Chapter 7

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

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Introduction: Debating Muslims, Contested Practises

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. Some inhabitants go as far as referring to their city as the fourth holiest place in Islam—i.e. after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. However this claim is rejected by the majority and is currently used mainly in the tourism sector to attract more visitors. Nonetheless, the associated saints, their legends, and practices of veneration continue to play a significant role in the religious life of the town of Harar and, similar to its ascription as the fourth holiest place in Islam, the saintly tradition is the focus of much debate concerning it legitimacy. This attitude is reflected in the following exchange between two employees of a local administration office:

Fathi: "What are people doing there, at the shrines? You know that it is forbidden to pray to someone other than God."
Imadj: "Of course. But people are not praying to the saint. That would be *shirk* (polytheism). They pray to God and they do it in communal way, since praying together increases the effectiveness of the prayer."
F: "So? But why are people doing it at the shrines? What is their importance? I may pray at home, it has the same effectiveness. I don't have to go there since God hears me everywhere!"
I: "No, no. Look, the saints are very important individuals, the friends of God. They have been great figures of Islam and they stand out due to their deeds and their character. It's better to pray at their places. It's also better to pray in a mosque than at home. The same thing is true with shrines."

F: "O.k., but let me ask you one question: When have you been there for your last time?"
I: "Hhm … That was long time ago. When I was a child I went there with my father or mother. I don't remember exactly. But that doesn't matter. The saints are important and righteous."
F. "You see. I even didn't meet any Harari, who's going to the shrines for *ziyara*. Only women may do it and a lot of Oromo people. Well, I just don't believe in it. And when I make this statement openly, they will call me a '*Wahhabi*' and I will have a lot of problems!"

This argument between the administrative employees is an illuminating example of the different perceptions of the saintly tradition. Both participants were Hararis and both were from the local middle class, who claim to be the original settlers of the town and differentiate themselves from other ethnic groups, such as the Oromo, Somalis, Argoba, and Amhara. Despite being a minority—they represent merely twelve percent of the town's population—the Hararis enjoy a privileged status among their ethnic neighbours based on their political power. As a result of the reorganization of administrative structures by the state from 1991, Harar became the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia, the *Harari National Regional State* (HNRS). This development guarantees special legal rights for the Hararis and underlines the importance of their current political role. Today, most of the Hararis live in diaspora communities in other Ethiopian cities or overseas. Fathi is an exception as he returned to Harar a few months earlier to take up a job opportunity, while Imadj was born and raised in Harar.

Their discussion illustrates that the contestations of local saint veneration includes at least three categories of actors. First, there are people who position themselves against the saint tradition. These individuals clearly constitute a minority within the Harari society and are fearful of expressing their point of view openly as they will be accused of 'Wahhabism' which is equated with extremism (*akrari*) in local parlance. The accusation of being a 'Wahhabi', mostly made in the context of gossip, can have severe social consequences. In reality, only a few Oromo, mainly graduates of Saudi universities, and their followers publicly accuse saint veneration as 'un-Islamic'.

Second, the supporters of the saintly tradition, who may visit shrines for veneration, are identified by Fathi as 'women' and 'Oromo'. Fathi used these terms as collective references for people from the margins of society, which includes the 'crazy Sufis', peasants, and illiterates and reflects the image the local middle class has of the 'ordinary people'. This also includes the belief that they are ignorant of 'correct' religious practice. Those who believe in saint veneration, on the other hand, resist this allegation and see themselves as agents of an 'orthodox', but mystical inspired Islam. They justify their argu-

ment by referring to a mystical world view which underlines the hidden inner dimension which would not be captured by either middle-class secular education or the abstract knowledge of religious scholars.

This debate between followers and their opponents is not new, but a comprehensive phenomenon of Islamic societies and must be understood in the context of the continuous purification of religious practice through the influence of modernity and ideas of Islamic reform. However this arena of debate is supplemented in Harar by a third group, a characteristic of which is its ambiguous attitude towards the saint tradition. Like Imadj, the members of this group praise the saints, but will never visit the local shrines or participate otherwise in their activities. At the same time they lament the decline of the saintly tradition and may criticize the related rituals without, however, categorizing them as un-Islamic while defending them vehemently against those who openly question the practices at the shrines. This group includes a variety of people from the well-educated middle class, shop-keepers, traditional religious scholars, and even reformers from the *Tablighi Djamat* or the *Habashiyya.*[1] This heterogeneous group is characterized by its ambivalent stance: people from this group visit the local shrines seldom or never and may even criticize some of the related practices. However, like Imadj, these people never fundamentally question the saints and even defend them in disputes.

The question that arises here is why these influential and, in part, prominent people in Harar stand up for saintly places although they never visit them for religious practice. This question is directly related to local imaginations of the self and locality. As the city of saints, Harar is an important resource not only in the context of religious contestations but also in relation to identity politics. This chapter will explore the problems of the construction and negotiation of saintly locality. The aim is to show that local saintly places are not marginal, but an important factor of religious and cultural order. The spatial dimensions of sanctity play a part in the disputes surrounding their legitimation. This paper will show that the conflation of culture, history, and locality with religion are an important project for the maintenance a Harari identity, in which the city of Harar is constructed as Islamic but rather resembled a predominantly 'Harari' city. The question concerning the contemporary role of saint tradition must be seen in a wider context, in which Harari Muslims are trying to positioning themselves as modern Muslims in a wider sense of the *umma*, while defining themselves in a local and regional context through their distinctiveness.

