

# Abstracts

## **Sufi Regional Cults in South Asia and Indonesia: Towards a Comparative Analysis**

*Pnina Werbner*

This chapter examines the spread of Sufism from the Near East to South Asia. It then moves on to consider whether Sufism in Indonesia, which has been analysed using vernacular rather than analytic concepts, in fact bears significant similarities in its organizational, ritual and symbolic forms and processes to Sufi practices elsewhere. So too, the chapter argues, the legends and miracles of North African, South Asian and Indonesian holy men and Sufi saints, though set in entirely different historical and ecological contexts, contain remarkable 'deep' mythic structural similarities. In this sense, the chapter argues against Clifford Geertz's comparative analysis of the differences between local Moroccan and Indonesian Islam, that there may be underlying resemblances between the ideological underpinnings of Sufi orders and sacred centers in widely separated geographical localities, which generate similar symbolic and organizational logics. Taking a fresh look at recent ethnographic studies of Sufi orders and cults in Indonesia, the paper compares them analytically and ethnographically with modes of Sufi thought and religious organization in South Asia, mainly India and Pakistan. In both countries the veneration of saints has come under attack from reformists, but continues to be a living, vital tradition in its reformist modes.

## **(Re)Imagining Space: Dreams and Saint Shrines in Egypt**

*Amira Mittermaier*

The order of modernity in Egypt intersects with many other spaces, among them the order of the saint shrine and the order of the dream. This chapter invites to a re-imagining of space through considering interplays and tensions between these three different orders. Adopting Lefebvre's notion that neither imaginary nor material spaces can be understood in isolation, it examines how dream spaces spill over into, and are shaped by, material spaces and concrete spatial practices. While both the saint shrine and the dream seemingly subvert the order of modernity, the paper challenges materialist readings which view dreams as a form of false consciousness or which prioritize saint shrines as sites of resistance. Instead it suggests that understandings of saint shrines are incomplete unless they are conceptualized within a space which includes both the material and the imaginary. Also dream stories do not so much resist the

hegemonic order of reality but rather create an alternative, but not purposively contrary, space within it.

## **Remixing Songs, Remaking Mulids: The Merging Spaces of Dance Music and Saint Festivals in Egypt**

*Jennifer Peterson*

‘Mulid’ dance music is a popular current that draws musically and lyrically from Sufi spiritual songs performed at Egyptian saint festivals (mulids). Amplified on large speakers at mulids as part of their carnival-like atmosphere, it is also established in other, more mundane, social realms, such as the bootleg cassette tape market, internet forums, and cell phone ring tones, as well as at ubiquitous events such as weddings, small business openings, and evening strolls along the Nile promenade.

The festive time and space of mulids is ephemeral, and they are further being gradually marginalized by various forms of Islamic and modernist discourse and policy. Yet this current of dance music has successfully drawn on them as a dynamic cultural source and, thanks to its fluid nature, enabled representative aspects of them to seep into other, seemingly disparate social realms. This music trend relocates mulids into social spaces far removed from the physical domain of the saint, extending the very idea of a mulid through time, space, and lived experience into forms and concepts arguably more permanent than those of the mulid itself. And, in the opposite direction, this music current is furthermore contributing to reshaping the features of actual mulids, offering an alternative ‘modern’ approach to celebrating these festive occasions and meanwhile reinforcing their social significance.

This study explores how the remixing of Sufi spiritual songs has led to a remaking of mulids, by shaping them into cultural metaphors found in a variety of social spaces as well as through contributing to an alternative ‘modernization’ of mulids themselves. In doing so, it follows the trajectory of this music current’s developments and examines what meanings are conveyed when its social context is changed from the ‘otherworldliness’ of the mulid to the ‘everydayness’ of contemporary Egyptian life.

## **Notes on Locality, Connectedness, and Saintliness**

*Armando Salvatore*

This chapter offers a few critical notes reflecting the experience of the *Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam* from a theoretical viewpoint, based on the *Yearbook*’s goal of facilitating an understanding of the ambivalent positioning of Islam in the global construction of society, and using the subject of saintliness as an entry point into the discussion.

Since its inception, the validity of a Weberian categorization of the issue of modernity with regard to Islam appeared as an inevitable starting point for the *Yearbook* project, yet also as one that needed a critical revision. This chapter departs from the issue of saintliness and discusses the interplay in it of locality and connectedness, in particular to the extent they are related to the Weberian concept of ‘charisma’.

