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# Introduction

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The shrines of Muslim saints can be found in a number of similar forms around the world: a tombstone, often surrounded by a quadratic structure and covered by a dome, sometimes standing alone, sometimes attached to a mosque. And around the world, these shrines are special places. Not only do they mark natural boundaries, roads, and villages, they also constitute places: i.e. standing on central squares and crossroads, giving names to towns, attracting pious seekers of relief, pilgrims, students, trade, and festivals. The desire to gain the blessings of the sheikh, to stand—if only for a brief moment—under his *baraka* and, in many cases, to gain a sense of the aura of the sheikh’s place is as prevalent among modern Muslims as it was in earlier periods. The sheikh’s charisma and the aura of his place seem to incorporate and radiate divine power. The singularity of the places makes them stand out from and dominate their surroundings, they appear as intersections of the human and divine, the religious, and the secular, and of conflicting and contradicting claims.

The reference to locality forms a very important dimension within all world religions where the ideas of return to origins and of an imminent physical presence of the transcendent in specific places play a foundational and ideological role. Like Judaism and Christianity—and perhaps even more so—Islam as a world religion is based on a highly abstract and absolute notion of the transcendent which its followers establish and celebrate at very specific sites: Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, and the vast and complex landscapes of mosques and saintly places around the world.

This importance of saintly places has, however, become increasingly complicated and troubled by different currents building on modern modes of cultural authentication. Modern reformist movements within Islam, particularly those of Wahhabi and Salafi orientation, have denied the possibility and need for any mediation within the dichotomy of God and His servants and, as a result, have furiously attacked—in both word and deed—localized cults of Muslim saints. At the same time, this religious opposition to saintly places has gone hand in hand with their nationalist valorization as ‘culture’, strongly aided by modern archaeology and anthropology, which have contributed—sometimes unwittingly, sometimes willingly—to the belief that local cults are a separate cultural reality away from and opposed to what they have deemed orthodox universal Islam. In response, anthropologists have recently tried to develop more nuanced views on Islamic dogma and practice. It is within this

complex context of the local and local saint cults that we wish to locate the contributions to this volume.

Looking at localized cults of Muslim saints around the world it is striking to note that, wherever one goes, they are often described by local intellectuals, reformist Muslims, and many Western observers as local syncretisms, continuities of local, pre-Islamic traditions under the cloak of Islam. In Egypt, the shrines of Muslim saints are sometimes claimed to be superficially Islamized sites of Pharaonic gods or Christian saints. In the Indian sub-continent, they are sometimes told as belonging to Hindu deities turned into Muslims. However, on closer examination, it is striking how similar the concepts of sainthood, the beliefs in *baraka* and miracles, and even the physical structure of saints' shrines are around the Muslim world. In addition, the festive traditions around these sites show striking similarities in form and atmosphere in Morocco, Egypt, and Pakistan, although in each country one will hear from folklorists and reformist Muslims alike that these are very special and unique local traditions, in reality not religious at all, but communal customs that pre-date Islam.

Thus if we are to enquire about the relationship between locality and sainthood and their importance for Islam as a world religion, we must question and reflect on the various claims that 'local specificity' is the key to understanding the very significance of the local. In fact, claims to continuity, competing theories of the origin of a saint and varying and often contradicting *modes of authentication*—that is, of ways to imagine and to argue for historical, territorial and normative foundations of a religion, a nation, a culture, or any other such imagined community—significantly contribute to the kind of importance and dimensions that are assigned to a location. The same physical structure becomes a very different thing, depending on whether it is interpreted as the manifestation of the universal truth and divine aura of Islam, as a key site of local identity, or as a trace of a pre-Islamic past. And, in each case, the kind of authenticity it is attached to, the kind of territorial and collective imagination, and the kind of relationship of the transcendent with the world of humans and things appear in a different configuration.

Like followers of all religions, Muslims in our time relate to locality, sanctity, and the transcendent on different levels. It is from this angle that we might address the components of locality viewing them in relation to the categories of the saintly and the sacred in Islam, and to their sociological significance.