1 Both movements have different theological and practical approaches but share the objective of a renewal of the Islamic faith. The *Habashiyya* is locally known as *Sheikh Abdullahi Djama* and was initiated in Lebanon by a Harari scholar in the 1980s. Similarly the *Tablighi Djamat* is quite popular in Harar as the *Dawa Djama* and developed in India in the early 20th century.

Symbolic and Historical Configurations of Local Sanctity, Saints, and their Places

Harar is known by its inhabitants as *Bändär Abadir*, the city of the saint Abadir or, even more distinctively, as *madinat al-awliya'*, the 'city of saints'. This term reflects the density of saintly places in and around Harar. Emile Foucher (Foucher 1988, 1994), a catholic priest from the Capuchin mission in Harar, identified 235 saints, while several years later the anthropologist Camilla Gibb counted about 272, i.e. 232 male and 40 female (Gibb 1996: 291-309). More recently, the University of Rome published a map of the old town in cooperation with the Harari People National Regional State which contains the location of 100 saintly places (CIRPS/State 2003). However, the exact number of saintly places and their associated saints in Harar and its surrounding is not known as many sites are considered locally as *khuddun*, which means 'to be covered', a synonym for the Arabic *batin*, i.e. esoteric, hidden.

This bundling of locally perceived religious importance into a meta-term 'city of saints' has its significance even today. Although some religious scholars may not accept the term because of its relationship to a mystical and, in their view, 'popular' Islam, many people from the middle class appreciate it. As they see it, the expression 'city of saints' not only underlines the importance of the town, but also explains the obvious density of saintly places in Harar. Other Hararis may justify the expression with reference to mystical knowledge. According to a popular legend, the denomination of Harar as the city of saints goes back to the prophetic ascension (*mi'radj*):

> During the nocturnal journey the prophet Muhammad saw from above a shining spot on earth. He was drawing the attention of his escort, the angel Djibril and asked him about the place and its name. The angel answered him that this is the city of saints and they continued their journey.[2]

In addition to this story there is a saying that embeds two of the most venerated saints of Harar, Abadir and ʿAbdulqādīr Djilānī, the famous founder of the Qadiriyya, into the wider context of the ascension of the prophet: *Bād zaleyu Abādir*. *Bäri zaleyu 'Abdulqādīr* (The land belongs to Abādir. The gate belongs to ʿAbdulqādīr).[3] According to local interpretations the prophet was expected by the later Caliph Abu Bakr as-Siddiq. Abu Bakr was already in-

2 This legend was already published in a similar form by Foucher, i.e. Foucher, Emile (1994) "The Cult of Muslims Saints in Harar. Religious Dimensions". In: Bahru Zewde/Richard Pankhurst/Taddese Beyene (eds.) *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa (1-6.4.1997)*, Addis Abeba: Institute of Ethiopan Studies, Addis Abeba University, pp. 71-83.

3 A local adaptation of a *hadith* which is especially recognized by the Shia: "I [Prophet Muḥammad] am the town of knowledge and Ali is the gate."

formed about the sighting of the *madinat al-awliya'* by Muhammad through their close relationship and the possibilities of dream communication. As a result he tried to claim the city for himself. However, the prophet said that he would not give it to him but to his great-grandchild. After all, the local saint Abadir is genealogically related to Abu Bakr, and the Hararis see themselves as the descendants of the saint, which means that their claim to the town of Harar was finally legitimated through the prophet himself. Djilani was mentioned because he met the prophet on one of his spiritual journeys and he was assigned to rule the wider region, emphasizing his spiritual role in the Horn of Africa.

These overlapping stories of spiritual belonging and leadership in a specific territory are set into a repertoire of legends that construct a connection between the local spiritual order of Harar and a semantic Islamic imperative, the *mi'radj* in this case. All these legends of spiritual claim and protection are connected to a cognitive map which extracts meanings that individuals and groups assign to places. They are more or less embedded in historically contingent and shared cultural understandings of the terrain and sustained by diverse imageries, through which people see and remember the city of Harar as a regional centre, which obtained its legitimation as saintly from the prophet itself, distributed genealogically through the first caliph to Abadir, the final owner of Harar.

Saintly landscape and local cosmology— the manifestations and meaning of saintly places

As in the case of other traditions of saint veneration throughout the Muslim world, the saints in Harar are believed to have the capacity to heal diseases, find of stolen goods, bring good fortune, generate fertility, and redirect lazy pupils from Qur'anic schools back to the path of learning. In a particular case the ascribed meaning of sanctity does not necessarily reflect an Islamic or Sufi doctrine, but rather concrete needs and cosmologies of the local community. This kind of contextualization causes the high level of identification of the people with the saints, who lived, acted, and ultimately died at the shrines as neighbours, ancestors, teachers, healers, friends, and even foes. In Harar sanctity is partly ideological and not related to purity and taboo but mainly to protection and the common good, both spiritually and worldly.