Weber’s charisma as first personalized or localized and then diluted into routine practices contrasts with the knowledge we can gain from exploring Islamic traditions. The chapter mentions the example of the enigmatic character of Khidr, who plays a key role in both scholarly and popular traditions variably related to Muslim saintliness, in order to unveil Weber’s notion of charisma as the outcome of a post-Protestant secularization of the chemistry of the social bond that misreads its relational nature in favor of an ongoing dialectics of inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) and publicness (*Öffentlichkeit*). This is not a wrong genealogy or a plain anachronism, but rather a self-genealogy of hegemonic Western views. It is useful as such but can scarcely account for global modernity and the role that revitalized or reformed traditions play in it.

### **Saints (*awliya*’), Public Places and Modernity in Egypt**

*Ahmed A. Zayed*

This chapter attempts to cast light on the transformations that occur in places surrounding the shrines of saints in Egypt considering them public places, and specifically to analyze the influences of modernity on them. The main questions to be addressed here are: How had the traditional mind built a sacred image for such places? How did they transform into spiritual and cultural places? How had such images structured the traditional society? What are the modes of transformation of such places and images in modern Egypt? And how do modern Egyptians reproduce local society in the festivals and rituals related to saints in different parts of Egypt. In conclusion the paper claims that the modern public sphere created at the saint’s square is in many ways ever more contested and fragmented. This is due to ideological and religious struggles, urban expansion, modern economy, and the state. There are also attempts to impose fences, police surveillance, and other physical restrictions on the use of the saints’ place. The chapter includes data from different places and regions in Egypt and gives specific reference to social change in the local public sphere and interweaving aspects between traditional and communal culture on the one hand and new forms of state and consumer culture on the other.

## Islam on both Sides: Religion and Locality in Western Burkina Faso

*Katja Werthmann*

This chapter is about two sacred or saintly places in present-day Burkina Faso. It compares the sacrificial site of Dafra and the Muslim village of Darsalamy in the vicinity of Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso's second-largest city which is predominantly Muslim. These two places appear to epitomize the difference between non-Islam and Islam. Dafra is seen by many Muslims as a quintessentially pagan place where people sacrifice animals on a shrine. However, according to stories of origin Dafra was created or discovered by a Muslim saint. The village of Darsalamy was intentionally founded by Muslims from Bobo-Dioulasso in order to create a saintly place where pagan practices such as masks and dances are forbidden. The comparison of these two localities shows that they do not correspond to a neat dichotomy between Islam and paganism, but rather represent two cases of 'Islam on both sides'. For Muslims and non-Muslims alike, Islam is an important element for the constitution of collective identities or the legitimization of authority.

## The Making of a 'Harari' City in Ethiopia: Constructing and Contesting Saintly Places in Harar

*Patrick Desplat*

The East Ethiopian town of Harar is considered the most important centre of Islam in the Horn of Africa. Its symbolic capital is reflected in its local representation as *madinat al-awliya*, the city of saints, which emphasizes the spiritual value of the hundreds of saintly places within its old walls and the many shrines in the countryside beyond them. The associated saints, their legends, and practices of veneration still play a significant role in the religious life of the town of Harar. This tradition is currently the focus of debates, in which some groups consider the local veneration of saints as an out-dated 'cultural'—and sometimes un-Islamic—practice, while others hold more ambiguous views.

Against this background, this paper concentrates on the contemporary role of locality and saintly tradition and the question as to how are they constructed and negotiated among the Muslims of Harar. The adopted approach explores changes which are expressed in phenomena of both decline and revitalization. One of the main theses of the paper is that a shift in meaning regarding the role of saints and their sites took place in context of modernity: i.e. from the more classical model of intercession between God and Muslims to the production of local and collective identity.

**Merchants and *Mujahidin*:  
Beliefs about Muslim Saints and the History of Towns in Egypt**

*Souzan El Saied Yousef Mosa*

This chapter looks at the tales about a *wali* (saint) as ways of telling the history of the northern Egyptian city of al-Mansura. Different districts and social groups in the town have created different wali characters and related to them a special historical imagination. Be it with the fundamentalists depicting a Muslim saint as a Jewish merchant, Sufis turning mystics into mujahidin, or merchants and craftsmen uniting social with spiritual leadership—in all cases people arrange stories and meanings in a way that fits with values they hold important. The folklore they thus create—the heroes, the festivals, the popular architecture—tells us of the group identities and local histories people tell to themselves.