The focus of this volume, therefore, is on locality. Building on immanence—in the very sense of the presence of the deceased saint at his place—we wish to develop here a complementary view to that pursued in Volume 5 of this *Yearbook*. It struck us there that the manifest continuity of 'extra-worldly' orientations and soteriological needs of the modern subject are find-

ing a parallel expression in Sufism and the veneration of saints in Islam. We wanted to show that the coincidence of extra-worldly salvational attitudes and individualism form a new, ‘modern’ category today, and that this certainly features in cultural attitudes in Islam. However, in contrast to the issue of the cultural needs of the modern subject raised in Volume 5, the present volume stresses a different type of interplay of the realities of the sacred: i.e. the immanence of the place and the powerful totality of any locality seen to be inspirited.

By following the perspective of the place, this volume attempts to overcome the misgivings of Weberian dichotomies and to look to modern forms of appropriating religious ideas in terms of their manifest immanence in modern life. This perhaps provides a better key for understanding the claims and practices of local authentication in religion and art and seeing their expressions in Islam (and other world religions). Rather than focusing on questions of identity construction and modern self-constitution and on Weber’s conceptual antagonisms, we attempt to depart from the strategic use of ‘Islam’ as an explanatory paradigm and the accompanying dichotomy of Islam and non-Islam. Instead, the book takes the construction of saints and places as a primary level of reflection and analysis, looking at the dynamic and competing imaginaries of aura and modes of authentication at work.

Some—although not all—of the papers included in this volume were presented at a small conference titled ‘Saintly Places in Islam’ which was organized by the Research Group ‘Saintly Places and the Veneration of Saints in Egypt and Ethiopia’ of the DFG Collaborative Research Centre 295, ‘Cultural and Linguistic Contacts’ at the University of Mainz in Haus Noth Gottes near Mainz in June 2006. The large number of contributions on Egypt derives in part from the editors’ own research orientation and, in part, from a strong Egyptian presence at this conference. We would like to avail of this opportunity to thank our Egyptian counterparts, Professors Mahmoud Auda and Ahmad Zayed in Cairo, who directed an Egyptian research group in the field, and our colleagues in Mainz and specifically the speakers of the Collaborative Research Centre 295, Professors Walter Bisang, Ursula Verhoeven and Thomas Bierschenk, for their unconditional support.

## **Continuity and Authenticity**

The many localized expressions of Islam have also become a subject of study ever since the emergence of European scholarly interest in the Muslim world. The, perhaps, oldest approach to their study had its focus on continuity, the aim of finding a true core, or at least a positive trace, of earlier worship in the practices of contemporary Muslims. In this view, a saint’s shrine and mosque is ‘really’ a temple in disguise, an unchanging essence behind a changing ap-

pearance. Largely abandoned in contemporary Western historiography and anthropology, this approach enjoys continued popularity in the folklore and social sciences of many Muslim countries, in particular Egypt.

There is no doubt that where people are educated and socialized, and in turn educate and socialize the next generation, there is continuity in human history. But how continuity takes place, and how it is imagined by people remembering and reconstructing the past, requires closer examination. Take, for example, the topic of an essential continuity of the Pharaonic tradition in current Egyptian cloaks of Christianity and Islam granting an essential Egyptian Islamic specificity. This notion of a ‘genius of the place’, of an inner lasting essence of a location, has great poetic (and, potentially, ideological) power, but remains problematic in view of both historical evidence and its heuristic value as such.