The historical sanctity of the 'golden age' is bound to protection and the common good. This is reflected today in the local cosmology of temporal and spatial protection. Like the town of Harar itself, virtually all visible shrines are constructed on top of hills. Taken in combination they constitute characteristic landmarks forming a saintly topography. The material appearance of these places is highly diverse. They exist in the shape of niches, trees, simple

graves, rocks, and the typical cupola. Some shrines have rooms, which are used for the veneration of saints (*gelma*). Many of the shrines have a mosque with a small cemetery attached to it. Saintly places in the countryside in particular are erected close to enormous overhanging sycamore trees.

The temporal aspect of protection is provided through local interpretation, according to which Harar is safeguarded by 355 saints. This figure correlates with the days of the Islamic lunar year. Thus every day of the year is protected by one saint. Oral histories tell that each weekday is represented by a specific saint, however in most cases their names are not known. All of the saints belong to a spiritual 'parliament'. According to legend, all of the saints of Harar meet every week on the top of nearby Mountain Hakim to debate about the well-being of the city. These weekly meetings are supplemented by monthly and yearly gatherings. This belief in protection conducted by a saintly 'parliament' corresponds to a common notion in Sufism of a 'hidden government' (*hukuma batiniyya*), who debates and judges the affairs of the mortals and the worldly authorities, the 'visible government' (*hukuma zahiriyya*) (Reeves 1990).

In addition to this temporal perspective the Hararis perceive saintly places as spatial landmarks of protection. The city wall of Harar has five gates which lead to the region's main trade routes. Many saints have their last sanctuary on these routes. The saints with the first shrines beyond the gates are seen as important patrons of protection. This is undoubtedly related to their location as the gates were known as obvious points of attack. Shrines in the countryside are also known for their protection, but also combine other functions. On the one hand the shrines are believed to be places of education, Islamization and healing during times of peace. On the other hand these graves are seen as intersections of a wider network of communication which helped to transmit information concerning attacks, epidemics, etc. as quickly as possible during times of crisis.

The 'golden age' of saints as reflection of historical crisis and marginality

The symbolic configuration of local sanctity is historically situated and demands a perspective that brings together hagiographical sources and historical events. The reference to a 'golden age' of saints is more than a mere glorification of the past. The 'golden age' was, in fact, anything but golden. It was a time of crises, in which Harar lost its political, military, and economic power. As the capital of the Sultanat of Adal, the city became the most important centre in the region during the 16th century. It was the breeding ground for a new religious elite who waged a 14-year *djihad* (1529-1543) against the Christian empire in the Ethiopian highlands. Their most popular leader, Imam

Ahmed b. Ibrahim, conquered extensive parts of Ethiopia during the war but was finally vanquished with the help of Portuguese troops. From this point on the situation in Harar changed dramatically, particularly due to the intervention of a third party; for unknown reasons, the pastoralist non-Muslim Oromo started to migrate to the western and eastern parts of today's Ethiopia, driving a wedge between Christians and Muslims and party benefiting from the war-devastated land and the resulting power vacuum in these regions. In the eastern regions, which had been dominated by Muslims, the Oromo migration only left small enclaves of the former Islamic dominions. For the first time the inhabitants of Harar saw themselves as a Muslim minority against a foreign majority of Oromo who constantly attacked the town. Islam remained the only resource for superiority and civilization. This symbolic distinction between town and country, physically manifested in the wall, is reflected in local terminology which classifies the town as 'civilization' (*ge*) while the outskirts in the countryside are associated with 'barbarism' (*därga*).[4] Thus, Harar became a historical Islamic bulwark which influenced the perception of the city as an Islamic center more than its role in education and scholarship. Surviving the tremendous tragedy contributed to the glory of the city, which is acknowledged throughout the wider region of Ethiopia.

The most popular saints and the ascription of their sanctity must be understood in this context of ideologization. They are historical figures who are venerated on the basis of their deeds as leaders and protected the community, while miracles transmitted in oral or written form provide supplementary material not the primary legitimation of their saintly status. The most important saint of Harar is Abadir. He is considered as the main patron of the city and nicknamed *imam al-quṭb* or *shaykh ash-shuyukh*. He is not seen as the founder of the city or the first person who Islamized the region, but is instead associated with the reorganization of Harar and the establishment of the local saint tradition. According to the legendary local hagiography, *Fath madinat Harar*, he arrived in the already Islamized region of Harar from the Hidjaz with 405 saints the 12th century (Wagner 1978). Abadir, who was elected by the saints as their leader, ordered the reorganization of the town, which was formerly divided into seven villages. He asked each of the surrounding tribes, i.e. the Somalis, Argobas and different Oromo clans,[5] to bring their agricul-

4 There is an entire repertoire of words relating to this division: the Harari named their town *ge* and call themselves *ge usu*, the people of the town. These *ge usu* speak a Semitic language called *ge sinan*, the language of the town, they claim a specific *ge ada*, a town culture, live in *ge gar*, the traditional town house, and send their children to *quran ge,* the urban Qur'anic school.

