in the twentieth century (compare Baron 2005: 85).

Fig. 7.1 Husayn ‘Abd al-Qadir, governor of San‘a, with one of his sons, a grandson holding the governor’s infant daughter, and a grand-nephew, 1940s

no photos were taken.[7] Girls who in the 1970s went to studios to have their photos taken were considered liberal; it was very uncommon.’ The covering of women’s bodies has arguably been the most ubiquitous subject in the anthropology of Muslim Middle Eastern cultures, yet has hardly been explored in relation to photography which raises new issues concerning the ways their bodies are represented and managed. Women, who are concerned to protect the boundaries of their bodies by covering them, are nonetheless eager to create records which make them permanently visible. Women’s photos are considered to be intimate belongings that must be shared only with close relatives or female friends. Both men and women argue that the female body is endowed with a much greater capacity to stir desire than the male, which is why female bodily practice – including exposure of photographic images – must articulate appropriate ethical dispositions. Most women living in the Yemeni capital San‘a cover their entire bodies in social domains where male ‘strangers’ are present, but this practice is

[7] It is noteworthy that the wedding took place in the southern city of Ta‘izz, located in close proximity to Aden and less conservative than San‘a.

Fig. 7.2 The late Mufti Ahmad Zabarah, accompanied by a female relative, at an audience at the residence of Pope John Paul II, 1993. The woman's posture makes her almost unrecognizable

often relaxed in the company of close kin and at work.[8] They argue that a stranger's sight of their photo would be an affront to their dignity, and some consider it to be *haram* (forbidden by religion).[9] If they happen to be photographed at an official function, they may not feel comfortable (Fig. 7.2).

[8] The majority of women whose families have been living in San'a for several generations or who have moved there from the northern parts of the country since the 1970s endorse this practice (vom Bruck 1997; Moors 2007). Among those are self-identified neo-Salafis as well as Zaydi-Shi'is. Regarding the latter, the first Zaydi Imam of Yemen, al-Hadi, is said to have ordered women to cover their faces (cited in Mundy 1983: 535, n.47). Some of the women who adhere to Zaydi precepts refer to this edict when rationalising the covering of their bodies. However, there is much debate about this issue. For example, one elderly Zaydi woman contended that those who insisted that women must cover their faces had come under the spell of 'Wahhabi' doctrine. Some male Zaydi scholars argue that no *madhhab* (School of Islam) prescribes the face-veil. Interpreting Imam al-Hadi's edict in an historical context, they suggest that he ordered women to cover their faces because he found his contemporaries' religious commitment wanting.

[9] Photographs of women who do not cover their faces in public may be seen by outsiders, provided that other parts of the body are concealed. Photos of women politicians and other public figures, who wear the *hijab,* appear in the media.

Fig. 7.3

Women's photographic images are problematic because they may affect the onlooker in the same way as the object represented (the prototype), and because they may fall prey to unauthorised viewing, thus in some ways 'delivering' the object to the beholder. It is as shameful for an unauthorised viewer to see the photo of an uncovered woman as to see parts of her in the flesh. Young girls do not normally mind being photographed by strangers, but beyond the age of seven are likely to run away on seeing a stranger holding a camera. Photographing women in the street, even when fully covered, may cause an outburst of anger. Unauthorised viewing may lead to a serious deterioration of relations between the beholder and the woman's male relatives.[10]

Apparently unable to find a Yemeni woman willing to let him take her photo that would be sold in the market as a postcard, a photographer in the 1990s persuaded a Spanish tourist to reinvent herself as a 'Yemeni traditional woman' (the postcard's caption) (Fig. 7.3).[11]

However convincing this impersonation might appear at first sight, a closer look might raise suspicion, for the cloth is wrapped around the woman's body in an improper way. Perhaps the photographer sought to protect himself from accusations of defaming Yemeni women by selling their images to foreigners who are the most

[10] Particularly during periods of heightened political tensions, unsolicited photographing may arouse strong emotions. For example, turmoil began in neighbouring Saudi Arabia after police videotaped Shi'i women pilgrims at Jannat al-Baqi', a graveyard near the Prophet's mosque in Madina, in February 2009. On their men folk's request to either destroy or hand over the video material, several arrests were made and pilgrims were injured (Matthiesen 2009). On the problematic of photographing women in public spaces in Saudi Arabia, see Okruhlik (2004).

[11] Radfan Tours, personal communication 2008.

Fig. 7.4

likely consumers of such *objets trouvés*.[12] Most postcards available in San'a, captioned 'San'a traditional dress' or 'Hadramout farmers' (Fig. 7.4), reveal no more than the women's eyes (unless they are very old), and some women's faces are entirely covered.

During the recent conflict between government forces and Zaydi-Shi'is in the northern province of Sa'dah (2004–2010), some women were asked by their male relatives to burn all their photos for fear that they might be found by soldiers who, by looking at them, would humiliate both the women and their male kin. Women who were photographed against their will during the revolutionary upheaval of the

[12] Irrespective of the obstacles, photographers have succeeded in photographing women in order to sell their images as postcards (e.g., Pascal Maréchaux; Acacia Tours), or to display them at exhibitions. In 2012 World Press Photo assigned a first prize (Contemporary Issues) to Stephanie Sinclair for her photo of two young couples in Hajjah province entitled 'child brides' (www.worldpressphoto.org). Whether the girls were made aware that their photo would appear in the internet remains unclear. In a recent interview one of the first San'ani women photographers, Bushrah al-Mutawakkil, talked about the challenge of photographing women (www.yobserver.com, 2 February 2009). Photos taken of Yemeni women by explorers such as Hermann Burckhardt (1857–1909) are displayed at the National Museum of San'a. On the issue of sensitivity among 'Western' subjects to perceived violations of privacy through the display of their photographs, see Phillips (2010). Referring to the case brought by the American citizen Abigail Roberson against Rochester Folding Box Co. in 1900 for using her unauthorised picture in advertising, she discusses the shifting boundaries of what is considered an "encroachment on privacy" in 'Western' culture. She concludes that "our culture appears to be accommodating itself to the fact of surveillance and no longer considers voyeurism the danger it was in the past" (Phillips ibid., 14–15).

1960s suffered humiliation. After the men belonging to the Royal House of the Hamid al-Din had been killed or fled, the Egyptian army entered the Imam's palace in Ta'izz and deported his female relatives to Cairo where their photos were taken. 'I was crying when they forced me to expose my face and took my photo,' one of the women recalled. The women could neither prevent the intruding gaze of those who fought their family and its supporters, nor the production of a lasting record of this dishonouring event. The awareness of its continued existence in an Egyptian army archive has caused indignation.

These phenomena inspire an exploration of women's photographs' agency and relationality, as well as of photography's significance as a vehicle for conveying statements about the self and for reifying social distinctions. Questions as to the ways in which photography has created new relations of objectification have become more pertinent since it has become common in North Yemen's emerging consumer society from the 1970s onwards.[13] In spite of the current dire economic situation many of the less affluent have not left off creating lasting records of memorable events. This indicates that photography has come to play a vital role in the projection of certain self-images and status aspirations. As one of the new techniques of organising social experience, photography demonstrates taste and sophistication.

This paper attempts to analyse the production of videos, albums and studio portraits among relatively prosperous San'anis. My prime concern, the relationship between subjectivity and visual representation, is inseparable from a consideration of new consumption practices focusing on changing styles of self-presentation. In *The Power of Images,* Freedberg (1989) argues that images can affect the viewer in powerful ways beyond conventional aesthetic experience. Engaging with this argument, Gell (1998) attempted to understand the *modus operandi* of that power, but unlike Freedberg he was concerned with the ways in which personhood is 'distributed' among a variety of artefacts which are employed in social action. With respect to Yemeni women's photographs, the agency of the object is mediated above all through the prototype rather than those who produce or utilise images, which was Gell's concern. Such a conception of women's representation via images inevitably generates concern about what response might be elicited in the process of perception – and this involves issues of power and control. Regarding the potentially precarious consequences image production entails, Gell (1998: 102) observed that the issue "is not just that the person represented in an image is 'identified' with that image via a purely symbolic or conventional linkage; rather, it is because the

[13] The link proposed by Sheehi (2007) between photographic production and the process of *embourgeoisement* in *fin de siècle* Beirut cannot easily be established in northern Yemen. Soon after cameras became more widely available, photography became a much cherished pastime across the social hierarchy, and those who formed a nascent 'middle class' were far less concerned about the adoption of foreign practices than their peers in Cairo, Damascus, and Constantinople earlier on.

agency of the person represented is actually impressed on the representation."[14] What is at stake, of course, is *not* the relationship between persons and things, but between persons. It does not matter what a thing 'is' in itself – what matters is where it is located in a matrix of social relations (Gell 1998: 123).

By virtue of being 'extensions' of female subjects, images of women participate actively in a wide range of social relationships – above all between kin and between women. Within the context of certain sets of cross-gender relations, the issue is the female subject's vulnerability to the libidinal gaze via photographic images. Examining the moral issues surrounding women's photographic images, the first part of the chapter discusses the anxieties arising from their potential mobility which may undermine ordered sexual conduct and have consequences for relations of power between men. I shall then look at women's photographic productions as acts of consumption which have become sites for self-performances. By means of deploying idealised images of themselves and others whom they photograph, women establish themselves and each other as feminine subjects. This process may entail conjuring up a 'new body' – modern, cosmopolitan, desirable. Coming full circle, the last part of the chapter looks at women's attempts to cause and sustain enchantment in conjugal relationships by *evoking* the image's very agency which otherwise must be inhibited.

'Distributed' Personhood and the Issue of Control

Discussing artistic self-portraits, Jones (2003: 258) insists that 'in a sense, we relate to the image as a body in relation to our own.' Such reasoning is expressed implicitly in the moral discourses of Yemenis anxious about who might gain access to women's photographs.[15] In accordance with the status women occupy in networks of kinship in which men are granted authority over them, the beholder's gaze inaugurates a relationship of objectification which inevitably implicates them. Much of gender-related 'habitus' focuses on women's barring men from gaining visual access to their '*awrah* – those parts of the body which must be covered in the presence of male 'strangers'.[16] A key issue in Gell's (1998: 123) analysis of the operations of agency is that it is relational rather than defined in terms of physical

[14] See also Gadamer's discussion of the "simultaneity" of an object and its representation, implying that mediating devices of every kind have been rescinded (1990: 132).

[15] However, conceiving of photographic images as products of a type of agency which are treated as "person-like" (Gell 1998: 96) is *not* to argue that the bodies represented "somehow have the status of living bodies" (Freedberg 1989: 12). As it was phrased poignantly by Gell (ibid., 103), "as social persons, we are present, not just in our singular bodies, but in everything in our surroundings which bears witness to our existence, our attributes, and our agency." As I was told by an elderly Yemeni male friend, "a photo may cause desire – but a photo I cannot hug, I cannot kiss, I cannot smell."

[16] However, the '*awrah* might be defined idiosyncratically; see n. 8.

attributes – an aspect that is relevant to conceptualising male desire. The moral discourse about women's images and their concealment, as conveyed verbally to the anthropologist but hardly ever to boys or peers, serves to naturalise male desire. Certain kinds of demeanour – the caution with which men enter into spaces and announce their presence before doing so, being shown albums by female kin from which photos of unrelated women are removed in their presence – establish a bodily disposition ('habitus') in boys. The minutiae of men's and women's self-disciplining serve to transmit knowledge about the female body to them. The sedimented vestiges based on *not* looking structure their future interaction with non-*mahram* women once they have been barred from entry into all-female public spaces. The process of subjecting themselves to curtailed fields of visibility is one of learning to become desiring subjects.

Moral concerns – to which of course issues of control are always linked – are paramount in the analysis of how agency transmitted via material images acts towards others. Once images of women come into existence, the boundaries of their person are no longer restricted to the spatial boundaries of their bodies. (As we shall see later, this very fact enables women to manipulate those boundaries for their own purposes by means of image-making.) In socialities where cross-gender ocular exchanges are considered to be potentially precarious, the production and dissemination of 'parts' of female subjects will inevitably cause apprehension.

> I am sharing some pictures with my friend Amat al-Rahman, who is depicted in the rural surroundings of the capital 'at a spot where there were no people around.' She is shown wearing neither her outdoor garment nor the *hijab*. Her 86-year old mother-in-law, who is with us, is indignant that such photos exist. Amat al-Rahman has told me in the past that it is *haram* for a 'stranger' to take sight of her face. On asking her whether she is worried that a 'stranger' might one day see those photos, she says that they are meant to be family memorabilia. After a brief pause, she adds: "*bas al-surah timshi* (but the photo 'walks', 'travels')."

The image is talked about as if it had intentionality. Amat al-Rahman's suspicion indicates the obvious: like other domestic objects, photos are never entirely 'safe' even at people's homes. Irrespective of the photos' whereabouts and 'age', those depicted or their kin seek to maintain control over potential viewers. Photographic images are material objects in their own right which however never become entirely detached from persons even after their demise. Women and their kin have reservations about male 'strangers' looking at their photos after their death.[17] On one occasion I asked a friend for permission to copy his mother's photo taken some 60 years ago (she died in 1979). He agreed on condition that I would not publish it. 'Her brothers would not accept it.'[18]

[17] However, during the period of intermittent war in Sa'dah (2004–2010), images of female victims of landmines and bombardments were published on dissident websites – presumably because they are not thought of as causing desire and because they serve propaganda purposes.

[18] Such considerations correspond to the notion of photos as manifestations of 'extended' personhood. In the absence of a living spouse, close male kin must limit the channels of access to their *mahram* even after their death and thus guard their photographic images (*mahram* are those in a degree of consanguinity excluding marriage).

Such reservations are predicated on the assumption that the materiality of the body and the materiality of the photo are inextricably linked – and this concerns both the subject portrayed and the beholder. Making claims as to the paucity of purely semiotic approaches to visual culture, theorists such as Gell (1998) and Pinney (2002) have emphasized the need for an embodied analysis. As I have already indicated and will elaborate on, San'anis submit that the way gendered subjects relate to each other is never disembodied in as far as the visible is inherently a bodily domain. Hence the way they conceive of the relationship between the object and the beholder would seem to impose such terms of analysis from the start. A woman's image is a precarious object precisely because the eye's field of view is inexorably tangible and corporeal, as is the beholder's presence. As Gell (1998: 105) pointed out, 'the kind of leverage which one obtains over a person or thing by having access to their image is comparable, or really identical, to the leverage which can be obtained by having access to some physical part of them.'[19]

Some of my male friends argue that exposure of a woman's image to a male 'stranger' may cause the husband's jealousy, but a crucial rationale for prevention is that it is likely to animate the beholder in undesirable ways. 'This may not be too problematic if a man sits next to his wife while looking at a picture', a friend in his 40s explained, 'but if he is unmarried, he might want to satisfy his desire in illicit ways.' Thus, 'sight' is always linked to moral concerns about the action that *might* follow rather than to the imaginary capture of the referent, the photo's object.[20] This man, a politician who hails from a family of religious scholars, holds the view that Islam does not prescribe the covering of women's faces, but none the less argues that a male 'stranger's' gaze at a photograph depicting a woman's uncovered face would be an affront to her whole family. 'It's '*ayb* (indecent). Especially [unmarried] youthful men (*shabab*) should not see photographs of women who are dressed nicely. They might feel flirtatious and thus display amorous behaviour towards women. Anyone who is not married should not see a woman's photo because it may create desire and he may engage in *zina*' (illicit intercourse), and that is *haram*. It's different if a man's wife is present. He may even look at women's images in sexual posture because if this creates desire he can make love to his wife.' When he was living abroad, he asked his wife not to send him her picture because it might lead him to conduct himself immorally. Thus, unsolicited or undesirable 'seeing' may have socially undesirable consequences for male 'strangers' as well as spouses. The diverse views about what constitutes 'nakedness' (to be covered in the presence of male 'strangers') apply also to the viewing of women's photographic

[19] Sontag (1979: 24) describes the act of taking pictures as 'a semblance of appropriation, a semblance of rape'.

[20] While here the emphasis is on improper moral conduct which might result from looking at a picture, medieval Christian writers such as the Italian Cardinal Giovanni Dominici (d. 1420) were concerned about its capacity to stir desire for the person portrayed. The Cardinal recommended that people not decorate their bedrooms with images of persons they could not possess (Freedberg 1989: 12).

images. According to a renowned elderly Zaydi scholar, a woman's face is the most beautiful part of her body which must be concealed from view because 'catching someone's eye paves the way to *zina*' '.[21] However, a middle aged government employee did not place emphasis on the face, arguing that 'the *muhajjabah* (a woman whose hair is covered) will not attract men sexually. Yet if a woman wears make-up, she should be seen only by her *mahram* or else she invites harassment.'[22] One of his friends held that a man should not see the photo of a made up woman because this might embarrass him [in case the photo would arouse him]. 'Men do not want other men to see their wives. It's part of the culture of *hijab*. Women are more attractive than men. A man should not see another man's wife. Some things should remain private – not everything should be for other eyes.'[23] According to an elderly woman, 'a man should not watch dancing girls on television. This may cause marital problems because he might pay less attention to his wife.' Unintentional 'seeing' of other men's wives' images will be forgiven. 'If my brother saw my wife's picture accidentally, that would not be a problem', the politician referred to above noted. On asking a businessman how he would deal with an employee who had deliberately looked at his personal photographs, he said 'I would beat him and dismiss him.' Issues of sexual morality which inform reservations about men's 'sight' of unrelated women's images involve other issues of power, too. They focus on the photo's capacity to engender mischievous talk. A writer, a member of an opposition party, argued that his main concern to conceal his wives' photos from male 'strangers' was that his rivals might speak about them derogatorily in order to insult him.[24]

Because the photography of women is surrounded by anxieties over who might gain access to the finished product, women, who have become its most ardent consumers, rely on other women's integrity. On a certain level the camera indexes

[21] Sayyid Muhammad al-Mansur (in vom Bruck 1997: 187–8). Gell conceives of eye-contact as "the basic modality of 'second-order intentionality', [that is] awareness of the other (person) as an intentional subject". Of all body orifices, Gell says, eyes signify intentionality most immediately (1998: 120, 136). Al-Mansur's notion of agency implies intentionality which according to Gell (ibid., 125) precedes enactment. It is given momentum through ocular communication which, when occurring between non-*mahram* cross-gendered subjects, must be repressed. Discussing such interaction Sayyid Badr al-Din al-Huthi (d. 2010) admitted that a woman may also be attracted to a man's face, arguing that if women's face covering were to be made mandatory, then men should also be obliged to cover their faces (Yahya Badr al-Din al-Huthi, personal communication 2010).

[22] According to Meneley (2007: 231), in the western town of Zabid women adhering to neo-Salafi ideology even object to women's wearing lipstick in front of their brothers – who are close *mahram* – lest they stir desire in them.

[23] Those men did not object to a woman's passport photos being taken, provided she was covered by the *hijab*.

[24] Presumably the rebel fighters who paraded the family photos of the deposed Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi in the streets of Tripoli after raiding his compound in the summer of 2011 intended to humiliate him and to encourage scornful commentary.

networks of trust in as far as those women who do not mind being photographed are confident that their images will not be made available to male 'strangers'. Women have power over other women by reason of possessing their images in the form of portraits and videos. Showing someone a woman's picture without her permission is considered '*ayb*; 'it's like looking through a key hole', a girl-friend told me.[25] Yet some women who take photos of their girl-friends or relatives display greater loyalty to their brothers seeking wives than to their friends. In one case, a man broke his engagement after having been shown the photo of one of his sister's friends to whom he then proposed marriage. It is in the realm of match-making where people eager to find spouses for close kin are most likely to betray their friends' or relatives' trust.[26] A young scholar argued that if a man wished to see either the woman he wanted to marry or her photo, he should be allowed to do so in order to avoid marital problems later. 'The woman [depicted in the photo] should wear the *hijab* and ordinary clothes (*libs 'adi*), and she must not wear jewellery.' Men, however, suspect the camera's fidelity. As one young man put it to me, 'photos can be treacherous. Some women look beautiful in photos but they are not; others do not look as beautiful in the photo as they are in reality.'

Some women do not place trust in their husbands' confidentiality. A friend who showed me a video made at his son's wedding told me jokingly that he had no idea where the one recording the women's celebration was kept in the house.[27] 'My wife and daughter keep it under lock and key as if it were a blue movie.' Such statements point to uncertainties over the control of images that concerns both women and men. Imam Yahya, one of the last rulers of the imamate who died in 1948, objected to have his photo taken because he had seen people stepping on a photograph in the

[25] There is also fear of the anonymous male gaze in the form of hidden cameras. Assumptions about their presence at saunas and massage parlours keep many women away from such establishments. A recent case in Saudi Arabia indicates the seriousness with which violations are viewed. After it was discovered that she had concealed a cell phone equipped with a camera, a 13-year old school girl was dismissed from her public school programme. She later attacked the headmistress and was sentenced to 90 lashes and 2 months in prison (apparently the sentence was suspended). The use of such phones is banned in public schools lest photos taken of girls will be posted on the internet (Saudi Information Agency, 19 January 2010).

[26] Thus, a woman may let a close woman friend have her daughter's photo which she will give to the mother of a young man who has expressed interest in marrying the girl. Usually the man is shown the girl's photo without her knowledge. This is a sensitive issue causing ambivalence. Some argue that their daughter is 'not for sale', but if a suitable suitor asked to be shown the girl's photo, they would be likely to grant his request for they are keen for her to get married.

[27] Weddings are celebrated separately by men and women. However when they take place at hotels, occasionally the groom enters the women's party before it ends and the couple present themselves to the cameras.

street, so his dignity would have been vulnerable.[28] The former president of Yemen, ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Salih (r.1978–2012), after watching with indignation on television how Iraqis stamped their feet on Saddam Husayn’s portraits after his fall from power in 2003, had his own pictures temporarily removed from the facades of government buildings.[29] One man, anxious that someone might gain access to his albums depicting his girl-friends and him dancing with women while studying overseas, left them with a relative abroad for safe keeping. Men who are professionally or genealogically associated with piety (other than Salafis) object to photos being taken of them that might be interpreted as indulging or compromising: posing in front of a Ferris wheel, in bathing trunks on a beach, or at a café where scantily dressed women are seen sitting at adjacent tables.[30]

[28] Imam Yahya’s reservation was not religiously motivated. According to Sayyid Muhammad al-Mansur (personal communication 2007), Zaydi ‘*ulama* have never issued fatwas against photography. He recalled that when someone wanted to take the Imam’s photo, he would ask ‘what for do you want to take my picture?’ Al-Mansur elaborated that ‘he did not consider having his photo taken to be useful (*mufid*).’ Hünefeld (2010: 88–89) suggests that the Imam’s request not to have his picture taken served to increase the excitement about his appearance in public. ‘Perhaps the absence of a photograph of him made him more *present* than would have been the case had his picture hung in every subject’s house’ (translation and emphasis mine). According to the daughter of one of Imam Yahya’s senior officials ‘my father did not like to be photographed. They usually took pictures of him without him being aware. He would have conceived of being photographed as an act of vanity. We do not have any pictures of my grandfather. Very few people had a camera. Nobody thought of this kind of thing. Life was simple. We would live, die and that’s it (laughs).’ An elderly friend noted that when his father photographed people during the time of Imam Ahmad (1948–62), some of his friends objected from a religious point of view. ‘My father argued that a photo was only a piece of paper rather than a figure like those shown at Madame Tussauds’ (compare on this issue Baron 2005: 84). Muhammad ‘Ali, who ruled Egypt in the early nineteenth century, regarded photography as the ‘work of the devil’ (Graham-Brown 1988: 60–61). Whilst ruling in the 1990s the Taliban, whose doctrine is akin to ‘Wahhabi’ ideology, decreed that no image of persons could be displayed in public places such as shops, hotels or taxis. However, photographs continued to be taken clandestinely at studios (Cole 2003: 788; Devji 2008: viii).

[29] This might explain why a few days before the election of ‘Abd-Rabbu Mansur Hadi as president in February 2012, Salih once again ordered his portraits to be removed from all government buildings and public squares and replaced with those of the country’s new leader. After Salih had signed a transition agreement in November 2011, his portrait continued to be ubiquitously present around the capital. (In spite of ceding formal authority, Salih was allowed to retain his title and certain privileges until new elections were held.) In defiance of the agreement, soon after signing posters depicting him and his eldest son Ahmad, who had been groomed for the succession, appeared in public places.

[30] In this context, consider also the series of photos authorised by Qazi Muhammad Amin, one of the Afghan Hizb-i Islami leaders. All photos show a stern-looking man sporting a beard, photographed before a plain background or addressing a crowd (Edwards 2002: 222–3). Followers of the founder of the Yemeni neo-Salafi movement Muqbil al-Wadi‘i (d. 2001), who was educated in Saudi Arabia, repudiate photography altogether. No photograph of al-Wadi‘i exists. Students who register at the Dar al-Hadith, a college in Sa‘dah province, are advised that they are not required to provide photographs. In Salafi magazines the faces of fighters who fought against Zaydi-Shi‘i rebels alongside the Yemeni army in Sa‘dah were blurred (Laurent Bonnefoy, personal communication 2011).

Consuming Images

Thus men, too – especially those with reputations to lose – are anxious about the material embodiment of their persona in the form of photographic images. To explore another facet of the relationship between the photographic image and the prototype, I now turn to women's image production. In Yemen photography must be seen in the context of a much greater use of new communication media, above all the television which has played a prime role in familiarising people with alternative lifestyles. Since the 1970s the population in the northern parts of the country has been exposed to foreign feature films portraying gender relations well beyond the bounds of acceptable conduct, focusing on courting and consumer-driven images of the vain, seductive female.[31] Femininity and alluring self-display used to be linked with conjugality and motherhood (vom Bruck 1997), yet media images and certain features of women's photography depart from this. The fetishization of beauty at women's daily social gatherings (sg. *tafritah*) and in discussions preceding formal marriage negotiations is reflected in the production of images modelled on those seen on television and in women's magazines. Self-enhancement at *qat* chews and other ritual events has always been acceptable and to a certain extent called for, but had to be seen to be modest. Recent changes in self-presentation – above all dress, dance styles and photographic posing – reveal greater emphasis on the sexualised body.[32] This is also manifested in model display in shop windows and lingerie in the street markets of the old town.[33] These phenomena go hand in hand with a greater display of intimacy in outdoor spaces (Fig. 7.5).

By means of the objectifying lens women, who have hardly ever entered historical records other than 'family annals' have become creators of value in their own right. Image production is no longer confined to a small circle of kin. Like function rooms at hotels and *salons* that are hired for weddings, houses are public consumer spaces where the camera has become testimony to the ways young women in particular seek to live up to newly defined standards of femininity. The quality of garments and jewellery worn, and of the *qat* chewed at the gatherings

[31] Media stations based in Beirut, Cairo and Dubai present hitherto unfamiliar images of (publicly visible) enchanting females. LBC of Lebanon is widely seen as avant-garde, and the Rotana channels owned by Saudi Prince Walid b. Talal combine musical entertainment with what is often regarded as provocative exposure of women's bodies (see Hammond 2008: 345; Mellor 2008).

[32] Elderly women, in particular, express their dismay at what they consider women's immodesty, and feel vulnerable towards other women's disparaging comments about their younger relatives. When at a *tafritah* an elderly woman criticised the 'shameless' outfit worn by the daughter of one of her peers who was sitting nearby and overheard her, she said 'this is not my daughter.' Debates about women's self-display at the *tafritah* have become politicised and no longer focus primarily on the arousal of male onlookers. In Zabid, some younger women who oppose any form of adornment discourage women from wearing the transparent dresses conventionally worn at the Zabidi *tafritah* and more recently in San'a (Meneley 2007: 231; see n. 22). Some Salafi-inspired San'ani women reject the imaging of persons altogether, but some approve of it within the family. They are among the clientele of 'women-only' studios (below).

[33] Note, however, that photographs of women's scantily clad bodies which are displayed at the suq of Damascus (Halasa and Salam [2008: 126–153]) are not available.

Fig. 7.5 San'a, new town

have always had status-affirming functions; the production of photographic records by professional photographers who differ in quality serves further to mark social disparity. At photographic studios, new possibilities and imaginings are being forged – sometimes facilitated by catalogues of images of glamorous women which have been obtained through the internet (Figs. 7.6 and 7.7).

Establishing normative canons of beauty, small albums of women's portraits and videos focus on their attractiveness, often personified by the image of the bride, seen posing like a fashion model or a movie star.[34] The albums which circulate at

[34] Desire for film star-type self-images may also be linked to the distress caused by men's comments on female TV announcers appearing on channels such as Al-Jazeera. (He asks '*mush hiya jamila* [isn't she beautiful]?' a rhetorical question which is answered by a suppressed '*na'm* (yes)' by his wife, whereupon he confirms '*jiddan* (very [beautiful indeed]!') Readers might also remember the scene in Mir-Hosseini's film *Divorce Iranian Style* (1998) where a judge, seeking to reconcile a couple, tells the wife she must make herself beautiful for her husband. She responds that she can show him photos proving that she used to do so.

Fig. 7.6

Fig. 7.7

the *tafritah* provide evidence of women's mastery of what Bordo (1993: 182) has called the 'cultural paraphernalia of femininity': learning to please visually which is conceived of as a wife's duty. In expectation of women's and spouses' acknowledgement, these artefacts are vehicles for women's claims to allure.[35] As part of status competition at ritual events such as weddings, the production and subsequent showing of videos is expected to prompt statements of appreciation and gratification. Viewing sessions among women generate memories and desires, as well as gendered forms of speech and expression which become intersubjective forms of self-performance. An analysis of the subjectivity of viewing requires consideration of the female subject as both viewed and viewing. Women's gatherings are exemplary sites for this purpose.

