
Chapter 1

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

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Introduction

To compare Sufi orders across different places separated by thousands of miles of sea and land, and by radically different cultural milieus, is in many senses to seek the global in the local rather than the local in the global. Either way, charting difference and similarity in Sufism as an embodied tradition requires attention, beyond mystical philosophical and ethical ideas, to the ritual performances and religious organizational patterns that shape Sufi orders and cults in widely separated locations. We need, in other words, to seek to understand comparatively four interrelated symbolic complexes: first, the sacred division of labor—the ritual roles that perpetuate and reproduce a Sufi order focused on a particular sacred center; second, sacred exchanges between places and persons, often across great distances; third, the sacred ‘region’, its catchment area, and the sanctified central places that shape it; and fourth, the sacred indexical events—the rituals—that co-ordinate and revitalize organizational and symbolic unities and enable managerial and logistical planning and decision making. Comparison requires that we examine the way in which these four dimensions of ritual sanctification and performance are linked, and are embedded in a particular symbolic logic and local environment.

In this chapter I use the notion of ‘cult’ in its anthropological sense, i.e. to refer to organized ritual and symbolic practices performed in space and over time, often cyclically, by a defined group of devotees, kinsmen, initiates, supplicants, pilgrims, or disciples. The notion of a ‘regional cult’ drew on the geographical analysis of regional markets to refer to cults which extend beyond a locally demarcated and bounded administrative order (see R. Werbner 1977). Regional cults are, importantly, ‘cults of the middle range’, neither a world religion nor a local, parochially focused set of ritual practices. Regional cult *analysis* refers to the theorization of the complex, ambivalent relations between the politics, economics, ritual, and belief at the cult center, considered in its wider geographical and political context, as these relations are

played out historically, over time, and as they affect shifting power relations between sacred and temporal authority. Spirituality and territorial politics are often conflictual, at least publicly, but at the same time politicians seek the support of priests or saints at the center of regional cults, able to mobilize the masses, while the latter often draw legitimacy from recognition (and material support) granted by temporal rulers.

The Sufi cult or sub-order I studied in Pakistan (see P. Werbner 2003), was in many senses remarkably similar organizationally to other, *non-Muslim* regional cults and pilgrimage systems in Africa, Latin America, and Europe (for examples see the chapters in R. Werbner 1977). It also fitted the model of Sufi orders analysed by Trimmingham (1971), which was mainly based on his extensive knowledge of Sufi orders in the Middle East and Africa.

The difficulty, of course, in trying to understand Sufism and comprehend its systematic ritual and symbolic logic and organization, is that in any particular locality, there is a wide range of Sufi saints, from major shrines of great antiquity, managed by descendants of the original saintly founder and guardians of his tomb, to minor saints with a highly localized clientele (see Troll 1989; Werbner/Basu 1998). In any generation, only some outstanding living saints succeed in founding major regional cults, Sufi sub-orders which extend widely beyond their immediate locality. My own study was about one such Sufi regional cult, whose founder, Zindapir, the 'living saint', had established his central lodge, a place of enchanting loveliness and tranquility, in a small valley in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

During the saint's lifetime, his cult, from being regional, extended globally: to Britain and Europe, the Middle East, and even South Africa. Established during the 1940s, in the dying days of Empire, Zindapir began his career as an army tailor contractor for the seventh Baluch regiment, and his cult membership expanded through the recruitment of army personnel. These, in turn, recruited members of their families and, when they retired to civilian life, their co-villagers or townsmen. The cult expanded further as these soldiers went to work as labor migrants in the Gulf or Britain. Disciples were also recruited from among the stream of supplicants coming to the lodge to seek the saint's blessings or remedies for their afflictions, and from among casual visitors curious to see the saint and lodge itself, a place renowned for its beauty. Some disciples joined the cult after meeting Zindapir or his vicegerents (messengers) on the annual Hajj to Mecca.

These disciples and messengers of Zindapir met regularly to perform *zikr* at the lodge branches of the order, located throughout Pakistan. They gathered at Zindapir's central lodge weekly, monthly, and in most cases, annually, at the '*urs*', the three-day ritual festival commemorating the mystical 'marriage' of a deceased saint with God. Some pilgrims arrived for the festival as individuals, but most came in convoys of trucks and buses from particular

branches of the order, traveling in some cases for over 24 hours, bearing with them sacrificial offerings of grain, butter, and animals. They returned bearing gifts from the saint—gowns or caps, and in some instances, the sacred soil of the lodge itself. During their three-day stay at the *'urs*, all the participants were fed and nurtured by the saint himself. The hundreds of beasts sacrificed, the hundreds of thousands of baked chappatis and nans, the enormous cauldrons of sweet and pilau rice distributed during the *'urs*, feed some 30,000 people over three days, a major logistical challenge. But the saint also feeds pilgrims to the lodge throughout the year, in what may be conceived of as a form of perpetual sacrifice. The lodge itself has been built with voluntary labor, usually in the weeks preceding the annual *'urs*. The crowds depart following the final *du'a*, the supplicatory prayer and benediction enunciated by the saint himself on behalf of the whole community.

These are the bare outlines of Sufi regional cult organization. The Sufi cultural concept which best captures the idea of a Sufi region is *wilayat*. *Wilayat*, a master concept in Sufi terminology, denotes a series of interrelated meanings: (secular) sovereignty over a region, the spiritual dominion of a saint, guardianship, a foreign land, friendship, intimacy with God, and union with the Deity. As a master concept, *wilayat* encapsulates the range of complex ideas defining the charismatic power of a saint—not only over transcendental spaces of mystical knowledge but as sovereign of the terrestrial spaces into which his sacred region extends. These, it must be stressed, remain unbounded and theoretically could reach the far corners of the earth. The term regional cult, a comparative, analytic term used to describe centrally focused, expansive and unbounded religious organizations, which extend across administrative borders and boundaries, seems particularly apt to capture this symbolic complexity. Saints do not command exclusive territories. On the contrary, the *wilayats* of different saints interpenetrate, and any one locality will be the abode of a range of saints, big and small, more or less respected, each with his or her own following.