5 This is an obvious invention of a tradition. While Wagner made clear that the time of the arrival of Abadir is historically more or less correct, the Oromo came not before the 16th century into the region of Harar at least not as permanent settlers.

tural products to the town and trade them. Moreover, these tribes had to elect one of the saints to be their leader. Subsequent to this initial action, he fought the surrounding unbelievers and after the final victory transferred the conquered land to his saintly companions, while staking a claim to the town of Harar for himself. Each saint was assigned to a specific site where he should act as scholar, local doctor, military commander, teacher, and/or miracle worker. After their deaths they were buried at their sites of action, which then became centres of attraction for local veneration and pilgrimage. Those places became saintly as spatial materializations of the saints and their transcendental power. Through Abadir, Harar became a both secular and spiritual administrative unit, with the city at its centre. Topographically, sanctity in Harar is organized as an urban-rural continuum and is not centred on a single grave. The saint tradition in Harar comprises a diffuse network of saintly places, which together form a saintly landscape restricted to a radius of about 40 miles. Moreover, this limited space of spiritual authority coincides with the territory of the independent emirate of Harar which was established during the 17th century. This may explain why, unlike Sheikh Hussein in southern Bale, Harar does not attract pilgrimages from all over Ethiopia, but appeals more to the immediate inhabitants of the region.

The second most popular saint is Amir Nur b. Mudjahid (1551-1567). Like Abadir he was a historical figure who is mainly praised for his deeds as military leader. Amir Nur tried to remobilize the *djihad* and succeeded in killing the ruling Christian emperor. On the way back to Harar he became involved in a military conflict with the approaching Oromo, but lost the fight and fled back to Harar. There he ordered the construction of a wall around the town, which provided effective protection against the continuous attacks of the Oromo and retains its high symbolic value to the present day. Abadir's approach was more inclusive; he organized the surrounding tribes to serve Harar, but excluded the Christians, with whom he fought in several battles. In contrast, Amir Nur's agenda may be interpreted as rather exclusive, involving the construction of a wall to exclude other foes, now the Oromo. However, this view neglects an important and mostly overlooked aspect; oral histories point out that it was Amir Nur who gathered the surrounding Muslims and resettled them in Harar to protect them against the Oromo. Due to their heterogenous backgrounds, fights broke out between the initial and later settlers. Amir Nur arbitrated in the dispute and ordered the destruction of all genealogies so that all inhabitants of the town could be considered equal as Hararis, a term which had not been used hitherto. This means that Amir Nur was not only responsible for the wall, but also for the genesis of a Harari identity. Seen from this perspective, sanctity in Harar is related to the exclusion of the foreign and the inclusion of the self—showing strength to the outside and at the same time endowing identity. However, during the reign of Amir Nur, the

spatial structure of sanctity in Harar was transformed into a more restricted area of what is today called the old town, the core of the city surrounded by its wall.

The third saint is Sheikh Hashim. He lived in the 18th century and represents a different type of saint. He is also seen as an innovator and is associated with the popularization of the Qadiriyya. However, the sanctity he represents is less concerned with protection and the common good than with asceticism and miracles. The conflict between Sheikh Hashim and the community is continuously underlined in the oral histories, cumulating into a story in which the saint fought with the ruling emir regarding the correct recitation of *dhikr*. Disappointed by the both ruler and the people, he ultimately left the town, announcing that all saints after him should be hidden (*khuddun*) and that spirit possession should instead enter Harar. This tradition is deeply symbolic and addresses the decline of the 'true' saintly Islam, while Sheikh Hashim is considered as the 'seal of the saints' (*khatam al-awliya'*). This is basically related to a different historical context: the inhabitants of Harar in the 18th century were less exposed to wars and crises, but experienced instead increasing security and prosperity due to alliances with the Oromo. Finally, the consolidation of Harar correlates with the end of the 'golden age' of saints; spatial sanctity itself expanded during Sheikh Hashim beyond the city wall.

Decline and Revival of Pilgrimages and Festivity

Saintly places must be 'charged' to maintain their status. A *ziyara*, the visit to a shrine, is probably the predominant practice involved in keeping such places alive. The organization of a *ziyara* may be based on a range of motivations. However, these can be differentiated into two categories. First, the individual *ziyara* whereby the faithful visit the grave of a saint for intercession and, second, the communal ziyara, which is usually connected to a specific time. During the individual *ziyara* the person approaches the representative of the shrine (*murid*) to beg for something, to seek for a solution, or to thank the saint for a fulfilled wish. The pilgrim usually hands over a gift for the saint, utters the problem to the *murid* who will first bless the donations and then recite specific prayers to gain the help of the saint. Incense is burned during this process. The *murid* ends the ritual with a blessing, spitting water in the face of the pilgrim. If the vow is fulfilled, the pilgrim must return to the shrine, not only to make further donations but also to participate in the regular communal *ziyara*. This kind of *ziyara* is always an overnight session and is organized on a weekly basis on Thursday night or on one of the eight 'big days' in a lunar year. These big days (*gidir jam*) are not related to the birth or death of a saint but are associated with generic occurrences in Islam such as the *mi'radj* or *badr*. On rare occasions, a communal *ziyara* may be organised due to catas-

trophes such as famines or family disputes. Despite the varying temporal settings, the practice is very similar: the scene is dominated by drum playing, dance, and the recitation of religious text in Arabic, e.g. the *mawlud*, supplemented by *zikri*, local songs to praise God, the prophets, and saints in vernacular languages. Large quantities of *Qat* and coffee are consumed and incense is burned continuously. The recitation is led by the murid and his *djamā'a,* an equivalent to a Sufi order but less organized, while others follow with the chorus of the songs, dance in a group forming a circle, or clap their hands to the beat of the drums. Depending on the shrine and the occasion, the *ziyara* may attract anything between ten and 200 participants.