> Soon after my arrival in Yemen in 2008, I visit a family I have been friendly with for many years. The women show me a new album of photos of a daughter's recent wedding. 'Aliyyah, the first of five daughters to get married, is seven months pregnant, and living with her husband's family. 'Aliyyah's father and her eldest sister Hannan have a modest income as government employees. The family possesses several albums covering about twenty-five years – none of them is chronologically ordered. The children are depicted during outings and there are photos of 'Aliyyah's paternal uncles. Her mother has never been photographed outside the house and always in the company of her children – never alone with her husband. While we look at these photos, she tells me that during the first three years of her marriage, she had a child each year. 'In Europe you have one or two children, but we are constantly pregnant.' And, perhaps with her daughter's forthcoming birth in mind, 'I had my seven children at home with my mother's help.'
>
> There are many photos depicting her eldest daughter's graduation from the University of San'a. Hannan, wearing a dark green voluminous ankle-long garment and the mortarboard, her face covered by the *khunnah* (facial cover), carries flowers in her hand. She is also portrayed with her fellow female students, all dressed in similar style. A couple of photos showing the graduates with their faces exposed were taken by one of them behind a bush in the university garden where they could not be seen. 'Those were taken very quickly,' Hannan explains. Others show the proud graduate with her father, one of her paternal uncles and her professor. 'He was highly qualified, but he was rude to us, calling us donkeys.' Other photos record a family trip to the southern port city of Aden, depicting Hannan, one of her sisters and their uncle at the seaside in front of trees, her face uncovered. I am surprised that she does not wear the *khunnah*. 'We found a spot where there were no people.' In another photo all the girls are portrayed with their faces uncovered. Two wear a light-coloured raincoat and sunglasses, outfits they would not wear in San'a. For an instant, the girls link themselves to cosmopolitan life-styles in other Arab metropolises, impersonating middle class women seen on television walking in the streets of Cairo and Beirut, interacting with unrelated men. I am provocative and ask Hannan why she did not wear this outfit in Aden city since no one knew her there. 'It's *haram*', she says.
>
> Hannan is keen for me to watch the video of her sister 'Aliyyah's wedding. According to the women, the video was produced for their male kin who celebrated the wedding in a separate location. However, the film is also shown to female visitors, some of whom

[35] These are also tied to expectations of gifts. Men must give their wives jewellery after the birth of a child, and are said to be motivated to do so by virtue of being enchanted by them. As Meneley (1999: 71) has pointed out, women's desire for jewellery and fancy clothing provided by men reflects their wish for public recognition of their value and virtue by husbands and male kin, which determines their value in wider social terms (compare Moors 1998: 219).

attended the wedding. ‘Aliyyah’s wedding took place in a *salon* which was rented for the occasion. The first part of the video, focusing on a celebration a couple of days before the bride was taken to the groom’s house, was filmed by her female cousin. ‘Aliyyah is shown walking majestically into the hall. The female guests, who did not want to be caught on camera, moved further back into the hall when the filming started. The camera masculinises the female public sphere: ‘Aliyyah, who is in the spotlight, conducts herself as well as she can, for she knows that she is under scrutiny by the guests. The women seek to protect themselves from the camera’s intruding gaze for fear that the bride’s male kin might catch a glimpse of them when watching the video later on. Eventually the camera captures the bride as she is surrounded by her sisters, a few children, and the bridal dresser who keeps fixing ‘Aliyyah’s dress.[36] ‘Aliyyah wears a voluminous light-blue dress and a burka, which reflects the influence of Gulf television programmes. All the while she dances, first *khaliji* (Gulf-style), then *masri* (Egyptian). As she approaches the centre of the hall, the guests suddenly appear on the screen, all covered in black. ‘Aliyyah smiles a little but looks nervous. As her dancing becomes more vigorous, her mother comments ‘she forgot it was her wedding, she was so tense, she knew that her movements were watched closely. I cried for two weeks because she was married so early. She was engaged for three years. Her fiancée insisted to get married because all his friends were already married, and he would not let her finish her studies. We were not happy about that and felt she was too young. I was sorry for her having to get married so young. I was married at thirteen.’ Previously ‘Aliyyah’s mother had explained to me that the fiancée was a relative whom they did not want to reject. I try to console her saying that he might still change his mind. ‘I would be happy to look after her baby while she studies. All her sisters attended university.’

During another visit to the house, ‘Aliyyah is with us. When her (female) cousin arrives, we watch the video once again. I ask ‘Aliyyah how she feels watching the video. ‘I have already forgotten about it [the wedding].’ Her sister does not believe her. I am not sure how to interpret her statement – whether she implied that being ‘on stage’ was an experience she now resents, or whether she is not happy with her life. ‘How did you learn how to dance?’ ‘Just like that.’[37] Her mother remarks that she only knows how to dance San‘ani style and cannot perform *masri* and *khaliji* like her daughters. I ask ‘Aliyyah which day of her wedding she liked best. ‘Tuesday’ (the celebration preceding the day she was taken to the groom).[38] Her sister fast forwards the film so that we can watch the last hours the bride spent at her home before being taken to the groom’s house. ‘Aliyyah’s cousin comments favourably on the women’s *naqsh* (lit. ‘drawing’, floral patterns applied to hands and arms). The sisters explain that they had it done at a place in their neighbourhood. It cost them YR 10,000 ($50) but they were not happy with it. ‘It was too thick. ‘Aliyyah had her arms and her back done; it took an afternoon to dry.’ Hannan notes that Bayt al-Ahmar, one of the wealthy shaykhly families, have *naqsh* done for YR 40,000. This gets her mother talking about the other expenses, the price of the dress, the *salon*. . .She appears on the screen wearing a purple dress and an old-fashioned headband, the *masar al- tali‘*. She speaks dismissively about herself as if wondering why she should be seen among her young daughters and nieces. Eventually we watch the last hours the bride spent at her parents’ house. She is seen dancing. Having always been told that on this day the bride must look more beautiful than ever, I express surprise that her make-up is less sophisticated than at the preceding event. ‘She could not wear those eye-lashes because she would not have been able to take them off, it would have been embarrassing,’ her mother explains, thinking about the wedding night. ‘Aliyyah is shown laughing, then crying. ‘She cried before she

[36] Bridal dressers tend not to be concerned about exposure to the camera.

[37] Girls learn foreign dance styles by watching television.

[38] By that time she had not yet met the groom.

was taken away.' Suddenly 'Aliyyah's sister Sukaynah is seen in the room's mirror, filming the bride. The young women get agitated because 'Aliyyah's husband – whom 'Aliyyah wants to show the video – must not see her sisters. One flicks nervously through the video, checking whether any other sister is seen. 'We will have to black out Sukaynah's face' she remarks.

Since weddings and other rituals are now being recorded, they are no longer fleeting moments in living memory – events to be discussed, judged and forgotten. The video keeps open to scrutiny the evidence of people's investment in weddings and of the bride's virtues. The very presence of a record might serve to enhance status competition for claims can be conveyed to others, whether or not they attended a specific event. During women's viewing sessions, there is much evidence of gendered discourse as women comment on the bride's appearance ('how magnificent she looks!'). It would be improper for viewers to offer words other than praise and admiration.[39] While videos must be kept hidden so as to foreclose possible arousal among unauthorised male viewers, part of their rationale is to direct the beholder towards the bride's desirability. By showing her husband the recordings of events he was unable to attend, 'Aliyyah is concerned to elicit his affirmative response. Such videos and photographic images are linked to wider issues of women's entitlement to recognition of their worthiness which is expected to translate into unfailing support, respect and love.

Hospitality, aimed at the guests' enjoyment and relaxation, is paramount at weddings. The fact that no one complains about the inconvenience caused by the intruding 'artificial eye', forcing them to leave their seats and to move elsewhere while the filming proceeds, indicates widespread acquiescence in new consumption regimes. The filming and screening of the video took on moral depth through the identifications and projections of the mother-daughter relationship, motivated partly by the mother's tapping into memories whose articulation may have been intended to gain sympathy. For example, when talking resentfully about her daughter's age at her wedding, she made others consider that she was even younger at her own. Others – above all 'Aliyyah's mother - assumed narrative authority and articulated 'Aliyyah's subject position on her behalf. 'Aliyyah performed her new status in front of the camera through bodily display, but other women took discursive control in this process of what, in allusion to Jean-Klein's work (2000: 122) on the 'economy of cross-subjectivity' in Palestine, might be called intersubjective self-promotion.[40] Presumably 'Aliyyah was proud to have gained the status of a wife but as we watched the video, she behaved as if she simply performed her duty. Her answers to people's questions were so short that I gained the impression that she might have preferred not to comment on her wedding. Everybody knew that

[39] See in this context Appadurai's (1990) insightful analysis of praise as a complex evaluative and interactive act.

[40] In the context of the Palestinian intifada, Jean-Klein (2000) explores reciprocal forms of self-articulation within cross-gender discursive formations involving mothers, sons and sisters. One of the merits of her analysis is to demonstrate empirically the correlative forms of such processes within historically specific discursive formations without losing sight of the distinct features of self-positioning in a highly charged political arena.

‘Aliyyah was upset because her husband would not allow her to continue her studies. Yet it would have been inappropriate for her to say so, and she never expressed her grievance. She responded briefly or remained silent so as neither to subvert the values associated with filial piety nor to leave anyone wondering whether she would be an obedient wife. The terms of her self-performance were established collaboratively with close female kin, among them the film maker who also participated in the objectification of values associated with conjugal duty and desirability. One of her sisters, who invoked moral codes related to normative gender subjectivity by insisting that Sukayna’s face be blackened out from the film, also contributed to establishing the new bride and her family as virtuous. By reason of ‘Aliyyah’s and the film maker’s largely non-discursive performance of gender norms, I suggest expanding Jean-Klein’s notion of reciprocal self-enactment by incorporating such features into the analysis. The mother expressed the conflicting values and the ambivalent subject positions of the bride who, while becoming fully gendered by virtue of her marriage and subsequent motherhood, had to abandon her dream of going to university. At the same time, by assigning her this role, her daughter corroborated her mother’s own moral value as a woman who had raised daughters who were sought as marriage partners, and who was willing to protect her daughter’s interests.

The albums kept by ‘Aliyyah’s family do not include photographs of couples. On a rare occasion, I encountered some in the possession of Miryam, who comes from a well-established *sayyid* family and was married to a relative a few years ago. Unlike ‘Aliyyah and her sisters, who have never left Yemen, Miryam spent several years in Europe during her father’s studies. On the day I was invited for lunch at her father-in-law’s house, I was joined by her paternal aunt. Miryam showed us her wedding photos, one depicting the groom taking his seat next to her in the function room of a hotel – the female guests covered in their black outdoor garments. There are photos of the couple’s honeymoon on the Canary Islands, where Miryam is shown wearing a short dress, her hair uncovered. Her aunt explained that in spite of her father’s conservative outlooks, he said nothing when he saw those photos because his daughter was now married. Other photos were taken at a lunch at Miryam’s parents’ house after the couple’s return from their journey. Miryam was photographed putting food into her husband’s mouth, a frivolity that most Yemenis of her class would consider a *faux pas*. Looking at that photo, Miryam is embarrassed because she behaved like that in front of her father. ‘That day I loved him like crazy’ she explained. Such explicit expression of affection for a spouse, caught on camera, was (and often still is) anathema for her parents’ generation. The couple are also shown on their wedding anniversary and on Valentine’s Day (‘*yawm al-hubb*’) – Miryam wearing a sexy dress, the couple embracing and chewing *qat*.[41] The photos are indicative of a new tendency towards individualism and intimacy which was never shared even with very close kin

[41] The celebration of Valentine’s Day is a very recent phenomenon and observed by few people. Like in Saudi Arabia, it is frowned upon as a frivolous Western import. *Qat* sessions are normally gendered; few couples chew alone unless they are too old to leave the house.

who are now asked to witness and document the couple's display of affection. The photos draw attention to a new kind of urban domesticity focused on the nuclear family, and are testimony to the couple's opportunity to realise their dream of romantic marriage and individual gratification. Unlike the photos depicting 'Aliyyah's mother, who has always been photographed in the company of her children rather than her husband, Miryam's do not place emphasis on motherhood. Whereas 'Aliyyah impressed through her self-effacement during the video viewing session, Miryam talked cheerfully and honestly about her photographs, adding that her husband did not want her to work but that she did not mind at all.

A Day at the Studio

With the exception of those taken by photographers at hotels, Miryam's photos were all produced in the domestic realm. However, professional photographic studios are increasingly used by women to create the desired self-images often shaped by media imagery referred to above. The photos commissioned at the studios are intended to reveal and naturalise women's alluring selves rather than to uncover hidden character features. Photographic sessions at studios become self-performances aided by the photographer who might be asked to touch up the photograph by smoothing wrinkles or by giving the face a certain glow. Surprisingly Gell does not appreciate the technical processes a photo might undergo *after* the camera has done its job. He describes the photographer as 'a lowly button-presser' (1999: 171). However, in the eyes of the client who commissions the production of a photographic image, the image's power to enchant is increased by having been 'touched up.' Indeed the photographer helps creating 'what is not out of what is' (Gell 1999: 174) and in this sense the artefact plays a significant role in the making of the subject. In as far as the subject is constituted via representation the project of subject-making is always collaborative.

> At an upmarket studio in central San'a, a female student and her girl-friend arrive to collect a couple of photos they have commissioned. One portrays the student; the other is modelled on a woman's image they have found in a fashion magazine. Entering a conversation with them, I learn that the student's father re-married three months ago. 'His new bride refused to have her picture taken, so I had one made that resembles her closely.' She will give the photo to her father as a gift. 'Is it a problem that the male employees at the studio see women's photographs?' I enquire. 'Yes it is', she says, laughing. 'My pictures are only for the album, they will not be displayed anywhere – not even in the bedroom. They will be seen only by my father, brother, and husband.'

The woman's desire to acquire a portrait of herself takes priority over worries that it might be seen by male 'strangers.' Significantly, she also feels that a woman's portrait which resembles her father's new wife is an appropriate gift for him. The commissioning of the photograph illustrates the importance people attach to stylised female images even in circumstances where women object to being photographed. Considering the manner in which Europeans fetishize 'family photography', reflecting their preoccupation with 'truthful' images which in no way

Fig. 7.8 Girl in flamenco-style dress being photographed at a studio

diverge from their mental image of 'blood' relatives,[42] the fact that – at least in this case – 'mere' resemblance did not trouble the gift-giver indicates other priorities. She assumed that her father would enjoy his new wife's image without anticipating irritant *méconnaissance*. What mattered, it would seem, was that the image produced at the studio supported the image her father held of his new wife. Because the bride has never acquiesced to her photo being taken, the question of whether the image created at the studio is inferior to her 'actual' one does not arise. From this perspective, it would seem unreasonable to argue that she would *not* come 'alive' via the studio 'portrait.'

Studios have become sites where gendered subjects are produced outside the home. Whereas Yemenis have hitherto given little attention to gender-appropriate conduct of children up to the age of about seven, the studio serves to inculcate certain ideals of femininity ('girling'; see Butler 1993: 231). Young girls are photographed in fancy dress and made to adopt gender-specific postures (Fig. 7.8). As some women arrive at the studio carrying bags containing bottled water, clothes, and

[42] For example Barthes (1993: 70), while mourning the death of his mother, wrote that his 'grief wanted a just image, an image which would be both justice and accuracy – *justesse*: just an image, but a just image.' (On Barthes's reflections on photography and realism, see Freedberg 1989: chap. 15.)

other artifacts which are spread across the studio, it becomes domesticated. The young girls' hair is brushed, straightened with water, and occasionally make-up is put on their faces before they are photographed. Usually the photographer makes some suggestions about the kind of background and additional paraphernalia (e.g., baskets to be held) as well as about postures to be adopted. During practices such as these, which serve to promote gendering and engage several other actors, the performative occurs largely outside the discursive realm.

Graham-Brown (1988: 59) notes that in colonial Middle Eastern cities, styles of portraiture were almost entirely inspired by European models. This trend has continued but is mediated through 'Arab' models. At the studios women have the opportunity to take inspiration from young girls' photographs, or from albums cataloguing film stars and fashion models whose diverse cultural backgrounds are rendered irrelevant by virtue of a ubiquitous posture expressing allure (see Figs. 7.6 and 7.7).[43]

> Two women in their early twenties, who have been waiting patiently for their turn, enter the room where women are usually photographed. Their mobile phones keep ringing. They wear a lot of make-up and are now ready to change their outfits. One, returning from the changing room, is wearing a tight, sleeveless knee-length suit. After choosing a grey background for her photo, she lies down cross-legged on a fluffy carpet, her head resting on one of her hands. The other woman, after looking at the album of children's images provided by the studio, decides to adopt the posture of a girl reclining on a bench (Fig. 7.9). She wears a sexy, sleeveless black dress that just covers her knees. The female photographer suggests that she lifts her lower leg. Soon after the customer has announced that she wants the photo for herself and her husband, there is a knock at the door and he enters. The photographer takes a picture of the couple holding hands, the woman turning her head towards her husband.

Thus the photographer, by proposing a certain style of posturing, collaborated with the customer in creating a desirable self. In the eyes of more conservative-minded people, such posing in front of the camera – whether at the studio or at home – presents an inappropriate display of intimacy. As one man from rural north-western Yemen remarked, 'wedding photographs are kept for a while; then the woman is 'cut out' and her photo destroyed. Being photographed with a woman is not an issue of effeminacy. The problem is that it may be found. A photo is like a book. Once it has come into existence, you lose control over its movement.' According to a San'ani businessman, 'I do not even want my brother's children to see a photo of my wife and I. They might describe it to other people and that's not polite. The only pictures I have of my wife and I were taken when we spent a couple of years in the United States. We never had a photo of us taken in Yemen. We would have to do it at a studio and I do not like that. I would feel ashamed [revealing intimacy]. Men do not like to admit that they love their wives. And I would not trust the employees. They may work with the Political Security who might put pressure on me. How do I know what they [the

[43] Men who come to the studio hardly ever ask to be shown catalogues of models, although an album containing images of Indian film stars is available.

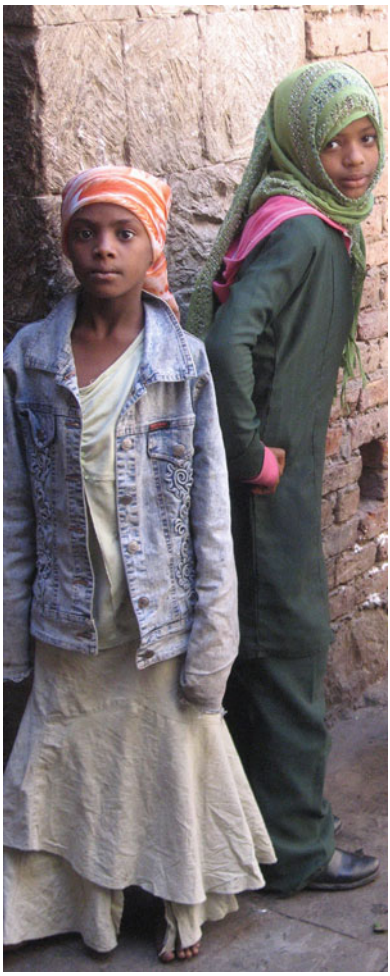
Fig. 7.9

employees] might do with the photos? They will not let me have the negatives.' Both men and women have reservations about women's photography at studios, expressing fears that the employees might 'steal' either their faces or bodies and publish them in magazines or on the internet.

There are several 'women-only' studios which cater for the needs of those women who disapprove of male employees' processing of their images. One of the studios, the *Markaz farah ('Centre of happiness')*, which is located in the old part of the city, offers its services to a pious, lower middle class clientele many of whom demand home visits. Like other professional photographers, those working at the *Markaz farah* also record weddings and children's birthday celebrations. I was denied a copy of a child's birthday party I was shown because some of the mothers of the little guests appear in the film. One of the photographers, worried that my tape recorder might also take photos, asked me to confirm that it does not. Some of the videos the photographers produced in the deprived parts of the old town draw as much attention to the pitiful interiors as to the happy event; however, by hiring a professional photographer, the customer has put forward a claim to status.

The other studio discussed previously is more up-market, but is by no means frequented exclusively by the well-to-do. There are customers from the surrounding countryside with little purchasing power, eager to obtain some high-quality photos of themselves or of frail-looking children who might not live. Women at the bottom of the social hierarchy, whom I never saw entering a

Fig. 7.10



studio, are none the less influenced by the pervasiveness of fashion models. Several women sweepers who live near the studio asked me to take their photos. The women belong to the stigmatised group of people who are attributed East African descent. They do not cover their faces when out working, yet one spoke of her desire to do so, thus adopting the moral codes of normative San'ani femininity. (She might also have wished to cover her face to conceal her dark skin which is disapproved of by the majority of Yemenis.) While she cultivated the self-image of a woman whose identity is hidden when outdoors, others were keen to be photographed in a pose imitative of fashion models. One rushed to her room and picked up her jeans jacket before adopting different poses next to her friend until she was satisfied (Fig. 7.10).

Another girl, who appeared less confident, awkwardly took up several positions until she settled for one, lifting one foot with one hand on her hip (Fig. 7.11).

Fig. 7.11

Thus, certain photographic styles informed by fashion model imagery have become popular and almost ubiquitous. Such imagery therefore generates a degree of social conformity, but it is taken up most by the educated well-to-do and least among under-privileged women in the poorer quarters of the old town. With the exception of women who subscribe to neo-Salafi ideas (n. 22 and 32), a family's reputation for piety need not necessarily hinder self-modelling on fashion idols in front of the camera. Such self-performances reveal both new standards of respectability and different levels of sophistication with respect to the clothes and make-up worn, and the confidence with which the body is displayed. Furthermore, studios, photographers, make-up artists and hairdressers have diverse reputations which affect their charges and the clientele they cater for. Therefore, even while bearing potential for alternative subjectivities, technologies of visual representation tend to corroborate existing social hierarchies.

Conclusion

Contemplating people's 'nervousness' about being represented in an index, Gell (1998: 102) argues that the crux is that the agency of the person represented in the photo is 'inscribed' upon it. As Benjamin noted, unlike painted portraits owned by

families whose interest in them lasts no longer than two or three generations, a photograph may maintain its animacy (to adopt a term coined by Gell) and work on the beholder in powerful ways. Reflecting on the photographer David Octavius Hill's image of a New Haven fishwife, taken in the nineteenth century, Benjamin suggests that there is something in the way she looks downwards with a casual, seductive shame which will always remain and cannot be silenced: a woman *who is still real* and who will never become purely an 'art' object (Benjamin 1981: 49; emphasis and translation mine). The worlds that are made visible by San'ani women's photographs, serving to expand the boundaries of their bodies, must remain concealed from the *ajanib,* male 'strangers.' As an 'extension' of a person's agency, a photo is intimately tied to her such that subject and object are never entirely separate. Here relations of objectification do not involve the incorporation of consumer objects into the self (Miller 1987) – at least not in the first instance. In an apparently paradoxical twist, the subject becomes 'embodied' in the object which in turn has the potential to establish it in certain ways. Because of its potential mobility and its capacity to captivate, enchant, shame, stir desire and fear, in the context analysed here a photograph must be explored from the perspective of the social relationships in which it is embedded. The most significant ones I have identified in this chapter are networks of kinship, the implication of which, in contexts of photographic creativity, pertains to issues of trust, power, responsibility and control. The covering of women's faces on moral grounds requires their constant vigilance so as to prevent unwanted ocular encounters. The arrival of new technology in northern Yemen, providing opportunities for 'multiple singularity', has rendered hindrance of exposure even more difficult. From the moment of its appearance in the material world, a San'ani woman's photograph is potentially a cause for concern. Male *ajanib* who, by looking at images which reveal parts of women's bodies which ought to remain disguised from their eyes, may cause women indignity and humiliate their husbands, and even lead them to conduct themselves immorally. Ethnographic data suggest that the degree of anger caused by unauthorised viewing depends on the identity of the beholder: a man's cousin's accidental gaze at his wife's photo is of far less concern than that of invading armies. Much of the discourse about the anxiety-creating properties of the photograph rests on the imaginary corporeal presence of the adult male beholder and the management of desire. I have suggested above that boys learn how to become desiring male subjects through observance of social practice and self-enactment within inhibited spaces. Just as the photographic object is productive of feminine subjectivity, by *acting towards him* it establishes the male beholder as masculine.

Women's photos, like those of other people, are objects that elicit responses – some resented, some desired. Women, who have alluring self-images created which they may show to or give to their husbands, seek to harness the very agency that is otherwise considered to be potentially perilous. Here the purpose is to stir desire and to make or sustain socially sanctioned relationships rather than to disrupt them. By utilising the camera's evidential power to underscore claims to

desirability, women attempt to create lasting value in the eyes of others.[44] Photographic images make those claims more authoritative, just as wedding videos make claims to status more authoritative. Some of the images that are intended to emphasise allure are informed by regional and even global consumer culture focusing on the 'marketable self' (Csordas 1999: 179). In recent decades, in northern Yemen photography has become a significant vehicle for a material engagement with the world that moulds subjectivity and, as the case of Hannan and her sisters shows, allows the contemplation of alternative subjectivities. The various visual images stored in their albums reveal a number of conflicting subject positions.

The objective of studio portraiture is at once to authorise and naturalise a specific image and to freeze it in time in order to preserve whatever power it might have, thereby excising the body from the ephemeral, the temporal, the transient. However, because the present is always already the past, and the image not necessarily identical with certain mental forms of memory, it only serves to instantiate a subject which is never fully constituted. The image, qua object, plays a crucial role in producing feminine subjects who however are implicated in ongoing processes of self-formation.

Image production in different social settings – outdoors, the domestic sphere or the studio – illustrates that in important respects, female subjectivity manifests itself in embodied practice which is not necessarily dominated by discourse. Theorists such as Butler (1993), by conceiving of corporeally enacted femininity primarily in terms of compulsory performances based above all on authoritative speech, have over-privileged discursive practice at the expense of other reiterative ones.[45] Drawing on Jean-Klein's work on the reciprocal production of moral selves during the Palestinian intifada, I have analysed photographic and videographic performances in terms of intersubjective self-articulation. Taking into account the significance of non-discursive elements and quasi-silences among some of the women introduced here, I submit that those forms of subject formation should be conceived as complementary to cross-subjective narration. Even though Butler (1993: 231) concedes that the socially imperative process of gendering is not fully determining, performative theory leaves very limited scope for such productions. Nor does it sufficiently explain the agentive power which causes subjection. Image production, which is instrumental in realising a certain kind of feminine subject, is always both a reiterative and an imaginative act, involving several actors. For the subject-in-the-making, positioning herself in front of the camera is a moment of interpretation, self-fashioning and meaning-production. In this regard, my encounters with socially marginalised black women suggest that questions of how

[44] By placing emphasis on representation in relation to enchantment, my purpose is not to reduce its effect to purely visual gratification.

[45] Of course a number of anthropologists have written about specific embodied practices which do not enter discourse wholly (for example, Bourdieu 1977; Csordas 1990; Good 1994). However, few deal with gender issues.

gendered subjectivity is informed by other forms of difference such as class, ethnicity and pious attachments (see Moore 1994: 50) are also vital and require further ethnographic inquiry.

Acknowledgement I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for enabling me to conduct research for this project (2007–2008). This chapter was written in fond memory of Alfred Gell. I am fortunate to have had such a solicitous and inspiring teacher and friend. His sympathetic, uncondescending engagement with his students was a model for all of us to emulate. I am grateful to Wolf-Dieter Lemke, Daniel Miller and the two editors for taking the trouble to read and comment on an earlier draft of the paper.

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Chapter 8
The Universal and the Particular in Rural Xinjiang: Ritual Commensality and the Mosque Community

Chris Hann

Introduction

Anthropological investigations of Islam in contemporary Central Asia have long needed to engage with considerable intra-regional diversity in religious practices and the interplay with secular practices and identities. Some of this diversity derives from the *longue durée* effects of Turkic and Iranian empires, but for the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to point to contrasting experiences of socialism in the recent past. With hindsight, the Soviet invasion of 1978 was little more than a further painful interlude in the ongoing agony of Afghanistan. Massive intervention by Western powers has done nothing to improve political stability and living standards, and the Taliban remain attractive to many. By contrast, although Islam in the USSR was repressed in the name of scientific atheism, the Soviet Central Asian republics were prosperous and overwhelmingly peaceful until the disintegration of the federal state in the early 1990s. Independence brought civil war in Tajikistan and recurrent outbreaks of violence in both authoritarian Uzbekistan as well as more liberal Kyrgyzstan. Islam was manipulated and mobilized by new power holders in constitutionally secular states for their own legitimation purposes (Hann and the Civil Religion Group 2006). New elites were more fearful of the universalist, scripture-based currents propagated by foreign missionaries than of a resurgence of the 'superstitions' denounced and repressed by socialist elites in the recent past. Anthropologists have documented much variation in private and public religiosity, and in the extent to which practices such as shrine worship have been revived from above as well as from below, in line with new national ideologies (Abramson and Karimov 2006; Hilgers 2009; Kehl-Bodrogi 2008; Louw 2007; Privratsky 2001). Recent contributions have also probed the revived role of Islam in moral education inside and outside the family in Tajikistan (Stephan 2010)

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_8,

and as the foundation of moral personhood *tout court* in Uzbekistan (Rasanayagam 2010, Chap. 5, this volume). In all of these post-Soviet studies the economic background is one of dislocation; in some cases the suffering has been severe. The overall result is that, as in Afghanistan, religious practices and commitments are nowadays significantly shaped by the politics of secular identities and by new forms of exclusion.

This chapter is concerned with that large component of Turkic-speaking Muslim Central Asia which was incorporated into China by the Qing in the middle of the eighteenth century. Long known in Western literature as Eastern Turkestan, since 1955 it has been known officially as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). It has a population approaching 20 million and is viewed by the Beijing authorities and by virtually all Han Chinese as an integral part of the Chinese state. As a result of heavy immigration in the socialist period, non-Muslim Han are nowadays approximately as numerous as the Uyghur, the titular nationality.[1] Like the Kazaks and the Kyrgyz, who are also present in significant numbers in the XUAR, the Uyghur are Turkic-speaking Muslims of the Hanafi legal school. Their mosque community (*jämaät*) is traditionally monoethnic.[2] The XUAR is not exclusively Muslim, and Muslims form substantial segments of the population in many other regions of the People's Republic. But in this chapter I am concerned only with Xinjiang, which exhibits both similarities and differences to its western neighbours, the former Soviet republics (Fig. 8.1).

Turning first to similarities, as in the USSR Islam in the XUAR was condemned as feudal superstition and harshly repressed in the Maoist years. Like other Chinese citizens, Uyghurs then benefited from the political and economic relaxation of the 1980s. Many mosques that had been destroyed or fallen out of use in the Cultural Revolution were restored. In the two decades that their neighbours and kin in former Soviet Central Asia have been learning to see their religion in terms of national identity, Uyghur intellectuals, too, have been granted a degree of freedom to document religious customs in terms of folkloric tradition, and thus to fuse their identity as Muslims with their secular identity.

But of course there is an immediate difference to the ex-Soviet cases. The XUAR is part of a unitary state, not a federation such as the USSR used to be,

[1] Uyghur and Han each comprise around 40 % of the regional population; see Toops (2004). For more detail concerning the consolidation of Uyghur ethno-national identity in the socialist era, see Bovingdon (2010).

[2] It is especially unusual for any of these Turkic minorities to share a mosque with Hui, (also known as Chinese Muslims or Tungans), who adhere to the Shafi'i school. Hui are officially recognized as an ethnic group (*minzu*) all over China on the basis of their religious difference, although the great majority share a language and many customs with their Han neighbours (see Gladney 1991). Since the death of Chairman Mao in 1976, Hui have benefited greatly from the softening of socialist power. They have been able to renew their entrepreneurial as well as their religious traditions, with Communist Party approval. In some regions nowadays Hui cadres have considerable freedom to practise their faith, but this is not the case for Hui in the XUAR who are, at least formally, subject to the same strict controls as other Muslims. Relatively numerous in many cities of the XUAR, few Hui are able to communicate easily with Turkic speakers.