Sufi Orders and Sainly Charisma in the Middle East and Pakistan

Trimingham (1971) speaks of Sufi *'ta'ifas'*, sub-orders focused around a single living saint or his shrine. His description makes evident that *ta'ifas* are comparable to other regional cults in their basic central place organization. The sheikh, a living saint or his descendant, heads the *ta'ifa* by virtue of his powers of blessing. Under the sheikh are a number of *khalifas* appointed by him directly to take charge of districts or town centers. He reports that in a large order each regional *khalifa* may have sectional leaders under him (Trimingham 1971: 173-174, 179). The sacred centers and subcenters of the cult, known as *zawiya* in North Africa, and *darbars* or *dargahs* (royal courts)

in Pakistan and India, are places of pilgrimage and ritual celebration, with the tomb of the founder being the “focal point of the organization, a center of veneration to which visitations (*ziyarat*) are made” (ibid.: 179). The center is regarded as sacred (*haram*), a place of sanctuary for refugees from vengeance.

The word *ta'ifa* was not used by members of Zindapir's regional cult (and appears to be unknown even in some parts of the Middle East). They spoke of the cult as a *tariqa*, but to distinguish it from the wider Naqshbandi order to which it was affiliated, it was known as *tariqa Naqshbandiyya Ghamkolia*. By appending the name of the cult center, Ghamkol, to their regional cult, they marked its distinctiveness as an autonomous organization. The saint at the head of the order, *Zindapir*, (‘the living saint’), was by the time of my study the head of a vast, transnational regional cult, stretching throughout Pakistan to the Gulf, Britain, Afghanistan, and Southern Africa. He had founded the cult center in 1948, when he first secluded himself, according to the legend, in a cave on the hill of Ghamkol. At the time the place was a wilderness.

A key feature of Zindapir's cult organization was the way in which the exemplary center has replicated itself throughout the saint's region through scores of deliberate and conscious acts of mimesis. In different parts of the Punjab important khalifas of the saint reproduce in their manners, dress, and minute customs the image of Zindapir, along with the ethics and aesthetics of the cult he founded. In their own places they are addressed, much as Zindapir himself is, as *pir sahib*. Such mimesis, I want to suggest, creates a sense of unity across distance: the same sounds and images, the same ambience, are experienced by the traveler wherever he goes in the cult region. Along with this extraordinary mimetic resemblance, however, each khalifa also fosters his own distinctiveness, his own special way of being a Sufi.

In other ways, too, Trimmingham's account accords with regional cult theory. He makes the point that *ta'ifas* “undergo cycles of expansion, stagnation, decay, and even death” (1971: 179), but that since there are “thousands of them, new ones [are] continually being formed” (ibid.: 172).¹

One way to understand processes of Sufi regional cult formation to look at the way cults are founded and expand ‘during the lifetime of an originary, living saint’. There are also cases, of course, in which saints are sanctified post-humously, their charisma ‘discovered’ by devout followers often decades and even centuries later.² The present chapter, however, aims to disclose what endows some men with extraordinary charismatic authority during their life

1 Sedgwick (2005) makes a similar point, in virtually the same words, about Sufi orders in the Middle East, without acknowledging Trimmingham's original contribution.

2 I am grateful to the editors for this point. Such post-facto sanctifications nevertheless require the organizational talents and dedication of living devotees.

time, and hence the power to found new Sufi regional cults and expand their organizational ambit.

To comprehend how the charisma of a saint is constructed and underpins saintly authority requires a comparative analysis of the poetics of traveling theories; that is, the way that such myths tell, simultaneously, both a local and a global tale about Sufi mystical power everywhere, and the settlement of Sufis in virgin, barren or idolatrous lands, such as the lodge valley in Pakistan or industrial towns in Britain. Each Sufi cult is distinctive and embedded in a local cultural context. But, against a view of the radical plurality of Islam proposed, for example, by Clifford Geertz (1968), I want to suggest in this chapter that Sufism everywhere shares the same deep structural logic of ideas. These shape the ecological and cultural habitat and local habitus wherever Sufi saints settle. Such beliefs persist, I show, despite internal inconsistencies and evidence to the contrary, and remain powerfully compelling.

Sufi Myths and Legends: Teasing out Comparisons between Morocco and Indonesia

In a groundbreaking essay, Clifford Geertz (1968), comparing Moroccan and Indonesian Islam, proposed that global religions are necessarily embedded in the taken-for-granted of local cultural milieus. In criticizing Geertz, I am not suggesting that he is entirely wrong. It is quite likely that Moroccan Islam and Indonesian Islam are in many ways very different in their feel, their style, their religious emphases, the emotions evoked by particular symbols and rituals, the centrality of ritual and religion in the society, its symbolic importance, and so forth.

Against Geertz, however, I want to argue that Sufi Islam as a traveling religion may change radically but in a way which seems almost the opposite to that suggested by him. In theory, and often in practice, when a world religion encroaches into an already charged social field, both religious practice and scriptural exegesis are likely to be politicized and to *lose* the taken-for-granted, doxic transparency that they once possessed. Instead, such religions become highly self-conscious, reflexive ideologies. Intertextuality, in other words, relativizes all knowledge. Recognizing the intertextual dimensions of locally appropriated global religious texts is a critical theoretical advance for an understanding of the global and local politics of religion and its thrust towards greater reflexivity.