While most saints and saintly places in Harar are not discussed, the middle class and religious scholars in particular criticize the religious practise and the participants. Theologically they agree about the righteousness of personalized sanctity in general and the historical role of the saints for Harar in particular, however they accuse the participants of being 'wrong Sufis', 'illiterate', and 'uneducated'. This argument is common among the middle class in different Islamic societies. However, the interesting fact is that, although they keep away from shrine activities, at the same time they defend them when sanctity comes under the attack, for example by the Wahhabis, whom they accuse of being extremists and, in some cases, even unbelievers. The consensus between the Sufis and the middle class concerning the significance of sanctity is based on different normative views of religion. While the Sufis have a mystical inspired world view and differentiate between the 'hidden' and the 'visible', a structure, which is dissociated from human intervention, the middle class argues that sanctity represents a paradigm from the past which is not practicable in the modern context. Their view on saint veneration is an ambivalent one, best reflected in an article published by Ahmed Zekaria, a Harari scholar. On the one hand he assesses the *ziyara* as 'syncretistic' and dismisses any form of intermediation through the saints as being strong blasphemy. On the other hand, however, he legitimates the practice in an historical framework and for today only if the believer has the 'right' intention before and during his pilgrimage (Zekaria 2003: 26). This attitude is a strategy of distinction which is addressed to both Sufis and the Wahhabis. I will not follow this line, but will recapitulate an incident in 2003 in which members of middle class attended a festival called *shawwal id* to deconstruct the thesis that members of the middle class will never visit any kind of *ziyara*.

As opposed to a 'generic' *ziyara*, the *shawwal id* is a public feast and also known as *Harari Id* as, traditionally, other ethnic groups did not participate in it. The *shawwal id* takes place at two shrines near the two northern gates following seven days of fasting in addition to the month of Ramadan. In 2003 these places where colourfully decorated with pennants and banners in Amharic or Arabic script. Flags of Ethiopia and Harar were on show everywhere,

underlining the role of the municipality as the main sponsor of the decorations. Schools and some shops were closed during the period of festivity. As in the case of other forms of *ziyara*, people recited local songs devoted to God, Muhammad, and the saints (*zikri*). The singing was accompanied by drums. The participants danced or clapped their hands, while others hung around, chewed *qat*, or strolled from one place to the next and back. Unlike in the case of a generic *ziyara*, men and women mixed freely, a religious text was not recited and there was no *murid* present. The scene in the evening was dominated by young people, both male and female. Many youngsters from the diaspora, easily identifiable by their style of clothing, recorded the dancing crowd on their video cameras and sold their recordings on CDs several days later. The young people were also present during the day when a lot of older women and children participated in the festival. The number of participants is likely to have reached several hundreds, mostly Hararis, but also people from other ethnic groups.

The success of the festival was highlighted by the comments of many Hararis who were surprised by the revival of the *shawwal id* as, previously, people had to be forced to attend the *shawwal id*. Similarly, some Hararis argued that the regional state, represented by the president and an employee of the municipality, once tried to ban the feast while others denied this and referred to religious scholars who were against it because of the lax attitude towards alcohol and the mixing of the sexes. The festival of 2003 presented an entirely different picture. This change of attitude brings us to the central questions as to what attracts people to saintly places and what draws them away from them.

Shawwal id stands in clear contrast to the generic *ziyara*. It is a remarkable case of the reinterpretation and a change of purpose, in particular in relation to the protection of the city. In the past it had two main functions. It reflected, first, the need for protection and, second, the presentation of strength. In the past, the practice of wandering between the two shrines at the night was intended to convey to potential enemies that the Hararis were not weak after the fasting period but alert to potential threats. The establishment and use of two shrines as places of festivity has nothing to do with the saints themselves. The *shawwal id* is considered to be historically linked to the coming of Abadir, who taught the Hararis the 'right' way to fast. There are several other oral histories concerning the festivity, but none ever mentioned the two saints' shrines where the *shawwal id* takes place. This is unusual, but taking into account that those two shrines are the nearest to the northern gates of the wall, historically the weak point of attack by Oromo and other groups, they may serve as spiritual guardians due to their location.

Nowadays, the symbolic frame of the parade between the two shrines is missing: people can take the most comfortable path and most participants do not know about the protective function of the festival. While, previously, par-

ticipation in the *shawwal id* was rather insignificant, today, the involvement of the young people has made a strong contribution to its revival. This may be related to another traditional function of the feast whereby it is intended to provide an occasion for the adolescent male to choose his future fiancée. The feast was the only occasion within a religious context when men and women were allowed to meet in the public. This partly explains the nicknaming of *shawwal id* as *Harari id*, since the Harari marry endogamously and may dislike the participation of other groups for that reason. Even if the original function sounds inappropriate in today's context in which the young people mix relatively freely, the *shuwwal id* is mainly being revived through them and members of the middle class who meet at the shrines, flirt, and hang around in groups and do not necessarily participate in the recitations of *zikri* or dancing. Visiting youngsters from other towns have a significant influence on the local event and use it as a platform for new cultural identity, a typical element of diaspora communities.