There is no archaeological or documentary evidence for a direct continuity of gods as saints. Furthermore, from the mediaeval period of the Islamization of rural Egypt, there is only one documented case of a Christian saint becoming a Muslim one. Far more often, however, we find evidence for the establishment of new Islamic sanctuaries that compete with the existing Christian ones (Mayeur-Jaouen 2005). However, there is, of course, the fact that some mosques and *maqams* (shrines) have been built on top of churches which, in turn, were built on top of temples. This has been cited by both Egyptian and European scholars as a case for essential continuity. The problem, however, is that the appearance of a saint at former site of Pharaonic, Greek, Roman, or Christian worship, stands for a specific way of building authenticity and cultural recognition that explicitly denies continuity in the sense of *genius loci*. The construction of a mosque over a pre-Islamic site of worship is an act of symbolical and physical triumph, of the defeat and replacement of the preceding cult. As such it is the instigation of the symbolic rule of the new religion, an expression of cultural break rather than continuity in essence.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the physical presence of pre-Islamic objects has always been acknowledged by Muslims, often with some ambiguity. Symbolic triumph implies recognition which, in turn, is a tool of the authentication and reconstruction of essence. It remains therefore important to analyze the changing and varying forms in which Islamic thought and practice relates to elements and expressions of Pharaonic history (El Daly 2005). If we want to understand how saintly places are constituted in relation to their surrounding settlements, other sanctuaries, and the wider religious and political ideologies of a society, the search for an unchanging essence behind changing facades does not help us in analytical terms. It is, however, an important clue for understanding the different modes of authentication at work. The search for unchanging ‘traces’ is in itself one of these imagined histories, or modes of authentication, embedded as it is in romantic and nationalist

imagination, but also in religious reformist polemics against the cult of saints. It is a distinctively modern point of view that stands in clear contrast to the way people in earlier periods dealt with the history of a site and with the material traces of earlier cults found at the sites or near the shrines of Muslim saints. In the mediaeval period of Islamization, liberal use was made of Pharaonic, Roman and Christian elements—stones, columns, etc.—in the construction of mosques. This was hardly a friendly gesture at the time, but a powerful demonstration of victory: i.e. the demolition of temples and churches and use of their stones to build mosques. In the contemporary period, however, these stones and columns have become a part of the nationalist romantic imagination of the cult of saints as unchanging Egyptian culture—an image which the Muslims who venerate saints do not share. Thus, once ambiguous signs of the victory of Islam, the physical traces of earlier cults now become at once secular symbols of national identity and potential targets of reformist attacks. For those, in turn, who continue to venerate the saints and their places as Islamic holy places, removing pre-Islamic objects becomes a way of reclaiming the Islamic nature of a contested site (see Stauth 2008).

## Beyond the Local and the Universal

Another very important and more sophisticated but nevertheless highly problematic approach to the local in Islam has come from the field of the anthropology in association with the concept of little and great traditions. This notion, originally developed by Robert Redfield (1960: 40-59), was most notably adopted by Ernest Gellner who, in his famous and eloquent analysis of Islam in Morocco, claims that there is an essential dichotomy within Islam between a universal, abstract, rationalist, and puritan Great Tradition and a local, mystical, ecstatic, and popular Small Tradition. He goes on to claim that the ‘central’ variant of Islam is in fact the one more compatible with modernity (Gellner 1981: 4-5). This, of course, is what many modernists of both secular and Islamic coloring claimed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Gellner, however, disregards that this opposition is a construct of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries’ own historical imagination. He reproduces a reformist imagination of true versus marginal forms of religion in an ingenious way but fails to problematize the claim that scholarly, purist approaches are central and others marginal.

On closer examination, however, the dichotomies between puritan and ecstatic, egalitarian and hierarchical, and metropolitan and folk Islam turn out to be very inaccurate: scholars have been mystics and mystics have been scholars throughout the history of Islam. The very notion of some beliefs being ‘folk’, or ‘popular’ is a modern one (Schielke 2007). The veneration of Muslim saints, today deemed marginal by some, was firmly and clearly a part of

orthodox Islam from the middle ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and while the question as to how saints should be venerated was subject to major controversy, their status as mediators between the human and the transcendent and as sources of religious authority was subject to far less questioning (see, for example, the history of as-Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi, Egypt's major Muslim saint in Mayeur-Jaouen 2004). Thus what Gellner deems the small 'folk' traditions of Islam may not be so 'small' at all. Mysticism, the cult of Muslim saints, festive traditions, magic, etc. are all intimately part of and make reference to the 'great' universal framework of Islam and just as peasants recite the Qur'an and hold on to 'central' traditions such as prayer and fasting, scholars and members of urban bourgeoisie have engaged in mysticism and magic.