Fig. 8.1 The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

let alone the sovereign post-Soviet republics. While religion was dismissed as feudal ideology under Mao, by the 1990s it was carefully monitored because of its alleged links to Uyghur ethno-nationalism. This tension was evident in the authorities' repression of the *mäshräp* ritual in the Ili valley. Revived as a 'conduit of national cultural unity' between Uyghurs in the XUAR and the large diaspora across the border in Kazakstan, this primarily secular, age-group ritual was promptly repressed by the authorities, who apparently feared both its nationalist potential and a vehicle for a 'parallel Islam' outside their control, analogous to Sufi groupings in the former USSR (Roberts 1998). Indeed, religious specialists were soon undertaking prominent roles in these rituals, which they had not performed in the *mäshräp* in the past (Bellér-Hann 2008: 212–4). According to Roberts (1998: 679), Uyghurs saw the *mäshräp* as "an important element of their 'traditional' culture which, in their eyes, has been suppressed by the Chinese and Soviet states and is faced with further deterioration at

the hands of the global culture entering the Ili valley with world capitalism". In other words, this ritual was a particular, ethno-national response to a perceived new threat that was universal in nature. Elsewhere I have described the government's controls at the local level as a renewal of 'militant secularism' (Hann 2012). The policies pursued in the XUAR have been more stringent than those pursued in other regions, including Tibet. The banning of religion in the public sphere and repression of informal assemblies in private, domestic space have been accompanied by strenuous efforts to co-opt religious specialists, including the imams of local mosques, into the machinery of government bureaucracy. Islamic popular customs continue to fill folklore compendia and the major Islamic holidays are classified as the national holidays of the Uyghur people.

As in the ex-Soviet republics, the concerns of the authorities are not altogether unwarranted. Xinjiang, always peripheral to the Muslim heartlands, was more isolated than ever during the Maoist decades, but since the 1980s it has been increasingly exposed to international influences. The authorities feared that influences from the ex-Soviet republics could trigger Uyghur aspirations to political separatism ('splittism'), although in reality radical ideas were more likely to enter from Pakistan along the newly constructed Karakoram highway. Even in the period before 9/11, which gave the authorities a pretext for intensified repression, it was almost impossible to undertake ethnographic research of any kind in southern Xinjiang, where most Uyghurs live. Fieldwork by Edmund Waite in the vicinity of Kashgar in the mid-1990s suggested that the revitalization of the local *jämaät* was accompanied by new ideas from abroad, which led some Muslims to become critical of their customary practices in the light of text-based norms (Waite 2007, forthcoming). A few Uyghurs gained notoriety through joining the Taliban (sometimes unwittingly) and eventually landing in the US detention complex at Guantanamo. However, while Chinese power holders have alleged a 'fundamentalist' spiral and some Uyghurs now have a new, 'objectified' perception of their faith and of their homeland as peripheral to Muslim heartlands, there is no evidence that religion has been a significant factor behind the ongoing political tension. Analysts of the ethnic violence of July 2009, which cost almost 200 lives in Urumchi, capital of the XUAR, agreed that religion was *not* a significant cause (Millward 2009).

Compared to these political and security dimensions, relatively little attention has been paid to the impact of market economy on the XUAR in recent decades. Yet this is the major contrast to Afghanistan and the ex-Soviet republics. In the last three decades the Chinese Communist Party has progressively abandoned the egalitarian moral vision through which it defined itself down to the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Chairman Mao in 1976. Instead it has presided over the most remarkable sustained growth rates in the history of the world economy. Hundreds of millions of citizens, most of them Han peasants, have been lifted out of absolute poverty. But these policies have promoted a tremendous increase in relative deprivation, including regional inequalities, corruption at all levels of the Communist Party and government, and a pervasive sense of moral loss and normative disorientation which the invocation of neo-Confucian 'harmony' rhetoric can do little to stem.

This nationwide embrace of amoral consumerism has distinctive consequences in minority regions such as Xinjiang. Recognizing that the economic development has been skewed towards the coastal provinces, since 2000 the authorities have introduced special policies to 'Develop the West'. While poor in comparison with the coastal provinces, statistics indicated that, even before 2000, the XUAR was significantly more prosperous than most provinces of central China (Wiemer 2004). But there are huge differences between sub-regions as well as between town and countryside and in Xinjiang these differences often coincide with ethnic differences. This is where the causes of recent violence must be sought (Hann 2011). Even in those parts of the XUAR where Uyghur predominate and Han are hardly to be seen (at any rate in the countryside), economic reforms have led to significant social differentiation. Far from constituting a political threat, I shall argue that Islam functions conservatively in rural settlements, to contain and alleviate the *anomie* of market economy. It does so above all through its rituals, of which there are many. I shall focus on just two, both of them based in commensality. Unlike the above-mentioned *mäshräp*, these rituals are not interpreted by participants in ethno-nationalist terms. The continuous realignment of religious and ethno-national identities is the most conspicuous feature of Islam in contemporary Central Asia as a whole (Hann and Pelkmans 2009). In the XUAR, state repression has led to a new synthesis or articulation. But the aim of this chapter is to open up an even broader set of comparisons in the anthropology of Islam: ritual commensality is shown to be crucial not only to the making of a local community centred on a mosque, but also to a universalizing cohesion and moral principles through which to counter the rampant differentiating forces of the market.

The Setting

My materials derive from fieldwork in two Uyghur rural settlements in Qumul (Hami) prefecture, eastern Xinjiang.[3] In Qumul county, bordering on Gansu province, Han nowadays constitute a majority in the main oasis and even in some rural districts. Religion is considered to be stable and no political threat is perceived – which is why I was allowed to live in rural districts for almost 9 months and to carry out ethnographic research free of supervision. My main themes were changes in kinship and social support practices in the light of economic reforms, with a focus on the increased significance of the market. Religion was not formally on the agenda.

[3] Qumul is the Uyghur name of this ancient settlement. This fieldwork was part of a project "Feudalism, Socialism and the Present Mixed Economy", undertaken jointly with Ildikó Bellér-Hann, in cooperation with Xinjiang University, in 2006–2009. I am also grateful for the assistance of Busarem Imin. Professors Arslan Abdulla and Rahilä Dawut at Xinjiang University were constantly helpful in dealing with formalities; unfortunately the joint Workshop that we tried to organize in 2008, and then again in 2009, could not take place for political reasons.

Yet it was soon obvious that the *jämaät* was a very significant form of belonging for the rural population, apparently more meaningful than secular affiliations. This applied in both of my main field sites, one a community in the eastern Tian Shan mountains and the other a much larger population at the heart of the oasis, adjacent to the modern city. In the following sections I shall consider one ritual in each setting in more detail.

Qumul is a strategically important location where Turkic speakers and Mandarin speakers have interacted over many centuries. They transmitted ideas and practices constantly. But there could be no question of fusion. As far as we know, there has never been much intermarriage between the two groups, nor between the Turkic-speakers and the Hui, their fellow Muslims. From 1697 the oasis was ruled by a dynasty known locally as the Wang. Today's Uyghur inhabitants classify these rulers as Uyghurs, although the Wang would not have used this term themselves. The last Khan (Shah Maqsud, r. 1880–1930) was highly sinicised, but even before his long reign the style of the Wang palace (*orda*) and the court was shaped by that of the Qing court in Beijing. This palace dominated the streets of the Muslim city (Ch: *Huicheng xiang)*, which were in turn circumscribed by high walls. Han and Hui lived outside these walls. The Khan visited Beijing frequently. Historical records confirm the consistent loyalty of the Qumul Khans to the Qing Emperor, on whose side they occasionally fought against other Muslim Turkic rulers. This close alliance enabled the Wang to preserve their autonomy until 1930, when, following the death of Shah Maqsud, their khanate was incorporated into the province of Xinjiang, with its capital in Urumchi.

Historical analysis of the Wang has been complicated by the imperatives of socialist ideology, according to which they represented an oppressive feudal theocracy. Along with so much else, this line has softened in recent years. The dynasty's impressive mausoleum complex adjacent to the Muslim city was proclaimed a state cultural monument and opened to tourists at the end of the 1980s. Since 2000 the complex has been extended by a reconstruction of the Wang palace (some 2 km from its original location) and new buildings dedicated to Uyghur cultural heritage. Some local Uyghurs claim that the Wang did much to promote the culture that they claim as their national heritage today. Some also claim that the Wang ruled according to Islamic precepts and took care to provide for the needy, e.g. by distributing animals from the pastures they held in the nearby mountains to the oasis poor on the occasions of the two principal Islamic holidays.

Such 'revisionist' interpretations of Wang rule seem questionable in the light of the peasant rebellions which disrupted the tranquility of the khanate in the early twentieth century. Some of this violence (particularly that which followed the displacement of the Wang in the 1930s) was probably provoked by the encroachments of Han colonists (Forbes 1986). However, conflict in upland villages of the eastern Tian Shan mountains pitted Muslim peasant against Muslim ruler. Socialist diagnoses of 'exploitation' found some resonance in local accounts of the Wang; but it was difficult to determine to what extent this reflected the propaganda of the Maoist decades, rather than the continuous transmission of a

peasant discourse of resistance over a period approaching 100 years. In the upland villages it was difficult to glean any information at all about the era which came to an end in 1930.

In contrast to the ambivalences and uncertainties evoked by questions concerning 'feudalism', questions about the decades of Maoist socialism elicited uniform and emphatic narratives from villagers in all parts of the county. In the latter half of the 1950s, in line with nationwide trends, agricultural organization was repeatedly changed by decree from above. Small cooperative groups were replaced by collective farms comparable in size to the Soviet *kolkhoz*, which were in turn consolidated to form a People's Commune, which in 1958 drew the inhabitants of numerous villages together into a single political and economic unity. Within the commune, production was delegated to the brigade (often an entire village) and, within it, the production team (typically a hamlet within the village, where the households were for the most part close kin). The commune was staffed by a large bureaucracy, including accountants responsible for allocating wages, in cash and in kind, on the basis of each member's accumulated work points. Villagers nowadays are unanimous in condemning the economic inefficiency of this division of labour. They point scornfully to ambitious schemes requiring tremendous labour investment which quickly failed, such as new roads and hillside terraces that were washed away by the first big storm. Only members of the Communist Party are likely to point out that some schemes brought long-term success, including major improvements in irrigation, and even to add that, however deplorable the implementation, the ideals of the Maoist era were just because they put an end to previous inequalities.

Most narratives of the period between 1958 ('Great Leap Forward') and 1976 (Chairman Mao's death, end of the 'Cultural Revolution') stressed the struggle to survive. Rural Uyghur are aware of mass starvation in other parts of the country. The villagers of Qumul county did not starve, but their subsistence depended almost entirely on what they were able to produce on their own land, and as long as production was organized collectively, they seldom had enough bread (*nan*) to fill their stomachs. The years of collective consumption in the early 1960s, when no cooking was possible at home, are recalled with extreme bitterness. After 1966 it was again possible to grow vegetables on a small 'private plot' (*qalduruq yär*) near one's home, but the staple wheat (barley in villages at higher elevations) remained under collective control until 1983.

The years in which economic activity was forcibly collectivized were also the years in which collective religious life was rigorously repressed. Many mosques were closed, converted into storehouses, or physically destroyed by gangs of Red Guards. Respected imams were required to work manually, along with everyone else; they were often singled out for harsh treatment. Religious observances were confined to the house. But since households no longer disposed of significant economic resources, it was impossible to sustain traditional life-cycle rituals, in which commensality was a key element in the religious performance. While weddings could still be marked in a modest way, and even in the years when repression was most severe an Islamic *nikah* was tolerated alongside the civil

registration, death commemoration rituals (*näzir*), the most significant manifestation of 'popular Islam' in this region, were condemned as 'feudal superstition'.[4]

The liberalization of the 1980s brought the decentralization of production to the household and the re-centralization of religious life around the mosque. The commune was restyled as a 'rural township'; it retained its political responsibilities and most of its staff. The resources which became available at household level were deployed to rebuild or repair damaged mosques, and to renew traditional patterns of sociality in which religion was deeply embedded. Villagers speak enthusiastically about these developments, which they see as the beginning of an era of 'freedom' (*ärkinlik*) that has persisted to the present day. They have little or no information about political vicissitudes in other parts of the XUAR since 1990. For them, the last three decades have brought unprecedented wealth and opportunities to consume. Even the upland village studied was accessible by an asphalt road and had been integrated into the regional electricity grid some years before the beginning of my fieldwork; almost every household possessed at least an old black and white television.

Yet, though undeniably better off than they had ever been before, Qumul villagers had a sense that they were not doing as well as others. Compared to what they could see daily on the TV or by making a trip to the department stores in the modern city centre, they were relatively deprived. In both upland and oasis villages, Uyghurs expressed their anxieties about the new market economy with reference to ritual practice, especially weddings. The cost of a wedding, notably the sum transferred to the parents of the bride known as *toyluq*, which is nowadays mainly used to acquire consumer goods for the newly married couple, has risen enormously. As in the past, it remains common, especially in the upland communities, to invite the entire *jämaät*, but subtle and not so subtle processes of differentiation and material emulation have been set in motion, which have a direct impact on matchmaking processes. The money given by relatives as a wedding present also reflects the new inequalities. Some secular elements act as a brake on these processes: by continuing to observe the traditional injunction to hand over metres of cloth as a gift during the wedding day festivities, even the less well off can participate publicly without losing face. But this is hard to sustain, because those able to give more than just cloth are understandably keen that their generosity should be known and recognized. This is how the market economy divides. In the case studies that follow I suggest that specifically religious ritual constitutes a countercurrent to this new world of consumerism, which even in remote villages is nowadays re-introducing strong forms of hierarchy.

[4] *Näzir* is a generic term for domestic ritual. If the term is used without qualification it refers to commemoration of a death (first held 7 days after the death; then again after 40 days, 1 year, and annually thereafter). Other types of *näzir* can be joyful, notably the *halis näzir*, which is celebrated to express thanks (e.g. for the safe return of a relative after a long journey). See bellér-Hann, 2008.

An Upland Township

I turn first to Tian Shan township, north of the oasis, where I was allowed to live for just under 3 months and to collect data systematically through visits to households.[5] Visible signs of differentiation are limited in villages where the great majority of households engage in subsistence agriculture and have little additional income of any significance, especially those at higher elevation where transportation remains difficult. Nonetheless money has become increasingly important as access to consumer goods has expanded and the costs of a wedding have spiraled. Many households have already acquired refrigerators as well as televisions; ownership of a motor bike is important to young men, even if its purchase means delaying his wedding. Young people take advantage of any opportunities available to earn supplementary cash. The only regular opportunity they have is to work as temporary labourers on the plain harvesting cotton or grapes (Hann 2009). The other major source of household income comes from animals, mainly sheep and goats. Traditional patterns of transhumance have been revived since the early 1980s, and a few families have succeeded in expanding their herds dramatically. Their wealth is evident in new vehicles and house improvements, but so far these have not been conspicuous. Housebuilding remains a communal affair, in which all the men of the neighbourhood are expected to lend a hand, just as all the women participate in preparations for a wedding. In any case the livestock specialists do not enjoy high status. The great majority of households own only small herds, from which they sell animals when money is urgently needed, typically to finance a wedding. Even so, the number of animals taken to the high pasture in summer now greatly exceeds capacity; the authorities have so far done little to regulate the sector, and so degradation of the pasture is continuing.

Given this economic context, the efflorescence of religious life in these upland communities has been necessarily modest. Some villages have just one *jämaät*, which coincides with the unit known formerly as the *dadui* (brigade) and nowadays as the *känt*, the lowest level of state administration.[6] Other villages have more than one mosque. Here the *jämaät* usually coincides with the *xiaodui*, the former production team (a unit rendered largely redundant by the post-Mao reforms). This township has very few new mosques and there is no lavish expenditure on gravestones. Household-based rituals are relatively infrequent. Most households

[5] The questionnaire was almost entirely devoted to economic issues and cooperation. Religion and ritual were only broached with families I knew well. Village imams were reluctant to spend time with me; like state cadres, they are repeatedly warned about the limits of "normal religious activities"; they were aware that religion was not a part of my official research project with Ildikó Bellér-Hann.

[6] The term *mähällä*, which in parts of ex-Soviet Central Asia specifies the lowest level of state administration and the mosque community, is frequently used but does not correspond exactly to any of these units. Rural Uyghurs tend to be more familiar with *jämaät* boundaries than with secular names and boundaries, which, both in the mountains and in the villages of the oasis, to be discussed in the next section, have been changed several times in recent decades.

perform just one *näzir* annually, to which neighbours as well as kin are invited. The hospitality is limited to *ash*, the soup which guests would consume in their own homes anyway. At weddings and at the major Islamic feasts an effort is made to put luxury items on the ritual table (*dastixan)*: fruit, nuts and sweet biscuits supplement the obligatory pilav (*polo*). Differentiation remains modest; the wedding party of a family of teachers or local cadres is hardly distinguishable from that of their peasant neighbours. However, if a wealthy family wants to make a statement, it can opt to stage the rituals in a restaurant in the oasis centre, which since completion of the asphalt road is little more than an hour away for the villagers among whom I resided; this has immediate consequences for the size and nature of the wedding party.

Villagers are well aware of the increased potential for inequality brought about by the new market economy and of the need to guard against it. Since the 1980s they once again observe Islamic precepts and transfer *öshrä-zakat* to the needy members of their community. Most say that they give grain to a less fortunate relative (they seemed to know that transfers to parents or to siblings do not qualify for this purpose: such close kin *must* be helped, whereas the charitable payment of *zakat* achieves its effect for the donor only when there is no imperative to aid this particular recipient). Elderly people living alone without close relatives to support them can rely on more or less regular gifts of cooked food in addition to *nan*. The mosque (*mäschit*) does not organize any of this, yet it remains a crucial institution. All households make a small annual contribution to its upkeep, known as *peterni*. Friday prayers in the mosque are generally attended by all men, except for Party members and those who work for the state (men in these categories are allowed to attend only at the two major Islamic festivals).

Since the 1980s, it has again become customary to take some *nan* or *chälpäk* (a similar dough fried in oil) to the Friday prayers. In a short supplementary supplication at the end of the service, the men pray to and for their ancestors and pass the food they have brought to one or more neighbours. Nothing is consumed on the spot; the idea is that everyone should take home food that has been prepared by another member of their community. In recent years, people have begun to contribute other foodstuffs, such as seasonally available fruit purchased in the oasis. It is not necessary to bring something every week, and the truly poor are not expected to bring anything at all. In one large village in this township, the men cross the road to the cemetery at the end of the service, pray to their ancestors, and then redistribute what they have brought along while sitting in a circle next to the graves. Some say that this is a traditional Uyghur custom (in fact it does not appear to be well known in other parts of the XUAR) but no one emphasizes the ethno-national aspect. Compared to the brief efflorescence of the *mäshräp* in the 1990s in Ili, this act of commensality is not at all politicized. Local state officials in the township's Religious Affairs Bureau have apparently classified it as 'normal religious activity'. It seems to me that the revival of this practice, every week throughout the year, is a powerful public statement of community solidarity in the face of the divisive forces of 'market socialism' (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3).

Fig. 8.2 Sharing food in the cemetery of an upland village, following Friday prayers

Fig. 8.3 Returning home with food supplied by a neighbour

The Old City

Shähärichi (Uyghur: 'inner town') is the site of the old Wang palace in Qumul, destroyed in 1933. In Mandarin it is still referred to as the 'Muslim city' (*Hui cheng*). The modern city of Qumul (Ch. Hami) has its administrative and commercial centre to the north-west, where wide boulevards demarcate the new urban space. The old city, too, has been modified by socialist planners, who have straightened roads and irrigation canals and extended electricity to almost all households. Officially, however, Shähärichi, like the Tian Shan villages discussed in the previous section, is now a *rural* township (*yeza*). A high proportion of its 7,000 inhabitants, almost all of them Uyghur, have no state sector employment. Like the upland villagers, they were therefore eligible to be allocated land when the reforms were implemented in the early 1980s. Since irrigated land is scarce, holdings are often insufficient to generate cash income. As in the mountains, many households concentrate on growing wheat for subsistence. Over the years, however, some have invested in vineyards, while growing cotton is a popular alternative source of cash that does not require significant working capital. Some households have one or more members who work in the modern city, or who have a state pension. For those who have no steady income from either wages or pensions, the proximity of the modern city makes for limited work opportunities, e.g. at the larger bazaars. Shähärichi itself has numerous shops and small businesses; they are most crowded on Thursdays and Sundays, when a central asphalt road is transformed into a market that attracts buyers and sellers from the modern city as well as all the outlying districts, Han as well as Uyghur. In short, compared to the upland villages, Shähärichi has a much denser population and a more variegated economy, accompanied by more significant social differentiation. This is demonstrated in the construction of large new houses by those who can afford them. These are erected not through communal labour groups, still the norm in Tian Shan township, but by specialized gangs, almost all of them Han.

The organization of religious life in Shähärichi also differs from that found in the hills. Here too, each household belongs to a *jämaät*, as well as to the state-defined units of the *xiaodui* (with which the *jämaät* often exhibits a high degree of congruence) and the *känt*. Shähärichi has 30 *jämaät* altogether. They vary greatly in size, from a dozen to several hundred households. Most of the old mosques survived the Maoist years. Many have been expensively renovated by their members in recent years, but some of the smaller communities lack the resources to maintain their buildings as they would wish. The house in which I lived was close to the mosque known as Ayliq Bozurga, established in the early nineteenth century. The imam had inherited the position from his father. I was shown a photograph of his father with other imams from Xinjiang when they were received by Chairman Mao during a visit to Beijing in the 1950s. The community nowadays comprises 45 households, which approximated the average. No sharp boundaries separate these communities from each other, but it is unusual to change one's affiliation and even those who live some distance away from their mosque rarely contemplate

a change. There has been substantial movement in and out of Ayliq Bozurga in recent decades. Population is falling due to migration to the modern city next door, but some expensive new houses have been built, and some of those who leave still return regularly, at least for major feasts. While some mosque communities are dominated by one extended family or clan, this is not the case in Ayliq Bozurga where the largest agnatic grouping comprises only five households. Affinal ties generate complex links, but marriages are nowadays arranged in all directions throughout the rural districts of the county and also in the modern city.

In addition to the local mosque, where the imam is usually a farmer who, as in the upland communities, has acquired his religious knowledge in traditional ways, Shähärichi also has a large Friday mosque. The old *jumä mäschiti* was destroyed in the Cultural Revolution, but a new one was constructed with state assistance in the 1980s. The *jumä mäschiti* is administered by a Damollah, who must liaise closely with cadres of the Religious Affairs Bureau at the administrative headquarters of the township. Ismail Damollah was in his early 40s. After initial training at Xinjiang Islamic College in Urumchi, opened in the late 1980s, he proceeded to further study at the Islamic University in Cairo. Several of the larger neighbourhood mosques also had imams who had graduated from Urumchi and received a salary from the state. Some of the older generation of 'peasant' imams received a more modest sum as a 'maintenance allowance'. This is an important part of the secular state's co-optation strategy, which I noted in the introduction. The price paid for this material support is that these imams in Shähärichi are summoned more frequently than their counterparts in the hills to political meetings.

The Uyghurs of Shähärichi support their mosque through the payment of *peterni* and observe the same norms of *öshrä-zakat* as the upland villages. Rituals are basically similar. However, the greater wealth of the peri-urban community enables households to stage *näzir* commemorations more frequently and on a larger scale; sometimes a separate room is prepared to allow women to take part in the prayers, which does not happen in the hills. Wedding parties are not necessarily larger in Shähärichi, because here the invitation is not automatically extended to the entire *jämaät*. But the cost of the party and the size of the *toyluq* are significantly higher than the levels in the upland villages. As in the hills, there is a lot of informal cooperation between households in the preparation for a major occasion. But since many individuals have full-time jobs, and many households no longer produce very much of their food supply, more goods and services have to be purchased for cash.

Ritual redistribution of food within the *jämaät* following Friday prayers is not found in Shähärichi, since this is the one occasion every week when the men of all the various *jämaät* come together at the large *juma mäschiti*. Instead a similar goal is achieved through a different practice, which seems to be an invention of the Reform period. Prior to the repression of the Maoist years, when religious expression in the public sphere was banned, spring fertility rituals known as *zaraxätmä*, or simply *zara* were an important celebration for the community. Older people recalled how, in the 1950s, they left their houses to gather by the bank of a nearby stream. An animal was slaughtered by the men and a meal prepared by women.

Prayers for the agricultural season were performed by men and women separately, led by the imam and by a knowledgeable woman (of whom there were many). This ritual is recalled primarily as an occasion of community togetherness at the end of the long winter, more a picnic than a pilgrimage. It was banned after 1958.

When controls were relaxed in the 1980s, *zara* could not be revived in this form.[7] Even in the more liberal religious atmosphere, rituals involving the imam belonged in the mosque and not in the public sphere. An additional factor was the dramatic change in the topography of Shähärichi, caused by new building and a massive drop in the water table due to the intensification of farming all around the old city. The picnic sites of the past had vanished, and a concrete irrigation canal was no substitute for a natural watercourse. The result was that at some point in the late 1980s, when the efflorescence of household-based rituals was at its peak, it was decided to celebrate *zara* collectively once again, but from now on *inside* the mosque.[8] By the time I was able to participate in a limited way in 2007, many people referred to this occasion as the *mäschit näziri*, the 'mosque commemoration'. The term *zara* was also used, but mainly by older people. Younger residents were often unaware of its origins as a spring fertility ritual.[9] Over a period of several weeks, each *jämaät* stages such a ritual. Initially performed for its own members, it has become the major occasion in the year for inviting guests. Sometimes several are held simultaneously, because there is a preference to hold the feast on a Saturday or Sunday, when it is easier for non-resident kin and those in full-time employment to attend (the usual restrictions apply, however; the rituals are monitored by the Religious Affairs Bureau, and those in state employment are often said to take a risk if they attend). The Damollah of the township is always invited, but he attends only at the larger mosques.

I was invited to attend an early *mäschit näziri* in a neighbourhood where I had gotten to know several families, some distance away from the one in which I was living. I was initially confused when some people said I should go to 'the mosque of the Tungans', while others used a different Uyghur name. The majority, however, said that this *jämaät*, well above average in size, was officially known nowadays as Ittipaq. This term translates roughly as unity/solidarity. It is widely used in socialist rhetoric, especially concerning ethnic relations. I was told that the original mosque on this site was indeed built by Hui (Tungans) who lived nearby and worked in the Wang palace, though no one could say for sure when this might have been.

[7] By contrast, in the upland villages it was possible to revitalize rainmaking rituals (*yada*), which draw the community (including women) together for commensality and prayer beside a stream or river in a very similar way (Hann n.d.).

[8] The passive formulation is unsatisfactory but I was unable to ascertain exactly who initiated this revival and when.

[9] Instead, young and old alike are made aware nowadays of a corresponding secular ritual: *Noruz* celebrations on 21st March. This equinox ritual is promoted by the state, especially in schools, as a national holiday for all the Turkic peoples of Central Asia. It is marked by elaborate folklore performances, stripped of all religious content (Hann 2012).

The present imam was too old and sick to take any organizational initiatives, but the feast had been arranged by a committee of active *jämaät* members. The most prominent among them was a retired local cadre who, since he had never joined the Communist Party, insisted that he had no cause to fear any reprisals from the secular authorities.

I turned up early on Sunday morning to find that the yard of the mosque was already a hive of activity. The older men of the *jämaät* lined up at the entrance, some of them seated, and new arrivals greeted them elaborately, each in turn. Local farmers generally wore the traditional Uyghur *doppa* or a European-style cap, while visitors, especially cadres, of whom there were many, were better dressed and more likely to sport a trilby. There was an opportunity for guests to make a financial contribution, which I was grateful to utilise; the amount of my gift was duly registered by the mosque accountant (*boghaltir*). Inside the mosque no hierarchy was observed: locals and visitors, peasants and cadres, old and young, all intermingled (a group of younger lads precluded from participating according to state law gathered separately in an annex to the main room). There followed a recitation of the Mäwlut. The majority of participants seemed to know the texts very well, although marking the Birth of the Prophet is not well documented historically in Xinjiang. I was told by a young graduate of the Islamic College that this was the proper time of the year to celebrate Muhammad's birthday; this seems to be a case of a recent foreign import that, however unorthodox, has been deemed harmless and sanctioned by the official clerisy. Ismail Damollah opened with a warning that it was forbidden to record his sermon. He concentrated on general issues of morality and the dangers of drug consumption (Fig. 8.4). I detected no mention of the impending beginning of the agricultural cycle, even though at least half of the assembled congregation were farmers.

At the end of the ritual (which, including sermon, lasted approximately 45 minutes) a shiny new banknote was placed in front of each participant (Fig. 8.5). Its value was 1 Yuān (10 cents), exactly the price of one *nan*. I was told later that this too was traditional. It was a meritorious deed (*sädiqä*) to make this transfer. Certainly the underlying idea of bestowing gifts on departing guests is well known in traditional Uyghur hospitality (Bellér-Hann 2008: 208). On this occasion the gift seemed to be identical for all participants (though I had a few more crisp notes shoved into my hand later when leaving). However, I was told that at other mosques it was customary to give more to elderly guests (*ahun* or *aqsaqal*) than to junior men. When I pressed the point about the purpose of the payment I was told that it was good to demonstrate in this way that the *jämaät* was prosperous economically.

After the money had been distributed, the meal which followed was similar to the food offered at a domestic ritual. Tea was served and sweets and fruit were followed by a *polo*, prepared in a vast cauldron in the yard of the mosque (apparently this may be done in nearby homes, if no communal facilities are available) and eaten with the fingers in the traditional way. The food was brought in by the younger *jämaät* members (Fig. 8.6). It was prepared by the women of the community (although the chief cook is usually male, sometimes a professional brought in for the occasion). The cleaning up after the event was also women's work. They took no part in the prayers; yet they too seemed to value the occasion as an

Fig. 8.4 The Damollah preaches at the mosque feast; the local Imam is seated next to him

opportunity to get together, and to meet many visitors whom they do not see regularly in their neighbourhood (Figs. 8.5 and 8.6).

Despite this gender differentiation, I interpret this annual event as having similar effects to the weekly redistribution of food in upland villages: sharing a meal inside the walls of the mosque is an eloquent demonstration of solidarity and of the basic equality of *jämaät* members. In this case, the principle of equality was extended to the world by offering members and guests alike the cash to cover the cost of a *nan*. The reality is that households are increasingly differentiated in both environments, though the diversity is much greater in Shähärichi. I had visited Ismail, an elderly man of this particular *jämaät* a month or so earlier with a *känt* official, who had identified him as vulnerable (*ajiz*) and living in poverty; since he had no close family to care for him, he was receiving support in cash and kind from the local state. Ismail could not relay on his *jämaät* for such support. No doubt the feast assured this man a good meal that he enjoyed all too rarely, but I was struck by the way that, despite his advanced years, he worked with other active hosts to serve food to the guests. In this sense the inequalities persisted even at the core of the commensality, since others of his age seemed content to leave this work to younger men.