Two related questions are implied by the argument that traveling theories gain in reflexivity: first, whether global religious knowledge, locally contextualised, is produced within a charged political field, in what sense can it still be said to be commonsensical, taken-for-granted and embedded unreflectively in a local cultural ethos and world view, as Geertz proposed? Second, in what

respect do traveling theories which change, *also stay the same*? In what respect is Sufi Islam one rather than many?

To address these questions, I want to follow Geertz in the first instance by shifting the focus to locally told narratives about saints and away from published sacred texts. Unlike Geertz, however, my aim is to explore the underlying structures—the moral fables—animating such narratives. The structural logic of these fables, I wish to argue, in being implicit is rarely questioned or challenged, even in politicized contexts. It provides believers with their sense of naturalized, taken-for-granted certainty. So much so that such fables or underlying plots, rather than being modified in travel, once adopted are a symbolic force reshaping the cultural environments they invade. This is so because, as Becker has argued, in most cultures,

knowledge of plot constraints is unstated background knowledge, like the knowledge of grammar and syntax. It is learned indirectly, first through fairy tales and nursery rhymes (and their equivalent in other cultures), and then from the various media that have access to children (Becker 1979: 217).

Hence, going against the anthropological tendency to stress the local, I propose that Sufi Islam, despite its apparent variety and concrete localism, embodies a global religious ideology within a social movement which everywhere fabulates the *possibility* (if not the actualization) of human perfection. Its shared implicit logic is revealed in the structural similarities between Sufi legends and modes of organization in widely dispersed localities, separated in time as well as in space. This is exemplified by the parallels in the plots of the myths reported by Geertz for Morocco and Indonesia (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sufi Myths in Morocco and Indonesia (after Geertz 1968)

(1) Inner Jihad: Overcoming Inner Desires/Total Submission

Morocco: Saint Washes with Smallpox-Infested Water

Indonesia: Saint Stands in a River for 15 Years

RESULT: DIVINE KNOWLEDGE

(2) Outer Jihad: Overcoming External Evil/Lack of Faith

Morocco: Triumph over the Evil Sultan

Indonesia: Conversion of Rulers at the Exemplary Center

RESULT: SPIRITUAL POWER OVERCOMES TEMPORAL POWER

The very same myths told about an Indonesian and a Moroccan saint could *both* be told about Pakistani saints, or even about the very same saint. This is because the myths represent two important and linked dimensions of Sufi Is-

lam—the inner *jihad* and the outer *jihad* (Figure 1). *Jihad* means struggle or battle. For Muslims there is an inner battle with their desires and appetites and an outer battle with infidels and non-believers.

The two myths in both localities, Indonesia and Morocco, tell a story of an ordeal overcome through faith in the Sufi teacher. In Morocco the hero washes the clothes of the teacher, covered in smallpox, and then washes in the dirty water. This ordeal, which is an act of faith, endows him with divine blessing from the teacher who, as a charismatic holy man, is an intermediary with God, and inevitably also with divine knowledge. In the Indonesian myth the hero undergoes a typical Sufi ordeal—he stands in a river for 15 years waiting for his teacher to return, and is endowed with divine knowledge for his patience. In both cases, according to Sufi doctrine, the heroes kill their *nafs*, their personal selfish and bodily desires or carnal self. The Indonesian hero's myth ends here, except that we know that the hero went on to Islamize the center of the state. In the Moroccan myth, the hero has a confrontation with a powerful but evil monarch. This is the external *jihad*—the fight against evil or religious backsliders.

My own interpretation of the message of this latter myth is different from that suggested by Geertz, who interprets the myth as implying that the Moroccan ruler proves his credentials as descendant of the Prophet. I propose that the moral of this myth is that spiritual power is always above temporal power—the house of God and his dweller, the saint, is more powerful than the palace of the monarch and its dweller, the worldly ruler. Both may be descendants from the Prophet, but one is superior to the other by virtue of his spirituality and the monarch must therefore bow to him. The moral of the tale is that the rule of God is above the rule of man. Man does not make the law, he simply administers it.³

This same principle is exemplified by Zindapir in a series of morality tales about his encounter with secular authority.

Once an uncle of the Minister of Finance Mian Muhammad Yasin Khan Watto came to Pir Sahib. He was seriously ill, and had returned from England, diagnosed as suffering from an incurable illness. Pir Sahib cast *dam* (blew a Qur'anic verse for healing purposes) on him and said: 'Let him eat from the *langar*'s food and he will be cured'. Once healed, the Minister asked the Pir if he could make him, the Minister, his disciple, allow him to cast *dam* and provide the food for the *langar* for three days. Zindapir said: 'You will provide for the *langar* for three days but what will happen after that? I cannot make you partner, *sharik*, with God. Nor will I make you

3 A similar message in contemporary Morocco is enunciated by Abd al Yasin, founder of the Justice and Charity Society, who rejects the authority of the King, according to Paul Heck (2006).

my disciple or allow you to cast *dam*.' (Story first told me by the Sheikh in October 1989)

The tapestry of legends, myths, and morality tales told by and about Zindapir objectify the saint's divine grace and power through concrete images and remembered encounters. At the same time, the powerful validity of the legends and morality tales springs dialectically from the observed ascetic practices of the Saint, which embody for his followers fundamental notions about human existence and sources of spiritual authority.

This dual basis for legitimized truth—saintly practice and concrete image—makes the legendary corpus about the saint impervious to factual inconsistencies. The 'myths' and 'legends' are conceived of as historically accurate, true, exemplary narratives about an extraordinary individual. If the myths contain self-evident truths which transcend the mundane and are not amenable to quotidian, common sense evaluation, this is because the subject of these tales, the living saint, is perceived to be an extramundane individual, a man outside and above the world, rather than in it.