However, the popularization of the festivity is also due to the fact, that it offers a broad scope for interpretation. The greatest potential for attracting the otherwise prejudiced middle class lies here as the *shawwal id* has been always popular festival which departed from social rules and constraints. This meaning is documented in different traditions, in which tension arose between the people who wanted to celebrate a festivity and a ruler who tried to forbid it, but failed due to spiritual powers. The inversion of hierarchical structure is not only obvious in several legends, but also evident in the conception of the *shawwal id* itself. In contrast to the 'generic' *ziyara*, the *shawwal id* is not about obtaining the blessing of the saint or making vows. There is no hierarchical order between the *murid*, *djama'a*, and the participants. Another point of distinction is that families or some of their individual members are usually connected to a specific shrine due to the fulfilment of their vows and therefore bound to attend the *ziyara* there. The *shawwal id* is the only festivity related to saintly places in Harar, which all Hararis should attend, irrespective of their relationship with a particular saint. Strictly speaking, the feast is not too embedded in the framework of mystical knowledge. The symbolization of protection through the wandering around and the selection of a fiancé are more acceptable by the middle class than any Sufi explanation.[6] Another trend is the increasing commercialization of the festivity and the involvement of the state through donations. Moreover the *shawwal id* is celebrated in Addis Abeba and Dire Dawa and thus reconstructs locality in another context.

6 It must be admitted that some Sufis have an explanation for the *shawwal id.* They relate it to a 'mystical fiscal year'. This is interesting because the 7th of *shuwal* is sometimes known as New Year of the pre-Islamic age. However, this explanation is relatively unknown and therefore of little relevance for most of the Sufis and the middle class.

The most important aspect of the *shawwal id* at present may be the presentation of Hararis as a homogeneous cultural group. This is reflected in the in different cultural-political programs of events. In the year 2005 the festival was further enlarged with the help of the diaspora organization *Harari Unity Youth Association* and additional events were staged, ranging from an anti-HIV campaign to musical and cultural shows at which popular local musicians performed Harari songs and women presented traditional Harari clothing. In 2006 the course of events was similar, but on this occasion the *shawwal id* also revealed a political connotation. The festivity was used to welcome the representatives of different groups, namely Somalis, Afar, and in particular Silte, a Gurage-group. The Silte party comprised 300 people who were welcomed by a brass band and fireworks. During the dinner the representatives gave a speech, in which the need for a reunion of Hararis and Silte was addressed:

> we have seen the reunification of South and North Yemen, East and West Germany and insh-Allah one day we want to see all Hararis 're-united' with their motherland.[7]

That other groups define themselves as 'Hararis' is a new phenomenon, but could be interpreted as reference to the 'golden age' as it is said that the Silte and the Hararis belonged to one group before the Oromo overran the region in the 16th century. Thus, the event forms part of a policy of remembrance, in which the heyday of the Islamic Sultanate under Imam Ahmed is celebrated—a fact furthermore underlined by the exclusion of the Oromo, the immediate neighbours of the Hararis.

The *shawwal id* offers different interpretations not necessary bound to the rules and regulations of the more 'generic' *ziyara*. The motivations for going to or staying away from shrines are diverse: i.e. to search for the spiritual inspiration, to meet friends and have fun with them, to compete with others in the recitation of religious texts, to dance and chew *qat* the whole night long. Some may go to shrines to gain the blessing of the saint, to find a solution for a problem, or to ask for the fulfilment of a wish. This rather individual *ziyara* is locally associated with the belief in intercession (*tawassul*) and is contested locally but also widely practiced and tolerated. First, this ambivalence is inherent to the saint tradition itself, which is not an explicit theology but an implicit belief and therefore open to different, often competing interpretations. Second, it is generally tolerated by those who do not believe in it because only few people visit shrines for intercession, or do so discreetly. It is considered a matter of personal religiosity whereby what matters is the intention be-

7 http://hararconnection.blogspot.com/2007/01/historical-shawal-eid-in-harar-2006.html [10.10.2007].

hind the visit matters and this will ultimately be judged by God himself. However, the revival of *shawwal id* and its meaning for the modern context must be seen in the context of two recent developments: the revival of religion and a revival of cultural identity.

Islamic Reform and the Revival of Cultural Identity in Harar

Islam had been constantly marginalized following the incorporation of large Muslim-populated regions into the Ethiopian state at the end of the 19th century. This was, in fact, the fate of all religions except Orthodox Christianity. This corresponds to the imagination of Ethiopia as a 'Christian island surrounded by infidels' and the projection of the country as predominantly Christian, despite the fact that approximately 45 percent of the population is Muslim. This attitude changed slightly with the change of government in the 1970s. Initially the socialist regime (1974-1991) treated all religions equally, but set up restrictions on religious networking, mainly the importing of religious literature, pilgrimages to Mecca, and visits by foreign scholars.