The explanation for Ismail's conspicuous activity possibly has to do with members' financial contributions to the financing of the feast. While some of the ingredients, notably meat, may be provided in kind by community members, rice and other food for the occasion must be purchased. The money has to be gathered in

Fig. 8.5 Cash distribution following the *Mäwlut*

advance by the *boghaltir*, who usually works closely with the imam.[10] Even if the money collected to finance the mosque feast is not included in official documents, the accountant keeps track of exactly what is contributed by each household. The expectation is, of course, that wealthy households with regular sources of income will donate more than peasant families entirely dependent on their plots of land. I was told that poor families unable to make any financial contribution may be encouraged instead to put in more hours of labour in the preparations as well as in serving and in the cleaning after the event. I imagine that, if an accountant felt that a wealthy family was not contributing according to its means, then this judgment would somehow leak out and be the subject of negative comment. But this does not seem to happen: at any rate, in the highly differentiated *jämaät* of Ayliq Bozurga, *all* the families of the community participated. Donations were also made by people

[10] Each *jämaät* is obliged by law to keep accounts and make them available for inspection annually by officials from the Religious Affairs Bureau. In the mountain communities the expenditure is minimal (often only coal, which has become the main fuel for heating the mosque in winter, is listed). In Shähärichi the official accounts are likely to include additional items, such as expenditure to maintain buildings.

Fig. 8.6 Commensality in the mosque is the culmination of the feast

who had long moved out of the neighbourhood to the modern city, and by those whose state job or pension prevented them from taking part on the day. Such persons still considered themselves full members of the *jämaät*.

A week after attending the *mäschit näziri* at the Ittipaq mosque, I was looking forward to repeating the experience in my own *jämaät*. The mosque was barely a stone's throw away from the house where I was living. I observed the preparations in the preceding days, sought out the *boghaltir* and made an appropriate financial contribution. On Sunday morning I was chatting to the cook preparing the polo when two Uyghur officials from the Religious Affairs Bureau arrived and told me very firmly to return to my house. This feast was not considered by the state to be a 'normal religious activity', I was told; and in any case, a foreigner had no business in participating in any religious activity, even of the 'normal' sort. Fearful that I might have caused a problem for my neighbours and hosts, I returned home at once. An hour or so later my neighbours arrived with profuse apologies and the largest portion of *polo* I was ever invited to consume.[11]

[11] They told me that the event had been a great success: the Damollah had not attended, but their own imam had given a very good sermon and the guests had been impressed by the collective hospitality. When I asked about the state officials I was told that they were merely doing their jobs; it was by no means inconceivable that these men were themselves contributing financially to the costs of the same even in their own *jämaät*, even though their jobs prevented them from any active participation.

Conclusion

Compared to the ex-Soviet republics, Islam in Chinese Central Asia operates in a very different political and economic context. The opening up to the market which has taken place in the last three decades of China's 'reform socialism' has destroyed the Maoist vision and widened social inequalities at all levels. No one in the XUAR can be unaware of the wealth that has been created in 'inner China', even if very few partake in it directly. This, rather than the dislocation characteristic of their western neighbours, is what they associate with global capitalism. The 'Develop the West' campaign of the last decade has further widened differentials within the XUAR: between sub-regions, social classes, and ethnic groups, especially the two statistically dominant groups, the Han and the Uyghur. Even within rural Uyghur society, the market has had a massive impact. This is the context within which the revival of food sharing and commensality rituals needs to be understood. If the example from the upland village might be dismissed as an archaic custom, likely to die out within a generation, the example from Shähärichi suggests that here a new form of ritual has been developed to correspond to contemporary conditions. Neither example is to be confused with 'political Islam'. Given the harsh repression of the Maoist era and the continued close controls exercised locally by officials of the Religious Affairs Bureau, who monitor attendance at such rituals in Shähärichi, participation inevitably has a certain political hue. Some younger participants may emphasize this aspect, and the tragic violence of July 2009 will make this all the more likely in future. Others, however, will insist that eating *polo* in the mosque has nothing to do with Islam, and condemn the practice. Meanwhile the great majority participates without reflection. If they do express their motivations, these pertain to religion, custom, and competition with the neighbours, but not ethno-national politics.

To interpret such rituals as resistance to commercial modernity runs the risk of romantic exaggeration. Perhaps one should simply say that people are continuing to celebrate their traditional forms of community as best they can; they are making a gesture of solidarity in the face of overwhelming pressures which have transformed and threatened to destroy their *jämaät* several times over within living memory; and the distribution to all participants of a shiny banknote representing the value of one *nan* shows that that they are not afraid of the new market economy. Of course the unequal donations brought along to the Friday prayers in Tian Shan township, or transferred to the *jämaät* accountant to sponsor the mosque feast in Shähärichi, do not correct the deep inequalities which have come into existence. Neither does rigorous observation of the norms for almsgiving throughout the year. In material, statistical terms, Islam is not an effective agent of redistribution. Ismail's well being is guaranteed by the local state rather than by his *jämaät* at the Ittipaq mosque. The mosque feast has become a significant annual performance, subject to social comment; there is pressure to put on a good show. Not all communities can afford to purchase the best confectionery and offer participants a cash souvenir of their hospitality. In this way, consciousness of inequalities may

actually be reinforced, as in certain practices of traditional Uyghur hospitality (Bellér-Hann 2008: 207). But I conclude that the *mäschit näziri* remains at bottom a shared meal, an occasion to bracket out or gloss over all the factors that divide its members as soon as they return to their homes. It is about the values of living in a community that is at once local and universal, *not* the Uyghur ethno-national collectivity, which falls somewhere in between. In this sense, although the ethnic grievances are real enough, although the differentiating, particularizing forces are stronger than they have ever been, thanks to the speed of China's transformation, and although religion is now a closely regulated sphere of an overwhelmingly secular society, the rituals in the cemetery and the mosque feast are accomplishing what the sharing of food in rituals has always accomplished.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to Ildikó Bellér-Hann, Äsäd Sulaiman, Turdi Qayum, and the Editors of this volume for comments on a draft of this chapter.

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Chapter 9
Apolitical 'Islamisation'? On the Limits of Religiosity in Montane Morocco

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Of all the various currents that criss-cross and connect the Muslim world, far and away the most socially significant, as well as the most widespread, of the last 30 or so years has been that which brings together the diverse forms of religious resurgence variously described as fundamentalism, Islamism, *intégrisme*, revivalism and, perhaps most frequently of all, political Islam. There can scarcely be a Muslim alive today who has not at some point been confronted with demands from whichever side that he clarify his position vis-à-vis such movements and the ideas they stand for. And the same is true of anthropologists and other scholars of the Muslim world. The questions we face may not be phrased the same way, but the subtext is virtually identical – both 'they' and 'we' are asked to take a stand, to 'set out our stall'. It is something that unites the academic community, serving as a point of reference or commonality that allows for a discussion between scholars working in areas as far apart as Morocco and Malaysia, Mombasa and Mumbai. And if indeed there is such a thing as the Anthropology of Islam (with capital letters), then it is an anthropology that is informed by ongoing debates about revivalism, about what it means and what impact it has on religious and social life.

The different labels applied to these movements (Islamism, revivalism, etc.) all speak to subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, differences in authors' ideas of how best to approach the phenomena in question and are at least in part the product of the different ways in which practitioners of these various revivalist currents and movements understand their faith and represent it to others. Between a Wahhabi-inspired imam in rural Morocco, whose principal stated aim is to cleave as close as possible to the Qur'an and the sayings of the prophet (*hadâ'ith*), and an advocate of armed conflict from the slums surrounding Casablanca, there is, properly speaking, a world of difference and the diversity of anthropological perspectives bears testament to this.

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_9,

Nonetheless, common to many of these approaches, as well as to the ideologies they are designed to describe,[1] is the idea of a quasi-umbilical relationship between religion and politics. In one way or another, and often with very good reason, they are seen as *necessarily* connected and the tacit acceptance of this idea can at times serve to implicitly (re)produce the classic distinction between secularism and Islam, with the former frequently being understood as the only alternative to political Islam. As Euben, for example, puts it, 'both optimistic and pessimistic prognoses of the post cold-war world... assume that religio-political movements [i.e. political Islam] stand in opposition to Western, secular power and the international order' (1999: 7). It is with this set of ideas that I wish to engage in this chapter, not by proposing yet another broad analysis of political Islam, but through the exploration of a particular ethnographic context, in which the development of revivalist interpretations of Islam has profoundly altered people's attitudes to religion, opening up whole swathes of society for public religious appraisal and debate, but within which the sphere of politics and political action remains a no-go area for religion. In so doing, I hope to shed some light on ongoing academic debates surrounding the nature of people's engagement with Islamic revivalist movements, reiterating the selective and culturally specific ways in which they commit to and interact with them. First, though, it is important to clarify exactly what this connection between Islam and politics is supposed to entail.

Islam $\simeq$ Politics?

When the Iranian revolution hammered the final nail into the coffin of secularisation theses (cf. Mahmood 2004: x), it became clear that (geo)politics in the Muslim world could no longer be understood without reference to Islam qua explicit ideology, rather than merely to a series of culturally embedded religious practices. Simply put, the Muslim world had been re-enchanted. However, this straightforward and fairly incontrovertible claim – that Islam and politics cannot be addressed in isolation from one another – hides a wealth of different theories concerning the precise nature of the relationship between the two. At one extreme, there is the widespread assumption, criticised by authors such as Eickelman and Piscatori, that Islam, unlike Christianity, 'makes no difference between the religious and political realms' (1996: 46). Nothing, so to speak, is to be rendered unto Caesar. This position, they argue, whilst supported by a number of sayings of the prophet, is undermined by the historical record and is, in any case, utterly inapplicable to the contemporary picture, where with the notable exception of Iran, revivalist religious movements in most Muslim countries had (until the so-called

[1] In the words of Nagata, "Much is heard among Islamists today about the Islamic state. This is often elaborated on by statements affirming the 'inseparability of religion and politics in Islam'." (2001: 482).

'Arab Spring' of 2011) been kept firmly at arm's length by those in power – be they the nominally secular Baathists of Assad's Syria or the divinely anointed sovereign of Morocco.

An alternative stance is that espoused by Eickelman and Piscatori themselves when they argue that "it is not an exaggeration to say . . . that "Islam" constitutes the language of politics in the Muslim world" (1998: 12). By this, they mean that many of the central terms of political debate within Muslim countries take root in or refer to the religious sphere. Again, this position can be broken down into various distinct claims. At the genealogical level, it is I think beyond dispute that key political concepts such as *ijtimâ'* (society) or *umma* (the Muslim community) emerged in the crucible of religious learning and debate. Precisely the same claim, however, can be and frequently is made about other major world religions, including Christianity – witness Agamben's (2007) recent efforts to explain the fundamental categories of contemporary European politics through reference to a fusion of oikonomia and transcendence in the form of the Trinity. There is, in that sense, nothing special about the claim. Eickelman and Piscatori, though, appear to mean something more than this; to wit, that the *language of Islam*, understood not just as vocabulary, but also as including 'both symbols and mediators' (1996: 13), is the principal form of political expression available in these societies.

What is more, the ongoing social expansion of Islamic revivalist movements, such as the Muslim Brothers in the Middle East or Tabligh-e Jamat in Afghanistan, seem to suggest that just as it is no longer possible to discuss politics outside of the Islamic referent, so it has become unthinkable to address Islam without taking into account its political dimensions. One notable exception to this trend is Olivier Roy (2004), who has long argued that explicitly politicised Islamism (as epitomised by Iranian theocracy or the Muslim Brotherhood) has been largely superseded by less overtly political forms of religious expression, which he glosses as neo-fundamentalist and which are more concerned with questions of morality.[2] This distinction, though, is more a matter of how one defines politics and the political sphere than anything else. Those groups that Roy describes as neo-fundamentalist in outlook (the Taliban, or the Al-Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb) can still be seen as political in a wider sense. It is merely that they have either abandoned their previous goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate and have instead situated their political action outside the framework of the state or instead postponed it in favour of a more 'gradualist' approach, as advocated by Hasan Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, this is precisely Roy's point when he argues that the Taliban are non-political because they 'do not care about the state' (2001), which is for him the sine qua non of all political action.

[2] A rather similar argument is made by Emmerson (2010) in his recent essay on 'Inclusive Islamism', where he suggests we recognise this shift towards what Roy what call neo-fundamentalism by removing the adjective 'political' from Piscatori's definition of Islamists as "committed to *political* action to implement what they regard as an Islamic agenda" and replacing it with the word "public".

This chapter, in contrast, addresses people's attitudes towards both state-level politics and more informal or everyday politics – here defined as the realm of collective action and the discourses that surround it. This provides the basis for the argument that the forms of Islamic revivalism present in montane Morocco are properly speaking apolitical.

Permanent, Silent Revolution

The Berber mountaineers of Morocco's Central High Atlas consider themselves, almost to a man, woman and child, to be devout, orthodox Sunni Muslims, and have done so since time immemorial. Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of local life for a young anthropologist arriving in the area in the early 2000s was the apparent homogeneity, and concomitant moral certitude, that characterised much of their religious discourse and practice. Although the area can boast a considerable history of religious scholarship and learning, the lively traditions of religious debate and exchange that are so much a part of inter-communal existence in other regions of the Muslim world[3] were remarkable only by their absence – debate might prevail on other topics, but religion was best left alone. There are numerous reasons for this, the most obvious being the lack of distinct religious communities between whom debate might flourish. Morocco's already negligible Shi'a community[4] is entirely nonexistent in the mountains and I was repeatedly assured by all and sundry that such people were, in any case *lkuffâr* (infidels). What is more, the numerous Jewish trading communities formerly present both in the mountains and surrounding plains – and remembered fondly by elder residents as the principal source of news of the outside world – have entirely vanished since the exodus of Morocco's Jews in the 1960s.[5] Finally, and most surprisingly, despite a long history of links to the various Sufi orders present in Morocco's deep south,[6] there was in the early 2000s little public recognition of the potential multiplicity of paths leading to paradise, or indeed of the non-orthodox nature of some of the vaguely Sufistic practices integrated into local religious life – notably saint worship.

[3] See, for instance, Marsden's work on the 'life of the mind' in the Chitral region of Pakistan (2005).

[4] There are no official figures for the size of Morocco's Shi'a community, but most estimates in the media place it somewhere between 4,000 and 8,000 people.

[5] Whilst many of Morocco's Jewish elite emigrated to France, Canada and the USA, the poorer communities established in the mountains principally left for Israel, where they found employment in "farms" in the Negev desert or as manual labourers. See Shokeid (1971) for the history of one such mountain community since its arrival in Israel.

[6] Notably, the Nasiriyya order, with its centre in the small village of Tamegroute, once home to one of the richest libraries in North Africa, but now better known for its pottery and annual moussem (festival), to which many of my informants conducted an annual pilgrimage. See Carey (2012), Gutelius (2001, 2004), Hammoudi (1980), and Spillman (1938).

The result was a religious landscape untroubled by questions of religious diversity and one in which locals could happily assert without fear of contradiction that there was only one sort of Muslim and that was them. It was also one largely untroubled by questions of secularity or atheism. Wider Morocco has, as befits a former French protectorate, had considerable exposure to secular doctrine (*laïcité*) and such ideas retain a certain currency, especially in the larger cities (Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat) and seats of learning: most universities have a small communist contingent who openly flout fasting restrictions during Ramadan and advocate proper secularism, whilst one academic memorably said to me in a discussion of religious influence on political life, 'Don't come to me talking about Mohammad, that paedophile'. The comment was made in a spirit of provocation, but the underlying secular sentiment was very real. There is also a less vocal and more hedonistic streak of scepticism that is not without its adepts in the plains and which similarly seeks to keep religion 'in its place' – i.e. as far as possible from the pursuit of pleasure in the form of hashish, alcohol and sex. However, for the inhabitants of the relatively remote mountains, most of whom rarely visit the plains and have limited Arabic, such ideas and concepts were little more than cautionary tales with which to fright restless children. Actual unbelief was known to exist among Europeans, but disregarded, and the notion of secularism as doctrine had yet to make much of an appearance in the region: of the handful of locals who had received a formal, state education in the plains, none had returned to settle in the area, and the one man who came back for occasional holidays was careful to police his conversation. In short, the Qur'anic assertion that 'only those are Believers who have believed in Allah and His Messenger, and have never since doubted' (49:15) was taken very seriously indeed.

This strident discourse on matters religious went hand in glove with an almost equally rigorous adherence to what they considered to be the principle articles of their faith: most men in Tiflilist, the village I lived in, prayed more or less regularly; all but one attended Friday prayer (and he was respectively the son, brother and uncle of the last three imams and so had special dispensation); and the potent fig firewater (*ma hiya*) and tobacco/cannabis blend (*kif*) that constitute perhaps the principle amusements in much of the Moroccan hinterland were duly abhorred.[7] This apparent rigour and apparent accompanying homogeneity should not, however, be mistaken for *actual* homogeneity, nor above all for stasis. The village prides itself on its tradition of religious scholarship and locals make a great deal of the number of village men who could at some point in their lives (and nominally still can) recite the Qur'an in its entirety; they are referred to as *ttulba*, literally 'students', but here applied to men of any age with considerable religious education. By so doing, the village compares itself favourably to the 'farming folk' (*ayt taflaht*) who inhabit the surrounding hamlets. The *ttulba*'s mnemonic virtuosity is,

[7] This abhorrence was, however, less visceral than conventional, as evidenced by the lack of opprobrium poured upon passing tourists (or anthropologists) who *did* partake – the rules only apply to those who admit them.

in the main, the result of years spent studying in the religious schools (*lmadâris*) scattered throughout the south of Morocco and the village has been sending its ambitious young men to study in these establishments for at least five or six generations (i.e. as far back as oral memory goes), and doubtless for much longer.

Thus, just as the types of doctrine or religious thought espoused by such institutions altered over time, so did those brought back to the mountains by the young men who attended them, albeit with something of a time-lag – which explains the relatively limited presence of revivalist Islam in the area as late as the early 2000s. Each generation was successively sent off to study, and those who returned did so with subtly different notions of what orthodox (*assunniy*) Islam amounted to and which they duly endeavoured to promulgate. This ongoing and incremental process of doctrinal and practical change was in evidence at the time of my arrival in the area in 2003, and much of it seemed to revolve around the generally painless smothering of various 'pre-Islamic' religious practices. These principally consisted of offerings to, or invocations of, various forms of spirit, conventionally associated with major landmarks and thuriferous juniper trees (*idghmîmen*).[8] In this spirit, porridge was frequently offered to the sacred (*agurram*) trees if a member of the family fell ill, and unmarried girls undertook pilgrimages to the highest local mountain, whilst those in want of a child processed to a waterfall. Such practices were, however, increasingly restricted to women (thus giving the lie to any ideas of homogeneity), if that is they took place at all. So whilst porridge was still offered up to the spirits during my initial stay, the last bridal pilgrimage apparently took place a couple of years before my arrival, and though in the early 2000s most people seemed sure one would take place again, nowadays the event is only discussed in the past tense. This progression was also something that people were quite lucid about, freely discussing both the changes and the processes that underlay them.

It is these processes that are of interest here, both for what they reveal about local political relations and because of the light they shed on the nature of religious exchange. For my older friends, who well remembered the days of regular pilgrimages and widespread porridge-offerings, the changes were clearly attributable to the ongoing influence of the *ttulba* (students). This point was made particularly forcefully by a man called 'Ali, who was both closely related to many of these students and who had himself attended two religious seminaries in the south for a number of years, acquiring a reputation for learning that led him to stand in for the imam when the latter was absent. This greater social proximity perhaps gave him a degree of licence that the others felt they could not so easily afford. And when I asked him how they convinced other people to follow suit – i.e. to abandon their long-held beliefs and practices and conform to the new orthodoxy – he replied that they "just said to them: '[this is] how it is'" (*inn asn ghayr: 'ha mkda iga'*).

[8] According to one French researcher I met whilst in the High Atlas, locals only made offerings to female junipers, even though they were unaware of the trees' sexual dimorphism. This he took to be a matriarchal "survival" in the Tylorian sense (Tylor 1871).

This response underlines the absence of explicit debate involved in these affairs, but it is only a very partial account of such processes. 'Just saying to them' may be an effective strategy with women in a subordinate position to the students (younger sisters and, later, wives), although even with these subordinates there is no necessary guarantee of success, as testified to by the occasional younger sister's making fun of an overly zealous brother or co-resident cousin when his back is turned. And when it comes to their mothers and fathers, it is quite simply impossible for the students to 'just tell them' anything at all. Instead, such recommendations, if they were to be heard, let alone heeded, had to come from a place of authority – i.e. from the wider community of *ttulba*, which included numerous elder men and could draw on the prestige derived from age and social status.

Until recently, the vast majority of these *ttulba* were drawn from the ranks of the richest and most influential extended family (*tan'amelt*) or 'bone' (*ighs*) in Tiflilist, itself the largest and wealthiest of the seven villages that together constitute the local tribal fraction.[9] Upon reaching maturity, the students collectively combined both economic clout and religious suzerainty. In any case, the *ttulba* were inclined to see themselves as a corporate group of sorts, united by ties of both kinship and scholarship and with a series of rights and responsibilities. So they officiated at weddings, circumcisions and funerals, being fed (lavishly) in a separate room and treated with a certain respect. In return, they blessed such occasions with their chants and were obliged to maintain gravitas by refraining from taking part in the festivities – for some of them, this amounted to looking on wistfully from the sidelines and regretting the circumstances that had turned them away from music and towards study. They partially compensated for this incapacity to participate in wider festivities by periodically pooling their resources and buying a bullock to be sacrificed and consumed amongst themselves over the course of a week or so.

This sense of collegiality did not, however, translate into a clear, common position on matters religious. Indeed, how could it when there was so little outright debate, so little opportunity to develop a collective line? Though I spent a great deal of time with many of the 'students', the only times I heard them debate religion directly were in response to my questions or regarding my presumed Christian belief. Nevertheless, many of them did see it as their collective responsibility to convey to other villagers a general sense of what was and was not 'proper Islam' (*islâm lm'aqûl*) and in one way or another they contrived to do so. The principal vector of such transmission was, of course, the imam and his weekly sermons, although ideas were also occasionally expounded in less formal contexts – slipped into conversation as comments or judgements on local and wider affairs. Such

[9] Central Moroccan tribes are generally subdivided into fractions (*tiqbilin*; sing. *taqbilt*), otherwise known as fifths (*khumûs*). Unlike the tribe (also known as *taqbilt*), whose existence is more a matter of theory than practice, these fractions continue to play an important role in people's day-to-day lives. This division of labour is typical of North African tribes – see Tillon (1966) for a comparative discussion of the matter. The local fraction, which includes Tiflilist, and has a total population of about 2,500 people.

comments, though, were very much the preserve of the *ttulba* and crucially they went largely undebated and unanswered. Whatever people's actual differences of religious practice they strove to avoid open confrontation regarding them. And such practical diversity was certainly present.

I recall one large collective work detail (*tiwiza*) where this came clearly to the fore: most of the assembled men ceased work in order to pray and instead of joining them or quietly wandering off, as one normally would in such an eminently collective situation, a few of them settled down to brew some tea and observe their orations. Surprised at the divergence, I sat down with the tea-brewers and asked one why he wasn't praying – a question no local would ever have presumed to ask. He responded by saying, '*yan ira y izzal, izzal; wayyad uhu, uhu. Wâlû ma dak inna yan. Ku yan iskr ghayr win ikhf-ns*' (If you want to pray, pray; if not, don't. The others just can keep quiet. Each person does as he pleases), a sort of local equivalent of the famous Qur'anic injunction, 'Let there be no compulsion in religion' (2:256). And a similar spirit was evident in the actions of those women who ignored the recommendations of the imam and other *ttulba* and continued to make their offerings to the sacred trees.

Yet, all this practical diversity had no real equivalent in the sphere of doctrine; on the contrary, the general thrust of the *ttulba*'s pronouncements was largely accepted. Part of this acceptance, such as the reluctance publicly to cross a scholar mentioned above, might be attributed to the *ttulba*'s social standing and economic clout: one doesn't necessarily want to contradict a potential employer, although as we shall see this doesn't necessarily prevent them from doing so in other contexts. Many of them were doubtless also stymied by their lack of access to alternative sources of information: few non-*ttulba* spoke Arabic well enough to read religious texts or listen to lessons or debate on the radio or television. But even behind closed doors, people rarely openly expressed differences of religious *opinion*. The man I mentioned above would not have contested that prayer was an integral part of being a good Muslim, and the women with whom I discussed offerings to trees, tended to shrug their shoulders, admit that it wasn't really Islam, but nonetheless conclude that it was better to continue, just in case… Such practices were anyway in fairly radical decline.

In short, the situation was one of permanent, silent revolution in the Trotskian sense,[10] where the *ttulba*'s appraisals of what constituted orthodox Islam gradually altered over time as they integrated each new generation of young students and this just as gradually affected people's beliefs and, in the end, their practices, but all without the need for public debate and without necessarily affecting the synchronic variety of religious practice.

[10] For Trotsky, the concept of Permanent Revolution explained how Communism could succeed in a country like Russia, that was not yet fully industrialised. The proletarian vanguard would seize power and join forces with the peasantry to work towards Communism.

The Advent of Revivalism

The contours of religious life described in the previous section were, as I have said, those I encountered in the area in 2003 and, according to my informants, were fairly similar in tone and style to those that had prevailed for the last few decades, and possibly even longer. Friends such as 'Ali who discussed religious developments with me, spoke of it as an ongoing and gradual movement towards orthodoxy, which at least suggests that there had been a prolonged period of relatively calm waters. There were, however, signs that change was afoot, with the return to the village of a new generation of religious students who had completed their studies in the south. Their presence made itself more and more obviously felt over the 18 months of my stay and the impression of a radical redrawing of the boundaries of debate was confirmed by subsequent visits to the area over the next 4 years. This generation, just as all the previous ones, brought back with it a new series of ideas about what constituted orthodox or 'proper' Islam – this time ones explicitly influenced by the sorts of revivalist interpretation of Islam that have been wide-spread throughout Morocco for the last few decades, but which were only belatedly beginning to make headway in the mountains. Unlike, however, previous graduates of such institutions, these students were not content to return to village life and settle into the local community of *ttulba*, finding a way to get their message across without ruffling too many feathers. They were at once much more numerous than previous generations had been and at the same time quite determined *not* to fit in.

Their greater numbers can largely be attributed to the introduction of semi-compulsory schooling in 1994, when the first government teachers arrived in the valley, but also to more fundamental socio-economic reasons – viz. the emergence of wide-spread seasonal labour migration in the 1970s, leading to a surge in the local population, no longer constrained by the limited availability of land, and a concomitant shift in people's hopes of social advancement for their children. For the first time, less wealthy families could afford to send their children to study after having completed primary education, and as their level of education rarely allowed them to continue in the state sector, the only option was religious schools. This process was also helped by the villagers' dynamiting and pick-axing a road through the mountains, again in the 1990s, which completely altered the dynamics of local life by making the plains readily accessible. As for their desire to stand out, here as elsewhere this was most obviously manifest in their adoption of particular forms of habitus and dress associated with revivalist Islam. So, many of them took to wearing long orthodox-style beards, with the moustache shaved; they adopted skull caps (as opposed to woollen hats or turbans); some of the more radical among them even began to use Afghani-style *sarwal-qamis*, declaring it to be the 'proper dress of all true believers'; and those who didn't, wore a particular kind of *fawqiyya* (thin overgarment) that marked them out as *issuniyyin* (the orthodox), as they called themselves, or *id bu imaryun* (the bearded ones) as they were more widely referred to.

I do not wish to engage in the thankless task of speculating about people's underlying motives for adopting revivalist interpretations of Islam – an endeavour that has bedevilled so much scholarly work on the emergence and spread of these forms of Islam. But given that a good many of these younger students come from the traditionally poorer sections of the community, one might argue that their attraction to such doctrines should be understood as a product of their subaltern position and their desire to assert themselves socially and politically. And there is doubtless some truth in this, but it doesn't explain the appeal of such ideas for members of the traditional elites, including a young man like 'Abd al-'Aziz, nephew of the current imam, grandson of his predecessor and first villager to pass his baccalaureate in 20 years – a man, in other words upon whom both past and future smiled kindly. Politico-economic considerations should not be ignored, but they fail to explain the social scope of such ideas and, above all, they round people's highly complex motives down to the lowest common denominator.

Instead, what I want to focus on here is the radically innovative nature, within the local context, of the discursive strategies they deploy, as well as the polarising and agonistic effect these have had on religious doctrine and practice. The content of these discourses is, within the wider context of revivalist Islam, fairly unsurprising and will be instantly recognisable to anyone who has spent any time at all in Muslim countries. Foremost among the young students' concerns was the eternal question of women's veiling practices. The traditional local veil consists of a headscarf, generally knotted behind the neck, which can be supplemented, for married women, with an additional red and green scarf placed over the first and tied under the chin. Some unmarried women also occasionally knotted their scarf under the chin, but this was episodic and might also be done for practical reasons, such as keeping out the cold. As of 2003, however, there was only a handful of women who tied their veils in the 'recommended' Malikite (the North African school of Islamic law) style – i.e. a single piece of cloth covering everything but the face. Even this style, though, was deemed unacceptable by many of the new *ttulba*, who began to exhort young girls to adopt a more rigorous type of veil that only left the eyes exposed and which they referred to as 'orthodox' (*tazzift tassunniyt*). And their efforts were at least partially successful: by 2007, a considerable number of the younger women had adopted the *tassunniyt* veil and in the small village opposite Tiflilist (where many of the new *ttulba* lived) it had become virtually *de rigueur*. They also stopped speaking to men from outside the family and averted their eyes when they passed – behaviour that is really quite remarkable in the local context, where the possibility of playful conversation and suggestive banter between young men and women is an integral part of social life (Carey 2010).

This is not to suggest that women's changing veiling practices were the straightforward outcome of the *ttulba* instructing them to change. Here as elsewhere, the reasons behind such shifts are multiple and are also connected to women's perception of new veiling styles as representative of an alternative modernity or as an opportunity for 'self-fashioning' (McBrien 2010). As one young girl who had taken up the *tassunniyt* veil, but still accepted to talk to me, put it: 'it's just fashion; I don't want to look like my mother'. Nor is the fact of such a change so remarkable in and

of itself; veiling techniques had been evolving for years and will doubtless continue to do so. It is, in other words, neither the fact of social change, nor the content of the young *ttulba*'s discourses that are of principal interest here, but rather the *style* of these discourses. Instead of slipping the occasional comment into conversation, or leaving things to the imam's Friday sermons, they were forthright in their declarations – not perhaps by the standards of young urban militants, but certainly by local ones. This involved gathering in groups in public spaces in and around the village shops, discussing religion and looking to get other people involved in debate. They also spent, obviously enough, a good deal of time at the mosque, both in the prayer rooms and in the *akhurbish*, the smoke-filled communal area beneath or beside the main building where men while away the cold winter months. There they held forth on what they took to be correct behaviour and, most importantly, explicitly denounced many aspects of prevailing practice as innovation (*lbid'a*), looking for confrontation and sometimes finding it. For them, it was not just that it was best to adopt the *tassuniyt* veil, but that anything else was morally reprehensible.

