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Politics of Worship in the Contemporary Middle East

Sainthood in Fragile States

Edited by

Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille

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INTRODUCTION: SAINTHOOD IN FRAGILE STATES

Andreas Bandak and Mikkel Bille

Introduction

In a village square in the Chilas region of Northern Pakistan, Mazjub Baba, an elderly Muslim ecstatic, yells out: "Muslims are frogs" (Frembgen this issue). Such an outcry may not cause a stir in all places of the world. But this particular area is heavily influenced by a strict and more literal form of Sunni Islam, where this would have serious ramifications under normal conditions. Yet, in this case, the man is exempt from harm. He is tolerated but remains rather inconspicuous in the strict Sunni reformist milieu of the Chilas region. His transgressive behaviour is seen as bewildered but also *perhaps* evidence that he is seized by God. In the lowlands of Pakistan he would most probably have been venerated within a Sufi shrine-cult. But here, in the Northern part, his presence is more ambiguous. He is socially positioned in an ambiguous state of whether he is to be venerated as a saintly figure of spiritual closeness or denounced as a heretic: How to tell a madman from a saint or even a prophet? For now he is simply tolerated.

Jürgen Frembgen's example points to one of the phenomena that has gained importance in recent decades in the larger Middle East, despite modernity's acclaimed efforts at disenchantment: the adaptation and contestation of sainthood. The case of Mazjub Baba emphasises the possibilities and dangers in the life of the individual, the group or the nation when the issue of excessive behaviour or signification is raised. By taking (or being offered) a position at the pinnacle of supreme closeness, the saints often act as "threshold persons", mediating between distinct symbolic orders (Werbner & Basu 1998: 9). In practice, this is not only a spiritual mediation between worldly and transcendental powers but also in cases of social conflict, where genealogical proximity to saints may be mobilised to legitimise status as mediating sheikhs in social conflicts (cf. Marcus 1985; Reeves 1995).

Recent events show how the very presence of saint worship in Timbuktu, Mali, causes conflict. Here new regimes of Islamic morality are imposed by *Salafi*-inspired groups destroying saint shrines to the protests

of UNESCO who on their part had tried to protect them by inscribing them on their Heritage in Danger list. Across the Middle East negotiations are thus taking place over who is considered a saint, which saint offers what and why, and should saints or saint worship even be tolerated. These contestations over sainthood are thus not just taking place on the outskirts of urban centres or in rural districts of Northern Pakistan. Rather, sainthood emerges as a topic in negotiations ranging from local tribal disputes, over national representations, to trans-national flows of populations and media coverage.

Beyond traditional understandings of saints as people chosen by God and acting as mediators, even national leaders often make use of connections to distinct characters as consolidating figures and mechanisms, while simultaneously maintaining an ambivalent position toward contemporary charismatic figures or the legitimacy of individual cults and claims to sainthood (Haugbolle this volume; Hopgood 2005b; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Wedeen 1999). Sainthood is inherently tying to political power, but it is also heavily embedded in negotiations of piety, propriety, and even sanity. This is what initially spurs our curiosity in this volume: how and with what effect do powerful individuals—state leaders, public figures, and religious virtuosi—tie links to a phenomenon like sainthood that so often is surrounded by precariousness and volatility? By denouncing or adhering to a saint, or even laying claims to be a saint, people balance a fine line between individual experiences and hopes of divine will or proximity, and the social and political life of that claim. By way of this introduction, we want to promote a particular perspective on sainthood that focuses on the *fragility* that sainthood inhabits, with related notions of precariousness, ambiguity and volatility, whether in the experiential state of a madman or in the nation state.

Sainthood in Fragile States

There has been a long tradition of studying the contestation of sainthood in the Middle East. Political science mostly focuses on the structural level of sainthood and assesses whether current political state forms in the Middle East are viable or not. Where negotiations of sainthood in a political register are important to trace out in terms of claims to power, this rarely includes subjective encounters with the saintly that do not directly inform politics; or if they do so, then not necessarily by direct intent. We instead argue that the field of sainthood is more productively conceived through the interplay between structural and existential states.

We here understand the term 'states' in a dual sense. One understanding centres on the state as a political or organisational structure, such as the Nation State or a 'state within the state'. This structural understanding highlights the negotiations that emerge over claims to sainthood in a collective sense. Here, claims to sainthood relate to a social situation and feed into or express wider concerns (cf. Kleinberg 1992: 7; Weinstein & Bell 1982: 6). Another understanding of the term is as 'states of mind' in an existential and social form, where spirituality, and experiences of the miraculous, is both a subjective phenomenon and embedded in social negotiations of evidence and faith. While sainthood is inherently social, it is also simultaneously experienced and negotiated beyond the domain of politics proper.

This distinction is not just intended as a play of words. Rather the point in the case studies presented in this volume is that the one cannot be conceived without reference to the other. Experiences of divine closeness often tie in with more mundane effects of social life and structural power. It is this interplay of structural and existential states that this book explores. Majzub Baba might, from one perspective, appear weak and bordering on insanity, but his claims can reach beyond normal realms and be potentially disruptive and dismantling of ordinary conceptions of power and place in Northern Pakistan (Crapanzano 1980; Ewing 1997; Frembgen 2006; 2008; Ivanov 2006; Saward 1980). As Michael Gilsenan notes, "To the state and to those attempting to regulate the spaces of power and citizenship, that person is above all a source of disorder and the illusory forces of magic" (2000: 605). In the region framed in this volume—a broad understanding of the Middle East—we see how apparently weak forms of power may exist in parallel, or even challenge and circumvent the classical forces of the political elite, the religious establishment or economic power, whereby strong forces may be rendered weak. We thus argue that the relationship between the two understandings of 'states' is a productive avenue for exploring the role of sainthood in the contemporary Middle East. This avenue points both to how subjective encounters inform political identities and to how political structures transform existential experiences.