A less dichotomous approach that attempts to avoid the ideological trap into which Gellner falls, has been offered by Clifford Geertz (1968) who argues that the universal discourse of religion is always localized in a specific cultural context which will make 'Indonesian Islam' substantially different from 'Moroccan Islam', even when they share the same doctrinal discourse. However, the problem in both Geertz's and Gellner's approaches is that they represent the relationship of the local to the universal as something fairly static and the difference between the two as more or less clear. In consequence, they thus fail to look at the ways people in any given local setting aim for the transcendent and locate themselves in it—a much more complex process that cannot be described by the simple opposition of the local and the universal.

A number of scholars of the history and contemporary practice of Islam and Islamic devotional cults (Abu-Zahra 1997; Werbner/Basu 1998; Sedgwick 2005; Soares 2005) have pointed out that while Islam as a religion always has been localized, it has never been disconnected from universalist discourses and trans-local networks. In *Embodying Charisma*, Werbner and Basu argue that rather than the localization of Islam, an Islamization of the local is the more accurate version of the story. Perhaps the most powerful model of a localized Islam, namely that of an 'African Islam' or 'black Islam' that was once promoted by the French colonial administration and that has long inspired the anthropology of Muslim societies in Africa, has been effectively demolished by contemporary Africanists (see, for example, Soares 2005) who show that not only have Muslims in Africa, whatever their doctrinal orientations may be, never subscribed to an 'African Islam' but to just Islam, they also have been well connected with the global movements of Sufism, legal scholarship, and most recently Salafi reformism. The local in relation to the various expressions of a world religion, it seems, is not really a category opposed to the universal and global, but something more complex.

One way to cope with this complexity would be to follow Talal Asad (1986) who has argued that rather than trying to distinguish different layers or

forms of Islam, one should recognize that Muslims around the world search guidance, make arguments, and relate to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna. While they disagree and debate, their debates are characterized by the shared reference to the scripture and the attempt to maintain coherence. This view of Islam as a 'discursive tradition' has been greeted enthusiastically by many scholars of contemporary Islam (Abu-Zahra 1997; Mahmood 2005; Soares 2005; Hirschkind 2006). Because its approach to plurality within Islam is not dichotomizing, it may at an initial glance appear very promising in accounting for such contested practices as local pilgrimages, shrines, and the veneration of saints.

However, the problem remains that this type of universalist perspective involves a sort of 'orthodoxization' reducing discourse to the interpretation of scripture with the aim of regulating normative practice and creating coherence. In doing this, it favors approaches to religion that do exactly that, and overlooks approaches that do not. There can be no doubt that Muslims continuously relate their religious practice and ideas to the universalizing discourses of Islam, and this renders obsolete many of the juxtapositions between the universal and the local, or between orthodoxy and popular religion. However that is not the whole story. While Asad points to the right direction, his notion of tradition does not really offer a way of understanding the problem of locality and localized cults in their complexity. By focusing so exclusively on discourse and by conflating the historical genealogy of a discourse with the ideological imagination of its own history, the notion of discursive tradition has three blind spots that are important to mention here.

The first are traditions which are not transmitted in the form of discourse but materially. While they take their orientation from the universalizing blueprints of Mecca and Medina, the shrines of Muslim saints are based on a more complex kind of imagination and transmission than is evoked by the concept of 'discursive tradition.' A more holistic common sense of the shape, form, and practices related to a saintly place can be far more determining than explicit references to the scripture.

The second blind spot are the historical transformations of 'tradition' in the course of shifting social and political hegemonies. The orthodox Islam of 18<sup>th</sup>-century scholarly and saintly establishments was radically different to the orthodox Islam of 21<sup>st</sup> century social movements and do-it-yourself religious manuals. And yet believers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century see themselves as being in the unbroken and authentic tradition of objectively true Islam.

Finally, Islam is only one of the many parameters that are important when people relate to cities, villages, landscapes, and the place of the sacred and saintly within them. As many of the authors in this volume show, modern nationalism, urban planning, and ethnic conflicts contribute to the formation, contestation, and transformation of not only saintly places but also their reli-

gious imagination in a way that cannot be explained by the ‘discursive tradition’ of Islam.