It was not until the current government came into power in 1991 that the state developed a more liberal attitude towards the religious sphere: religious freedom became an item on the political agenda and was written into the constitution and the previous restrictions were abrogated. These changes prompted a revival of Islam reflected in a new Islamic identity, the construction of new mosques and Islamic schools, the emergence of numerous magazines and newspapers with an Islamic focus, the participation of Muslims in public discussions, conferences, an increase in pilgrimages to Mecca, and the establishment of Islamic organizations (Ahmed 1998).

The non-interventionist stance by the state changed with the allegation of 'fundamentalism'. There had been fights against some groups at the Somali border and in June 1995 a significant incident occurred in capital Addis Abeba, in which Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president, survived an assassination attempt. As a result, the state began to intervene in the religious sphere again by banning several Islamic NGOs. The term 'fundamentalism' became synonymous with an Arab-inspired, foreign Islam that divides Ethiopian Muslims. This has a clearly political background as 'fundamentalists' are always depicted as 'foreign' by the state, i.e. associated with the neighbouring states of Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia, with whom Ethiopia has a hostile relationship. Based on this attitude, local groups also came into the potential focus of the Ethiopian state.

In Harar the revival of religion and the tension between the alternating state restrictions and liberal attitude is clearly reflected in the presence of Egyptian teachers in Harar in the early 1990s. Interest in religion increased at the time and was reflected in the establishment of new educational institutions

which combined secular and religious curricula or focused strongly on Arabic. The *Tablighi djamaat* succeeded in attracting a lot of followers, new religious literature circulated, and the access to cheap television and satellite equipment due to contraband trading offered access to Arabic channels broadcasting on religious topics. The arrival of the Egyptians and their engagement in religious education prompted a positive response by many Hararis. However, despite being tolerated for some time, they were suddenly expelled from the country by the Ethiopian State on the grounds of their lack of work permits. Hardly uncoincidentally, this happened soon after they exposed themselves as members of the Muslim Brotherhood and started to use the mosque's loudspeakers for preaching. The broadcasting and the content of the sermons were reason for both state and the Hararis to act against the Egyptians on the ground of their 'extremism'. While the Hararis embraced a renewal of Islam, they were not interested in appropriating ideas they consider as deviating from the established interpretation of religion—particularly when it is done openly in public. The Ethiopian state, on the other hand, was motivated by its concern about potential threats to national security which became an increasing issue after the failed assassination of the Egyptian president.

This rather brief incident was accompanied by a similar development on a wider scale. During the 1980s some Oromo received scholarships for religious studies from the Saudi government (Gnamo 2002). On completion of their studies they returned to their home country and preached that some long-established religious practices were un-Islamic. However their activities were only partly successful, mainly in the in rural areas and on the outskirts of the towns. In Harar, the reformist Oromo condemned saint veneration as a 'Harari cultural invention' which is alien to 'original' Islam.

But what kind of influence did the reformists have on the Hararis? The term 'Wahhabi' is locally indexed and embedded in an historical incident that occurred in the 1940s when a small group of pilgrimages came under the influence of Wahhabi ideology and after their return became involved in a local school. This group was challenged by local scholars and, again with the involvement of the state, their leader was arrested and the school closed down. The concept of 'Wahhabi' was initially used as a synonym of 'otherness' and the misinterpretation of Islam. Of course, this does not mean that new ideas were and are not appropriated by some Hararis. However, the people who embrace such views tend to express them in the context of small groups of friends and keep a low profile in public.

This conflict between the followers of different religious interpretations had a rather strong effect on saint veneration: people who venerated local saints were suddenly harassed and forced to justify their practice and members of the middle class, in particular people who never visit the shrines, started to defend local sanctity. The two groups attack the Wahhabis, on theo-

logical grounds and accuse them of distorting the doctrine of the unity of god (*tawhid*). However, views based on a polemic text, in which Wahhabism is exposed as being an invention by the British colonial power with the deliberate intention of dividing Muslims in order to control them have become even more popular in this debate. These kinds of conspiracy theories have a great impact on the debate as they are inherently disprovable. However, the middle class is probably not so much concerned about Wahhabism itself as the question of theological righteousness. They are more agitated by the fact that some Oromo are attacking the historical core of Harari identity, namely the saints and their deeds. Members of middle class see this as a direct attack on the legitimacy of the Hararis themselves and their role in the political and religious administration of Harar. This brings us to the recent process of culturalization and identity politics.

The culturalization of Harari society—locality as a cultural resource

The question of locality remained relatively untouched in the context of religious contestations in the past but has now re-entered the arena in the context of identity, since the conflict between people for and against saint veneration is intertwined with another set of conflicts between the Hararis and Oromo. Another facet of locality has entered the arena here focused on question as to who ultimately owns Harar.