The relationship between the two understandings is, however, not stable or unproblematic. Rather, the various states are as illustrated above effectuated through a notion of *fragility* that is embedded in their interplay. We take 'fragility' to be an wide and encompassing term that with its multiple applied meanings of easily broken or threatened, delicate, or vulnerable, illustrates how sainthood is encountered both existentially

and structurally with a degree of precariousness towards its tenability. Now, one can of course argue within a post-modern tradition that nothing is stable. Indeed, John Eade and Michael Sallnow have promoted such an argument in their famous book *Contesting the Sacred* (1991). This is a perfectly valid criticism, but one that misses both the emic point of view where tradition and religion may offer the stability of a chaotic life, as well as the fact that while meaning is fluid, it is rarely fragmented and detached from its source of identification. As argued by Simon Coleman (2002: 357), the very idea of 'contestation' has been one of the dominant lenses of scholars for the last couple of decades; a lens that may obstruct perspectives where contestation and forms of stability coexist.

Throughout the volume, various related understandings of fragility are highlighted, that emphasise the precariousness, ambiguity, and volatility of sainthood. While other related terms are also invoked in the volume, 'precariousness' highlights the lack of secure position; 'ambiguity', the openness to several interpretations; and 'volatility' the rapid change and unpredictability. The surrounding society may not necessarily be completely convinced that a person or event is indeed a sign of sainthood, but neither will they be ready to discard the possibility; they remain undecided. This fragility is not necessarily a question of people being permanently undecided or indifferent, but rather of the ways the decidedness is a fragile surface in the game of clarifying historical events and political negotiations. Through the notion of sainthood in fragile states, we thus wish to go beyond those previous studies where sainthood is a matter of perspective in which various notions of social and political legitimacy are at work. Instead, we argue that *fragility* and related terms are at the very heart of understanding the social potency of sainthood, and that this is what continuously empowers sainthood to be a phenomenon in political and religious life pertaining to both existential and structural states.

The Sociality of Saints

Sainthood is more than an abstract, ideal model of defining the order of charismatic figures. Sainthood imbues aspects of the religious practitioner's experiences and beliefs with content and meaning. One avenue of enquiry pursued in the chapters follows Robert Maniura's insight that, "the characteristics of saints are to be sought not in the inherent qualities of a category of persons, but in the behaviour of those who interact, or

attempt to interact, with them" (2009: 629). Yet, this also opens the door to interpretations that are in danger of reducing spiritual experiences to questions of social cohesion, where pilgrimages and sainthood primarily become sites for shaping social networks, ties and claims (el-Aswad 2004; Marx 1977).

Following recent research (cf. Gilsenan 2000; Meltzer & Elsner 2009), the chapters in this volume argue that by focusing on the very applications of and investments in ideas of sainthood, we are offered a broad and dynamic understanding of the oscillations between polemics and apologetics, ignorance and indifference, and oppositional and parallel movements, in the formation of sanctity and sainthood. The perspective taken on sainthood here is an encompassing one where a wide variety of ways by which ideas of the holy, charismatic and extraordinary, even in a non-religious sense, are invested in and with narratives, materiality and form. This implies, as we shall elaborate below, that various figures, such as prophets, companions of prophets, saints, 'friends of god', holy fools, and many other figures are encompassed within the heading of 'sainthood'.

To be even more explicit: we not only conceive of sainthood as bound to the specific figure of a saint, in a Christian tradition, but also as pertaining to ascriptions and a bestowing of sanctity as it materialises in the veneration of imagery and objects, as well as Islamic (Stauth 2004; Stauth & Schielke 2008), Jewish (Bilu 2005; Udovitch & Valensi 1984; Weingrod 1990) and even secular figures (Bosca 2005; Hermes & Noordhuisen 1999; Hopgood 2005a; Jasud 2009; Passariello 2005; Souboul 1983). In this we want to go further than the classical discussions on whether saints can only be found within, say, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox branches of Christianity, with its centralised hierarchical structure that may, at least officially, act to formally determine sanctity.

Sainthood is also a continuous process of stabilizing and de-stabilizing meaning, presence and content of events and persons. A saint may be potent and his/her legitimacy stabilised at one point in history, as compared to a constant battle over the status of another saint *in-the-making*. But this does not imply that decades or even centuries later, the powerful saint has not slipped into oblivion while the saint *in-the-making* remains; either in-the-making or as a legitimised saint. This is precisely because his or her ambivalent role and instability secure the constant reiteration of position. The question among informants may hence not be whether or not one can even talk about sainthood as a phenomenon to begin with, but about the way in which the *specific* example of sainthood often arises

as a deeply contested scene of playing out logics of evidence as well as social and political powers.

While Maniura argues for a practical definition of sainthood in a specific Christian context whereby: "the saints are dead people from whom one wants something" (2009: 646), it seems that the issue is more often that saints construct a relationship that *does* something. Sainthood is not a static quality, and if the efficacy of the saints is not recognised, then his/her saintly status may also be open to negotiation (Crapanzano 1973: 187; Kleinberg 1992: 5; Makris 2007: 150). In this sense a saint, as argued by Pierre Delooz, is always a saint for others (1983: 194). Furthermore, Maniura's practical definition shows its limits when, quite often, we are faced with *living* saints from whom one wants something, exemplified in the traditions of transmitting blessing between *sufi shaykh* and disciple (Makris 2007: 145).

More troubling, however, is the fact that saints are often believed to want something in return from the individual or group. For this reason, relationships with saints may also entail danger or a lack of control (Geary 1994: 116ff.; Orsi 2005: 61). If you go to the saint to obtain protection the saint will also want something in return. The saint can, likewise, from an emic perspective, punish, detect lies and fraud, and even claim something from people who do not frequent their tombs or shrines (Bille forthcoming). In recent work on Sufism, this has been elaborated in the crossing of the spiritual and mundane powers of the saint (Heck 2007). The saint here figures as a force with which people want to connect. This theme exists in both classical and recent research on the Middle East, where the notion of *Baraka* has received attention as such a connecting force (Cornell 1998; Gilsenan 1973; Pinto 2004; Westermarck 1926). *Baraka*, divine blessing or favour, is what the saint or the pious ones, in Arabic *al-salihun* or in Hebrew *tzaddikim*, may yield for their followers. Rather than a thing one possesses it is a mode of thinking about the ways the sacred enters everyday life (Geertz 1968: 44–45; Makris 2007: 147).