As well as veiling, they also focused on issues of ritual protocol. One key battleground was that of hand position during prayer, with the new guard maintaining that hands should be folded across the chest rather than placed by one's sides. Several of the younger and more religiously-minded men already prayed in this fashion, but with the new *ttulba* it quickly became a *casus belli* of sorts. They also, and even more controversially, insisted that the traditional recital of prayers over the graves of the deceased amounted to paganism and should be stopped. This point in particular ended up leading led to a good deal of ill feeling, as some of the more strident among them took advantage of the fleeting presence in the village of a wealthy young revivalist now living in Marrakesh to make their case for the prayers to be abandoned whilst one local family was preparing a corpse for burial. And finally, they strongly objected to both music and dancing, manifesting their aversion by asking local minibus drivers to refrain from playing music cassettes when they were in the vehicle (we listened to the Qur'an instead, before hastily replacing it with local music once they got out) and by trying to prevent local festivities known as *ahwâsh* (pl. *ahwâshn)* from taking place. These *ahwâshn* are normally held for weddings and on major religious and secular festivals and involve a group of proficient men (*ayt ahwâsh*) singing and playing drums and tambourines in a tight circle, whilst young men dance on one side of them and young women on the other. In 2003 and 2004 they were still regularly held throughout the summer months, taking place for all major weddings where the groom's family could afford it (the musicians must be fed and watered). However, the new *ttulba* campaigned hard to prevent their sisters and young wives from attending and announced to whoever would listen that such goings on were fundamentally un-Islamic. Not everybody was susceptible to their arguments, but in recent years the number of *ahwâshn* has fallen dramatically and most young people attribute this to the new *ttulba*'s tough line.

What all of these examples show is a move from tacit or implicit debate, couched in fairly neutral language, to outright challenge predicated on explicit moral

judgements, and they duly provoked some strong reactions. Most people, at least in my presence, avoided direct confrontation, uncomfortable with the idea of public debate on religious matters, but in private they railed both against the judgements themselves and the way in which they were presented. Girls from other villages began to refer those of the veiled village as *Ayt Afghanistan* (the Afghans) and mocked their slavish adoption of the new style. Meanwhile, several different men came to me in private and complained about being lectured on prayer technique and funerary protocol. In the words of one old man, who was officially a *ttâlib*, but who scarcely ever prayed: 'they come here telling us how to pray, when we know how to pray, and saying how women should dress. It's like Europeans coming in and saying girls should all wear miniskirts'. And similar murmurings of discontent could be heard regarding the absence of *ahwâshn*. What the latest generation of *ttulba* had done was to open up religion as a sphere of legitimate debate, profoundly altering people's attitudes regarding the possibility of public moralising in the process.

The Anti-politics Machine

The one sphere that seems to have avoided being opened up to public debate is precisely that of politics (*ssiyâsa* or in neo-Berber *tasertit*), both in its relatively informal local manifestations and in people's attitudes towards the more codified realm of national state politics. This absence of a religious referent is most immediately striking in the latter context. Moroccan elections are notable in the context of the Middle East for displaying relatively little fraud; rather, the elections are rigged beforehand, with the King politely asking certain parties not to stand in certain electoral districts. The principal victim of this strategy has historically been the major Islamist party, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), who given their widespread popularity probably ought to have won the national elections in 2007 (and were finally allowed to win those held in 2011). And one of the regions they have effectively been barred from standing was the Central High Atlas, where the interdiction starts as soon as one leaves the plains and heads into the foothills. However, whilst in most areas where the ban stands, it is widely resented, in the Central High Atlas, those people who are aware of the moratorium generally welcome it, and their attitude is not readily attributable to loyalty to the throne (of which they generally show precious little). On the contrary, some of the King's sternest critics are precisely those same people who welcome the absence of the religious parties. Nor is it necessarily the less overtly religious members of the community who side against the PJD.

One example of this stance was a conversation I was party to at 'Ali's house, when he was entertaining one of his in-laws (a man from a different village) and a mutual acquaintance of ours. Local elections were looming and talk quickly turned to politics, with 'Ali, then an ambitious young man of 35 from a good family, holding forth with some pleasure. Around election time, prospective politicians

from the nearest town venture up into the mountains looking to out-bribe rival candidates, and the sums pocketed by local dignitaries (of which 'Ali was one) are a staple source of village conversation for months on end: who 'ate' what, with whom they shared it, and what they got in return. In this case, though, it was Ali himself who began to tell the story of a representative of the PJD, who had recently come to the village. According to 'Ali, the man had paid him a private visit in his house and suggested to him that as a man of religion – 'Ali, remember, stood in for the imam during his absences – he might want to consider lending his support to the party in the event that they were allowed to stand in future elections. At the time, 'Ali was officially a member of a different party, but this had come about more by accident than design and he often ridiculed them. He was not, in short, averse to a change of allegiances. But in response to the man's suggestion, 'Ali instead replied with a query of his own, asking whether he had stopped in at the mosque on the way to his house. The man replied that he hadn't, and so 'Ali dismissed him, saying 'since you didn't attend the mosque to pray, but instead came to visit me with machinations in mind, you have no religion. No! Not any!' (*hata yan din ur dark illi*). 'Hear, hear', added our mutual acquaintance, 'politics does not [i.e. should not] walk with religion'.

Now given power relations between rural dwellers and urban politicians, I think it rather unlikely that 'Ali actually said those words, but what matters is that he considered the statement so uncontroversial that he could repeat it as a boast in front of one of his in-laws, before whom it is unthinkable to say anything provocative. Meanwhile, our mutual acquaintance, who seconded his stance, was also a *ttâlib,* and so hardly an obvious candidate for a public condemnation of religious involvement in public life. And indeed he would not have done so, had it not been that the sphere of public life in question was that of politics.

The same is less explicitly, but nonetheless equally true of everyday local politics, by which I mean discourses and practices of collective action. In the local context, the principal loci for such action are informal village meetings (*ijuma*'), often referred to in the literature as village councils (cf. Hart 2000).[11] When some event of importance occurs or when enough people decide that something needs to be done, such as building a road to the village or organising a water rota, those men (generally not more than one per family) who feel themselves concerned will gather in a public space or at the house of one of the richer members of the village to debate the matter. And here, unlike in religious matters, debate is extremely vigorous indeed, with the poorer and less educated showing little respect for their richer and better-educated fellows. Men will rise from a seated position to harangue the gathering, grab others by the shirt, raise their voice to shrieking pitch to make themselves heard over the hubbub of simultaneous conversations and physically manhandle their friends out of the room when things grow too heated. They draw on all sorts of different arguments to make their case, but they do not (at least in my experience) use religion to justify or denounce a course of action.

[11] I have argued elsewhere (Carey 2008) that the notion of council is erroneous and that they are better thought of as ephemeral crystallisations of political action.

This is true even of committed young revivalists. I participated in one meeting where ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, the well-placed young man mentioned above, was in attendance as his father was away. The debate revolved around whether or not the village should build a hamam and the village had split into two deeply opposed factions, each suspicious of the other’s motives. At some point, he was called upon to speak, in deference to his education and to the discontent of many villagers who wondered why such a greenhorn should be accorded this privilege. And whereas in everyday conversation, God never strayed very far from his lips, here he spoke for 5 min, discussing the importance of water and cleanliness in scientific terms and never once invoking religion.

The same discursive patterns of religion-avoidance were also noticeable in wider political debate outside the context of the village council. One of the major upheavals of recent years has been the arrival of a wave of European NGOs in the mountains, who form partnerships with locals and parachute in development projects (running water, new school buildings, etc.). These projects hold out the possibility of work and also, for the lucky few, of creaming off what are large sums of money by local standards. It follows that the competition to work in partnership with the NGOs is fierce, pitting friend against friend and brother against brother. At dinner parties (*zzerda*) throughout the village, men seek to form alliances, gossip about the competition and, if another group is looking to develop a project, they will try to convince the rest of the community of its worthlessness. And here again, they deploy a vast array of arguments: so I heard a potential clinic dismissed as an unnecessary diversion from the real problem of transport, or as a threat to morality, because it would bring loose female nurses from the plains, or even as an incitement to bribery, but I never heard anybody seek to challenge it on religious grounds.

On the contrary, whilst religion was constantly used to condemn or condone veiling practices, music, dancing, funerals, etc., once conversation turned to politics, it receded from view. This separation is not given voice in the same way as we saw for the national elections, but if questioned, some people recognise that there is a *de facto* expulsion of religious discourse from this ‘political’ activity. Nobody I asked, however, could offer any suggestion as to why this might be.

Conclusion

The answer, I suggest, to this conundrum has something to do with local understandings of the nature of specifically religious discourse, and a great deal to do with the contours of political practice in the area. Just as in many other parts of the Mediterranean basin, the Central High Atlas is a place where it is important for men not to be seen to be coerced; but unlike in many of these other places, it is equally important not to be seen to coerce. This is evident in daily life in the locally muted nature of the patron-client relations that are typical of so much of the rest of Morocco (cf. Hammoudi 1997). Whilst there are significant economic differences between individuals, ‘patrons’ are, in the main, very careful not to publicly lord it

over their 'clients'. When they do so, not only is violence likely to result, but their reputation will also be damaged. And the same is true of politics, where collective action is consistently undermined by people pulling out of projects when they feel coerced and so undermining the development of long-term institutions (Carey 2008). By the same token, political debate in village meetings may be very heated, but the language of debate is constructed in such a way as to avoid the impression of forcing other people's hands – rather like in the 'crooked language' of Ilongot oratory discussed by Rosaldo (1973). This suggests that if arguments by religion are excluded from political processes, it may be because they have the potential to be seen as coercive.

The Central High Atlas mountains are, I have suggested, an area where the construction and maintenance of *apparent* homogeneity (particularly in the religious sphere) are key aspects of social activity. In this context, the description of a given course of action as either religiously prescribed or, conversely, as condemnable amounts to an attempt to coerce other people through the appeal to an idealised vision of the homogenous community. And recognition of this dynamic underscores the potential for diversity in the relationship between religion and politics in Muslim societies and points us towards ways in which we can think outside the sterile opposition between Islam and secularism mentioned in the introduction. For whilst modern ideas of secularism emerged in Europe as a way of managing religious heterogeneity – notably in France, where the notion of *laïcité* can be seen as a direct response to the carnage of the sixteenth century civil wars that pitted Protestants against Catholics – the separation between religion and politics that I have described here should be seen as the product of local ideas of religious *homo*geneity. In other words, European secularism is not the only form of ideology capable of building a bulwark between religion and politics and, by the same token, Islam and Muslim modes of political action are not necessarily concerned with keeping them together.

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Chapter 10
Integrity and Commitment in the Anthropology of Islam

Morgan Clarke

Introduction

The anthropology of Islam remains a contested project.[1] Despite decades of substantial anthropological work on Islamic contexts and institutions, a concern abides over the possibility, even the probity of erecting 'Islam' as a category of comparative anthropological analysis. Given the diversity of often competing and conflicting discourses and practices claimed to be Islamic, and the difficulty of separating out 'the Islamic' from the rest of the complex skein of social and cultural life in any given context, it might seem, as Abdul Hamid el-Zein argued in his classic and formative discussion, anthropologically unjustifiable to define 'an isolable and bounded domain of meaningful phenomena' as Islamic. That would force the anthropologist into predicating a 'single, real Islam', albeit one anthropological interests might favour dividing into 'folk' or 'local' versions as against 'elite' visions, which are the preserve of the Orientalist and, more challengingly, 'the theologian'. 'Islam' as a category of anthropological analysis would be, on this reading, fundamentally incoherent (1977: 227, 241, 246, 249, 252). This concern was dismissed out of hand by Talal Asad (1986: 1–2), who proposed philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of a tradition, from which moral argument takes meaning and within which continuity and change can be argued for, and which has a past and a future, as a useful way of organising analysis in this domain (ibid.: 14ff.). This suggestion has indeed proved helpful (Zaman 2002: 4–7). But, as several scholars have pointed out,[2] it hardly serves as an answer to Zein's

[1] For recent discussions see e.g. Varisco (2005) and Marranci (2008).

[2] E.g. Lukens-Bull (1999: 5), Robbins (2003: 194), Varisco (2005: 146–47).

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_10,

challenge: the question would still remain as to what should be considered as falling within and without the tradition. Asad simply restates the problem, but in yet more acute form by noting that this process of inclusion and exclusion, the creation of 'orthodoxy', is a relation of power (1986: 15–17). But the anthropologist may still feel chary of being forced into exercising that power themselves. Whatever else anthropology's business is, this is surely not it.

This particular problem may remain unresolved, but these concerns have not stopped anthropologists from pursuing research into Islamic discourses, institutions and practices, or, as some would no doubt prefer to conceive it, into Muslim lives.[3] Indeed in this sense the anthropology of Islam seems in an enviable state of health (Robbins 2003: 191–92). The theoretical challenge posed by Zein has been sidestepped: never mind the anthropology of Islam, look to the ethnography, would seem the axiom on which much of this activity is founded (e.g. Varisco 2005: 146ff.). That is, the best antidote to concerns over generalising categories is rich and exact description of actually existing social contexts. As Robbins (2003: 193) observes, this is a familiar dynamic within wider socio-cultural anthropology, which has built its distinctive academic brand on the two pillars of extreme generalisation as the putative science of humanity and the extreme particularity of long-term ethnographic fieldwork. From the intrinsic tension between the two comes much of what is most interesting and valuable in anthropological theorising. In debates over the anthropology of Islam, as commonly elsewhere within the discipline, it is more often the anthropology – the overarching comparison – that is seen as problematic and ethnography that becomes the uncomplicated term.

My argument here will flow in the opposite direction: the ethnography of Islam poses at least as many if not more problems than the subsequent comparative analysis of its data. Indeed, to go further, there is a powerful sense in which the objections raised to that comparative analysis would be better seen as arising from the fieldwork process that precedes it. That is because anthropological fieldwork requires, engages with and creates commitments. Islam is itself at root (if not always in flower) a commitment, to God and to the message brought by God's prophet Muhammad.[4] Practising anthropology, 'one of the few genuine vocations' (Lévi-Strauss 1973: 55), entails its own commitments, if not, I should say, of the same order as those of Islam. Nevertheless, as in Islam, so in anthropology one finds strong positions on what counts as right belief and practice and what does not.

[3] That is, one could argue we would do better to realise that an abstract 'Islam' cannot be studied anthropologically (i.e. ethnographically), only actually existing Muslims can (see e.g. Varisco 2005: 47, 143, passim). My own personal feeling is that to reduce the complex lives of over a billion people to one defining commitment (being Muslim) seems a more real and violent essentialisation than to take an ideal as one's anthropological object. Far from everything that Muslims say and do has anything much to do with Islam, pious claims to the contrary notwithstanding. To think in terms of 'Muslim societies', another possible empiricist manoeuvre, seems problematic on similar grounds: 'Muslim society' is in itself an ideal and not an empirical category.

[4] Cf. Lukens-Bull (1999: 10).

Ethnography, conducted through fieldwork, is ineluctable. Canonical – 'archetypal', 'Malinowskian' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 11) – fieldwork is long, intense and intimate. The paradigmatic mode of this anthropological mission is not the interview or the survey but participant observation, the anthropologist sharing their subjects' lives and activities. And yet 'participant observation' needs differentiation, and an interest in Islam raises distinctive, if not unique, issues in this regard, as Ronald Lukens-Bull (2007) has strikingly described. Participation in religious practice, which I focus on here, can be seen as an index of religious identity and commitment, in itself a commitment that the largely secular, not to say atheist anthropological tradition is not well equipped to accommodate (Ewing 1994). Further, as in the case of Christianity (Robbins 2003: 192–3), Islam's universal address makes it hard to bracket off a compartmentalised ethnographic space within which such participation could be confined. Notions of personal integrity formally shared between Muslims, Christians, liberal atheists and anthropologists of whichever stripe, demand a unity of commitments through time and space.[5] And because Islamic practice is commitment oriented, the core professional commitment to participant observation renders maintaining such unity when studying Islam anthropologically especially challenging, albeit not uniquely so.[6]

There is no one standard of ethnographic practice here: such relationships are open to negotiation. To pick up the threads of the canonical debates over the anthropology of Islam, I thus further wish to argue that the diversity and contestability of Islamic discourse and practice are fundamentally problematic not so much as an insuperable obstacle to comparative anthropological analysis, but because, on the ground, they entail a multiplicity of engagements on different, and potentially conflicting terms. In addition to a basic tension inherent in participant observation of religiously committed practice, then, further tensions may arise between the ramifying commitments of different inflections of a religious tradition. I draw on my own fieldwork among Sunni and (Twelver) Shi'i Muslim communities in Lebanon in 2007–2008, which seeks to document the social life of the sharia ('Islamic law') and entails work in a variety of explicitly 'Islamic' contexts, including Lebanon's sharia (family law) courts, the offices of major religious authorities, mosques and Sufi circles.[7] Here, like Lukens-Bull (2007: 182–85), I concentrate on the basic,

[5] This claim would bear further argument. Such concerns, while shared in the contexts I am describing, might in a broader frame look more particular. See, for instance, McIntosh's contrast of (in her terms) Giriama and Swahili ideologies in coastal Kenya, where the latter depend on the sorts of notions of moral personhood I am dealing with here, for which McIntosh claims 'Abrahamic' roots (2009: 25, 149–50, 183–90). Exclusive belief-commitment may also be less central a concern within traditions with a differently inflected focus on 'techniques of the self'. See, for instance, Laidlaw's (2002) use of Jainism to explore the possibility of an anthropology of ethics less myopically intent on legalistic notions of moral conduct.

[6] Lukens-Bull (2007) provides some useful comparative cases from elsewhere within the discipline.

[7] This was for 3 months in 2007 and 6 months in 2008. The field sites for 2007–2008 are described in more detail below. I also carried out fieldwork in Lebanon in 2003–2004 (about 12 months in total including two spent continuously visiting from neighbouring Damascus), on which see Clarke (2009).

but crucial question of participation in devotional practice, especially prayer: in some contexts this was welcomed, even demanded of me, in others discouraged. Because prayer can be seen as an affirmation of a commitment to Islam, and because I am not a Muslim, this became an issue of some moment, for myself and for others. Archetypal fieldwork seemed problematic at best.[8]

Relocating Zein's challenge within this domain of ethnographic practice and commitment offers, I think, a fresh perspective on it, if not easy answers.[9] To be sure, if we take seriously the notion that Islam is a transcendent ideal then there can be no solution to Zein's problem. In point of principle, no earthly authority, not even 'the theologian', can wholly grasp God's will. Indeed I myself chiefly work with precisely these 'theologians' of the anthropological discourse on Islam – religious specialist scholars and practitioners of the urban Middle East – but they are not always sure of the 'single, real Islam' themselves, let alone that their colleagues have the answer and certainly not their peers working within rival schools and other 'sects'. And yet, if one refuses to admit such transcendence, there is no logical reason why one could not draw lines, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, to define what does and does not fall within the tradition, even arbitrary ones. If, as an anthropologist, one felt bound to defer to the Orientalist or theologian in this respect, then one could. If that means choosing one authority over others to 'define Islam', then one could do so. And there is no shortage of unthinking commentators who effectively do just that. But anthropologists do not want to. That is because they are bound by their commitments to those they work with, and, by extension, to others like them. They want to 'recognize' them, in Gilsenan's (1982) apt phrase and admirable example. Asad (1986: 2) was surely too quick to

[8] Of course, this is a particular perspective. Many, perhaps now even most, anthropologists of Islam are themselves, in different senses and in different ways, Muslims, for whom this particular issue would be very differently posed. But that is not to say that it would not be posed. I return to this question below.

[9] My focus on commitment might be seen as reductive: not all Muslims are committed Muslims. No doubt I am influenced by my principal subjects, religious specialists who have chosen Islam as a vocation and a profession and who, I must emphasise, see themselves as an embattled minority. I should stress that I do not hold that the anthropology of Islam should be confined to such studies. But I am also influenced by debates over the nature of the contemporary anthropological vocation. One influential way of coping with the challenge of constructing 'ethnography in/of the contemporary world system' (Marcus 1995) has been to see 'the field' as less a geographical expression than a political one, and anthropological knowledge as 'a form of situated intervention . . . a way of pursuing specific political aims while simultaneously seeking lines of common political purpose with allies who stand elsewhere' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 35, 38–39). That sets a daunting standard for entry into parts of the world like the Middle East, which have seen rather too much intervention of late and a virtuoso understanding of whose political complexities might be better seen as a goal rather than precondition of fieldwork. The contemporary anthropological vocation does have to be re-imagined within the current landscape of connectivity, and such commitments are one way of exploring that. But, as I will argue here, ethnographic commitments can and do extend beyond mundane politics and maintaining anthropological integrity is a more complex and challenging matter than just taking sides.

dismiss such recognition as a 'paradox' because it may entail the simultaneous recognition of conflicting positions (as to what 'true Islam' is, for instance).[10] Logic is not the issue: ethnographic commitments are. This is neither to dissolve Zein's problem, nor to make it any easier to bear: pangs of conscience over conflicting commitments to people, whether real hosts and collaborators or imagined audiences, are more painful than the pricks of paradox. But it does remind us why we are obliged to persevere, Zein's pessimism notwithstanding. Commitments must be honoured, or at the very least, acknowledged.

Fieldwork in Lebanon, 2007–2008

Lebanon was enduring difficult times in 2007–2008. The war with Israel in 2006, triggered by Hezbollah's capture of Israeli military personnel, had left much of the country's infrastructure damaged and devastated the southern suburbs of Beirut. It had also deepened the divide in the country between the governing March 14 coalition, led by Sunni politician Sa'd al-Hariri, and the March 8 opposition movement led by the Shi'i Hezbollah, a divide with ominous sectarian possibilities.[11] The machinery of government was paralysed by an opposition boycott and sit-in, and by a series of car-bomb assassinations widely perceived as related to Syrian regime concerns over the proposed United Nations investigation into the 2005 assassination of premier Rafiq al-Hariri, Sa'd's father. These internal tensions and conflicts were exacerbated by the disastrous regional and international situation subsequent to the US-led 'war on terror', widely perceived as a war on Islam, and the invasion of Iraq. My presence was thus a highly marked and no doubt more than occasionally worrying one in my field sites, although the success I had is a tribute to the generosity, openness and moral courage of those who helped me.

There was a seeming huge disproportion in scale between my academic project and its perceived significance. My investigations into sharia discourse in Lebanon were not of the potentially world historical, even cosmic import they were commonly attributed, flattering though that attribution might have been, not only to me, but also, with the greatest of respect, my informants. But nevertheless my research was often described as of the very highest moment: 'dangerous' but also 'important', it was firmly situated within the wider struggle, one in which God Himself would reveal His wider purpose. If I could only understand the truth about Islam, even just at the very most basic level that 'it is not terrorism', and communicate that message in Britain and in the West, then I would be performing a vital function. I for my part expressed my own, wholly sincere wish to contribute to such 'mutual understanding'

[10] For another defence of Gilsenan see Lukens-Bull (1999: 5).

[11] Somewhat diminished, it should be said, by the participation of the largely Christian following of General Michel Aoun in the March 8 alliance, offsetting the Christian Lebanese Forces' membership of March 14.

(*tafāhum*). There was thus a quasi-diplomatic cast to my work, which sometimes extended to invitations to official events: I became versed in the niceties of courteous, if occasionally banal conversation with religious dignitaries; and I took due care over my appearance, a point of considerable local interest.

My presence in the sharia courts was relatively uncontroversial. The Sunni and Shi'i initial courts where I did most of my work are more or less simple offices.[12] One judge and a recorder sit behind a desk and the plaintiff and respondent stand in front of it; some easy chairs line the room for other attendees (such as the ethnographer). There is little to mark this as a 'religious' environment, beyond the occasional piece of calligraphy on the wall, a pertinent Quranic verse perhaps. More striking is the apparel of the judge, who should wear his full religious regalia, his turban and robes, the Sunni and Shi'i versions being somewhat different; and women are required to wear some form of *hijāb*, often just a cloth draped over their heads. The sharia courts follow a law of procedure modelled on civil court principles and the sessions are conceived as public: 'We could not stop you attending even if we wanted to!', as I was frequently told, with some exaggeration no doubt. I had the permission of the judges I worked with, and some were more tolerant of my repeated presence than others. My role was as an observer: I could attend sessions (*jalsāt*) in order to see how Islamic law worked in practice; I was to record what I saw accurately, only withholding the names of parties to these cases; where I had failed to understand something, I could ask the judge for clarification. I could also turn to one of the lawyers working in the courts: trained in the civil legal tradition, several were prominent advocates for reform of the sharia courts and Lebanese 'communitarianism' more broadly, and saw me, rightly, as a natural secularist and thus a potential ally. Relations between them and the shaykhly judges could thus occasionally be strained.[13]

'Just tell the truth. We don't ask for more than that,' the then head of the Sunni courts, Shaykh Muhammad Kana'an told me when I first embarked on this path. The concerns of postmodern critique notwithstanding, objectivity was thus the intellectual, anthropological and political space where we could meet. My going to both Sunni and Shi'i courts was a sign of my commitment to that objectivity, and my neutrality at a time of elevated sectarian tension. I would occasionally be drawn into the action: one of the parties to a case, or one of their companions, might suddenly appeal to me, taking me for a functionary of the court, or perhaps a knowledgeable lawyer, dressed as I was in shirt and jacket and taking notes. If a

[12] As opposed to the appeals courts, that is, which sit in much grander courtrooms. For more on my ethnography of Lebanon's sharia courts see Clarke (2012).

[13] Again, these courts are restricted to the sphere of family law. Christian courts provide a parallel function for Lebanon's numerous Christian communities. There is no civil marriage law, and one cannot marry, divorce, or perform any other family legal procedure without going through one of these religious tribunals. They reproduce religious identity automatically, and are thus a focus for critique on the part of civil society activists, who see such institutions as underpinning Lebanon's communitarian legal and political system and thus, they would argue, its periodic sectarian tensions.

case involved a foreign jurisdiction, as it very commonly would, the judge might rhetorically call on me to confirm a point as to British law or European social mores. Whenever an egregious instance occurred of the maltreatment of a wife by a husband or, conversely, a shining example of the kindness of the sharia to women, the judge might call my attention to it, inviting me to note either the distance of society from the teachings of Islam or the wisdom of the divine lawgiver. I did not have the opportunity that Ziba Mir-Hosseini (1993) did to act as judge's recorder, for example (probably for the best). I could at least occasionally point people to the right office when they were wandering lost in the corridor. But it was observation, more than participation, that was my primary function, and this positioning was reproduced in many of the other settings in which I worked, as in the offices of the late Ayatollah Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah (d. 2010), for instance, then perhaps Lebanon's leading (Shi'i) religious personality (see Clarke 2010: 357–67).

Participant Observation of Devotional Practice

As part of my interest in Fadlallah's work, I wanted to attend the Friday sermons he delivered in the capacious al-Imamayn al-Hasanayn mosque in Beirut's southern suburbs. Fadlallah was a prominent and outspoken political commentator as well as religious authority, and these sermons were notable political events in their own right. The sermons were broadcast on radio and television, and were (and still are) also available on the ayatollah's website (www.bayynat.org.lb), but I was keen to attend in person for my own anthropological motives. Watching it on TV was not the same as being there. That wish was seen as wholly comprehensible and legitimate by the ayatollah's staff, but a problem loomed. Friday prayers in the packed mosque started immediately subsequent to the sermon. Were I to attempt to rush out at that moment, I was advised, especially were I to be anywhere close enough to get a decent view, 'people would find it unacceptable'. One solution might be for me to sit with the security guards in their booth at the gate, watching the sermon on television. I was not keen. Would I mind going through the motions with everyone else, then? I was naturally delighted at the prospect of being so closely engaged in mosque practice, but I wanted to know if this was ethically sound: would this not be hypocrisy (*nifāq*)?[14] Of course not, my advisor, a highly placed clerical member of the ayatollah's staff told me. This was a personal matter.

[14] 'Hypocrisy', it should be noted, has particular, deeply negative connotations within Islamic discourse. In the context of the master discourse of the Quran, it refers to the wavering loyalty of some of the early converts to Islam, 'the hypocrites' (*al-munāfiqīn*), on whom Muhammad could not rely during crucial episodes in the formative history of the Islamic community. These might thus be better thought of as 'dissenters' or even 'apostates' (Brockett 1993). But in the context of my conversations in Lebanon, it had the familiar meaning expressed by the Quranic verse (3: 167), 'they say with their mouths what is not in their hearts'. On the question of its applicability to non-Muslims participating in Muslim prayer, see also Lukens-Bull (2007: 185).

After all, he himself regularly attended interfaith meetings at Christian venues, and would participate in prayers, following their motions, if not repeating their exact words, as that would indeed be unbelief (*kufr*).[15] And so I became a regular attendee at these sermons and the subsequent prayers, frequently accompanied by a member of the ayatollah's staff who I could quiz as to what was going on around me and who would guarantee the legitimacy of my presence. As I had hoped, my participation in the activities in the mosque gave me insights that would have otherwise been denied me,[16] and my presence among the thousands of worshippers seemed not to inconvenience anyone, save through my occasional blunders in mosque etiquette.

Here then I remained an observer, but more of a participant one. But such a devotional setting allows different sets of themes, relationships and projects to be invoked and actualised. One of my closest and most productive relationships throughout my fieldwork was with a young (late twenties at that time) and dynamic Sunni shaykh, at the beginning of what promised to be a successful career. He worked as assistant to a judge in the courts, and was a generous host to me at his family apartment. He was also imam of a well-known West Beirut mosque, and delivered weekly lessons on Saturday nights to the congregation at which I was a regular attendee. These sorts of events are most conveniently held after work in the evening, for most of the year between the sunset (*maghrib*) and evening (*'ishā'*) prayers. I was encouraged by my young friend to arrive in good time so I could hang out with him and the lads (*shabāb*), and to wait for his departure after leading the evening prayers so that we could walk the streets together and chat. I would thus regularly attend both sets of prayers. But again the question arose, as a non-Muslim, what should I do? Although my friend emphasised that the decision was ultimately mine, we both came to feel that I should sit at the back during prayers, as a non-involved spectator. To participate might be to mislead others as to my identity and intention in this very public but relatively intimate space, with a regular congregation of a hundred rather than thousands. The attendees, and especially the latecomers rushing in past me, gave me quizzical looks and I naturally felt uncomfortable, marked out in this way. Nevertheless, despite occasional discomfort, this mode of ethnographic practice seemed to work. But a different dynamic had now been created. My attendance came to extend to months, then years. Was I always going to sit apart? Or was I eventually going to join in? A teleological framework naturally fell into place that was different from that for my work in the courts. There, people did begin to start wondering when they would be rid of me,

[15] I.e. it was not here assumed that I would also be repeating the verbal phrases exactly. To forestall a sectarian reading, this is not a specifically 'Shi'i' discourse. Such interfaith settings are attended by Sunni as well as Shi'i clerics. And the problem of my attending the Friday sermon and this solution was also one I encountered in Sunni settings. Nevertheless, it is true to say that I found myself less often the object of *da'wa* – being 'called' to Islam – in Shi'i contexts than Sunni ones, although I have no ready explanation for that.