This returns us to the question raised at the outset: to what extent is Sufism as a transnational religious movement differentially embedded in the common sense notions of specific cultural environments? I want to argue, against Geertz's relativist position, that the religious rationality and common sense values implicit in Sufism *transcend* cultural and geographical boundaries. The underlying logic of the fables constituting this religious imagination is the same logic, whether in Morocco, Iraq, Pakistan or Indonesia. It is based on a single and constant set of equations, starting from the ultimate value of self-denial or asceticism:

World renunciation (asceticism) = divine love and intimacy with God = divine 'hidden' knowledge = the ability to transform the world = the hegemony of spiritual authority over temporal power and authority.

The legends about powerful Sufis, from Indonesia and Morocco, which Geertz argues exemplify the contrastive localism of Islam, retell, in essence, the same fable or plot: (1) initiation through a physical and mental ordeal overcome; (2) the achievement of innate and instantaneous divine knowledge; (3) the triumphant encounter with temporal authority. The same legends can be found in Attar's 'Memorial of Saints' which records the lives of the early saints of Baghdad (Attar 1990). What differs are merely the ecological and historical details: a flowing river and exemplary center in Indonesia, desert sands and a fortress town in Morocco, the Baluch Regiment, an anti-colonial brigand's valley, and corrupt politicians in Pakistan. A single paradigmatic common sense plot upholds this legendary corpus, while the legends' local

concrete details—regiments, rivers, and desert sands embody this common sense and suffuse it with axiomatic authority. But the symbolic structure underlying this common sense is as unitary as it is inexorable.

Indonesian Sufism: Teasing out Comparisons

This brings me finally to a comparison of South Asian and Indonesian Sufism. One of the difficulties of drawing such a comparison relates to the different terminology used to describe Sufi regional cults in Indonesia. The key elements—places, actors, and rituals—that sustain Indonesian regional cults are described by their indigenous names even in anthropological texts, and this makes comparison difficult to tease out. Nevertheless, the basic building blocks of the cults: saints, shrines, annual rituals, sacred exchange, central lodges, and their hierarchically ordered branches, all seem to be present in Indonesia.

Let me consider each of the different building blocks comprising Indonesian Sufi cults first, before exploring how they are interrelated. I draw on published texts, along with three doctoral theses and one masters thesis submitted to the Australian National University which are also crucial ethnographic documents in this comparative endeavor.⁴

As in South Asia, so too in Indonesia there are famous ancient Sufi shrines of celebrated *wali* which are places of pilgrimage for persons coming from the whole of Indonesia. As in South Asia, these major shrines often have associated with them whole villages of descendants who service the grave and its festivals, each with its own clientele. Such a village is described by Jeffery (1979) and by Pinto (1995) in their studies of the shrine of Nizam-uddin Auliya located in Delhi, and for Indonesia by Muhaimin (1995) in his description of the Buntet shrine complex in Cirebon, Java. My own focus here, however, is on the smaller Sufi regional cults whose extension is far more limited and local, focused on either a living saint or his shrine, which rise and fall periodically, waxing and waning over time.

The other point which needs to be made in advance of the comparative analysis is one established clearly by Mark Woodward (1989) and a range of other Indonesian scholars: namely, that Sufi mystical theosophy in Indonesia, along with the practice of *zikr*, the repetitive recollection of God's name, resemble practices and beliefs elsewhere in the Muslim world. The basic ideas of taking the oath of allegiance to a saint (*bai'at*), initiation, and 'travel' through different mystical stages on the Sufi path, self-denial, asceticism,

4 These are: Dhofier (1980); Zulkifli (1994); Muhaimin (1995); Jamhari (2000). For a survey of studies of Islam in Indonesia, with particular emphasis on anthropological studies of Islam, see Jamhari (2002) and for further references see the brief survey by Fox (2002).

control of the vital, selfish soul (*nafs*), and mystical epiphany are found in Indonesia as they are in the Middle East or South Asia. Second, as in South Asia, Sufism in Indonesia, known locally as ‘traditional’ Islam, has been under attack by Islamic and modernist reformists, who accuse it of unlawful syncretism and polytheism (*shirk*). While such highly politicized attacks are found throughout the Muslim world, and are often defined as an opposition between ‘doctor’ (*‘alim*) and ‘saint’ (see Gellner 1981), in Indonesia, as in South Asia, the resistance to this attack has involved, it seems, an alliance of both saints and learned religious scholars or clerics (*‘ulama*), a point to which I return below.⁵ Following from this, like in South Asia and other parts of the Muslim world, a tendency to distinguish in Indonesia between practicing Sufis and the so-called superstitions surrounding the cult of saints’ shrines has obscured the intrinsic *interdependency* of these two.

In Indonesia, saints are known honorifically as *kyai*, but also by a range of other titles: *wali* (usually reserved for big saints, including the nine founding saints in Java), *muqaddam*, *mursyid*, *serepah* (meaning elder), and *syekh*. Important *kyai*, founders of their own lodges (*pesantren*) are regarded as charismatic figures, imbued with blessing, and this charisma is transmitted from father to son, much as it is in other parts of the Muslim world. Woodward acknowledges that “for many traditional students, relationships with *kyai* are elements in the *zuhud* (ascetic) complex. They see *kyai* as much as living saints as teachers, as much as sources of blessing as of knowledge” (Woodward 1989: 144). As in South Asia, in Indonesia too, high value is placed on asceticism even in the case of wealthy saints (*ibid.*: 145). Saints prepare amulets for supplicants and engage in healing, blessing, and exorcism as they do in South Asia (*ibid.*: 146).