In this regard, the saintly prospect is also typically a charismatic figure. Charisma, however, is not just an innate personal trait but also an acquired and ascribed quality. Max Weber, in his initial formulation of charismatic authority, pointed out how such a quality, more than being an actuality, is often presumed or alleged (Weber 1978: 242). Yoram Bilu, in his fine work on Jewish saints and the relocation of sainthood from Morocco to Israel, builds on and adds to this understanding by situating charisma as: "tenuous, processual, and amenable to calculated use

and manipulation" (2005: 23). Bilu shows in a case from Israel how two different saints build on each other in a fierce competition, where both make use of various resources in the form of descent and lineage and popularity in constructing claims to sainthood. Both are industrious and fashion wholesale organisational networks, which attract money and distribute merchandise, videos and other items for followers. Sainthood emerges here as a late modern phenomenon in which celebrity and New Age conceptualisations are just as important frames of reference for understanding the popularity of competing cults and modes of ordering the past, as are theological doctrines (Bille this volume). The competing claims to sainthood in Bilu's case entail both a severe criticism of the other protagonist but also, and alongside, build on and add to each other by both claiming spiritual and worldly influence.

From validating miracles, to denunciation of saint pilgrimages, through national discourse rooted in venerated figures, sainthood matters in that it is not clearly discernable to all parties what makes the specific person exceptional, who it empowers, or to what degree sainthood is embodied. Recognition of sainthood relies on a complex negotiation of the relationship between the visible, the forces of the unseen, and political and religious authority. What is at stake is the political positioning of individuals whose actions—or the narratives thereof—transcend the ordinary and simultaneously the reaction oriented towards understanding the actions themselves as evidence of the extraordinary. The chapters in this volume explore the claims of—and to—sainthood in a broad sense, such that not just religious forces but also secular, national and regional forces, as elaborated below, can be discussed.

The actual political production of sainthood in the Catholic Church has developed significantly over the ages, and the Church has never been able to forcefully bring the veneration of saints solely within its orbit (Baldacchino 2011; McBrien 2001; Woodward 1990). For extended periods of both Eastern and Western Christian history, sainthood depended as much on public reputation as on official recognition. Only in the Medieval Ages did the Catholic Church succeed in establishing more formal procedures and criteria for testing and naming saints (Goodich 1982; 1983; Kleinberg 2008; Vaudez 1997). This process of formalising procedures is obviously political in that certain persons and people are selected while others are not. Historically, the Catholic Church has named far more men than women as saints, and likewise it has named far more people from its own ranks in e.g. religious orders or societies (Macklin 2005; Woodward 1990). In this sense

a permanent feature in the history of sainthood has been the attempts at controlling and containing claims to sainthood (Kieckhefer 1988: 2). The famous Catholic theologian David Tracy has recently captured the tensioned relation to the saints on part of authorities, when stating,

> On the one hand, the authorities wish to honor and encourage exemplary models. On the other hand, authorities often fear a loss of their own power if they cannot control the emerging autonomous spiritual power of the saint, living or dead. Authorities wish to be the only ones to name and thereby institutionalize as their own these potentially dangerous and autonomous spiritual powers in the community. (2011: 98)

An inherent danger seems to persist in the power of spiritual figures. This does not rule out the possibility of popular 'folk' saints turning into authorized saints as demands from below can be pressing. In this regard past as well as present persons may long be in a process to receive official recognition while others will never do so even if they are treasured and venerated as folk saints, sometimes against the wishes of the papal institution (Macklin 2005).

Despite occasional claims of the decline of religion, the use of saints has not been waning over the latter years, rather the opposite. A strategy of Pope John Paul II was to make the naming and declaration of saints an integral part of his visit to local churches worldwide. During his pontificate Pope John Paul II beautified a staggering 1.341 men and women and canonized 482 (Walsh 2011: 423)—more than all other popes collectively in the history of the church before him. Where this may give us an idea of politics within Western Christianity, this book deliberately goes beyond an exclusive focus on Christian saints, which we find somewhat detached from the empirical cross-religious negotiations taking place both historically and at present in the larger Middle East. What we therefore find needed is a comparative study of sainthood, where sainthood emerges in emic and etic terms, references, or functional equivalences. Whether in relation to the Christian saint, where the question and claim may emerge informally from below yet be incorporated into structural negotiations, or the Islamic versions which are often based on informal and highly localised negotiations, or dependent upon the goodwill of structural elements (Zeghal 2009), we see this broad comparative perspective as a fertile way of underscoring the political and fundamentally existential nature of the negotiations of sainthood. Thus, we see sainthood as a poly-semantic term with porous boundaries, spanning from the ecstatic, a shaman, over a Christian saints and Islamic 'friends of God' to national heroes.

Modelling Sainthood

Traditional understandings of sainthood and intercession often merges with notions of patronage, as Michael Herzfeld puts it with regard to Southern and Mediterranean Europe: "In these analogies of saintly and patronal relations, it is not entirely clear *which is modelled on which*, and it is probably easier to assume that both represent a particular conception of the person who is caught between overwhelmingly dominant powers" (1992: 60, our emphasis). This understanding of patronage and sainthood as related ways of working in and on a given reality has led to a focus on the political aspects of sainthood, to the detriment of what Aviad Kleinberg terms "spiritual sharing" (1992: 110). In many Middle Eastern countries, sainthood and claims to descend from saints, form a central reference in the distribution of political power, if not governmental or religious, then local. Most notable have been the many investigations of the role of the Marabouts in Morocco (Eickelman 1976; Gellner 1969; Geertz 1968; Rabinow 1975). Furthermore, those in power may willingly adopt or co-opt the saints as invisible friends, and by this move, embrace the role of the patron in representing or being the saints in society (Brown 1981: 38; 50ff.). The important insight hereby pointed to is that the expectations of the group may work on different levels in which political influence, spirituality and cultural identity are all, in various ways, at play. Sainthood may hence prove efficacious on both quotidian and more elevated levels.