The contributions in this volume present a more complex approach, looking at the ways sacred and saintly locality is established, imagined, and authenticated under complex and specific circumstances but always involving claims for wider, even universal (but not necessarily religious), validity. This, indeed, forms a specific component of what might be called discursive connectedness. Rather than taking Islam as the primary level of analysis and trying to explain what Islam ‘is’, we attempt to show how the local specificity and the historical and inter-local connectedness of a site and the beliefs and rituals relating to it are imagined and constructed (in the physical sense too) in a given historical and social setting.

## Locations and Localities

The authors of this volume take up the issue of locality and sanctity from different perspectives, and yet their approaches all share the problematization of ‘place’ or ‘location’ in the banal sense: the limits and history of a place, the landscapes and territories it belongs to, its position in a political or religious imaginary, and its physical and conceptual structure, can all be and are being questioned, rethought, and remade by people who live in, visit, use, and plan them.

The perspectives of the contributions to this volume can be roughly divided into three groups. Werbner and Salvatore develop more general analysis perspectives, working on what may be called a communicative theory of locality and sanctity. Basing their analysis on empirical work and anthropological fieldwork, Desplat, Mittermaier, Peterson, and Werthmann make their field of research the starting point for wider questions and theorizing that move beyond the customary dichotomies of tradition and modernity, sacred and profane, Sufi and reformist Islam, or Islam and non-Islam. Zayed and Mosa, finally, take a special position in the volume since their research, conducted at Egyptian research institutions about Egyptian sites, is not only engaged in fieldwork but also forms part of the contestation of saintly places. As a folklorist, Souzanne Mosa problematizes Islamist claims to the history of a city but also presents an established point of view about the ‘folkloricity’ of the cult of saints. As a sociologist, Ahmed Zayed engages in a wider public debate on the shape of modernity in Egypt—and doing so questions the consensus of equating the cult of saints with folklore.

Locality appears in different dimensions in the contributions in this volume. First, it can be understood in the immediate sense of *place*, the historical continuum of practices in a location essentially defined through a reference to its past and continuity. As such, the aura of saintly locality is a product of his-

torical imagination. The saint, ultimately localized by his or her shrine, is the carrier of local histories and identity. As a result, his or her character and deeds can change along with the interpretations and emphases of local history. As the contributions of Desplat, Mosa, and Werthmann show, claims to a place, its description as belonging to a religion, an ethnic group, or a clan, always imply a different way of imagining the place itself. When Islamists claim a Muslim saint to be a Jew and Sufis counter that, on the contrary, he was a *jihad* hero, when the middle classes of Harar claim the saints of the city as ‘theirs’ in opposition not only to Salafi reformism but also to other ethnic groups in the city, not only the saint but his or her identity with a town, village, family, or ethnic group stands in question. Contesting a saint’s shrine becomes, as a result, a contestation of the identities and values of the people who relate to it.

Secondly, locality and the aura of the saintly place emerge in the sense of *landscape* or *territory*, the interrelationship of various locations to each other, and the hierarchies between them. These landscapes can take forms of highly organized movements, as Werbner shows in her contribution in which she brings in the level of regional cults as an important and often neglected category between the reference to a universal religious ideology and the localized practice at a specific site. As Desplat shows, such landscapes can also be very detailed and material, as is the case with the hierarchies of saints in Harar and the network of shrines and other sacred places in the countryside around the city. Such landscapes need not, however, be coherent or harmonious. On the contrary, as Werthmann shows in her comparison of the two saintly/sacred sites near Bobo-Dioulasso, they can stand in explicit contrast to each other and thus present very different forms of sanctity that contribute less to a coherent hierarchy than to a pluralistic landscape of different levels of connectedness and discourse, and different material, organizational, and communal interests.