[16] For example, into the extent to which Fadlallah's own highly rationalised brand of religiosity penetrated into everyday lay practice: that is, the ways in which such modernism could be 'enchanted' (Deeb 2006).

when I would 'have enough', enough, that is, to write up a satisfactorily complete study. But in the mosque, a different sort of end game became imaginable, one where my ever-increasing knowledge led me to become a Muslim; and I was subject to a continuous bombardment of well-meaning questions and exhortations in this regard. Failure in this context meant not producing a disappointingly thin ethnography but an eternity suffering the torments of hell fire, as graphically described in my friend's lessons.

These issues played out differently again in another, still more intimate context, that of the Sufi order led by one of the Sunni judges I worked most closely with. He was clear that his approach to his judicial duties was deeply affected by his Sufism. He invited me to attend some of the order's ceremonies and again I accepted with alacrity. Two or three times a week, his circle gathered at their lodge in West Beirut, occupying the ground floor of an apartment building on a back street, with one large, somewhat airless room served by a creaking AC unit, a bathroom for ritual ablutions and a tiny kitchen. Here too the ceremonies took place generally between sunset and evening prayers. We would sit, 10–15 of us, on cushions on the floor and follow a set formula of rituals in remembrance of God (*dhikr*) to gain access to divine illumination through the mediation of the order's founding shaykh, with whom our shaykh had studied in Iranian Kurdistan. The founding shaykh had been initiated into both the Naqshbandi and the Qadiri orders, and the path (*tarīqa*) he himself inaugurated combined elements of both. From the Naqshbandis we practiced a silent remembrance of God, sitting in the dark, first meditating on the inevitability of death and then focusing on opening our heart to the shaykh's light. From the Qadiris we took recitation out loud, chanting the name of God with ever greater passion until many of the initiates reached states of ecstasy, frequently exuberantly expressed. Although I had made it clear to the shaykh and the regular members of the circle that I was neither a Muslim nor otherwise religiously committed, my openness to participation in these practices was noted and appreciated.

This openness was understood within the framework of enchantment that was so explicit in the circle's activities. As the shaykh told me, while other branches of the Naqshbandiyya lock the door during the *dhikr*, they left it open. 'That was our shaykh's way. There are two types of men: the seeker and the sought [*al-murīd wa-l-murād*]. The seeker wants to be a member of the order, but might never make it. The sought could be a drinker or a fornicator, but for whatever reason God brings him there. It is God's will.' Whether or not that were the case, it was important to me that I at least not be an obstacle to the circle's devotions: the success of the *hadra*, the 'presenting' of the divine, depends on those participating, whether 'they are helping [*musāʿid*] or not', as the shaykh told me. 'Whether there is sincerity [*ikhlās*] in the circle. Sometimes someone might be holding everyone back. You don't know who.' And indeed some sessions were 'hotter' than others. Could one not handpick the circle to best ensure that, I wondered. 'No. It is God who chooses and arranges things. We are totally open.' The shaykh's right-hand man, who led many of the ceremonies, was more explicit:

> You came from far away and came here to this circle for a reason. What you take part in here, God knows about it, and on judgement day He will take account of it. There are angels around us, one on each shoulder,[17] but also many, many more. Each person has three hundred: you have three hundred around you now. We can't see them of course – it's like air – it's there, but you can't see it with the naked eye. When we are doing *dhikr*, the angels go up to heaven and God asks them, 'Why did you leave them? What were they doing?' 'They are praising you', they tell him. When you go home to London, maybe you will do it a bit yourself, in private. There is a saying of the Prophet: anyone who says there is no God but God [*lā ilāha illa allāh*] with sincerity will enter Paradise. But even if he says it without sincerity, God will discount his sins.

In the privacy and intimacy of the lodge my sitting out – missing out on – the prayers that were an integral part of the rituals was wholly unacceptable to my friends, and I was literally dragged into them.[18] Of course this was not just a way of understanding and accommodating my presence within a formal framework of discourse and practice. It was clearly hoped that the path God had laid out for me included my coming to 'embrace Islam': matters had, to some extent, been taken out of my hands. However, there was no explicit pressure placed on me to do so, although there were certain conditions for my participation. As an adept of my age assigned to me as a special companion told me:

> Whether or not you become a Muslim, that is up to you. But if you come to our place to pray with us you have to be ritually pure [*tāhir*]. There are rules about how to wash. And you have to come with a pure heart. Then hopefully your heart will open, and you will receive some of God's light. You will reach another stage, a higher level. You will be walking in the street, and maybe you will see someone who will teach you something. In your sleep, maybe you will travel. Maybe an angel will come.

A different sort of space had been opened up for me in which to conduct ethnography, and for those I was conducting it with to accommodate me. I entered it gladly – and made sure to wash myself correctly (in my approximate fashion) beforehand.[19]

This engagement with devotion, an attempt to understand it through in some small sense sharing in it, was very valuable to me, and seemed integral to my attempts at anthropological study of Islam. I have to admit that this full-blooded participation in the rituals of the order seemed much closer to archetypal fieldwork than sitting in court in my jacket and carefully ironed shirt and trousers (not that I neglected my dress here either). But it also allowed me to find a place for the divine in my ethnography that had hitherto seemed lacking and was surely, I felt, indispensable. As the custodian of the young shaykh's mosque, who treated me to endless homilies designed to facilitate my conversion, put it to me: 'It's not like working in a laboratory or making a car, knowing about Islam. You've got to feel it.' He would quiz me as to my metaphysical beliefs and was totally astonished

[17] One to record one's good deeds, the other the bad.

[18] And here there was an expectation that I also at least attempt to learn the requisite verbal components.

[19] I did also wash before attending the sermon and prayers at Fadlallah's mosque, although this was not explicitly demanded of me.

when it became clear that they were very far from his. 'What?! I thought you were learned [*'ālim*], more learned than me anyway – I can't even read. Just the Quran, thank God. But this sign [he pointed to a sign over a door as we walked down the street together], I can't really read it. And you can read Arabic! But now I see you're nowhere at all.'

Knowledge of 'The Truth' (*al-haqīqa*) was being radically restructured in ways that would be hard for me to meet and that became increasingly troubling. Another committed Sufi, long resident in California and member of a different circle from that I commonly frequented, took it upon himself to put the fear of God into me (in English):

> I know you white guys. You want an experience, like a movie. Then you'll go home and forget all about it. But this isn't like that. It will haunt you for the rest of your life. People don't realize, but it starts the moment you die. You don't get time to look back, see people crying over you – no, straight away two angels come to question you,[20] terrifying, with blue fiery eyes, horns, fangs down to the ground, much more terrible than any movie monster. They say, 'Who is your lord, who is your leader, which is your people?' There are angels with you all the time, one on each shoulder recording your deeds. Come judgement day, they will throw them in your face. 'Why did you do this?' You won't be able to say, 'I didn't know'. Because you do know, you've been told about Islam. You know about *dhikr*, and it says in the Quran that once you know about it, 'only the blind turn away'. So if you learn about this now and then you ignore it, you will be made among the blind in the afterlife. I'm only telling you this because I don't want responsibility. I don't want you blaming me on judgement day.

Anthropological work is not, one hopes, just a matter of wanting 'an experience'. But it did seem to be entailing awfully high stakes.

In these three different settings, my participation in prayer took three different forms. In Fadlallah's large mosque, it was allowed, even necessitated by circumstance, understood as a mark of respect and as part of a legitimate intellectual project, but not taken as indicating a religious commitment by those responsible for me. In my young friend's rather smaller mosque, the possibility of it being seen as such a commitment tended to indicate that direct participation should be avoided in favour of sitting on the sidelines, but thereby created a tension and a teleology towards exactly such a commitment. Within the much more intimate setting of the Sufi circle, such participation was thrust upon me in response to a classical anthropological openness that was seen as both laudable and promising – God knows best. In each setting, I felt I was acting in good faith, and I had the security of the word of the religious authority presiding. But these worlds were not isolates. They were inevitably interpenetrated. Ayatollah Fadlallah's highly politicised sermons were televised, raising the nightmarish scenario of my acquaintances on the other side of Lebanon's political divide, not to mention whoever else might be scrutinising the area, seeing me 'praying behind the sayyid', and thus taking my commitment to participant observation as a very different kind of commitment, whether to 'the opposition' (*al-mu'ārada*) and 'heretical' (i.e. Shi'i) other, or to a perceived close associate of the 'terrorist organisation' Hezbollah.

[20] Named, in the wider tradition, Munkar and Nakir.

More concretely, however, the world of my young friend's mosque and the Sufi circle were directly intertwined, as the circle held a celebration (*mawlid*) in the mosque every week. If I attended, should I then pray or not? I did attend but I did not pray. This of course raised questions, for my friends and for myself. How sustainable was the ethnographic space that had been opened up for me in the intimate confines of the Sufi circle? And if my openness to the divine was part of the greater plan, then why did it obstinately remain stalled rather than blooming into something finer? These different spaces with their different sets of mandated practices could flourish independently. But, given that those practices were all nominally directed towards the same end, within a nominally unitary field of discourse, the boundaries of those spaces ought in principle to be coterminous rather than distinct. Participating in prayer in one place and not in another could all too easily look like an inconsistent approach to a unitary issue (being Muslim or not) within homogeneous ethical/ethnographic space, rather than a consistent attempt to participate as far as was possible in a variety of distinct ethnographic settings – performing, that is, an anthropological rather than a religious commitment.[21]

Such inconsistency was perceived by myself and others as potentially damaging to my integrity[22]; and it was explicit comment to this effect that led to my more or less abandoning such participation in devotional practice, to the regret of some of my friends no doubt. Such critique came in fact not from them but from 'outsiders' to these circles, themselves bearers of religious authority: from a member of a visiting delegation of shaykhs from Egypt, who expressed his concerns forcefully in an alarming early morning telephone call; and from a pupil of the shaykh of the Sufi order, usually leading his own circle elsewhere, but deputed to lead our ceremonies one week in the shaykh's absence and clearly not briefed as to my circumstances. He was shocked, disgusted even, to discover that I was not a Muslim after the session, having assumed that I was, and his reaction marked, as far as I was concerned, the definitive collapse of this part of my ethnographic project.[23] To others, however,

[21] A comprehensive account of the issues of sincerity at stake here would also touch on the Islamic notion of right intention (*niyya*), vital to the proper fulfilment of Islamic religious obligations (see e.g. McIntosh 2009: 136–42).

[22] I had no desire to find myself effectively posing as a Muslim when I was not one, which seems to be the situation Lukens-Bull got himself into. When he asks (2007: 177), 'Was this ethical?', the answer must surely be no. However, material to my argument here, it was, by his own, refreshingly frank account, his professional ethical commitment to participant observation that brought him to that pass rather than bad faith (ibid.: 176, 182). I must stress that I certainly do not want to claim to be holier than thou, or rather holier than him, in this respect. My own efforts at best ethnographic practice in this domain proved unsustainable (see below), and might not themselves withstand the most determined forensic scrutiny. Rather, I seek to find some theoretical capital to be gained from this mess.

[23] It was, I think, his having been embarrassed at mistaking me – having been deceived, if not with that purpose, by my conduct and demeanour – that was at the root of his discomfort, rather than a determination that participation in Muslim devotion by a non-Muslim was in and of itself reprehensible. The Egyptian shaykh, however, was keen to impress on me that such a path was itself a dangerous one in spiritual terms.

this failure in my engagement with enchantment would be a profound relief. My civil legal colleagues were troubled by my closeness to some of the shaykhs: were I to convert, I might be lost to the cause of civility and legal reform. 'Just be yourself', a distinguished civil judge with a supervisory post in the sharia courts told me in a stage whisper as we sat as guests at a mufti's villa.

Drawing Lines

James Clifford (1997: 204), well known for his critiques of ethnographic practice, quotes an apposite passage from Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes tropiques* (1973: 410–11), which, immaterial to Clifford's purposes I should say, directly follows a very ill considered polemic against Islam (ibid.: 401–9). In the Chittagong hill tracts, Lévi-Strauss visits a Buddhist temple, going barefoot and performing the ritual ablutions ('After the climb through the mud . . . quite natural and devoid of any religious significance'). His companion moves to perform some prostrations, telling Lévi-Strauss he need not do likewise, and he concurs.

> I did so less through self-consciousness than discretion: he knew that I did not share his beliefs, and I would have been afraid of debasing the ritual gestures by letting him think I considered them as mere conventions: but for once, I would have felt no embarrassment in performing them. Between this form of religion and myself, there was no likelihood of misunderstanding. It was not a question of bowing down in front of idols or of adoring a supposed supernatural order, but only of paying homage to the decisive wisdom that a thinker, or the society that created his legend, had evolved twenty-five centuries before. . .

While tempted to prostrate himself then, he did not. As Clifford (1997: 205) remarks, another anthropologist might well have done so. But Clifford is not seeking to chastise Lévi-Strauss, or present his decision as typical or exemplary. Rather, he wishes to note that 'a similar line will be drawn somewhere, sometime, in the maintenance of a professional fieldwork habitus.' My own, first point here is that we would do better not to assume that there will be only one such line to be drawn. Such lines are necessarily continuously redrawn across inevitably non-homogeneous social fields. This is not mere ethical relativism: it is a consequence of trying to maintain a common standard of respect and ethnographic commitment in a varied and, in this case, contested ethical domain. Again, the variability and contestability of Islamic discourse and practice has ethnographic consequences prior to its analytical ones.[24]

Secondly, not all lines drawn are of the same sort. Acceding to one's hosts' wishes is not always a matter of participating in devotional practice, for one thing. Further, as Lévi-Strauss so candidly owns, the secular Western imagination finds in its idea of Buddhism, say, a much more sympathetic religion than one where there might be a 'likelihood of misunderstanding', of 'adoring a supposed supernatural

[24] Although one imagines that the same applies to Buddhist discourse, for instance, as well.

order', as would be the case for Islam. The anthropological commitment to participation is hardly supposed to be unbounded, and this surely extends to religious commitments of a universalizing type. While an openness during fieldwork to the exotic and marginal metaphysics of, say, Amazonian shamanism may raise its own issues personally, a receptivity towards, let alone a commitment to the all too familiar other of Christian or Islamic theology seems of a different order, and not so easily perceived as confined to 'the field'.[25] The ethnographic space negotiated in the intimate domain of the Sufi order became hard to sustain in a wider, more public sphere. But line drawings in these areas are not just locally public acts. These sorts of commitments are globally legible. And the massification, objectivification and self-consciousness of religious discourse and practice that global modernisation, secularisation and intensified communication have brought have changed the terrain in this regard.[26]

It is hard to imagine now, for instance, the anthropological world evoked by Michael Lambek (1993: 24–5) in describing his fieldwork on the island of Mayotte in the 1970s:

> Once I started going to the mosque the remark was everywhere: 'Michely is not a *vazaha* [European, white person], he's a *Silamu* [Muslim, one of us].' I was proud but also uncomfortable about this, felt myself a hypocrite, and worried that they might not want an unbeliever in their mosque, miming the prayers. But for them my entry into the mosque transformed me into a Muslim and the concept of mimicking prayer was unthinkable... When people challenged or questioned me, it was less about whether I was coming to believe in Islam or to agree with them than to verify the degree to which I knew the ritual phrases... When Jon Breslar, an American anthropologist, moved into a neighbouring village... he had similar experiences... [O]ur relative competence at doing our jobs (which was a matter of some competition between the villages) was measured largely according to how much recitation each of us knew and how well each of us followed the ritual precepts of Islam.

Lambek presents a classic anthropological trope: rooted as he is in a post-Christian intellectual tradition, he initially misreads religion as belief; his hosts are more interested in ritual practice.[27] One suspects that Mayotte may have changed in this regard, presumably now more closely connected by new communications technologies with the objectified and self-conscious representations of the global Islamic media ecumene. Certainly in all the Islamic contexts I am familiar with, it is

[25] Cf. Lukens-Bull (2007: 186). In this respect, I think Robbins (2003: 192–94) exaggerates the relative anthropological ease of studying Islam over Christianity (Lukens-Bull [2007: 186] puts it the other way round), although he may be influenced by a North American context where Islam is less and fundamentalist Christianity more ubiquitous than in Europe, say. With regard to Christian fundamentalism in the US, Harding's work engages directly with the issues we are concerned with here (1991, 2000: xi–xii, 34–60). For a thoughtful exploration of the challenges for an anthropologist who did convert (to Islam) in the field, see Young (1996: 131–39).

[26] See e.g. Eickelman (1992), Eickelman and Anderson (1999), and Horvatich (1994).

[27] See e.g. Ruel (1992). For the classic exposition of this argument regarding Islam see Smith (1957: 28), and for critique of it see e.g. Asad (1986: 15) and Varisco (2005: 9–10). Lukens-Bull (2007: 183) seems more sympathetic to this line of thinking.

the belief, a conviction (*iqtinā'*) of the truth of the central proposition that there is no God but God and Muhammad is God's messenger, that really matters. Practice can be engaged with, can itself be hoped to be a path to conviction, but it is not conviction itself – and it is that distinction that opened up some of my own ethnographic spaces, in completely the opposite way, it is worth noting, to those opened up for Lambek by his hosts.

Such spaces are opened up in different ways for Muslim ethnographers of course, but that is not to say that they are not closed off in different ways as well. Abdul Hamid el-Zein was a committed Muslim as well as a committed structuralist,[28] a tension that brought him no little personal difficulties, which his own integrity bound him to ignore (Eickelman 1981: 362, 365). And he and his wife clearly faced analogous tensions of some sort working in Lamu among people that thought their island 'the leader of the Islamic world, because it alone has preserved Islam in its purity', and their guests as 'ignorant, if not positively heretical' (El-Zein 1974: xvi, 9). Prayer was a crucial case for me because it can be seen as in itself the fundamental affirmation of a commitment to Islam, incorporating as it does in canonical form the testament of faith, the *shahāda*. Indeed it is precisely this that allows it to be the site where radically different visions of what Islam entails can at least be affirmed together (Henkel 2005). But prayer is not the only possible such location for such dilemmas. Similar questions may be posed for female anthropologists in particular, Muslim and non-Muslim, by practices of modesty (*hijāb*).

Again Clifford (1997: 205) raises the issue, although without, I think, seeing the specificity of the sorts of cases I am interested in:

> Today, in many locations, indigenous people, ethnographers, and tourists all wear T-shirts and shorts. Elsewhere, distinctions of dress are more salient. In highland Guatemala it may be a necessity of decorum, a sign of respect or solidarity, to wear a long skirt or an embroidered shirt in public. But this is hardly cross-dressing. Can, should, an anthropologist wear a turban, yalmulke, *jallabeyya*, *huipil*, or veil? Local conventions vary. But whatever tactics are adopted, they are employed from a position of assumed *cultural* discretion.

These items are not all of the same order, nor all merely matters of local convention. Even if donning *hijāb* might well be a locally situated tactic of cultural discretion, it is also potentially a globally legible sign of a commitment to Islam, and one of a certain type, an endorsement of a particular vision of moral order, although such visions are more variegated than the mere fact of covering the hair, for instance, may be able to signify. Pictures of the ethnographer wearing the veil can be posted on the internet, and become part of their global public image. Equally, so can pictures of them not wearing the veil. New dilemmas arise. A colleague, not a Muslim, who wears the veil in parts of her geographically dispersed field now finds her hosts wanting to be her friends on a well known social networking website. But she uses the site primarily for viewing photos of her pursuing sports where she

[28] On the latter see e.g. El-Zein (1974: xxi, 167 ff).

is necessarily less well covered, indeed scandalously so by her informants' standards. The distinction between public and private selves has become flattened to near zero under globalised media technology (see also Clarke 2009: 207–9), as has the possibility of having more than one public self: after all, my colleague no more wears athletic kit to work in Britain than she does *hijāb*. Her donning *hijāb* during fieldwork is indeed a sign of cultural discretion. But her wearing it in photographs posted on the internet by others for the world to see, as they have, has left her open to critique from feminists in her wider field setting and beyond as a betrayal of the cause, or, less dramatically perhaps, letting the side down. And one can imagine similar dilemmas for Muslim ethnographers too.

Being several people at once is the normal state of affairs in life generally, and almost inevitable for an ethnographer one might suspect. But it can all too easily be called out as 'hypocrisy', and hence, in current professional terms, 'unethical'. Where an earlier generation of ethnographers might have left other selves in the field, the contemporary, globalised world of decentred cultural production, exponentially intensified communications and mass migration has left the classical conception of fieldwork and ethnography out of place and time, as an extensive literature has argued.[29] The difficulties of identifying and 'travelling' to a separated field site have become notorious. The field becomes as impossible to leave as to distinguish, and the ethnographer becomes ever accessible to and survey-able by their subjects as well as their colleagues in ever more intimate detail. The particularity and negotiability of each fieldwork encounter, already problematic on a local level, becomes still harder to parochialise, to keep in its context. Here I want to stress both the ways in which Islam's universal address and global legibility amplify this effect, and that the fundamental contestability of Islamic discourse – there is no one right answer to a given ethical issue, such as whether non-Muslims can attend and participate in prayer amongst Muslims[30] – makes such particularity and parochialism inevitable.[31]

Conclusion

I have sought to relocate the crux of anthropology's particular problems with engaging with Islam as a disciplinary object away from the domain of theory and instead within the ethnography that is basic to it. Theoretical problems with defining categories and boundaries are ubiquitous and are periodically ignored,

[29] E.g. Appadurai (1991), Faubion and Marcus (2009), Gupta and Ferguson (1997), Marcus (1995), Rabinow et al. (2008).

[30] See also Lukens-Bull (2007: 183–85).

[31] To put the relatively trivial concerns of anthropology aside for a moment, for Muslims explaining the genealogy of Islamic commitments at such nodes of this global flattening and policing of moral discourse as airport security checks can be a much more real problem.

polemically debated and ignored again throughout the whole range of the discipline's interests, as indeed every other discipline. But ethnographic issues are not so readily sidestepped as they are posed in the field. In my experience in Lebanon at least, the contestability of religious authority in Islamic settings means that different standards of right behaviour for the ethnographer apply in different settings within one connected field, giving rise to tensions further complicated by the super-connectivity of the wider contemporary world. Lebanon's religious diversity is marked, and it would be hard to delimit a religiously homogeneous field site here. Local standards of due respect across the communitarian landscape in any case mandate as inclusive an address as possible. But one hardly imagines that this diverse micro-ecology is unique to Lebanon. Conflicting standards and commitments are intrinsic to social life, and must be common to ethnographic studies generally and of Islam in particular, and are certainly part of what it means to live in a connected world. 'Participant observation' would seem in some sense itself an ideal, and as such not fully realisable in practice, at least in any ethically coherent sense. And yet it is nevertheless worth pursuing, indeed vital to the anthropological vocation, according to the mainline of the tradition at least.[32] Unless one concludes, then, that anthropology as ideally practiced is a fundamentally unethical activity, such tensions are necessary to it.

Zein's challenge thus matters, or should matter, to anthropologists not so much because of fears of theoretical paralysis, but because anthropologists, committed as they are to the ethnographic method, know intimately how much defining Islam matters to the people they work with. As in other areas no doubt, a disciplinary ambivalence towards erecting an 'anthropology of Islam' would be better seen as stemming not from philosophical scepticism but from personal appreciation. And recognition of that should spur anthropologists to continue with their more or less ad hoc and imperfect comparative categories and ventures as they necessarily must, while continuing to harbour and express their reservations in this regard. This is less a vicious logical inconsistency, then, than an anthropologically virtuous grounding in inevitably conflicting social relationships.[33] It is the personal contact enjoined by anthropology's emphasis on fieldwork that makes studying Islam anthropologically so rewarding, often a joy. But knowing intimately how much such things matter entails in turn a further recognition, that an anthropology of Islam is not an impossibility, but a duty.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank all those who helped me so much in my researches in Lebanon. I am also grateful to the editors and organisers of the conference at SOAS that was the genesis of this paper, as well as my fellow contributors, and to Judith Scheele in particular for her helpful comments on draft versions.

[32] Asad for one has challenged this (2003: 16–17).

[33] Anthropologists are committed to the recognition of their informants' commitments. But they are not, surely – and this is where the problematic nature of 'participant observation' of practices of commitment really bites – thereby bound to commit to those various and potentially conflicting commitments themselves.

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Chapter 11
Anthropological Fieldwork in Afghanistan and Pakistan Compared

Magnus Marsden

Introduction

This chapter explores a nexus of methodological, epistemological, and ethical issues that I have encountered while conducting ethnographic work on Islam and Muslim life in connected regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. As a number of other contributors to this volume suggest (especially Morgan Clarke), it is anthropology's rooting in ethnography and in-depth participant observation that ensures the distinctiveness of the discipline's contribution to the study of Islam. Rethinking anthropological approaches to the study of Islam inevitably also entail, then, a consideration of ethnographic fieldwork. At one level, there have been numerous attacks in recent years on the traditional idea that participant-observation lies at the core of anthropological practice and theory; these attempts to rethink the centrality of fieldwork to anthropology have also played a critical role in shaping the development of the anthropology of Islam. Talal Asad, for example, argues that anthropology's central concern is the cross-cultural analysis of categories through space and time, an enterprise that might be undertaken as well with texts as with human beings. The focus on texts in the development of the anthropology of Islam and attempts to understand the meaning of 'being Muslim' in particular socio-historic circumstances is evident in much work (e.g. Messick 1992). At another level, the capacity of anthropologists to conduct in-depth ethnographic fieldwork with Muslims has also come under considerable pressure for other reasons: the so-called 'war-on-terror' has led many ethnographers to raise pertinent ethical questions about fieldwork in Muslim societies and communities (e.g. Werbner 2010).

In such a context it is indeed tempting to advocate for more text-based studies of Islam, both for practical and more ethical reasons. Yet doing so raises difficult

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_11, © Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2013

questions for anthropologists: How do we judge which texts count as being 'truly Islamic'? Talal Asad, has emphasised the importance of anthropologists embracing texts in their study of Islam, given how important these are for the Islamic tradition (Asad 1986). As Irfan Ahmed has recently noted (Ahmed 2011), Asad's seminal arguments raise important questions concerning how far texts other than the Qur'an and Hadith should be incorporated into this endeavour: Rumi's *mathnawi* is widely referred to in Iran as the 'Qur'an in Persian', for example, while the Aga Khan's *farman*s are deemed sacred by many Shi'a Ismai'lis.

Secondly, and more importantly, a growing body of scholarship suggests that focusing on texts weakens anthropologists' readiness to deal with one of their discipline's founding questions: how should the inevitable differences between what is said and done in human life be understood and theorised? And, what does the nature of these disjunctions help us to understand about the ways in which religion informs the worlds that people inhabit and create? If the starting point for anthropological work on Islam and being Muslim begins with debates between Muslims about the nature of correct practice according to the texts, then how do we relate these themes to other dimensions of their everyday lives? One of the strengths of anthropological writing on Islam over the past two decades has been to contest the notion that 'Muslim identity' is all-encompassing and defining. Yet it is also increasingly noted (cf Schielke 2010) that even much of the best recent anthropological writing on Islam focuses on what Muslims say and do in mosques and at prayer gatherings (Mahmood 2005), in the absence of comparatively detailed attempts to describe their lives in the workplace, on the street, or even at play.

In a series of publications Samuli Schielke (e.g. 2009) has argued that taking account of other domains in the lives of piety-minded Muslims reveals dimensions of their moral lives that are more ambiguous, contested and fraught than is suggested by models of piety-minded Muslim forms of selfhood. One important issue raised by anthropological works that seeks to reveal and theorize the complexity of Muslim lives – both intimate and public – and thereby challenge simplistic 'clash of civilization' arguments, however, is what Muslims reading such accounts make of them. Schielke argues that revealing the contradictions of people's lives should not be seen by our informants and others reading anthropological work as part of an attempt to unmask 'Muslim hypocrisy'. It should contribute, rather, to a 'more serious' theorization of such contradictions and a wider recognition of the extent to which 'being Muslim' is shaped by ambiguities of 'moral ideals, actions, and expectations'. Active processes of reflection on the nature of such ambiguities is not unique to being Muslim, he argues, yet it is something especially visible in Muslim-majority contexts today; one of the reasons for this is the emphasis that Islamic reform place on individual strivings for moral coherence (Schielke 2009: 161).

I agree with the emphasis that Schielke and others writing in a similar vein (e.g. Simon 2009) place on the pervasiveness of moral contradictions to all forms of human subjectivity. Elsewhere I have also sought to explore the ways in which adherents of Islamic reform often excite reflection about human moral complexity rather than one-dimensional attempts to overcome such contradictions (Marsden 2005). In this essay I seek to show that anthropologists also need to explore

the contradictions that form the basis of human subjectivity in greater depth by illustrating their logics and grammars, the forms they take in daily life, and the ways in which such contradictions provoke varying forms of reflection on the part of particular individuals and societies.

Hypocrisy, of course, is an important source of moral approbation in Muslim societies; it is a concept widely used rhetorically during the course of daily life in many different Muslim settings to encourage 'the doing of good and the prevention of evil' (Cook 2000). Yet there are also instances in the daily life of Muslims in which, according to the Islamic sciences, apparently duplicitous forms of behaviour are judged as being permissible. One example is the acceptability for Shi'a Muslims to embrace *taqiya* (dissimulation) in circumstances that are hostile to them. What is the relationship between such 'Islamic' understandings of duplicity and the more local languages and registers through which people of Muslim background talk about, judge, evaluate, and actively learn dimensions of their everyday lives that might be understood as being duplicitous? Even hypocrisy, as Shklar has noted, after all, is 'socially learned behaviour' (Shklar 1984: 56) – something that people must learn to use appropriately and in the right context.

There is a wide and excellent body of writing in anthropology on duplicity and other related concepts – deception, lying, deceit, and, now, even, bullshitting. The best of this work demonstrates the ambiguity of this complex set of practices. It demonstrates how their meaning varies from one culture to another: practices of pretence might evoke relationships of 'domination, aggression and superiority' in some contexts, and of 'accommodation, conflict-avoidance, and courtship' in others (Argenti-Pillen 2007: 322; cf. Jamous 1993). Evans-Pritchard on double-talk amongst the Azande, Gilsenan on lying in Lebanon, Unni Wikan on etiquette in Bali, Ohunuki Tierney on wrapping up rudeness in Japan, Frederik Barth on 'living together although not socially' in Sohar, and F.G. Bailey on the 'tactical uses of passion' in academic committee meetings all explore widely different forms of concealment and revealation, yet all might agree with Bailey that 'deception is a social and political necessity' (Bailey 1991: 72). Attempts to theorize duplicity, thus, depart from such sociologically grounded positions rather than pre-existent moral premises.