Indonesian saintly lodges or *pesantren* (*ibid.*: 135) are most often rural, and they often own large tracts of land donated as religious endowments (*waqf*), by royal patrons (*ibid.*: 146) or through purchase. If the lodge is an old one, it usually includes the graves of the founders and their sons and grandsons. These are known as (*keramat*) and are the focus of an annual festival commemorating the death of the saint, usually called *khaul* or *kaul* in Indonesia. The lodge doubles up as a religious seminary for youth, mostly young men, which teaches a standard course in religious studies, with a traditional Sufi inflection. The centrality of teaching in the Indonesian lodges seems often to overshadow the centrality of saintly charisma and pilgrimage (*ziarah*) to a Sufi shrine characteristic of Pakistani and Middle Eastern central lodges. In Pakistan, Bareilvi, Sufi-oriented, schools and seminaries are kept separate

5 Sufi-minded ‘ulama are also found in Egypt where Sufi orders continue to flourish.

from saints' lodges (on the growth in the number of these schools in Pakistan see Malik 1998).

Several ambiguities arise in the literature from the educational role of the *pesantren* Sufi lodges in Indonesia. The saint or his deputies (*khalifa*, *khulfat*, known in Indonesia also as *badal murshid*) who head the lodges are often described in English as 'teachers'. More usually in Sufi parlance, the saint as religious guide on the Sufi path is called a *murshid*. Saints in South Asia never officiate as religious officials in the mosque or in weddings and funerals. Unless they are minor saints, they never teach young children. These are tasks allocated to learned religious clerics who respect saintly traditions. The saint's role is confined to guiding his initiates (*murids*), healing supplicants, advising his flock and pronouncing *du'a*, a supplicatory prayer, benediction or blessing. In addition, the saint organizes the feeding of the multitudes in rituals, festivals, and weekly *zikr* meetings at the central lodge.

So who is the *kyai* in Indonesian Sufi Islam? Is he a teacher of young men and small children or a *murshid*, initiating and guiding his disciples?

The second ambiguity in the literature arises in relation to the organization of *pesantren* Sufi lodges in Indonesia. Woodward, following Dhofier (1980), describes the rise of a major Indonesia *kyai* saint, Hasyim Asy'ari, born in 1881, scion to a saintly family (Woodward 1989: 136). He began 'teaching' in his father's lodge at the age of 13 and later studied in Mecca. Returning to Java in 1899, he 'taught' briefly at his older brother's lodge before founding his own lodge, Pesantren Tebuireng at Cukir in East Java. Woodward says that "within ten years it was a major supplier of teachers to other *pesantren*". He reports that according to Dhofier (1982: 95-96), Asy'ari's students were sent to found their own lodges, many of which became institutions with over a thousand students.

The question is, were these so-called student-turned-teacher disciples promoted by the saint as his deputies and messengers (*khalifa*), being in some cases even aspiring *kyai* saints in their own right, or were they merely learned '*ulama*? One possibility is that in Indonesia two centrally focused, regional systems overlap, but only partially: one system is that of learned scholars, the '*ulama*, who remain connected to a major center of learning such as Tebureng in Easter Java, described by Dhofier (1999). Dhofier says that in its heyday there were 500 madrassas linked this lodge with 200,000 students, and it was the center of the NU (the Nahdatul 'Ulama), an association of '*ulama*, with its circuit of meetings and conferences (see Hefner 2002: 144). Alternatively, one might look at the regional cults of the *kyai* or saints as comprising the sacred center along with its *khulafa*, sent by the saint to found new lodges, who continue to recognize their allegiance to their saint-guide, and to regard his lodge as the cult center. This view is lent support by Jamhari (2002)'s discussion of the central lodge in Buntet of a Tijanniya saint studied by Muhaimin

(1995: 346). Kyai Abbas acting as murshid, he says, ‘organised and centralised’ this Sufi order widely through the establishment of new lodges centered on Buntet (Jamhari 2002: 19-20). Van Bruinessen (2003: 9) reports on an ‘*alim*’ who “succeeded his father Romly as the major Qadiriyya wa-Naqshbandi teacher of East Java and inherited a vast network of hundreds of local, mostly rural, groups of followers led by local deputies that went on expanding, and he established close contacts with members of the military and political establishment in Jakarta”. He further reports that “in West Java, there was a rapidly expanding Qadiriya wa-Naqshbandiya network too, centered upon the *pesantren* of Suryalaya and its chief teacher, Abah Anom”. Sila (2003: 3) reports on a popular order in Bandung which had 318 places of *manaqiban* (Sufi circles practicing collective reading of saintly hagiographies), with the number of students extending to tens of thousands throughout the city. Another order, Kadisiyya, was said to have founded four branches, spreading in several large cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, with Cilegon as the headquarters (Sila 2003: 9). This particular founding saint claims direct inspiration from a hidden companion (*Uways*) of the Prophet. In one case, reported by Azra (2003: 5) a newly founded Sufi center which treated drug users through *zikr*, had developed transnational network throughout South East Asia. In other words, it had developed a new regional cult around the center.

How is such a far flung regional cult co-ordinated in Indonesia by the sacred center? We know nothing about these particular cults, but the literature contains some clues about the co-ordination of other Sufi regional cults in Indonesia. First, it seems that many saints are related to one another by kinship or marriage, and trace their origin as Sayyids to the Prophet’s line of descent, as well as through a sacred genealogy (*silsila*) of teacher-disciples (Woodward 1989: 145).