Third, sacred locality emerges in the more abstract sense of *space*, the structure and organization of a world apart. Here the notion of aura, or *baraka*, or charisma, becomes central as the principle of spatial organization. Zayed and Mittermaier, in particular, juxtapose the geometrical, functional order of the modern city to the imagination and organization of saints’ shrines, their surroundings, and the (urban) landscape they constitute. While adopting very different perspectives, both argue that the saintly/sacred space of shrines is a world apart, structured according to spiritual hierarchies and open to different kinds of use and meaning. It is this at once open and esoteric character that has made saintly space so problematic for proponents of modern systematic rationality—of Salafi reformist and secular varieties alike. The modernist and reformist imagination of religion, society, and space highlight systematic rationality giving everything and everyone a place and a purpose,

and spectacular hierarchies that prescribe knowledge and communication as a top-down process where the role of the public is to receive knowledge. In contrast, the imaginary and physical spaces of saints shrines, surrounding squares, and the landscapes they constitute are characterized by the moment of intersection: between the human and the transcendent, between pious and profane practices, between different social classes, and between open and protected (or ‘public’ and ‘private’) spaces. Ambiguous by default, saintly space cannot be put to the service of any grand project of reform or development and contains a degree of autonomy that continues to trouble those who believe that society and religion should be structured according to clear boundaries and ruled by universal laws.

Fourth, space, in turn, emerges as a metaphor for a *state of being* in the contributions of Mittermaier and Peterson. Focusing on dreams, Mittermaier highlights the importance of imaginary spaces. In doing so, she demonstrates the extent to which locality on all levels is a category of imagination: the history and meaning of a place, the details of a landscape stretching beyond the horizon, the hierarchies and structures of a space, all exist primarily on the level of imagination that provides ‘a mode of perception and an order of reality’ (Mittermaier in this volume), in which the history, the extension, and the structure of a site become meaningful. In a further step, Peterson shows that space as constituted through imagination can develop into an independent mode of action and experience that need not be in a direct relation with physical space. Peterson argues that the spatial arrangement of a saints-day festival as they exist around the Muslim world is essentially characterized by its temporality. The space of a festival is thus always a time-space: a structure of things related to a very specific moment in which more is allowed and things work differently than otherwise. Referring to the genre of *moulid* pop music, Peterson shows how this time-space of festive joy can become independent from its original site to a certain degree: when *moulid* develops into a category of experience characterized by *haysa*, fun, joy, and dancing, it becomes a metonymical space, not so much denoting any particular location and its structures than a modality of action that is described by reference to the spatial and temporal event of the festival.

Finally, Salvatore introduces charisma and relationality as a possible perspective for the study of the sacred, sainthood, and saintly locality. Critically engaging Western theoretical approaches to the concept of charisma, a category that has been used with considerable—and questionable—ease in opposition to rational authority and organization, Salvatore argues that we must see charisma as a relational principle based on the need for a connecting link between the human and the transcendent, or in more general terms, the specific and the universal. While Salvatore’s approach does not center on the question of locality, the way he highlights relationality as the key moment of charisma

could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how exactly places can ‘be’ saintly, ‘have’ *baraka*, ‘radiate’ aura, and ‘embody’ charisma.

## Sanctity and the Sacred

The three holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem each are bestowed with a special relationship to the transcendent: Mecca as the core site of the pilgrimage and the physical and imaginary center of Islam, Medina as the site of the victory of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam’s charismatic mediator par excellence, and Jerusalem as the site of Muhammad’s ascension to Heaven. These sites have also developed into paradigmatic examples of localized sanctity around the Islamic world. This is most evident with the tomb and mosque of the Prophet in Medina. The tomb, built at the site of Muhammad’s house, and the mosque which, after successive extensions, has come to surround the tomb from all sides, serve as the blueprint of practically every Muslim saint’s shrine around the world.

Far from being the absolute and mystical opposite of the profane world, the sacred embodied by these sites is a dynamic category that can be and has been imagined differently. More than that, different concepts of the sacred are often at work at the same time. The authors of this volume repeatedly discuss different, at times coexisting, at times mutually hostile, notions of sacredness, sanctity, and charisma. Different notions of sanctity and sacredness go hand in hand with ways of imagining and structuring locality and its meaning, in other words, different modes of authentication.