Clifford Geertz reminded us that we need to discern between genealogical and miraculous sainthood; one relying on the ability to categorise events as inspired by divine forces, the other on the genealogical proximity to prophets, saints or the like (Geertz 1968: 45). From this latter perspective, the question of sainthood becomes less about the interpretation of acts than of relationship. This points to Ignaz Goldziher's early claim that the veneration of saints in Islam expresses the need to fill the gap between humans and their god (1971: 259). Or, to frame it in terms known across the Middle East: sainthood is another way of getting or making connections, or *wasta*, be they mundane or divine, with friends in 'higher' places (cf. Cunningham & Sarayrah 1993; Hammoudi 1997; Makris 2007, 150; Rabo 1986). These insights also highlight the analytical importance of examining the functional equivalence of different societal orders, in which the relations with persons and powers from whom you want something also places you in different kinds of obligations and debts. Sainthood and patronage, then, may not be the same thing but the social effects, and indeed their models, may resemble each other to the point of indistinction. In this regard, both

the secular leaders of the nation as well as the traditional religious saints may conjure up followers in the form of cults.

In most regions of the Middle East, there are one or more renowned figures, current or historical, that perform a role in shaping religious and social capital. The experience of charismatic figures raises a range of questions concerning how people know that what they are experiencing or worshipping is indeed a matter of sainthood. How do the (stories of) acts, predictions and premonitions of people become signs of sainthood, and not just the ramblings of the village fool? What criteria of evidence do they rely upon? And, if there are indeed different *qualities* of sainthood between, say, a *weli, sayyed*, or a Christian saint, then how do these variations become apparent to other people? Is it, for example, their efficacy in relieving the sufferer's pain, the miracles they perform themselves, or a question of genealogical proximity? As we are often dealing with phenomena that go beyond any empiricist perspective, we are left with questions of the evidence employed to substantiate relationships between the seen and the unseen, between revelation and concealment, and the fortitude of faith and scepticism. This is particularly evident in claims on part of the saint and his or her promoters that miracles are worked through their intercession and/or access to a special force—be it in a Christian sense of miracles as signs of divine presence (Weddle 2010: 141ff.) or in a Muslim sense as divine authority and God's intent (Thomas 2011: 214).

In prominent studies of the Middle East, it has been pointed out how differences can be found in 'higher' or 'literal' understandings of Islam as opposed to more popular forms of 'folk Islam'. Ernest Gellner (1963; 1969; 1981), for example, locates the veneration of saints in this latter form, even if this separation has also been contested for neglecting the way people may shift spheres of reference (see also Makris 2007: 49–51). Where different positions have been taken on whether to call Muslim *awlia* 'friends of God', saints or whether this is a Christian imposition (Turner 1974), we follow several other authors and use the terms interchangeably (Crapanzano 1973; Meri 2002; Reeves 1995; Renard 2008; Wilson 1983). In other words, it is the *functional equivalence* of singling out extraordinary persons for veneration and/or emulation that is important in this volume (cf. Hopgood 2005a: xii; Kieckhefer & Bond 1988: viii). The value of a comparative perspective across domains in contemporary Middle East, we find, will prove illuminating to the diverse attractions of persons, leaders and religious figures. This raises the issue of how such people gain a following, how wider circles in society relate to these figures, and how they come be prominent both in stabilizing current configurations of power as well as the opposite;

attesting to potentialities not yet seized. Simon Coleman formulates this perceptively when he elucidates how the idea of sainthood can be seen,

> as a concentration of religious elements found in all of the world religions. Links between sacred texts and holy figures, between bodies and landscapes, and between transgression and mimesis in the constitution of the religious subject are all located in the person of the saint as religious virtuoso (2009: 417).

This formulation we see as a viable way of framing an exploration of sainthood in a specifically religious sense. However, in this volume we aim at broadening the scope by taking figures of veneration not just in the self-designated religious groupings but also in the more profane notions of cult, charisma and aura (cf. Benjamin 1999 [1968]; Basu & Werbner 1998; Ede 1999; Hirschkind 2006: 36; 50ff.; Kuzmanovic this volume; Lindholm 1990; Weber 1992 [1922]). One way of understanding our impetus to broaden the scope of sainthood beyond the religious is hence to emphasise how for example nationalism or secularism, like religion in Durkheim's classic conception, is a way for society to revere itself. For this purpose, society produces and creates its martyrs, and makes its leaders resemble and mimic those from a spiritual domain (Allen 2009; Herzfeld 1992: 34ff.). Paradoxically, the absence of a charismatic leader may nonetheless create a cult around the leader at hand, as the case has been argued for the previous Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad (Wedeen 1999). Such cultic position may offer the person a role to play even if s/he is reluctant to take his or her part. The cultic position of these leaders becomes important as they mimic a model, known from other contexts or historical events. We are not therefore arguing that no differences exist in various traditions of veneration of saints, cults and charisma, but merely pointing to the value of a comparative project where both traditions and historical contingencies are framed in the concrete cases examined. A cult such as the one promoted around the former Syrian president and after him his son Bashar may be resting on porous ground and the authoritarian leader may very well be assailed and challenged if nothing is delivered in terms of hopes and prospects—as we see with the current escalating situation in Syria. In such a situation the *modus vivendi* is suddenly sundered and the power of the regime can start to crumble.

In other words, what we wish to achieve through the broad conceptualization of sainthood as a fragile set of relations is not just an understanding of the different forms and roles allocated to specific saints but rather of the models of sainthood as generic forms of singling out, marking and demarcating qualities of extraordinariness. Sainthood can be understood

as particular nested relationships with extraordinary persons, living or dead, that function as models *of* and *for* action. By model *of* sainthood we wish to point to the fact that the figure singled out as a subject worthy of special attention is crafted in concordance with cultural expectations, where the model *of* sainthood here attests to the viability of the prospect as a source of blessing and influence. The model *for* sainthood, however, points to the power of the saintly subject to attract emulation. More than just presenting a model worthy of veneration, this perspective presents a model worthy of imitation. In this regard, we transpose Geertz' (1966) classical formulation of models *of* and *for* reality to another domain in order to show how the existential state may indirectly inform the structural state, and vice versa.