The Ethiopian state again assumed an important role in this debate. With the change in government in 1991, the Ethiopian state not only liberalized the religious sphere, but also implemented a federal policy. While in the past the state was controlled by the Christian Amhara, the new state tried to concede more rights and autonomy to different ethnic groups. To that end, new regional states, each with their own parliament, budget, and tax authority, replaced the previous administrative zones. The most distinctive feature of the restructuring process was its ethnic and linguistic dimension. The smallest regional state, i.e. *Harari People's National Regional State* (HPNRS) was established in 1995. At the expense of other ethnic groups in the region, most notably the Amhara and Oromo, the Harari minority obtained political privileges which permitted them for the first time since the incorporation of Harar into the Ethiopian state not only to lay claim to the city of Harar but also to administer it. This governmental empowerment of Hararis triggered a revitalization of ethnic-linguistic identity and also gave rise to conflicts with the local Amhara and Oromo who see themselves as politically unrepresented.[8]

8 It must be added that the above-mentioned groups and the Somalis, have their 'own' regional state. However, due to the symbolic role of Harar, its characteristic as a historical crossroads, at which many groups interacted, the town is also claimed by others. The militant *Oromo Liberation Front* (OLF) is striving for an

This search for a Harari identity was supplemented by the search for 'authentic' Harari culture understood as a rather static system of binding rules. The ideological power of 'culture' is based on the essentializing politics of identity, through which the meaning of being Harari is currently discussed. The establishment of museums, publications in the Harari language, and also the successful application for inclusion in the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage sites are exemplary of this process. The city of Harar has become a political and economic resource. To underline the continuity of its significance, in a recent publication the former president of HPNRS explained the central theme in the preface: "This book will help the cause of protecting the heritage in no uncertain manner. [It] will surely help to prevent losing our heritage" (Revault/Santelli 2004: 5).

While the religious meaning of the city for the region was constantly underlined in this book, the main focus was on historical and cultural manifestations. It is worth noting that the publication classifies shrines in Harar as 'culture'. This structure reflects the common middle class discourse that today categorizes shrines as cultural and historical manifestations. Parts of the new regional government are particularly concerned about the areas of language, culture, and the administration of historical places, in particular "mosques, shrines and graves of saintly figures" (Abubeker 2001: 27).[9]

Local sanctity is a symbol, in which the complex imagination of the own group is mobilized. This is only possible because they are historically 'proven'. The saint tradition is one of the many aspects Harari society, in which a territorial and spatial concept of representation and symbolization is mediated. Saintly places along with the wall and mosques are used as places of memory. A sense of belonging and, moreover, belonging to a certain place and involvement in its administration is part of this culturalization. The conflation of culture and history with religion are inherent to the Harari project of identity. From the perspective of the regional state and the middle class, saintly places are historical-cultural landmarks and only secondarily religious sites.

independent Oromo state including Harar. According to some Somalis, Harar should play an important role in the context of an idea of 'Great Somalia', including the war-torn Somalia, as well as Djibouti and parts of northern Kenya and eastern Ethiopia. The Amhara, on the other hand, would like to place the Harari regional state under the central government of Addis Abeba, as was done with the town of Dire Dawa, due to its multi-ethnic status.

9 In practice, however, the regional state provides sporadic help to economically weak shrines. It usually focuses on the repair of shrines and related buildings, e.g. the festivity rooms. The municipality will sometimes donate a camel or goat for a *ziyara*, but mainly to shrines with a female clientele which are economically weaker than other saintly sites.

Religious meaning and cultural use of saintly places

In this context it is understandable why people feel so attracted to festivities like *shawwal id*, while they may neglect other forms of pilgrimage. It is worth noting that the term 'culture' is interpreted in different ways: while some Oromo, who are associated with the Wahhabi movement may attack the saint veneration as 'cultural', the Hararis, i.e. both middle class and Sufis, justify their practices as religiously legitimate. They argue from the same logic but with different normative claims. However, outside this debate saintly places become indeed a cultural resource of the regional state and the well-educated middle class. For them, 'cultural' becomes an attribute of positive self-representation that does not contradict the 'religious'. Both levels of culture and religion are intermingled and used as arguments in particular situations. There may be situations in which many Hararis will strictly divide between religious and cultural practice. However, if the 'other' is claiming the same thing, the argument will be strongly rejected. This middle-class ascription of shrines as primarily cultural (rather than religious) sites explains why Hararis today may defend these places and even the associated practices. It is not even about not going to the saints' graves, but about a different way of going and the attachment of an altered significance to the shrines.

Against the background of the initial question it is evident that the tradition of saints is of significant relevance, but the nature of the relevance has changed. This development cannot be reduced to processes of rationalization, secularization, or 'Wahhabization' of their own religion, which means the confrontation and contestation with modernistic ideas. In fact the reinterpretation and refunctionalization of saintly places has become obvious: i.e. from the classical model of intercession between God and Muslims to the production of mainly local and collective identity. The modification is the result of the interaction of different groups of actors and the continuous negotiation of the 'true' Islam. Processes of increasing transnational integration simultaneously strengthened processes of definition and redefinition concerning the self and the other. The apologetic discourses in the context of recent contestations display a feeling of loss. Saintly places are promoted as moments of cultural and historical remembrance without losing their inherent ambivalence. For this reason the relation between the locality of urban Harar, a saintly topography, and collective identity have produced a new meaning. The construction of saintly locality, manifested in individual shrines or in the town itself, comprises processes of uprising against the recurrent waves of purification that involve the attempt of a hegemonic reduction of the natural heterogeneity in Islam.

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