The customary terminology of Islam has several terms that can be more or less accurately translated in terms of sacredness and sanctity. The Arabic root QDS serves as source for terms that describe the transcendent and absolute holiness of God, such as in *muqaddas* (holy), al-Qaddūs (‘Holy’, one of the names of God) and al-Quds (Jerusalem, literally ‘sanctuary’). From the root HRM are derived terms which describe sacredness in terms of protectedness, taboo, and opposition to the profane, such as *haram* (protected sanctuary, especially denoting the sacred districts of the three holy sites of Islam) and *harâm* (forbidden, taboo; sacred). Finally, the root BRK is a source for terms that describe spiritual power, most notably *baraka*—a complex notion that involves the divine aura, charisma or power of a person, object or a site, material beneficial power, and protection.

If the notions of holy/*muqaddas* and sanctuary/*haram* highlight the opposition between the human and the transcendent, and consequently the explicitly otherworldly nature of sacred space, the notion of *baraka* stresses the possibility of contact and mediation. It is no coincidence that *baraka* is the essential and most important quality of Muslim saintly places. By the virtue of the divine grace, the saint, a pilgrimage site, can be a source of protection, power,

healing, wealth, and peace. In the Muslim faith, the Qur'an, holy places, pious people, and pious deeds radiate this beneficiary power that emanates from God and can be physically transmitted and received, be it by reading the Qur'an, by undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca, by receiving the blessings of a religious person, or—although this is strongly contested in our time—by visiting the tomb of a pious person who enjoys a special grace of God that makes him a friend of God (*wali Allah*), in other words a saint.

Even where it has been established in clear contrast to pre-Islamic cults, the sanctity of a Muslim saint's shrine is of a kind that always carries an inclusive momentum that does not respect the clear limits of sacred and profane, Islam and non-Islam. In this volume Werthmann shows that elements of Islam can be incorporated into animism just as elements of animism can be incorporated in Islam. Furthermore, as Werthmann's juxtaposition of the sacrificial site of Dafra and the saints' tombs of Darsalamy shows, not only the places themselves, also the kinds of sacredness/sanctity ascribed to them are different.

The notion of *baraka* goes hand in hand with modes of authentication with their primary reference to divine grace and mediation embodied by the deceased saint, and a form of discursive connectedness that present localized mediation and universal transcendental truth as compatible. By the virtue of its *baraka*, its aura of the extraordinary, a major sanctuary is open to a much wider array of people and practices than a holy site defined by purity and opposition to the profane would be.

It is precisely this openness that has become a major issue in the intense criticism and often physical attacks on Islamic saintly places over the past century. If the sacred has a taste of license at the saintly place constituted by *baraka*, in another, distinctively modern notion of sanctity and the sacred, this is unthinkable. The often furious indignation of Muslim reformists about the participation of women, the openness of a saint's festival to the profane atmosphere of a fair, the ecstatic and spontaneous nature of religious performance, and the occasional presence of pre-Islamic objects are telling of a deep split in the ways the relationship of a sacred place with its history, landscape, and structure is being imagined.

## **The Place, Connectedness and Paradigms of Authentication**

It is thus not merely the 'locality' (in sense of being specific to a particular place) as opposed to 'universality' of saintly places that has made them a favorite target of Salafism and developmental modernism, and an ambiguous icon of nationalism during the past century. Nor are the attempts to defend and to redefine saintly places merely a move from the 'local' to the 'universal'.

It is necessary here to return to the notions of aura and discursive connectedness. The special ‘aura’ of places, the imaginary yet immanent quality that makes them extraordinary, meaningful, powerful, and part of something greater can be thought of in different ways—and each way involves a different kind of connectedness, a different way of feeling about a place, of seeing it carry meanings and fitting into a bigger picture. The success of establishing and stabilizing the presence of the saint in a given place over a long period of time depends largely on successful modes of authentication, that is, re-imagining the place in terms of its origin (history) and establishing this imaginary as manifest (also changing) physical structures and ritual practices. But what happens when these imaginary histories and connections become contested? How do people attempt to defend, redefine, or replace the aura of a saintly place? The ‘aura’ of a place and its discursive and imaginary connectedness are intimately interwoven, and if one changes, the other will be affected.