However, the models *of* sainthood have the potential to become models *for* sainthood. Models *of* sainthood, in this sense, has a qualitative difference in that a person is distinguished, or distinguishes him or herself, from the norm through acts of excessive signification. Such models *of* sainthood may, however, transform into a model *for* sainthood in that future veneration or people may have to emulate that original figure to gain legitimacy or potency in the specific social setting. Thus the model *of* sainthood turns into a model *for* sainthood as a social consequence. Saints such as the Christian Lebanese Mar Sharbel, who attracts a huge following both in Lebanon as well as world-wide, are often found in a tension between veneration and emulation (cf. Kieckhefer & Bond 1988). The importance of the movement between the two terms is one of accepted and contested images of sainthood embodied by particular persons, and the development of these to wholesale matrices for future action, thought and affection. In using and transposing Geertz, we do not aim to render meaning or any fixed set of ideas of religion; something Talal Asad (1993: 29ff.) has criticised Geertz and others for. Rather, by highlighting the movement between *models of* (qualitative differences) and *models for* (social consequences) sainthood we want to open the door to both questions as well as examinations of mimicry, emulation and embodiment in everyday life, where none of these are necessarily fixed.

The Political Taming of Sainthood

With the announcement of sainthood, politics is never far behind (Blanchard 2009; Meltzer & Elsner 2009: 377–379; Green 2006). In the process of taming experiences that lie beyond the range of everyday

encounters, there is also the potential for creating alternative orders or neutralizing what can be considered a threat. The appropriation of the imagery of sainthood provokes responses, either through political persecution and denunciation, celebration and worship, or indifference. When evidence and practice of sainthood relies on the material world, its cousin 'iconoclasm' is lurking in the background. In certain events, the material remains are either left to dilapidate or intentionally destroyed in efforts to purify and modernise local traditions so that they adapt to emerging understandings of universal religious standards. An apt, and much cited, case of this is the paradoxical visual potency of the Taliban television broadcasting their destruction of the Bamyan Buddhas in Afghanistan (Flood 2002; Meskell 2002).

Angie Heo (this volume) takes another view of the role of media when arguing that *mediation* is critical for understanding both saintly agency and recent conflicts such as the uprising in Egypt. Heo's chapter shows how Coptic Christian martyr narratives in mediatised forms also become a way of framing political action against the Mubarak regime. Here, a Coptic Christian sense of sacrifice and martyrdom also leads the way to becoming martyrs for the nation in and through the revolution. Recent incidents, which have seen Copts killed, are hence recast along the lines of saintly action. Heo, in this regard, points to the importance of media and images to make narratives travel in today's world. The role of Copts in the new emerging Egypt is undecided and the sacrifices made are not able to guarantee that the Copts will be incorporated into the Nation, arousing fear as to what the future will bring. Another important theme brought to the fore is the relationship between sainthood and martyrdom. Historically, this tie has been evident in the Christian genealogy of sainthood (cf. Kleinberg 1992; 2008: 15ff.), but the same tie has also been clear in various Islamic formulations, be it in the battle of Kerbala and the Shiʿa inception of figures such as Ali, Hussein and Fatima as saintly prospects, or in Sunni versions where particular sacrifices has been elevated. In the Middle East this theme has been prevalent also more recently in the intifadas, where Palestinian suicide bombers have used this model for political and spiritual action (cf. Allen 2009; Hage 2003: 120ff). This also ties into the global fight for a particular form of Islam, where the giving and taking of lives can be seen as having saintly potential or resemblance through martyrdom. In similar veins, the American government after killing Osama bin Laden made sure not to leave any bodily remains, but to dispose his remains over the ocean. Bin Laden was not to be made into a saint or having a tomb, which could develop into a shrine. While the

absence of visible remains offers a potential for speculation about truths and facts, it also offers to defuse a controversial locality for worship or commemoration.

In the traditional understanding of saints as people chosen by God and acting as mediators, it may be that the worker of miracles does not him or herself lay claim to political power. But the descendants often gain powerful positions from the gifts and esteem that the genealogical link affords; sainthood, in this way, is productive of social consequences. Pnina Werbner's chapter is illuminating on the use of genealogical links to sainthood in positioning contemporary individuals on the contested borders of international terrorism. From various sources, Werbner crafts a fascinating portrait of Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani across the localities of Pakistan, the United Kingdom and the United States. She shows how a saintly career can change over time from a militant pole to a more spiritual and organizational one and, indeed, transgress any fixed presumption of locality. It appears, Werbner argues, that politically fragile nation states and volatile times make way for utopian oppositional millennial movements led by individuals who claim charismatic authority, whether by descent or by divine inspiration. Furthermore, the role of the new media increases and diversifies the place of gossip, rumour and conspiracy, not just for followers of saints but also for the scholar who wants to keep track of events.

In a very different process of incorporating genealogical ties, states such as Jordan or Morocco, both of them kingdoms, have, in different ways, sought to embellish themselves by claiming more or less direct lineage to particular Islamic prophets. In a recent article on sainthood and mimicry in Morocco, Malika Zeghal shows the shifting and fragile trajectories in the use of sainthood (2009). Zeghal explores how different models of sainthood can be forceful in relation to the power of the state but that the same model of sainthood can be rendered obsolete when the state mimics the model of sainthood. In the mid-1960s, King Hassan II had gained complete control over Morocco, silencing the opposition. Constitutionally, the king had the honorary title of "commander of the faithful". In 1974, Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine admonished the king for not living as a saint: "The king was described as a potential saint who had refused sainthood and instead remained a despot" (Zeghal 2009: 588). By placing such a model of misjudged sainthood on the king, Yassine himself gained a reputation: a fearless sheikh rebuking injustices narrated in the form of a dream. In the situation found in Morocco, where sainthood is built up locally, this very construction is located at the conjunction of faith and politics, and

the saint remains a political agent. Whereas this strategy worked for Yassine in a period of political closure, it was completely without efficacy when the Moroccan authoritarianism gradually opened up to more political discussions. In this changed, albeit still authoritarian climate, Yassine's narrative was rendered obsolete; he became just one social critic among others.