In his own study of Jatinom, another lodge, Jamhari reports on a traditional celebration, named *Angkawiya*, commemorating the life of a deceased saint, to which people walked on foot some 30 kilometers to obtain *apem*, a pancake-like cake made of rice flour, coconut milk, sugar, salt, and oil (Jamhari 2000: 228). The festival, also known as *apenam* (ibid.: 205-215; 2002: 29), culminates in a ritual struggle by the attendant crowd for the pancakes, regarded as endowed with powerful blessing (*baraka*), thrown from a tall tower. As many as three tons of flour are donated by surrounding villagers, and the *apem* itself can only be baked by direct descendants of the saint (Jamhari 2000: 217, 226). The *apem* is arranged in a mountainous shape, in two types, one male, one female, representing the saint, Kyai Ageng Gribig, and his wife (ibid.: 226). Before its distribution a supplication (*du‘a*) is made over it and during its distribution the crowds chant *dhihr* and address God, the Almighty and most powerful (ibid.: 227). Exegesis Jamhari obtained highlighted

the spiritual aspect of the scramble, the ‘striving’ for *apem*. “This means that if in the *slametan* you obtained *apem*”, one informant told Jamhari, “this indicates that you have obtained a spiritual blessing from Kyai Ageng Gribig” (the departed saint) (ibid.: 39). The *apem*, containing *baraka*, is not eaten but can be used in various ways: as a ‘fertilizer’ scattered over fields, to get rid of pest attacks, to protect a house (ibid.: 229).

We see here parallels with the ‘*urs*’ in Pakistan as an annual ritual festival at the sacred center, the abode of the saint, to which all the branches of a regional cult make pilgrimage. This is a moment of sacred exchange: the saint feeds the multitudes, slaughtering hundreds of animals in sacrifice, while disciples return from the lodge with gifts of white caps and cotton scarves. The moment of *du‘a*, supplication, is a breathless moment of sacred *communitas*. Indeed, I have argued that the ‘*urs*’ is the organizational hub of Zindapir’s and other Sufi regional cults. Woodward reports on the royal Sufi rituals at Yogyakarta, in which the sultan is said to attain mystical union with God and tens of thousands of people gathered are offered ‘mountains’ of sticky rice, highly charged with blessing (Woodward 1989: 179). Like the King of Morocco, Indonesian royals also claim direct descent from the Prophet. Dhofier (1999) reports that in the minor lodge at Tegalsari, at its heyday, during the annual *kaul* five cows, forty goats and hundreds of chickens were slaughtered for the festival. Jamhari reports that in the annual *kaul akbar* ceremony at the shrine of Sunan Tembayad, which lasts for a whole week, the cloth on the grave, the *pasang singep*, is changed and the old cloth is cut into handkerchief shapes and distributed to visitors, sometimes for a fee (Jamhari 2000: 127, 218). In Pakistan *dupatta*, green, red or black shawls, are carried through the lodge and laid on the saint’s grave, much as they would be held over the bride’s head at a *mehndi*, pre-wedding ritual, symbolizing his union, ‘marriage’ with God (Werbner 2003: 252-254, 269).

Van Bruinessen tells us that from 1950 to 1970, traditional *tariqas* such as the Naqshbandi, Qadri and Tijani, “expanded considerably and built up enormous rural followings, that had turned umbrella organizations into significant political actors” (2003: 13) with many top level army officers and politicians. This is very like the following built up by Zindapir. But what are these so-called umbrella organizations? Is he referring here to the regional cults formed around particular living saints, or are they the associations that joined these cults together? Once again organizational analysis and the use of vernacular terminology inhibit theoretical and conceptual comparisons with Sufi orders elsewhere. For example, according to van Bruinessen (ibid.) among the living saints that emerged were antinomian characters, but we are not told whether they were able to build regional cults, or whether they simply had a high-level clientele who believed in their magical powers of blessing.

A further weakness in this literature is that no distinction is made between (1) disciples, (2) supplicants to a saint seeking blessing or healing, and (3) 'groups' of disciples attending the sacred center, whether merely forming a *zikr* circle, or based at an alternative lodge. Second, we know little about how students are recruited to study at the lodge. How can a Javanese lodge attract young students in their teens from as far afield as Bali or Malaysia? Such recruitment from a vast catchment area implies connections—whether via key individuals or lodges located in peripheral areas.

Muhaimin (1995) contains the best ethnographic detail on the connections between different lodges. He reports on the many instances in which a saint sends delegates to found new lodges, much as Zindapir did in Pakistan and beyond it. The career of a saint usually begins as a young man with travel for learning, in which he may spend time at many different lodges, and often in the Hijaz, before returning to his original lodge and ultimately founding his own lodge. Over time a network of lodges emerges, linked through discipleship to the central lodge (see in particular Muhaimin 1995: 311, 351). There is a tendency for saints to recruit talented sons-in-law by marrying them to their daughters, and many lodges are connected by intricate kinship relations, since saints tend to marry endogamously with families tracing descent to the Prophet (ibid.: 317, 320). Lodges often celebrate the eleventh of the month (known in Pakistan as *gyarvi sharif*) much as they do in Pakistan, and Muhaimin reports regular visits from other branches to such celebrations. This, in addition to the annual ritual commemorating the saint's death, the *kaul*, celebrated in most central lodges in Java, although we are told little about the delegations from other lodges attending such festivals. It is also evident from the ethnography that most big saints go on regular circuits to visit outlying branches of the lodge.