Despite the complexity and sophistication of these works, an older set of assumptions about duplicity remains powerful in contemporary stereotypes of Muslims that circulate widely in the media, and beyond. Images of distinctively 'Muslim' forms of hypocrisy are central to recent portrayals of both Islam and Muslims, and chillingly attested to in depictions both of chameleon-like vodka-drinking Muslim terrorists in the media (cf. Ossman 2007) and the statements of US Army psychiatrists which assert that there is nothing dishonourable to Arabs about lying because 'they' have a different understanding of the truth (González 2010). In more complex terms, 'Iranian culture' is also widely treated as an especially rich context for understanding culturally specific forms of 'hypocrisy' (Bateson 1979). Ethnography that explores the contested space between what people of Muslim background say and do seeks to contests these stereotypes by theorizing the varying ways in which lying, duplicity and hypocrisy are universal dimensions of human experience,

independent of the cultural contexts in which they are performed or the religious beliefs of those who enact them. As such, this expanding body of work, which treats human selfhood as inevitably layered and complex sits uncomfortably beside studies that focus on Muslim forms of self-fashioning (Ossella and Soares 2009).

As good an entrance point as any other to the contradiction and ambivalence of people's lives and understandings of themselves is a consideration of the role played by such dimensions of everyday life in the fieldwork practices of anthropologists themselves. The self-reflexive turn in anthropology did bring forthright engagements by anthropologists of duplicity's place in fieldwork: Gilsenan's discussion of being roped into his informants' endless practical jokes is an especially memorable example (Gilsenan 1996). There is less reflection, however, on ways in which practices of duplicity are more generally important to ethnographic knowledge. Johannes Fabian has recently argued that duplicity

> is involved in performing, playing roles, which we do when we work 'as' ethnographers; in that sense it is an epistemological concept helping us to understand how knowledge is produced. Not being forthright at all times because, without a certain shiftiness, a stranger in a society might not be able to move at all; putting on an act, say, by trying to communicate and interact above one's linguistic and cultural means and competence, assuming multiple roles and guises as senior researcher, disinterested observer or hanger-on, affable conversationalist, convivial companion or friend – to the moralist all this must have something unsavory or outright repulsive. Yet, I would contend, ethnography, much like our ordinary lives, could not be done in any other way (Fabian 2008: 6).

Duplicity, moreover, comes in many shapes, grades and sizes. They may be more or less conscious acts of duplicity, for example. Duplicity and pretence are also modes of procedure – *skills* – that anthropologists need to learn how to use appropriately. It is the transmission and reception of duplicity and what fieldwork encounters can help us to understand about such processes of transmission that will concern me throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Learning to Be Tricky

For the past 15 years I had been visiting and conducting intensive fieldwork in Pakistan's North West Frontier Province, where I stayed in villages with families and moved with ease across and through the region's small towns and cities. I was in Pakistan shortly after Nawaz Sharif test-fired its nuclear weapons, as well as during an outbreak of major sectarian conflict that affected the village and particular house in which I stayed, President Clinton's bombing of Khost, eastern Afghanistan, and on September 11th. On the occasion of the first event I was even accused of handing over a bag of cash that led to the assassination of Chitral's most infamous pro-Taliban mullah. These 'critical events' helped shape the nature of my fieldwork: they forged powerful bonds of trust and solidarity between my informants and myself. Intellectually they were interesting for what they taught me about how my friends dealt with accusations and counter-accusations of unfaithfulness, both to one another and to the moral values that animated their lives.

In Chitral, these moral values revolved especially around concerns regarding the centrality to distinctively Chitrali ways of being Muslim of compassion and sincerity (*ikhlas*), and having a 'heart that burns for others' (*hardi puluak)*. Focusing on the complex ways in which these concerns informed the everyday nature of moral life also required a consideration of Chitralis' own recognition of the importance that forms of lying (*changeik*) and duplicity played in their attempts to manage their relations with one another in the intimate setting of village life. Such forms of duplicity are locally referred to as 'being one thing on the surface, another thing on the inside' (*sura khur mula khur*). My informants often joked that more than any locally distinctive culture or 'moral code' it was Chitralis' ability to 'say one thing and do another' that defined their collective identity. As I explore below, this dimension of being a Chitrali was both a source of humourous comment and reflection yet it was also experienced by villagers in painful and difficult ways; regardless of the moral 'colour' (*rang*) that such practices of concealment were given in any particular context, it was absolutely necessary to maintaining village peace (*deho aman*).

Considerable energy was also invested in the social learning and transmission of being duplicitous. My Chitrali friends often asked me if I spoke a language called *thorkovitchivar*. According to them, this language is spoken by Chitrali people who live in a valley near to my main fieldwork site, Rowshan; yet it can also be learned by those living elsewhere. *Thorkovitchivar* was characterised not by a grammar or vocabulary that distinguished it from Khowar, they said: it was, rather, the capacity of a person to say the exact opposite of what he or she really felt or thought without letting on to the listener. Alongside being a good Muslim (*jam mussalman*), the ability to use such 'double-speech' was a dimensions of everyday life that required learning and perfection.

In the context of the events mentioned above I often worried that my being called a spy (*jasoos*) would jeopardise my fieldwork. By contrasts, my informants and those with whom I lived strategized about what would be the best course of action in the circumstances. The year in which I was accused of being behind a murder, for example, I was told to stay put: if I did so, people would see that I was not afraid and had nothing to hide. Equally importantly, my decision to stay and share their troubles would also suggest my sincerity (*mukhlis*) to the village. The timings of such accusations were interesting. They often came late on during my yearly visit to the village. Alternatively, after I had been away from the village for some time, I would often receive a letter saying that there were rumours circulating about my being a spy and I should return to the village in order to refute them as soon as possible. I gradually recognised such letters as being invitation for me to return to the village, rather than an attempt to eject me from its moral boundaries: through *return* I would make visible my honesty (*froski*), faithfulness (*wafadari*), and love (*muhabat*) for the village and its people.

After 2007, fieldwork in northern Pakistan became increasingly difficult, largely due to major armed conflict between militant groups linked to the Taliban and the Pakistan Army in the district of Swat, about a 3 h drive from parts of Chitral. As a result, I chose to conduct fieldwork in Afghanistan, a country I had been visiting with Chitral-based Afghan refugees since 1995.

I had known many of the people I began to work with in Afghanistan during my stays Chitral. Yet shifting fieldwork sites required me having to do more than

merely improve my knowledge Dari. Most visibly, I had to make subtle changes in what I wore during fieldwork: I switched my woollen Chitrali-made waistcoat for a multi-pocketed journalist-style outfit of the type preferred by the Northern Alliance yet regularly mocked by Chitralis as a sign of being backward. My friends in Afghanistan also schooled me in a whole new range of embodied attitudes and forms of discipline that they said were critical to my being able to conduct fieldwork safely in Afghanistan.

As in Chitral, simulation and dissimulation were critical both to fieldwork habits and to the lives of my informants. In Afghanistan I was told never to talk to people in taxis, never to travel alone, and to always lie about my location. In addition, when I was a guest in someone's house, I was told, even at the risk of insulting the host, that I should make a call with my mobile phone set to loudspeaker mode to a man 'known' – although not too well – giving my precise location and the name of my host. My hosts should know, I was told, that I was never alone. If in Chitral socially learned formed of duplicity were appropriately deployed in order to maintain village peace and smooth over complex inter-personal relations found within village, then for my Afghan informants they were held to be a necessary feature of the ways in which individuals inhabit, traverse and survive within a political fluid universe that is characterised by chronic levels of insecurity. Of course, for many Afghans, who have lived on the front-line (*khat-e awal*) of invading foreign armies and local insurgencies for over three decades, being flexible in terms of behaviour and political affiliation is a skill that has also been perfected and worked upon. In this context, villagers are required to work alongside the government by day and the insurgent by night (*ruz hokumat, shaw taliban*). Only in the light of day that follows the battle does demonstrating the authenticity of one's having adopted a particular position become truly critical, and even then often in only marginal ways.[1] In the context of a world shaped by such geo-political conflicts, many people chose to refer to such forms of agility and flexibility using the English term '*diplomacy*'. This is a skill held to require the careful deployment of a type of sensibility informed by politics (*siyasat*) rather than simple (*sadah*) affection and sincerity of the type so valued in Chitral.

There are significant political differences between Chitral and northern Afghanistan and these inform the varying nature of the forms of contradiction important to people's lives and identities, as well as the ways these are theorised and reflected upon by local people. In addition to its connections to their geo-political world, the sensibility of diplomacy is also connected to socio-economic activities of my Afghan informants. The Chitralis with whom I worked were largely small-scale farmers, civil service employees and NGO workers; many of my Afghan informants, by contrast, are small to medium scale traders, involved in the export, for example, of Pakistan cement and oranges to the former Soviet Republic of Tajikistan: they purchase these commodities through agents in Pakistan, transport them through Afghanistan, and then distribute them in the markets of post-Soviet Tajikistan.

[1] On the complexity of such identity formations in the context of Vietnam see Kwon (2010: 93).

Their work takes them across several international boundaries, one of which divides the post-Soviet Muslim-majority state of Tajikistan from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: two connected nation-states with starkly divergent modern political histories.

Traders seek to traverse and profit from the divided world they inhabit: this, they admit themselves, requires them to learn diverse diplomatic skills. These skills are often deeply embodied. A man, for example, must be able to switch from wearing Afghan clothing to Tajik fashions and do so in a persuasive fashion, something more difficult than it at first sight sounds. Being successful at such shifts, allows traders to avoid catching the attentions of Tajikistan's security officials who frequently ask them for bribes, or try to plant drugs on them. At the same time, traders are also required to learn languages spoken in the contexts across which they move, notably the form of Persian spoken in Tajikistan (Tajik), as well as Russian. Traders spend considerable time imparting these skills to their own business partners (*sharik*), frequently reminding them to 'be diplomatic', especially on occasions when tempers are lost as a result of the behaviour of untrustworthy if powerful clients. Being skilful in the arts of diplomacy is not always a strand of these peoples' lives that is hidden or concealed from their children at home in Afghanistan: youngsters are often give insights into the other lives of their fathers, who tell them of their exploits in Tajikistan nightclubs during the course of their trading missions.

The traders do not, however, simply valorise duplicity: being diplomatic is often registered by these men as a painful dimension of daily life that clashes both with the importance of being reputable to a merchant's fortunes in this and many other contexts, as well as with the signifcance that they say Islam places on honesty to being Muslim. Traders often assert, for example, that with one another their relations should be founded not on feigned forms of respect (*ta'rof*) but a commitment to shared humanity (*insaniyat*) and respect (*ihtiram*): between friends and partners there is no room for displays of *kalan-kari*, or arrogance and show – all should behave as 'good, correct, Muslims' (*khub sahi musulman*). Moral conversation between friends (*dostha*, *rafiqha*) should be honest (*drost*) and straightforward (*sadah*), rather than *diplomatic*. Accusations of arrogance – being showy – and engaging in acts of diplomacy, both inappropriate with friends, lead to arguments and physical fights, the decay of business partnerships (*sharik*), and to the ultimate insult of calling somebody 'not a good Muslim' (*khub musulman nist*).

Given this context, it is hardly unsurprising that my informants place a great deal of emphasis on my capacity to act both 'diplomatically', but also as a friend. They often make me pretend to be 'an Afghan' – of some type or another (often from Nuristan or the Panjshir valley); coming from one place or another (often from exile in Germany or the UK). One of the ways in which they do this is, without informing me, introducing people unknown to me as 'Jawed from Nuristan': speaking to me in Chitrali, they tell those with whom they are conversing (usually Dari-speakers) that we are speaking Nuristani. Having done so, they force upon me an 'ethical moment': should I laugh the prank off or let it run? Practically, of course, while the latter course of action is expected as a mark of friendship my companions also realise that it is impossible for me to pass as an Afghan, yet, if I try to do so, I will look like a buffoon.

Islam/Being Muslim

I have explored above the ways in which in two politically volatile settings people actively think about the ways in which their lives and identities are shaped by multiple forms of contradictions and ambiguities: these are dimensions of personhood and the presentation of self that are topics of reflection for Muslims in these two settings, as much as for anthropological treatments of them. My focus now is on the varying and contested ways in which my informants relate to me as a non-Muslim. I am interested in particular in what their reflections on this matter reveals about their moral evaluations of different forms of lying and deception, and how these articulate with their understandings of being Muslim.

Over the past decade, more anthropologists working with Muslims have reflected on the extent to which whether a fieldworker is Muslim or otherwise influences the richness of the ethnographic material gathered during fieldwork. They have also debated the extent to which non-Muslim anthropologists should play an active role in Islamic practices, including most especially prayer and worship in the mosque (compare Chap. 10 by Clarke, this volume). Perhaps the most interesting reflections on such concerns, however, move beyond questions of 'positionality' and, instead, problematises simplistic distinctions between the types of insights that are available to 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim' researchers. By exploring how anthropologists of Muslim background who do not think of themselves as believers experience definitional Islamic rituals (such as the *hajj*), scholars have raised wider theoretical issues about the adequacy of the category of belief for understanding the nature of religious experience (Hammoudi 2005).

Changing field sites also schooled me in new ways of interacting with people of Muslim background, alerting my attention to dimensions of my fieldwork practice in Chitral that I had learned when I first went there in 1995. One theme that runs across my fieldwork in both Chitral and Afghanistan concerns the ways in which my informants have reflected and acted in relationship to their understandings of my relationship to Islam. I have always conducted fieldwork saying I am a non-Muslim and have never participated in daily Islamic prayers. At the same time, I have also been expected by those with whom I work to be flexible in my understanding of what 'being Muslim' means.

My friends in Chitral were keen for me to adopt modes of comportment, behaviour and agency that displayed my 'sincerity'. While Chitralis talked about 'sincerity' as an affective disposition central to being Muslim, I was rarely encouraged to become a Muslim. The performance of sincerity according to local standards, however, was treated as something that I could achieve. During my time in Chitral I was often told, only half jokingly, that other than become a Muslim I was free to do anything I wished during my stay in the region. If I were to become a Muslim, my friends, both Sunni and Ismai'li, men and women, young and old, often joked, I would become, like all Muslims, a liar (*changatu*) and hypocrite (*munafiq*). One of the reasons I assume that I was instructed thus was because of the particular form taken by the Islamic tradition in Chitral: Chitralis are the adherents of two Islamic doctrinal clusters – Sunni and

Shi'a Ismai'li. Even entertaining thoughts about my potential conversion to Islam raised problematic questions concerning to which of the two doctrinal clusters I would be affiliated. Matters were made yet more complex because I lived in an Ismai'li household in a predominantly Sunni hamlet. In these circumstances, a sort of cross-village, unspoken consensus emerged amongst most if not all villagers who agreed that performing *da'wat* would raise divisive questions about faith and belief within the village; doing so was thus best avoided. In his chapter for this volume, Clarke explores how he was often invited to attend and perform rituals organised by the different Muslim groups with whom he worked. Eventually, however, it was the complexity he faced in managing this multiplicity that led him to withdraw his participation. By contrast, I was never encouraged to pretend that I was Muslim, pray or go to the village's Sunni mosques or Ismai'li *jama'at khana*s – to do so, it was recognised, would have raised uncomfortable questions in problematic and highly visible ways about Islam's multiplicity in the village.

The lack of formal invitations to become a Muslim, participate in Islamic rituals or even to merely enter religious spaces did not mean that I was simply interacted with as a non-Muslim, or somebody who existed outside of the village's moral universe. In some forms of public discourse and more often during conversations in the intimate spaces of village life – houses, orchards, and guest rooms in particular – I was told to desist from saying that I was a non-Muslim (*ghair muslulman*): if I did not pray, it was said that I embodied the forms of sentiment and loyalty to other villagers that were required of a Muslim. This assessment chimed with the emphasis that villagers placed on the importance of balanced emotions and good thoughts to being Muslim: warm sentiments, rather than carrying out Islamic prayers, villagers often said, made a person a 'proper Muslim'. Such forms of attitude and thought needed to be learned and demonstrated through the performance of ritualistic forms of behaviour that were not 'Islamic' in any straightforward sense yet were strongly influenced by local understandings of what being Muslim meant. Musical gatherings at which Sufi-influenced love songs were sung and impromptu debates about religious and spiritual matters staged in village orchards were the types of events in which a person's strivings to live a good Muslim life were demonstrated and evaluated: if I did not enter mosques, attend prayer circles or visit *jama't khanas*, I did participate in such gatherings.

Many in the village thought it important that I neither identified myself formally as a Muslim or a non-Muslim, even if, at the level of belief and ritual practice, my status as a non-Muslim was never questioned. This was especially the case in relationship to spaces and relations that implicated questions of gender. There were several houses in the village whose wives and daughters did not follow *purdah* in my presence and I was referred to as 'a sweet brother' (*shirin brar*), the Khowar term used to define a real as opposed to an adopted brother (*brar ganiru*). In these houses in particular the notion that I was a non-Muslim *tout court* was unacceptable: when I referred to myself as a *ghair musulman* the women would often remonstrate with me, either saying that 'Christians are also Muslims', or that in terms of my behaviour (*suluk*) I was as good a Muslim as many of the people they knew. My entering such houses raised critical issues to village people. At one level,

there is a great deal of conversation in everyday life concerning whether or not 'the neigbours' properly follow Islamic stipulations purdah. At another level, Chitral's complex system of status hierarchy also produces stereotypes about lower status families being less strict over matters of *purdah* and the honour of their women than the region's 'lordly' (*lalei*) families. In addition, differences between Sunni and Ismai'li Muslims are also often coded in relation to supposedly either the more morally lax or enviably modern forms of purdah. My complex relation to all of these intersecting dynamics – relating to village politics, regional status histories and hierarchies, and forms of sectarian identity formation – was an ever-present yet rarely openly talked about feature of my time in the village. On one day, for example, during a trip to the bazaar, a mullah told one of his students that he should not speak to me because I was a *kafir*, a comment overheard by a 14 year old boy from the house in which I stayed, who reported it back to those at home. As a result, all hell broke lose and one of the sisters in the house sent a message to the mullah via her younger brother: 'I'll piss on your beard you dirty *kafir* if I hear you saying something like that to my brother again'.

I have been struck by the contrasting ways in which my mobile Afghan trader friends in and beyond Afghanistan have addressed in contrasting ways my identity as a non-Muslim. I have been required less to strategize the performance of my own sincerity than to partake in the aesthetics of strategizing itself (cf. Gilsenan 1976; Argenti-Pillen 2007: 316). Islam and being Muslim in this context are not in any sense compartmentalised outside of the realm of strategy. At one level, it is usual for my Afghan friends to make jokes about my being a '*kafir*' or unbeliever, a term that was never used in my presence to refer to me during my stays in Chitral. At the same time, my Afghan friends sometimes introduce me as 'a Muslim' to other people, even when I tell them I would prefer if they did not.[2] They say that they do so, however, because it is safer for them and me; also, doing such 'makes other people happy' (*marduma khushan mekonad*). In January 2010, for example, a friend in his mid-30s who is related to a powerful mujahidin commander in Afghanistan, and who I have known for 10 years, asked one of his kinsmen, a former *mujahid* who fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and is now the bodyguard at a major bank, to show me around Kabul. 'I told him you were a Muslim to make him happy', my friend remarked as he went back to work, leaving me to ponder what to do in another of the many pre-fabricated 'ethical moments' that my informants often create for me. As I walked through the city with the gunman, he never asked me to join him in prayers or for confirmation of my being Muslim.

[2] A Springer anonymous reviewer misunderstood this point. She/he suggested that I pretended to be a Muslim in the field, and failed to ask questions about how this might effect the safety of the people I was with. By contrast, my interlocutors, without informing me, tell others that I am a Muslim, in the interest of my own safety, and theirs. This raises ethical issues of a different order than those that simply relate to how far my actions have implications for the safety of my interlocutors. They bring to light, rather, the ways in which ethical responsibility for any particular act always need to be understood in terms of the social relationships in which it was embedded, rather than as the outcome of an act of autonomous, individual agency (see Laidlaw 2010).

The dynamics involved in exchanges with people who have been 'mis-informed' that I am a Muslim suggests the importance of the aesthetics of being Muslim alongside direct invocations of truth, belief, intention and conviction. The *mujahid*, after all, never did ask me to join him in prayer. On another occasion, I was being driven in a friend's car between the northern cities of Mazar-Sharif and Kunduz: mid-way between the two cities, my friend decided to wash the car in the river at the town of Pul-i Khumri. There had been a demonstration earlier in the day by people from a nearby village who claimed that NATO soldiers had forcibly entered one of its houses, and the atmosphere was tense. My friend drove the car not into the shallows of the river, but deep into it – the car quickly filled with water, we abandoned it to the river, and looked for help. A truck driver approached, offering to retrieve the car with a tow rope, and asked my friend who I was: 'He's our friend', he replied, 'a convert to Islam from England': 'really', said the truck driver, 'there was a Russian who lived here, who converted to Islam, and took a wife: it was only then that he was killed'.

My interlocutors both assess that putting me in such predicaments is safer for us all, but, simultaneously, also good fun. Such strategies take different forms in the context of long-term social relations, however. I spent the summer of 2010, for example, travelling around the northern Afghan province of Badakhshan, mostly with a former mujahidin commander who is now an MP in Afghanistan's parliament in Kabul. I have known the MP's family since first going to Chitral. Most of this man's public addresses during his election campaign took place in mosques. I hesitated from entering the mosques to listen to these speeches, and, instead, stood outside of the mosque or sat in one of the cars and waited for the men to return. On several occasions, however, the MP told me to join him; on one occasion announcing to the hundreds of men gathered in the mosque while looking in my direction: 'you are fasting and therefore a Muslim, why should you not join us in the mosque' (*ruza megiri, musalman asti, chera masjid na meyoyi*?).[3]

I spent most of my time during this period of fieldwork with the MP's bodyguards – the mussalah. I mostly slept on the roof of the MP's house with the core of ten or so of these men. All were one-time mujahidin fighters, yet their past allegiances had not only been to the MP with whom they now worked, or, indeed, the faction of the mujahidin with which he was associated. Two or three had fought with the Taliban, although said they did so because they were living in Kabul at the time had few other choices open to them than to fight alongside the Taliban. During the course of daily conversation (*gap*) that took both more serious (*jidi*) and playful-like (*gap-i azad*) forms: the *mussalla* spent a great deal of time cajoling me to say the *kalima*, or *shahada* – the Islamic statement of faith, something that I always refused to do. It was Ramadan, however, and I was fasting for entirely practical

[3] A one-time supporter of the pro-Soviet 1980s government of Dr Najibullah, who was serving as the personal secretary of the former jihadi MP, appeared to be more worried about my visiting mosques than the Islamist politicians for whom he worked: he advised me to stay out of the mosques, the course of action that subsequently followed with some degree of relief.

reasons: there was a constant stream of visitors in the guest house and a quite space in which to eat was hard to come by; the one man who did offer to take me to eat melons in a nearby field, moreover, was a known heroin-user whom one of the other men in the group has already threatened to 'beat' having discovered him using mouth tobacco during daylight hours.

My decision to fast and also to wear Afghan clothes prompted the bodyguards to ask questions about my inner convictions and beliefs (*aqaidah*). Did I wear Afghan clothes in London as in Badakhshan, they asked, on saying not, one young man in his mid twenties who had recently been thrown out of the police force for shooting a woman he had been informed by other villagers was a prostitute, told me that I had become a lizard like an Afghan.[4] Why fast, they also asked, if I did not recite the *kalima*? One man who had fought with the Taliban during their period of rule, told me that it was a sin (*gunha*) to fast without professing internal conviction (*aqaida*) both to God and Islam. My fasting was seen, if anything, by these men as being more problematic than it was respectful: it illuminated rather than concealed my lack of inner conviction towards Islamic teachings, rituals and practices.

If I was treated as a *kafir* in some respects, in other contexts my position was conceived of by my interlocutors in considerably more complex terms. As my departure date came closer and discussion concerning the dangers of my being stopped by Taliban insurgents on the road to the border with Tajikistan heightened in tempo, for example, the men all agreed that it would be a great shame if I were to be martyred during my journey: unmarried, my martyrdom (*shahidat*) would be less sweet (*shirin*) than if had I left the world with a wife and children.

Accusations of hypocrisy shot around the commander's house and compound during my time there, perhaps because during the month of Ramadan attention to details of personal and public life are more exaggerated than usual. On one day, for example, the bodyguards, myself and one of the MP's brothers went on a 5 h jeep drive up-valley in order to go fishing and have a swim. The day trip passed largely without event; when we returned to the home, however, the MP's brother and some of his bodyguards discussed with me how 'it had turned out' that one of our companions – who had otherwise been tirelessly working to serve the hundreds of guests descending on the MPs house on a daily basis – was a *kafir*: he had been gulping water, they said, while diving in the river: 'Even you are a better Muslim than these six-coloured (*shash ranga*) people', one of our fellow swimmers commented.

As Morgan Clarke argues in this volume, new forms of sociality, especially those on the internet, mean that informants now often have direct access to the intimate lives of ethnographers. This raises anxieties among anthropologists working in Muslim societies concerning whether as people in the locales in which they

[4] Clothing, indeed, is widely recognised by many in the country as an important dimension of the political strategies of Afghan politicians. The MPs and his advisors often discussed where posters that pictured him in a suit and tie should be displayed, and where those of him dressed in Afghan clothes and *mujahid* cap be placed: the former being posted in villages with significant populations of both Ismai'li Muslims and past supporters of the People's Democractic Party of Afghanistan, and the latter sent to valleys whose inhabitants had largely supported the *mujahidin*.

work gain access to photos on the web that display very different types of self from those enacted by ethnographers during fieldwork, informants will consider the behaviour of anthropologists as being hypocritical. It is now, moreover, normal for informants to examine samples of what anthropologists write before giving them fieldwork access; something no doubt that has been heightened by the pervasive Islamophobia of the last decade, as well as the role of security services working within Muslim communities. Yet even in the era preceding the advent of social networking sites our informants were aware of the performative nature of fieldwork and the extent to which all modes of presenting the self are in some way or other calculated. The people with whom we work have their own complex and multi-layered forms of behaviour: sometimes they judge contradictory forms of thought and behaviour in terms of its hypocrisy, and Islamic ideas of what constitutes hypocritical behaviour; on other occasions, they openly reflect on the painful and troubling dimensions of their own lives that appear as being perilously close to the domain of duplicity. In yet more circumstances, certain forms of duplicity might even be validated in relationship to moral projects of a higher order, such, for example, as the maintenance of village peace in Chitral or the protection of the 'sacred guest' in Badakhshan.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to reflect on the complexities of undertaking ethnographic fieldwork with Muslims in northern Pakistan and Afghanistan before and after the 'war on terror'. On the one hand, as in many other contexts – Muslim and non-Muslim, characterised by their political fluidity, flux and internal cultural heterogeneity – one of my key concerns in fieldwork has been to understand how people adapt to changing circumstances and contexts, and also often encourage me to act likewise. On the other, in the context of a world in which Islamic movements and authorities increasingly emphasise the need for internal coherence, commitment and even homogeneity, my interlocutors also think and reflect a great deal on the flexibility of their daily lives. In particular, they are concerned by questions concerning where the boundary between flexibility and duplicity lies. A growing body of anthropological work seeks to emphasise the contradictions that exist in the everyday lives of Muslims, including, even, those who might profess to be 'reformists' or 'piety-minded'. In doing so, these studies add nuance to theoretically driven accounts that emphasise the capacity of Muslims to fashion themselves through particular practices according to Islamic teachings. This chapter has sought to contribute to this body of work by showing how people in the two connected, yet in many ways very different, Muslim societies in which I have worked reflect on the contradictions of their own existences, assessing the ways in which these are fed by the politically divided world in which they inhabit, and the heterogeneous nature of its Islamic tradition.

I also aim to have contributed to an emerging discussion about some of the specific issues faced by anthropologists working in Muslim societies over the past decade. Anthropologists have debated the extent to which it is ethically appropriate for non-Muslim fieldworkers to take part in Islamic rituals. They have asked how far anthropologists should actively seek to contribute to public debates about Muslim identity, radicalisation, and terror networks, asking what insights, if any, ethnographic material offers into these dimensions of Muslim life. There are fewer attempts, however, to explore the specific ethical dilemmas faced by anthropologists conducting fieldwork in Muslim societies at the heart of the 'war-on-terror' and its aftermath. In many respects, these are similar to those addressed by anthropologists conducting fieldwork in other conflict settings, be they Muslim or otherwise. Yet the extent to which the fieldworker's relationship to Islam – be he/she Muslim or otherwise – is a pervasive if not distinctive dimension of such fieldwork encounters. Anthropologists working with Muslims are often required to profess or disavow their commitment to Islam. In addition, they are also frequently asked to express attitudes about Islam. Yet fieldwork also renders visible the flexibility and openness of the category of being Muslim itself. For some of my informants in Chitral, the notion that I was anything but a Muslim 'at heart' was if not 'unthinkable' then distasteful.[5] For others in Afghanistan, my being a *kafir* who does not pray did not stop my being placed in situations where I was expected to act 'as if' I were a pious Muslim. In both contexts, I constantly found myself having to face ever-changing 'ethical moments' that I was required to resolve, both with my own safety and that of my informants in mind. This required the habituated making of judgements in particular circumstances rather than conscious reflection on ethical practices and rules (Lambek 1997). While reflecting on forms of duplicity and lying is inevitably uncomfortable, it is important: doing so reveals the importance of forms of moral reasoning to both being Muslim and the ability for anthropologists – Muslim and otherwise – to work with and seek to understand people of Muslim background.

More theoretically, is 'duplicity' the best collective term that we have to glossing the forms of concealment explored in this chapter? Theoretical fashions might suggest that it is performance or mimesis with which the chapter has been principally concerned. Yet whilst this is no doubt part of what I have been exploring, the ways in which my informants and I have made calculated decisions about acts of self-presentation suggests that recognition must also be given to the specific moments at which people 'plump for' particular ways of behaving, acting and speaking that may convey and conceal different things. Another obvious set of terms to refer to the forms of choice-making about self-presentations that I am thinking of include lying, bullshitting and hypocrisy. Lying, however, is too closely associated with a simplistic conception of truth to be of use to anthropologists as an

[5] On the concept of the 'unthought' in the Islamic tradition, see Arkoun (2002).

epistemological category. Bullshitting, at first sight, looks to be a much more attractive concept. According to Harry Frankfurt, bullshitting is not concerned with the truth; it may, indeed, reflect an attitude of total scepticism to the very idea truth. Such scepticism is no doubt important in certain strains of anthropological thought. Bullshitting, moreover, is also deeply aesthetic (Americans talk of bullshit *artists*, in the United Kingdom of piss artists) rendering it closer to existing anthropological accounts of duplicity's aesthetics. Yet bullshitting also involves people expounding on topics about which they know nothing – talking *nonsense* about the nature of human life in places, contexts, and eras about which they knew little: it is this that makes it a problematic concept to work with for professional anthropologists.