By way of conclusion, we take up three juxtapositions that make clearer the ways in which the aura and the connections of a saintly place can be and are being imagined by present-day Muslims: *baraka* versus systemic rationality, cultural versus religious authentication, and city versus countryside.

The first juxtaposition presents *baraka* and systemic rationality as two opposing principles of organizing not only religion but social practice in general: inclusive as opposed to exclusive, the sacred as a source of power and protection—thence with an air of license—as opposed to the sacred as established by rational study and moral practice—therefore with an emphasis on discipline and purity. The inclusive nature of saintly places becomes a threat not only to the purity of the rational sanctity of revivalist Islam, but also to developmentalist modernist notions of public order and rationality. For the modernist notion of society as an organic system structured by over-arching norms and purposes, spaces that are characterized by openness rather than order are very problematic. As a result, the *baraka* of a saintly place becomes fundamentally problematic for the projects of modernity and Islamic reform because of its inherent ambiguity, openness to Islam and non-Islam, religious and secular practices, hierarchy and anarchy, local and trans-local dimensions.

The second juxtaposition presents a religious mode of authenticity deriving from the presence of a saint’s body and the connectedness of the site to a grand history of Islam as opposed to a secular national mode of authenticity deriving from the cultural and regional specificity and very long but locally grounded history of the site. From a nationalist point of view, a site with a very long history radiates the continuous presence of something that is essentially ‘ours’, but precisely this presence can make it inauthentic in a religious imagination that takes the break between paganism and Islam as a key mark of authenticity. As a result, this puts people who venerate and defend Muslim

saintly places in an ambiguous position whereby they have access to different levels of authenticity which, however, each may jeopardize the legitimacy of the site in a different way. Nationalist modernist middle classes and elites, on the other hand, face a different kind of ambiguity where saintly places present a threat to their religious and civilizational imagination, on the one hand, and an asset for their nationalist cultural narratives, on the other.

The third juxtaposition is the most complex of the three and presents modernist imaginaries of the village and the city as two modes of locality and social and civic order, the first imagined as culturally authentic but territorially limited and civilizationally backward, the other presented as culturally alienated, globally connected, and modern. The saint's shrine, in this imagination, is part of the village (regardless of the fact that most major shrines stand in cities) or of old city districts and resilient to the dynamics of urbanity and global modernity. This imagination is, in a way, an attempt to resolve the ambiguity of the first two juxtapositions, but when we look at the actual influence of the nation-state and urbanization on rural saints, a very different picture emerges. Mosa and Zayed, themselves arguing within the paradigm of modernity as a normative discourse on society, paradoxically show how 'city' and 'state' not only 'limit' the space of the saintly place by marginalizing it to the backward village, but also contribute to a de-territorialization of the saint. While their perspective is a modernizationist one, they present an intense interplay between different groups around a saint's place and the dynamics of saintly locality that makes obsolete the modernist dichotomy of city and village. While the Muslim saint in a modern city dominated by nationalist order and Salafi religious movements survives by undergoing many and often surprising transformations, saint cults in village milieus experience similar if not the same transformations in their physical and imaginary connectedness.

Finally, it is essential to stress that these contestations take place in complex ways which, while intimately related to the temporal imaginary of modernity, do not follow commonplace narratives of modernization. The flourishing regional Sufi cults (Werbner), the ambiguous balancing of the Harari middle-classes between religious and cultural authentication (Desplat), the dream spaces that compete with the modernist structures of Cairo (Mittermaier), the re-invention of the saint's festival as dance music (Peterson), the shifting boundaries between Islam and animism in Bobo-Dioulasso (Werthmann), and the omnipresence of peripheral modernity in Egyptian countryside (Zayed) all indicate that locality and the aura of saintly places cannot be thought of in terms of local-universal oppositions. Instead, it is established, contested, and remade as part of different outlooks on both the specific place as well as the world as a whole.

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