As in other regional cults, large Sufi regional cults in Indonesia encompass a wide catchment area, including followers on other islands (Bali, Kalimantan, Sumatra) and beyond, in Singapore and Malaysia. They are thus inter-ethnic and trans-national. This is a distinctive feature of central place organizations and pilgrimage centers, which do not respect administrative and territorial boundaries. According to Richard Werbner, regional cults are, distinctively,

cults of the middle range—more far-reaching than any parochial cult of the little community, yet less inclusive in belief and membership than a world religion in its most universal form. Their central places are shrines in towns and villages, by cross-roads or even in the wild, apart from human habitation, where great populations from various communities or their representatives, come to supplicate, sacrifice, or simply make pilgrimage. They are cults which have a topography of their own, con-

ceptually defined by the people themselves and marked apart from other features of cultural landscapes by ritual activities. (R. Werbner 1977: ix)

Like other regional cults, Sufi cults are transregional, transnational, and transethnic. They interpenetrate with one another rather than generating contiguous, bounded territories. They leapfrog across major political and ethnic boundaries, creating their own sacred topographies and flows of goods and people. These override, rather than being congruent with, the political boundaries and subdivisions of nations, ethnic groups, or provinces (*ibid.*). For example, in the regional cult headed by Zindapir in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan, followers within Pakistan were Pashtun, Punjabi, and Sindhi speakers. The cult extended into Afghanistan, and also had South African (Indian Muslim) followers, who are mainly Gujarati speakers. Zindapir's Murshid, Baba Qasim, had Hindu and Sikh followers. Zindapir was seeking to reach Christians in Sindh and was very welcoming to Christians, Japanese, and even a Jew like myself, since this proved his universal inclusiveness. There are still shrines both in India and Pakistan that have Muslim and Hindu followers (see, for example, Saheb 1998).

Regional cult analysis aims to disclose hidden structural interdependencies and ruptures between different domains of action: economic, ritual, political. Like other regional cults, Sufi regional cults are both linked to centers of political power and in tension with them. Various historical studies have highlighted the pragmatic tendencies of Sufism in South Asia which have enabled Sufi saints to accommodate to a variety of different political regimes and circumstances, over many centuries of imperial and postcolonial rule.⁶ The relationship between the political center and the sacred center is a changing, historically contingent one, and in this sense, as in others, regional cults are historically evolving social formations.⁷

6 See, for example, Gilmartin (1984), (1988); Eaton (1978), (1984), (1993); Mann (1989); Liebeskind (1998); on North Africa see Eickelman (1976), (1977); Evans-Pritchard (1949).

7 An example of the complex, historically unstable relations between Sufi regional cults and indigenous political rulers in South Asia is highlighted in Susan Bayly's study of South India during the volatile pre-colonial period from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries (Bayly 1989). Initially following the trade routes into the hinterland, Sufi regional cults drew extensive patronage from a wide variety of Muslim and Hindu petty kings and rulers who struggled to legitimize their rule by claiming spiritual dominion via important Sufi shrines or Hindu temples. The sacred networks of individual shrines extended well beyond a ruler's administrative territory and were thus perceived to be a source of power, so that displays of generosity towards a famous *dargah* became "important touchstone[s] in the competitive acts of state-building pursued by professing Hindu and Muslim rulers" (*ibid.*: 221).

In a landmark study of sacred peripherality, Victor Turner defined pilgrimage centers as ‘centers out there,’ beyond the territorial political community, and in doing so opened up a whole new set of questions regarding ritual journeys as transformative movements (Turner 1974: ch. 5). Turner conceptualized pilgrimage centers as alternative loci of value within feudal-type societies. Like the rites of passage of tribal societies, he argued, the ritual movement in pilgrimage culminated in a liminal (or liminoid) moment of ‘communitas’ which was anti-structural and anti-hierarchical, releasing an egalitarian sociality and amity. Pilgrimage centers thus embodied an alternative ethical order, one uncircumscribed by territorially defined relations of power and authority.

In critiquing the series of dichotomous contrasts generated by Turner’s theory—inclusive versus exclusive relations, peripherality versus centrality, generic versus particularistic sociality, egalitarian or homogeneous relations versus hierarchical or differentiated ones—regional cult analysis, as outlined above, aims to highlight the dialectic resulting from the complex *conjunction* of these apparently opposed types of relationships, coexisting in a single cult (R. Werbner 1977: XII *passim*).

As the history of Sufism in South Asia shows, Sufi regional cults are inextricably intermeshed in regional politics. This is because Sufi cults are not simply inclusive. They foster an exclusive membership, and yet the sacred center and the major festivals around it are open to all. Relations between initiates are said to be (generic) relations of love and amity, stripped of any prior status, idealized as beyond conflict or division, yet the organization of regional cults is based around the ingathering of elective groups from particular, defined political and administrative communities—villages, towns, city neighborhoods—while cult relationships are often, as I show in my book (Werbner 2003), marred by interpersonal rivalries and jealousies. The egalitarianism between initiates comes alongside internal relations of hierarchy, and all disciples, whatever their rank, are subject to the absolute authority and discipline of the saint or his successors at the cult center. Indeed, worldly status, class and caste are implicitly recognized at the central lodge, while saintly descendants often vie bitterly for the succession after the decease of the founder.⁸ If there is a moment of experienced *communitas* during the annual ritual at a Sufi regional cult center, it is the product of complex logistical planning, a highly disciplined division-of-labor, and constant vigilance on the part of the organizers.

In the face of criticisms leveled against Turner’s theoretical model (R. Werbner 1977; Sallnow 1987; Eade/Sallnow 1991; and for India see Fuller

8 Caste is even more in evidence in the complex regional cult organization of the Swaminarayans of Gujarat who divide ascetics from lay followers and recognize divisions by caste among the ascetics (Williams 1984).