Finally, then, does hypocrisy offer any potentials as an epistemic category for anthropology, or is it entirely unhelpful as a conceptual category given its obvious association with acts of moral judgement making? Judith Shklar argued that liberalism with its emphasis on 'political principles and loyalties' raises 'moral and political expectations' and leads to 'endless accusations of hypocrisy' (Shklar 1984: 70). It is anti-hypocrisy, as much as hypocrisy itself, Shklar argued, that is a moral vice: anti-hypocrisy closes down debate by deploying a 'language of distrust that uses threats rather than arguments' (ibid.: 63). As a result, little space is left for analyzing forms of duplicitous behaviour that are central to attempts to be moral without being accused of promoting immorality. As Shklar argues, this is a regrettable state of affairs:

Does equality not have more to gain from a flexible attitude to all roles, to easy transitions from role to role, and to a multiplicity of role for each citizen? Why not consider a possibly hypocritical appreciation of all legitimate roles, types, and conditions? Hypocrisy . . . may be indispensable if we are ever going to fully accept human diversity in all its individual manifestations.' (Shklar 1984: 77).

In his recent book *Political Hypocrisy*, the political philosopher David Runciman is more open to what the anti-hypocrites have to say about hypocrisy than Shklar who, he suggests, depicts them as endlessly seeking out hypocrisy in all the forms of multi-layered behaviour they see around them. One well-known anti-hypocrite, George Orwell, after all, was a book reviewer – a profession that, as he himself reflected on, requires a healthy dose of hypocrisy if to be done well. Orwell and other anti-hypocrites recognised that hypocritical behaviour manifests itself at varying levels and grades, varyingly evident in different events, professions, and eras. Even Orwell and other anti-hypocrites distinguished between first and second order hypocrisy (hypocrites who were just hypocritical and anti-hypocrites who were also hypocritical), hypocrites who were and were not self-aware and simulation (concealment) and dissimulation (actively putting false information into the public domain) (Runciman 2008: 86). There is nothing inherent about the morality of these different types of hypocrisy. At first sight, simulation appears as less as a vice than dissimulation: it requires mere concealment as opposed to active misinformation. According to Francis Bacon, however, it is the degree to which either form of hypocrisy becomes *habitual* that is problematic, rather than the act of hypocrisy per se, on the one hand, a habitual simulator might lose the openness of mind that Bacon saw as being central to good moral character, on the other, the occasional act

of dissimulation might well add an invigorating element of surprise to public life. F. G. Bailey wrote, indeed, of Bacon's adage 'a mixture of a lie doth ever add pleasure', himself arguing that 'deceit and fictions are Max Weber's magic – creativity, imagination, fantasy, ingenuity, charisma (Bailey 1991: 126).

Ultimately, of course, hypocrisy's public status as a moral sin means that to use it as a label to refer to the forms of duplicity we have encountered during the course of this paper will inevitable result in misunderstanding and conflict. The complex range of terms and concepts used by our informants to refer to and register a multiplicity of practices and ideas of duplicity that are important in their everyday lives are unhelpfully glossed as being forms of 'hypocrisy', lying or duplicity. My aim in this chapter, then, has not been to reclaim hypocrisy from the moralists, but to demonstrate how debates about hypocrisy and duplicity in political and moral philosophy might raise anthropological awareness of the internally differentiated grammars of duplicity that we encounter and ourselves come to learn in the field. Philosophical reflections on lying and hypocrisy offer a unique window into the study of religion's relationship to morality, and one that reveals different strands of human thought and endeavour than the head-on attempts to be 'virtuous' that so much recent work has focused upon.

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Chapter 12
Afterword: De-exceptionalising Islam

Simon Coleman

Introduction

One day in January 2009, almost exactly 2 years before I sat down to write this piece, I was staying with some Nigerian friends in their apartment in a suburb of Lagos. Leaning over the small balcony attached to the apartment, I looked out across the street towards my friends' church, run by the Pentecostal 'Redeemed Christian Church of God', and close enough to be reached after a minute or two of dodging one's way across the congested street and busy market stalls. The evident proximity of their congregation was clearly important to my friends, and it also provided a powerful expression of the RCCG's successful policy of urban expansion. And yet, merely by shifting my gaze slightly to look at the buildings situated on the other side of the street, I found myself noticing another striking feature of the local city space: a large mosque, placed almost directly opposite the RCCG building. Later on, after night fell and most of the road was plunged into darkness, light began to stream through the windows of the church, and the hypnotic murmur of Christian hymns, sung over and over again as part of an all-night vigil, drifted through the local soundscape. But a few hours later, after the vigil had finally ended, a first call to prayer for the day was heard in the street, this time emanating from the mosque.

Such a scene – and such an array of sounds – are unremarkable in themselves, even if they take on particular resonances in a country where civic and political discourse are marked by ever-shifting clashes, confluences and accommodations between Christians, Muslims and other religious groups. However, the memory of that day came back to me as I read the chapters of this book because it expresses something of the editors' call to take note of the conjoined invocation and diffusion of religious adherence and practice. So, thinking again of the ethnographic frame afforded by the view from my friends' balcony, 'Islam' could no doubt be found in the mosque, but it might also be celebrated, challenged, reinvented or downplayed

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3_12,

in the market-place below, indeed even in the church across from the mosque or in the apartment owned by my Pentecostal friends. Different architectures, temporalities, transactions might all have contributed to the crafting of Islam as boundary but also as interface, shifting between presence and absence within any of the social spaces visible from the apartment.

If the theoretical and ethnographic 'gaze' directed towards Islam is therefore sometimes more appropriately rendered as a glance (in the sense of a perspective that must also at the same time comprehend other views), contributors to this volume ask us to think more carefully about what adherence to the social scientific study of Islam, as well as to the religion itself, might imply. Morgan Clarke reminds us in his chapter that the anthropology of Islam remains a 'contested' project. In their introduction, Magnus Marsden and Konstantinos Retsikas ultimately reject both Abdul Hamid El-Zein's (1977) positing of the existence of 'many Islams' and Talal Asad's (1986) later focus on the idea of a unified discursive tradition; rather, they come down in favour of an approach that examines how, where and why connections and disconnections might be made in relation to – but also in constituting – an Islam that can be characterized as 'immanent'. In comparison with either El-Zein or Asad, this is an approach that emphasizes the importance of observing empirical processes of conscious or unconscious making or masking, as well as forms of assembly and disassembly that emerge from the dynamic constitution and reconstitution of arenas of social life. Yet, we might briefly note some of the similarities as well as the differences evident in the various approaches posited above.

El-Zein's rootedness in a broadly Lévi-Straussean, structuralist framework (see Eickelman 1981:363–4) is very much a product of its time, but – like the present volume – complicates distinctions between elite and folk Islam, while stressing the need to focus on what he refers to as 'native models'. Intriguingly, also, both El-Zein and Marsden-Retsikas deploy a common vocabulary of 'articulation', 'system' and 'immanence', albeit with very different implications. For El-Zein, Islam, religion, economy and so on are to be seen as 'articulations of structural relations, and. . .the outcome of these relations' (1977:251). In turn, a relational logic can be discerned in the system of religious symbols associated with Islam – even as this system can be explored at depth from any point, since 'the logic of such a system, the logic of culture, is immanent within the content and does not exist without it' (ibid.). This approach is invoked to suggest an alternative to what El-Zein sees (ibid.:230) as a Geertzean tendency to emphasise how the creation of symbols serves to fix meanings in objectified forms. It also implies, in a way at least distantly reminiscent of Marsden and Retsikas, that investigator and informant occupy a level field of analysis. However, whereas for El-Zein this assumption is justified because ethnographer and informant share a cultural and cognitive 'logic' beyond their conscious control, anthropologists writing now, over 30 years later, are more attuned to processes of mutual enactment, entanglement and performance of religious and analytical discourses. Thus for Marsden and Retsikas 'systematicity' constitutes not a structuralist frame but a form of action, a kind of order*ing* rather than a drawing on order, involving the dynamic tracing of connections and disconnections. Such action is performed 'by people of Muslim

background' (p. 1), where whatever is seen as the religious can be evinced but also eclipsed, depending on situation and at least sometimes on strategy.[1]

So 'articulations' in the present volume involve not structural relations but processes of assembly and disassembly, formed and reformed out of what we might see as the shifting sedimentations of social life. If there are seemingly 'binary' oppositions at work here between evoking and ignoring, the conscious and the unconscious, they are ones that actually explore a distinctly messy 'logic' of embodied action that allows for – indeed requires – what the editors call 'a whole range of positions between these extremes' (p. 25); furthermore, they allow for comparison with the work (rather than with the cognitive make-up) of anthropologists, who are also engaged in constructive processes, involving both the privileging and bypassing of analytical relations. A by-product of this approach is that while El-Zein's argument aims at creating a distinction between theological and anthropological approaches to Islam, Marsden and Retsikas are suggesting a way of incorporating theologizing into their model of observing the making of religious discourse.

While El-Zein's approach actually aims to combine structuralism with a 'democratizing,' 'fragmenting' approach to the study of Islam(s), Marsden and Retsikas point to the more centripetal orientation to Asad's analysis – one where the foundational role of texts and traditions of interpretation serves to establish relations of discursive continuity and give rise to particular formations of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Asad's interest in the creation of the subject anticipates some of the more recent work on Islam carried out by Hirschkind and Mahmood,[2] but also links with the current volume's interest in notions of practice. At the same time, in emphasizing the contingencies of performance as well as the salience of broadening out the contexts through which we examine action relating to Islam, Marsden and Retsikas challenge Asad's tendency to move towards tropes of 'coherence' and 'core' in his analytical framework. Islam 'immanent' can thus become Islam 'un-expected.' This point is further illustrated by Johan Rasanayagam's discussion in this volume of how we might avoid approaching Islam as the primary object of research, partly on the grounds that it is also worth focussing on what makes diverse practices of Muslims and non-Muslims in a particular locality mutually intelligible.[3] As Rasanayagam points out, such 'intelligibility' does not need to involve common

[1] We might also ask whether 'Islam' needs to be seen as instanciated by those who self-identify as Muslims, but that can be a debate for another time.

[2] Though deploying a rather different attitude towards agency.

[3] Rasanayagam also points to the resonances between his stance on intelligibility and that of Michael Carrithers, whom he describes as presenting sociality as the innate propensity of human beings to interpret the speech and actions of others as 'unfolding stories' (Carrithers 1992). I would also point to the parallels between the more general theoretical orientation of the present volume and Carrithers's presentation of 'rhetoric culture' as perceiving social life as moving through messy and mutual action and reaction, drawing on cultural schemas that are plastic and mutable, the material of constant symbolic play (2008:161–2; see also Coleman forthcoming, in a special issue of *Ethnos* edited by Andreas Bandak and Jonas Adelin Jørgensen that also reflects on issues of foregrounding and backgrounding in 'religious' contexts).

interpretations, and can go beyond cognitive reasoning into the qualities of subjective experience. Furthermore, as the editors note, a broadening of analytical frame in relation to that evident in Asad's work is also evident in Judith Scheele's chapter, which shows how the making of sacred genealogical connections in Central Sahara is inflected by new forms of difference and value, for instance those related to ideas of citizenship and the nation-state.

The approach suggested by Marsden and Retsikas, located more within a theoretical lens of Deleuze and Guattari alongside Latour rather than, say, of Lévi-Strauss or Foucault, is one that leads us to reflect on an Islam that is 'unbound' as well as immanent. If, as they state, 'Islam's immanence registers itself in the sense of always already being there' (p. 13 fn. 43), one of the productive ambiguities of this sentence relates to where we should locate 'there'. Systematicity and articulation invoke categories of religion, politics, culture that have no obvious 'outsides or insides,' but that can also work at very different scales of analysis. Marsden and Retsikas discuss this point in relation to Edward Simpson's chapter on the operations of the 'spirit of patriarchy' in Western India, where mobile trajectories of self-formation operate through 'expansive' space, as sons define themselves in relation to forms of authority that go beyond the 'purely' Islamic. Or again, we see scale operating in a different way in Morgan Clarke's discussion of 'multiplicity' in Beirut. Clarke's piece takes us from the intimacy of a lodge into Islamic spaces of increasing size – spaces that interpenetrate but also conflict with each other in their vision of Islamic practice and commitment.[4] The ethnographic 'contentions' over appropriate conduct that he encounters illustrate the mutually implicated and morally freighted constructions of Islam by ethnographer and informants.

Arguably, issues of scale are further evident in chapters that document imagined Muslim worlds constituted in relation to 'universal' frameworks of belonging. Thus, for example, Scheele's tracing of Shurafâ as cosmopolitans in the central Sahara demonstrates how references to very wide frameworks of Islamic history, evident in documents and oral accounts, are integral to local notions of difference and value, while Kai Kresse explores what it might mean for coastal Muslims in postcolonial Kenya to live out their everyday lives while having the 'wider world' in mind. I am also reminded here of an earlier work on Islam, John Bowen's *Muslims through Discourse* (1993), where he uses the close study of Muslim society in highland Sumatra to show how practitioners situated in local settings understand themselves to be part of a wider tradition and public sphere of religious adherence. Or we might even think of Anna Tsings's *Friction* (2005), where she analyzes the construction and effectiveness of 'universals' within historical conjunctures.

One of the implications of this argument for an 'immanent' Islam is that it not only encourages us to reconsider the scales and settings in which Islam is invoked and embodied, but also prompts us to redraw the wider analytical and ethnographic landscape in which we locate our studies. Indeed, a stated aim of this volume is

[4] Though in invoking scale, we should not always assume that a model of ever greater encompassment is the culturally appropriate one.

"to explore. . .Islam's place in old 'culture areas' from new perspectives, as well as spaces of Muslim-life that are less central to the anthropology of Islam" (Marsden & Retsikas p. 17). More implicit in the volume, but still very much there, I think, is an argument about the unstable *temporal* instanciations of religion, the sense that we need to acknowledge the unevenly chronic character to the expression of what is deemed (by informant or analyst) to be 'Islamic,' and certainly to go beyond assuming that we can rely on observations of regular, marked, ritual action. An obvious parallel here is with the notion of 'living' or 'lived' religion, much deployed in religious studies (e.g. McGuire 2008) and focusing on how religious dimensions form part of wider 'life-worlds', but unlike such a notion it also attempts to comprehend how religious is constructed in more formal ways as well.[5] These processes are inherent in strategic elements of foregrounding and backgrounding, but can also be seen in some of the ways we are invited in this book to trace the trajectory of people's lives. Thus Simpson juxtaposes ideologies of patriarchal genealogy with individual cases where its implications are teased out in personal ways. As Simpson points out, what occurs in his chapter is 'something far more subtle than a schematic succession of fathers and sons dragging their feet in the sands of time.' Genealogical 'passage' is far from straightforward, marked by rupture and tension, even if in one remarkable example that Simpson explores, his informant Hameed's 'manic travel' eventually leads to a scene where the ethnographer visits his friend finally settled at work, surrounded by his sons, and feels moved to observe: 'It felt, quite literally and rather uncannily, as if Hameed had become his father.'

Away from Exceptionalism?

The rendering both immanent and unbound of Islam helps us to disrupt the ultimately static assumptions about the workings of culture that lie behind the notion of Islam as 'blueprint for social life.' Here we might take special note of Matthew Carey's contribution to this volume, where we see how Islam can be both widely 'shared' within Berber-speaking villages in the High Atlas, and yet – partly as a consequence of its very diffusion – must be excluded from certain political registers. Or we might observe how Chris Hann's piece on a population in Turkic-speaking Central Asia examines the complex relations of boundary-marking and accommodation between Muslim ritual and consumer activity. A wider implication of challenging the 'blueprint' model, alongside the more general unbounding of Islam, might also involve questioning the very basis on which the religious exceptionalism of Islam among world religions (at least as constructed by social scientists) seems to rest.

[5] Marsden points out that Mahmood focuses almost exclusively on what her informants say and do in mosques and at prayer gatherings, rarely, if at all, describing their lives in the workplace, on the street, or even at play (see also Schielke 2010).

In fact, this point also seems to be implied by the theoretical framework adopted by the book. After all, the theoretical language of, say, assembly and disassembly, need not be applied only to Islam, and rather reflects a broader orientation towards the workings – and makings – of both the cultural and the social.

The point here is not to argue, in procrustean fashion, that, far from being irredeemably 'Other', Islam actually turns out to be just like other world religions, such as Christianity. This kind of claim – a kind of Orientalism replaced by a form of intellectual McDonaldization – would combine ethnographic naivety with a contradiction of this volume's message concerning Islam's 'immanent' resistance to being separated out into an autonomous realm of belief and action. However, such reflections should lead us to a question raised about the anthropology of any world religion, once we start to worry at 'exceptionalisms' or 'essentialisms': what is actually gained by confining our theoretical questions and comparisons to cases relating to any single religion? This issue is raised forcefully by Chris Hann (2007:402) in relation to the burgeoning anthropology of Christianity, where he criticizes the idealism behind calls to explore the 'cultural logic' of the religion, and indeed questions (ibid.:406) Joel Robbins's attempt (2003) to present the anthropology of Islam as exemplary for that of Christianity. Hann summarizes Robbins's approach as stating that 'similar progress [to that made on Islam] might be made with Christianity if all those working on Christian groups were to prioritize the theme of religion and engage systematically with each others' work' (Hann 2007:406). By ways of contrast, Hann challenges the very idea of demarcating one world religion as a suitable domain for comparison, and argues instead for an approach that proceeds on the basis of identifying analytical problems (such as Christian and non-Christian ideas of transcendence, Catholic versus Muslim notions of mediation, and so on). In some respects, we already see this approach played out in the present volume. For instance Retsikas invokes the work of Thomas Csordas (1994) on charismatic Catholicism in juxtaposing Charismatic and experiences of the immanent presence of the divine. Gabriele vom Bruck's invocation of David Freedberg's *The Power of Images,* (1989) in her discussion of photographic representations of women also opens a window to the kind of comparative observations that Freedberg himself makes.

We might see Hann's approach as protesting against the 'foregrounding' of any world religion (considered autonomously and *in toto*) by anthropologists. We might also perhaps speculate as to whether we are seeing the remnants of a deeper, anthropological fault-line here, between broadly 'social' and broadly 'cultural' approaches to the discipline, represented by British and American anthropologists respectively. That said, there is surely much to be said for a position that is wary of searching for a 'cultural logic' inherent in any widely diffused religion – even if the phrase has different implications than those intended by El-Zein. We also need to be wary of introducing a new and problematic form of holism into our characterizations of world religions, implying that we might somehow be able to 'encompass' all possible manifestations of a religion through juxtaposing multiple 'mini-'versions of it. Yet, we might take Robbins's suggestion in another way through focusing on his call for an anthropology of Christianity 'for itself.'

Here, in my view, attention is drawn to the social and intellectual organization of our discipline in a way that can be extended to examining the study of Islam or any other religion. The basic point is not to confuse 'the anthropology of' any religion with manifestations of the religion itself (even though the two can at times be mutually implicated). The former is of course likely to be an expression of wider institutional influences and theoretical interests at any given time, constituted through academic networks and quoting circles that, it is to be hoped, will generate comparative insights. Or, to put it more bluntly, internal comparisons across 'Christian' or 'Muslim' case-studies are going to occur, whether we like it or not. Furthermore, there is genuine value in looking at how seemingly common theological texts, ritual practices, concepts and so on move across and are reinstantiated by (sometimes transnational) networks of religious believers. In this sense, the anthropologies of Islam or of Christianity can become one – but importantly only one – of any number of possible comparative frames for anthropologists to emphasise in their analyses of ethnographic data. We have already seen how the making of genealogical connections is played out rather differently in Scheele's and Simpson's chapters, even as both show how genealogies create ways to establish spiritual links as well as distinctions at various scales of operation. It seems to me that much is indeed gained by the juxtaposition of both chapters in the same volume, as well as by the detailed consideration of what 'genealogy' means in relation to Muslim texts and tradition.

If it can be useful to deploy anthropologies of Islam, Christianity or any other world religion (albeit with care), it can also be instructive to reflect on the genealogies of the quoting circles being produced. In this sense, there seems to be agreement that the anthropology of Islam ('for' itself), if perceived as 'originating' with El-Zein's article, is of an older vintage than the anthropology of Christianity.[6] We might say that while anthropologists saw the value some decades ago of debating the value of a 'blue-print' model of Islam, in other words of foregrounding the idea of socially and politically all-encompassing Muslim societies for analytical purposes, many of those scholars who encountered Christianity in the field chose to put this particular religion into the analytical and observational background, often to see it as Western-inflected and often politically dubious 'noise' in relation to fieldwork on more suitably ethnographic objects. Thus Fenella Cannell (2006:4) refers to the way Christianity has functioned as the 'repressed' of anthropology, given that it has been, for such a long time, 'a religion whose very proximity has hitherto rendered it only imperfectly perceptible' (ibid.:6). Viewed in these terms, the apparent 'difference' from secular, Euro-American assumptions that is represented by Islam has perhaps made it all too visible an ethnographic topic. A visual metaphor also pervades the title Dan Varisco's *Islam Obscured* (2005), where he

[6] This is not to say of course, that anthropologists did not study cultural arenas relevant to Christianity before the last few decades, but it is to state that the conscious development of the sub-field is barely a decade old.

juxtaposes four anthropology texts on Muslim contexts[7] and argues that each constructs Islam in misleadingly unified, essentialized ways. We thus come back to an argument for the acknowledgement of multiple 'Islams,' though from a very different intellectual standpoint from that of El-Zein.

An implication of what Cannell is saying is that Christianity as a world religion has a special relationship to anthropology, that we can talk of the 'Christianity of anthropology' as well as the 'anthropology of Christianity' (see also Cannell 2005). This is of course to assert a different kind of exceptionalism for this particular world religion: not the distancing one (in relation to the secular West) of a 'blueprint' but rather one of privileged yet ambivalent proximity, established through genealogical connection. Indeed, the question arises as to whether many of our concerns in studying other religions – looking for relations to the secular and the 'modern', examining forms of subjectivity, even perhaps deploying of a vocabulary of 'immanence' – is drawing on a vocabulary ultimately derived from Christian roots.[8]

For these reasons, then, we cannot see the anthropology of Christianity as simply 'equivalent' to that of Islam: their genealogical positions – and more especially those of their religions – have indeed been very different in relation to the emergence and development of the discipline. Yet, at the same time, the anthropologies of Islam and Christianity do emerge from the same discipline, and we must acknowledge common disciplinary traces in both. I have already mentioned the extent to which current understandings of culture and the social resonate well with a vocabulary of assembly and disassembly. There are other commonalities, however, and I wish to mention some of these below.

I begin with a return to Kresse's introduction to his contribution to this book, and his reference to a colleague's complaint that 'there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam' (Schielke 2010:2). The point here, very much in line with Marsden and Retsikas's position, is that an over-zealous focus on the specifically religious in the Muslim world excludes the acknowledgement of other frames of reference that are also important in the conduct of everyday life. Kresse notes the resonance between his argument and Ben Soares and Filippo Osella's call for a new paradigm in the study of politics in Muslim contexts, that of *Islam mondaine*, (Osella and Soares 2009:11), where religion is not privileged over other aspects of

[7] Two are by Western anthropologists: *Islam Observed* (Geertz 1971) and *Muslim Society* (Gellner 1980). Two are by Muslim scholars: *Beyond the Veil* (Mernissi 1975) and *Discovering Islam* (Ahmed 1988).

[8] Some current anthropological debates make explicit their connections with specific theological debate: in this book, for instance, Simpson refers to the 'rupture' inherent in the workings of the patriarchal relations that he studies, but this has very different implications to the use of the term by both anthropologists and others considering the current theoretical significance of Pauline visions of social change to the study of Christian contexts (e.g. Engelke and Robbins 2010). At the same time, it is important to appreciate the changing political economy and institutional landscape of anthropology itself, and to appreciate that new intellectual pathways are being created for the discipline by scholars who would not readily associate themselves with Christian intellectual genealogies.

the experience of the world. The irony here is that anthropologists, of all people, are being accused of not taking 'context' into account, but if so it is an irony that can at times also be applied to the current anthropological study of Christianity. Let me give a brief example. At a recent workshop held at the American Anthropological Association meetings I and a number of other anthropologists were invited to contribute to an open forum dedicated to the issue of fieldwork within broadly evangelical contexts.[9] I learned much from the discussion, but one of the things that struck me forcibly was how much of our conversation focused on marked religious activities, rather other aspects of the lives of believers, such as going to work, engaging in apparently 'secular' leisure, and so on.

So in my view there is decidedly too much evangelicalism even in the anthropology of evangelicalism. Furthermore, as Hann and others have pointed out (Hann 2007; Bialecki et al. 2008:1152), much of the sub-field of the anthropology of Christianity has hitherto been dominated by studies of such groups. There are of course good reasons for this development. Evangelicals are not only highly visible religionists (occupying mission fields as well as public spheres of many societies, even sometimes in the West), they have also proved highly convenient vehicles for the discussion of themes currently occupying the anthropological world at large, such as the globalization of cultural forms, responses to (post-)modernity, and the so-called 'Southernization' of centres of religious power. Indeed, we might see them as providing the Christian equivalent of an aspirational 'blueprint' model for the operation of religion. As believers who themselves 'foreground' their faith, they provide much more 'explicit' ethnographic subjects than more liberal Christians, whose commitment is often deeply immanent within other areas of life and expression (indeed, we might point to the emergence of the concept of 'implicit religion' as one way of addressing the issue [Bailey 1998]). For our purposes, what is most significant about this discussion, however, is the relative structural equivalence – in the context of anthropological sub-fields – of militant Christian evangelicalism and revivalist, *intégrist* Islam. As Matthew Carey notes in his chapter, if there is such a thing as the Anthropology of Islam, then it is an anthropology that has been informed by ongoing debates about revivalism and its impacts on religious and social life. And if there is certainly a justification for the prominence of either Islamic or Christian revivalism in academic consciousness on the grounds of their political and social impacts, there is surely also an epistemological reason for their 'popularity' within their sub-fields: it seems easier – however misleadingly – to unpack the significance of militant, overtly self-promoting forms of religion than more immanent manifestations.[10]

[9] 'Belief, Participation, Circulation: Challenges in Participation-Observer Fieldwork within Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic Christianities', organizers Jon Bialecki, Robin Shoaps and Henri Gooren, November 19, 2010, AAA Meetings, New Orleans.

[10] In his chapter, Retsikas points out yet another problem with a focus on Islamic revival when he questions the widespread assumption in the anthropology of Islam that reformist Islam can somehow be seen as compatible with 'modernity,' whereas Sufi practices are relegated to 'tradition'.

Let me mention just one more parallel between the issues debated at the AAA workshop and those aired in the pages of this book. This one relates to the experience of fieldwork itself – an issue discussed most explicitly in the two final chapters of the volume. As Clarke notes, Islam's universal address indeed makes it difficult to create a compartmentalized ethnographic space within which participation can be confined. The fieldworker not only has to manage the different performance frames appropriate to different spaces in the field, but also the ways in which home behaviours chime (or do not chime) with those in the field. A Goffmanesque imagery of impression management seems appropriate here, with all its implications relating to strategy and the moral character of performance of self. The question is rendered more complex, of course, if one's home is also located in or near a field site, or becomes part of a 'diasporic' landscape for religious migrants. Marsden implies that the fact that Islamic practice is commitment-oriented can cause awkward situations for fieldworkers, but this point is certainly also salient for those who study Christianity, especially of the evangelical variety. Marsden indicates a further significant dilemma. For if the fieldworker can become an easy target for accusations of hypocrisy (emergent from one's own conscience as well as from the accusations of others), the ethnographic representation of religious lives, the tracing of shifts between social frames can for some readers imply exposure of the moral hypocrisies of informants. Yet, one of the things that this book does is to illuminate the cultural contexts of what appear to be forms of dissimulation, as we see indeed in Marsden's own tracing of the seeming contradictions of self-presentation in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. In fact, the point is a vital one as well for scholars of Christianity, as anthropologists can appear all too keen to expose what they see as the hypocrisies behind evangelical lives. A good example of this is provided by views towards 'Prosperity' Christians, whose attitudes to money are assumed to be both cynical and comprehensible from a straightforwardly 'secular' point of view (Coleman 2004).

Ambiguities and Immanences

I began these remarks with an image of Islam counterpoised with Christianity, as observed from a Lagos balcony, and I want to finish with two brief references to other images that both illustrate and complicate our views of these faiths.

The first refers to a blog written on January 6, 2009 (just around the time I was leaning over my friends' balcony)[11] by Gerardo Marti, a sociologist and author of a book called *Hollywood Faith* (2008), detailing Prosperity and Holiness discourses among Christians in a church in Los Angeles. This blog was not about Christians per se, but was entitled 'Muslim Televangelists Inspire Revival in the Arab World'.

[11] http://praxishabitus.blogspot.com/2009/01/muslim-televangelists-inspire-revival.html

It contained remarks about Ahmad al-Shugairi, a former MBA college student in California who had rediscovered his commitment to Islam and was beginning to use a televangelical idiom of communication more often associated with Christianity in order to appeal to young Muslims. The complexities of this case cannot be explored here, but I simply point to the fascinating difficulty of determining the nature of 'immanence' here. For instance, is Christianity foregrounded or backgrounded, made present or absent, in this genre of preaching, which pitches itself as modern, tolerant, opposed to fundamentalist forms of the faith evident in some parts of the Arab world? In a sense, we see here a productive interface that invokes both background and foreground, a power that can derive from an ambiguous invocation of both at the same time.

My second image is a much more recent one, from Friday the fourth of February, 2011. It is a (to me) remarkable picture of thousands of people prostrate in prayer in Tahrir Square, Cairo, as part of – or at least parallel to – their protest against Hosni Mubarak's regime. I found it in a BBC article headed 'Egypt Protests'.[12] As I write, the military regime have taken what is assumed to be temporary control of the country, and any reader of this piece will presumably have a far clearer ideas of the medium-term consequences of the actions taken in January and February 2011. But my point is a different one. Amid the welter of commentaries, speeches, prayers, and emergent leaderships in Egypt the role of Islam seem deeply unclear in an Egypt that is undergoing such change: is there a move towards secular democracy, towards government by the Muslim Brotherhood,[13] or towards another regnant form of Islam? If there are 'logics' here they are moving in and out of focus, sometimes subject to gazes, sometimes to glances. In such circumstances, one of anthropology's jobs is paradoxical but significant: to unveil complexities, to uncover immanences,[14] and to point to interfaces as well as boundaries in the making of society and culture.

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[12] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-12362826

[13] Consider the following quotation from 'A senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood, Issam al-Aryan' who is both presenting his political agenda and denying his own organization's ambitions for the presidency: "We want a civil state, based on Islamic principles. A democratic state, with a parliamentary system, with freedom to form parties, press freedom, and an independent and fair judiciary."

[14] For a consideration of the political value of an 'immanent' anthropology, see Coleman (2010).

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M. Marsden and K. Retsikas (eds.), *Articulating Islam: Anthropological Approaches to Muslim Worlds*, Muslims in Global Societies Series 6,
DOI 10.1007/978-94-007-4267-3,

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