Secular Sainthood

Proclamations of sainthood are thus capable of both mitigating and destabilizing structural narratives of power, through both secular and religious modellings of sainthood. One may borrow ordering mechanisms from the other, at times consciously, at other times without much notice, and this is no less so when the model of sainthood is mimicked in a secular context, if such distinction even makes sense to the people. More than this, in states where secularism has been the foundation of modernization policies, grasping the saint, or incorporating secular figures in practices resembling saint veneration, is part of a political theology seeking, among other things, to reduce the influence of other evolving transnational religious movements, such as Islamic ones.

Parasitic features also abound in the use and appropriation of sainthood when states such as Syria or Turkey, with no monarchic succession, to a very large extent excel in a cult around the current or previous presidents (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Wedeen 1999). In Syria this can be understood against the background of the regime's Alawite composition, where claims to saintly lineage are impossible and yet a cult surrounding the president can still be found on display in all public spaces (Wedeen 1999). This is a cult in which the iconography deliberately draws on and mimics a religious register and has at least the immediate effect of simulating an idea of unity guaranteed by the president in person.

Similarly, in Turkey, secularism has created a fault line whereby a strong cult surrounding former head of state Mustapha Kemal Atatürk is attested to in the public space, and where he is revered more intensely than many Muslims ordinarily venerate the prophet. This has even increased since the elections in the mid-1990s brought the Islamic Welfare Party to power (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 22). Daniella Kuzmanovic (this volume) brings this tension between secular and religious figures to the fore with the notion of excessive agency. In Kuzmanovic's chapter on Turkish doctor and civic activist, Türkan Saylan, an ardent promoter of secularism following Atatürk, we see the full range of discussions and negotiations of the status

of a prominent figure in the Turkish public sphere. Kuzmanovic argues that the construction of Saylan and her public stature rests on ideas and stories of excessive agency that continue long after her death. Bedevilling by her opponents in the media after her death only added to her reputation. What is significant here is that Saylan, as a secular figure, attracts such attention and relays perceptions of civic agency and the Nation. By extension, Saylan thereby attests to the fault lines in modern Turkey regarding the role of religion in the public sphere.

In contrast, Lebanon has seen differing models of sainthood played out in connection with various factions placed at odds with each other and neighbouring Israel and Syria. Here, Maronites venerate the figure of former National leader Bashir Gemayel as a martyr (Hage 1992; 1996). However, as Sune Haugbolle's chapter also shows, the position is by no means uncontested. Bashir Gemayel is still revered today and has been given his own commemorative day, which some of his followers use as an opportunity to rally and reify their idea of Lebanon. Also in the streets, however, the face and icon of Bashir sends a not-so-subtle message of a strong Christian and Lebanese presence. Bashir's own life and death were aligned with nigh spiritual qualities, as his words about self-sacrifice can be read prophetically like Christ or Saint George victorious. The former National leader, in this sense, embellishes both a strong nostalgia and longing for a particular past but also an awareness of the precarious mosaic of Lebanon today. Moreover, martyrs and memorials play a larger role in Lebanon, where everybody claims particular historical trajectories in and through specific figures and their sacrificed lives for the sake of the Nation, religious community or village after the long years of civil war (see also Haugbolle 2010; Vogel 2010).

Gendered Sainthood

Similarly for Shiites, role models and ideals are drawn differently from saintly figures such as Hussein and Zaynab, which Lara Deeb argues play upon gendered relations to politics and activism (2009a). Where Hussein is embodied on the battlefield by males, Zaynab is emulated by females in scores inside and outside the home. While Deeb focuses on the role of particular saints for gendered practice in Lebanon, Edith Szanto's chapter explores the emulation of Zaynab in Syria, in terms of medical treatments and cleansing, such as sustaining medical traditions of self-flagellation and cupping. Szanto argues that the bodily practices situate spiritual

models in relation to contested fields of modern medicine and spiritual knowledge, where the practitioners' sense of healing and intercession are nested by contestation.

A significant point brought out by the work of both Edith Szanto and Lara Deeb (2009b) is the role of gender in the conception of sainthood. Different roles and models are allotted to males and females in the Middle East. In much classical, scholarly literature, however, masculine saints have occupied scholarship. It is therefore important to explore the gendered practices in relation to models for both veneration and conduct. In this volume we see that both gendered conduct towards the saints (Mernissi 1977) as well as the gender of the saint are illuminating to wider social perceptions. The gendered roles can be nested through the saint as an ideal, but it can also cross the gendered domains in appeal. In this crossing of gendered domains however also lies a potential conflict in some more conservative religious milieus (cf. Gilsenan 2000).

Recently, inspirational work has been done on Marian devotion and how Mary as a figure plays a significant role as a model both for Muslims and, of course, Christians to relate to both in terms of healing and empowerment (Jansen 2009). Here, visions and dreams often play a role in which both Muslims and Christians claim to have received or seen Mary and experienced cures as a consequence (Heo this volume; Jansen 2005; Mittermaier 2011: 156ff.; Shenoda 2012). This may be in public spectacles such as the famous Zeitoun apparitions of Cairo, which attracted an estimated 250,000 people. Over several months in 1968, both Muslims and Christians attested to the light over the Church of the Holy Virgin, which by many was interpreted as the Virgin Mary (Nelson 1973). This has also been the case more recently, as in December 2010 when a similar phenomenon took place in Zeitoun. The figure of Mary functions to encompass different religious groups in that she is nested in different cultural expectations and modellings.