1993: 212-213), it seems more accurate to say that sacred pilgrimage creates not ‘anti’-structure but ‘counter’-structure. Nevertheless, Turner’s key point, that pilgrimage centers and the cults they generate produce sacred geographies where alternative, non-temporal and non-administrative ethical orders are ritually embodied and enacted, still seems valid. In this spirit, regional cult theory, as proposed here, aims to conceptualize the dynamics of spatially alternative focal organizations to those centered on bounded, territorially based states or administrative units.

The literature also make clear the extent to which Sufi cults and orders are intermeshed with the politics of Indonesia, first with the politics of the court—royals claimed descent from the Prophet and officiated at major Sufi rituals—and later with the colonial and postcolonial governments. At the same time, most Indonesian saints guard their autonomy and refuse to be fully co-opted by any regime. This too is a widely found feature of Sufi saints and their cults.

Conclusion

Sufism always has its concrete, local manifestations. Without an adequate analytic terminology, however, and a conceptual framework linked to central place theory allowing for comparisons, the study of Indonesian Sufism seems doomed to remain locked in fragmentary descriptions and often fruitless debates about syncretism. Metaphors such as ‘networks’ are inadequate to describe the complex organizational logistics of Indonesian Sufi regional cults, especially because these networks are not documented ethnographically in detail and are sometimes said to consist of individuals, sometimes of groups or (in rare cases) of lodges (*pesantren*). Without serious consideration of hierarchy and authority relations within each regional cult or order, one has no sense of how such networks are constructed and maintained. Without serious attention to ritual performances as indexical events, the management of cult organization remains obscure, and no serious comparative analysis with South Asia or the Middle East is possible. Above all, we know very little about the kinds of sacred exchanges occurring at a central lodge—how are relations between saint and disciple or saint and *khalifa* embodied? What are the rituals that connect distant places? We do, however, get a hint of the prevalence of such sacred exchanges in accounts of the distribution of *apem*, sticky rice and sacrificial meat.

It is evident that, like in Pakistan and North Africa, in Indonesia as well Sufi centers rise and fall, wax and wane (see Dhofier 1980: 172, 235) as they do elsewhere. But the literature on Sufism in Indonesia lacks serious attention to the indexical dimensions of the annual saints’ ritual, the *kaul* or its equivalent, which elsewhere, I have demonstrated, revitalizes the charisma of a saint

and his dominion over an extensive catchment area, or *wilayat*. Too much attention, it seems to me, is paid to the educational, scholarly and intellectual dimensions of Indonesia Sufi cults, or the mapping in space of genealogical connections or chains of authority in the case of Sufi orders. These may not reflect actual organizational connections on the ground, but are often merely a way of conceptualizing space through the use of genealogies descent, familiar in the anthropological literature. In the case of Sufi genealogies, these trace the links from Pakistan or Indonesia to Mecca, the sacred center of Islam. To understand the charisma of a Sufi saint, and the cult he creates, sometimes expanded by his descendants, the need is to study contemporary Sufi regional cults or sub-orders, apart from the major global Sufi orders to which they recognize allegiance. The need, in other words, is to plot the actual relationships between branches and their disciples, and how these are sustained and revitalized through periodic ritual performance. This is a central theme in the regional cult theorization of Sufi orders.

In Trimingham's view, the larger orders were never viable organizations; their expansion took place, and continues to do so, via the *ta'ifas*. This was true of the Suharwardiyya order which was never, he says, a unified order but merely a "line of ascription from which derived hundreds of *ta'ifas*" (Trimingham 1971: 179). He continues:

Similarly with the Qadiriyya; the descendant of Abd al-Qadir in Baghdad is not recognized as their superior by an Arab Qadiri *ta'ifa*. Even the nineteenth-century Tijaniyya, as it expanded, has tended to lose its centralized authority. The shaikh of the central Darqawi *zawiya* has no control over the many offshoots (ibid.).

Only very small, parochial orders are coherent, he says, maintained by tours undertaken by the shaikh and his emissaries (ibid.).

Although lodges often imitate royal courts, the Weberian tension between bureaucratic or temporal authority and charismatic authority still holds true for autonomous Sufi lodges in South Asia.⁹ Moreover, the capitalist, commodity economy is converted at a saint's lodge into a good-faith, moral economy through altruistic giving to the communal *langar*, a form of perpetual sacrifice¹⁰. Even more generally, the site of the saint's lodge is set apart as a space of voluntarism, expressive amity, and emotional good will, of *sukun*, tranquility and harmony. The bureaucratic state and its politicians, by contrast, are seen as menacing, corrupt, greedy and unfeeling. They are not truly 'rational' in the Weberian sense since they bend the rules to their selfish in-

9 For a discussion of Weber's notion of charisma, see Eisenstadt (1968), and for the debate as to whether charisma is located at the center or periphery, see Turner (1974); Shils (1965) and Geertz (1983).

10 On this see Werbner (2003).

terests; but they use the instruments of patriarchal domination to achieve their goals. Theirs is a charisma of unbridled power. By contrast the saint's charisma—and his achievement of subjective autonomy and freedom—is the product of his perceived (and projected) self-denial and self-mastery, of love and generosity.

But at the same time, as regional cult theory proposes, social structure is not effaced in Sufi regional cults, just as the mundane realities of politics, economics and social ranking cannot be made to disappear; instead, these structural and ordering elements are incorporated in new combinations, and negotiated in practice. Experientially, nevertheless, the lodges of Sufi saints are for supplicants and pilgrims a fleeting sanctuary from the 'real' world, a place of self-discovery and self-fashioning. A comparative analysis between Sufi cults in widely separated localities, using the range of analytic tools outlined in this chapter, enables us to begin to explore these complex interrelationships between power, authority, economics and religious experience in the contemporary world.

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