However, these apparitions and messages are by no means beyond contestation but entail scrutiny and the production of further evidence. Andreas Bandak (this volume) shows this by exploring both followers and critics of the contemporary Christian stigmatic, Myrna Akhras, who on numerous occasions has claimed to have received apparitions and messages from the Virgin Mary and Christ. Bandak's chapter shows how the claims to sainthood also rest on a basic paradox of making the saintly prospect visible to others, while at the same time not pointing too much at Myrna herself but at the divine grace bestowed upon her and, by extension, Damascus and Syria. The followers are drawn into the process of

accounting for the very divine intervention even if, or perhaps rather *because*, many Christians of Damascus are reluctant to go and see for themselves. Evidence, knowledge, indifference and ignorance are diverse attitudes that all, Bandak argues, belong to the same field and are mutually constitutive.

Following this, dreams and visions play a significant role in leading observers to saints in different traditions (cf. Bilu & Ben-Ari 1985; Gilsenan 2000; Mittermaier 2008). Here, shrine visits, pilgrimages and devotions attest both to pious attitudes as well as to a form of pragmatism in relating to spiritual figures that may cross typical religious borders as well as change over time (Bowman 1993; 2012). In more practical terms, the question is then not only about evidence within the various local communities. It is also about categorizing the events in a terminology recognizable to other people—although that naturally does not exclude resistance and alternative negotiations.

The Piety Trope

Particularly within anthropology, there has been a recent enthusiasm for studies on the formation of pious subjects in the modern Middle East. Scholars such as Saba Mahmood (2005), Charles Hirschkind (2006) and Lara Deeb (2006) have prominently redirected the scholarly focus on the Middle East by tracing out how modern religiosities are lived and formed in Egypt and Lebanon, respectively. This recent spate of studies help us to get closer to the discursive formations of piety as ongoing struggles in which modern technology, such as cassette tapes and the concomitant use of recording and circulation of e.g. Islamic sermons, not only bring about change in a single register but also help orchestrate affects of laity as well as enable broader discussions on how to lead a pious life (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996; Hirschkind 2006; Hirschkind & Larkin 2008; see also Miller 2003). The similarly honed capacities of females in mosque movements in Egypt attest to the discussions of the limits of secular-liberal reason, or at least show contestations of how Muslim lives can or should be lived (Mahmood 2005).

In this focus on the pious subject, however, we see a possible danger in that the 'trope of piety' may be taken as *the* story of the Middle East, at least of the Middle East at the beginning of the 21st century. This runs the risk of giving greater uniformity to the variety of subjectivities found in the area termed the Middle East than is actually the case, as Edward

Said (1978) argued was the case of the Orientalist trope. As pointed out recently by Benjamin Soares and Filippo Osella (2009: 9ff.), the inherent danger in the trope of piety is the totalizing tendency to take the pious subject as somehow standing as the picture when actually it is only a part of it. Or, as emphasised by others (Schielke 2009; Simon 2009), that the project of forming a pious self is highlighted when it succeeds but not when subjects are finding it difficult to keep to the ideals.

The various chapters in this volume, each in their own way, investigate sainthood as a fragile aspect of social life, employed in a wide range of situations and levels of society that does not necessarily privilege any single domain of experience or political structure. This draws attention to the variety of connections made with varying degrees of consistency and intensity, and where piety is but one important path in the Middle East. Acknowledging the significance of the studies of the pious subject, we want to push the agenda of current research by asking when or even whether the trope of piety is well-suited to grapple with issues that traverse much broader segments than that of the pious themselves? Do we not run the risk of emphasizing a particular life form—the pious one—by focusing solely on this kind of subject formation? And do we not find *various* claims to sainthood, alongside the trope of piety, as embattled options across scales of locality, nation and region?

A feature in the negotiation of sainthood then is the question of *scale* and how it can be rethought from the perspective of sainthood, since saintly figures can simultaneously be local, regional, national and, increasingly, transnational, each scale gaining authority from narratives of events in the other (Deeb 2009b; Wedeen 2008; Werbner this volume; 1997). Mikkel Bille demonstrates this in his chapter, which deals with different ways of incorporating saintly figures in present-day Jordan. As the piety trope highlights, an Islamic Revival is increasingly shaping both religious and social life, as a consequence of which tribal groups in southern Jordan have distanced themselves from saint intercession. However, aside from this piety movement, there is simultaneously a parallel universalising heritage discourse aiming at safeguarding the sainthood practices. These heritage efforts are closely tied to a third universal trope of New Age shamanism that finds remnants of an original spirituality of human kind in the saints. In this sense, it is not possible to place easy limitations on the scope of sainthood within the confines of an Islamic Revival, since the potential followers of saints or involved people are bound not simply by territory but draw both attention and inspiration worldwide, shaping multiple versions of the saint.

While one may bemoan the loss of many local traditions of saint veneration or the destruction and 'creative reconstruction' of shrines that occurs across the contemporary Middle East, we are more interested in the social dynamics involved in the production, maintenance and rejection of claims to sainthood. Such an approach takes us beyond a one-sided critique of recent piety studies, and instead to particular analyses of relations, claims and contestations of sainthood as it is played out in Christian, Muslim, or secular settings of the Middle East. In other words, we see in the different chapters the possibility of unravelling the way the relationship between sainthood, piety, and politics is conceptualised and exploring how it is played out in everyday identity politics.

Objects of Sainthood

Stories also abound of the deeds and miracles of people who are now performing a role as saints. These stories are increasingly transformed and legitimised through modern technologies from the oral domain to the printing press or YouTube. These technologies are employed to standardise, recall and justify claims to saintly proximity, or to spread stories of the potent religious experiences or charismatic deeds of local figures so that they have a global impact. Simultaneously, as the ability to spread the word has increased, so too has the contestation against claims to sainthood either because they contradict other sources covering the events or because they are considered deviant or resembling idolatry. Movements centred on various forms of sainthood, for example the Islamic Mourides in Senegal (Roberts & Roberts 2003), often seem to balance universal standards of religious teachings with local adaptations incorporating iconic visual culture.

Whether sainthood is viewed from a strictly religious sense, as Christian terminology, as variations of Islamic 'friends of God', or taken in the broader understanding as also encompassing venerated secular subjects, the material world is often manipulated to legitimise religious traditions and interaction. Shrines, statues, relics and pilgrimage trails have, throughout history, been entangled in contentious negotiations of spiritual efficacy, theological evidence and construction, even display, of religious piety. Sainthood with its apparent focus on subjectivity, it seems, is in *need* of the material world in the sense of objects, bodily gestures and places, to make itself recognizable to others (Kleinberg 2008; Morgan 1998; 2010; Szanto this volume).

From the *marabouts, awlia, fuqara, derwish* to the *sayyeds* and *qadisiyyen*, sainthood is closely associated with topographical features; either in the case of their burial places, the places they perform(ed) their deeds, where they live(d) or subsequent places of commemoration. The geography of pilgrimages, rituals and prayers is integral to the history of saint veneration, and to the wider social politics of geography by shaping genealogical claims to, for example, land claims (e.g. Marx 1977). These places instil in people a sense of belonging. They tell the stories of past (or present) knowledge of the inhabited landscape and its spiritual or political power.

The material world raises the issues of the specificity of things to evidence claims of miracles, events or actions rather than remain confined to subjective experiences alone. Following anthropologist, Webb Keane, the material manifestations continuously produced in religious (and other) acts cannot be reduced to evidence of *something else*. Instead, "as material things, they are enmeshed in causality, registered in and induced by their forms. As forms, they remain objects of experience" (2008: 124). In other words, they are part of the practice of sainthood rather than merely evidence of it.

The material manifestations often resemble persons or bodily gestures that, in effect, mimetically call prophetic or saintly events forth (Ardener 1989; Navaro-Yashin 2002: 30ff.). The materiality of ritual practices and objects may elicit central concerns about the role of sainthood and, not least, the proper or most practical way of interacting with those things and people without profanation (Bille this volume; 2010; Szanto this volume). A key insight from this is that it is not possible to separate the material from the spiritual as the saint is vested in particular forms of icons, shrines, tombs, popular images and other forms of relics and paraphernalia (cf. Morgan 1998). Nevertheless, central and ongoing theological debates have been heated as to exactly what is to be worshipped and venerated and what not. Christian debates over the proper role of icons are famous and have been captured in the treatises by John of Damascus (2003). Where John of Damascus argues that worship is due to God only, he is positive that all materials that lead people to God can be used. The icon is not to be worship, but veneration is due to all saints and their likeness insofar as it points in direction of God himself. In Judaism and Islam the ban on imagery is famous even if various traditions have handled the ban with some variance (Flood 2002). In this volume we look at the processes of singling out persons or imagery for veneration, awe or worship

are particularly apparent in practices of iconization of both national and spiritual leaders (Hopgood 2005; Ghosh 2011; Tambiah 1984).

Knowing the Saint

Beyond the possibility of instilling a sense of belonging in people, any claim to sainthood must be related to the broader social landscape of the Middle East, where it gives rise to questions of ownership and veracity, polemics and apologetics beyond the control of any single set of actors. Many people, however, are reluctant to adhere to models *for* sainthood, as this would often demand changes in their lives. In this sense, many are satisfied to know *of* the saint but keep a certain distance until a need arises to visit the saint, be it in search of fertility or to be healed from ailments suffered. More than a century ago, William James captured this well when pointing to the indulgence with which saints are often accepted: "We are glad they existed to show us that way, but we are glad there are also other ways of seeing and taking life [...] We are proud of a human nature so passionately extreme, but we shrink from advising others to follow the example" (1982 [1902]: 339).

In this sense, the broader functions of sainthood can also be understood as fed by often intended ignorance of the particularities of the saint's potential power in that people neither believe nor disbelieve but suspend judgment, leaving it up to others' best knowledge (Marcus 1985: 456). To deal with the extraordinary, the saintly or charismatic in this sense plays into larger economies of *knowing*. Ways of knowing are informed by various forms of its opposite, namely not-knowing, ignorance and indifference. Where Roy Dilley (2010) has recently pointed to ignorance always accompanying knowledge as its shadow and even actively being produced as such, we also see indifference as a major strategy for avoiding having to make a personal choice (Bandak this volume; Barth 2002; Herzfeld 1992). In this regard, the fields of both politics and religion, if separation is even possible, are often not characterised by belief and conviction but rather by people acting *as if* they revered their political or spiritual leaders (see Agamben 2005; Bandak 2013, Berger 1990 [1967]; Havel 1990 [1978]; Vaihinger 2008 [1911]; Wedeen 1999; Zizek 2001). Being aware of the saint and confirming the *possibility* of miraculous deeds in general is, in this sense, apparently easier to acknowledge than claims of conduct such as the call for e.g. a pious life, which appears attractive to varying degrees to those who go to see and worship the saint.

The ability to explain (both existentially or structurally) the works and wishes of the divine plays a dual role in both providing powerful authority and stirring contestation, when the interpretation favours one group over the other, or borders on accepted theologies. Such contestation may go far beyond national borders, and indeed feed on transnational movements. The Islamic Revival is an example, in which the so-called purification and standardization of a universal Islam is spread through the mass media, to reach the Muslim world. Here, the legitimacy of many local saints is effectively questioned, and practices such as those of Gellner and others associated with 'folk Islam' are rapidly vanishing. Yet, as the case of Majzub Baba shows, examining the relationships people shape out of extraordinary behaviour is intermingled with strong feelings of both enmity or devotion, or perhaps the un-decidedness—even indifference—of actors, and empowers existing, alternative or parallel trajectories on different scales.

Summation

Three interlinked themes thus emerge through the chapters. Firstly, we see the potential for exploring models of sainthood found in contemporary Middle East. Here, we are not only thinking of self-ascribed forms of sainthood but also where models of sainthood are mimicked more or less consciously by religious or secular authorities. By so doing, we can explore the precariousness and contentiousness of any claim to sainthood. Secondly, we explore the objects of sainthood. Focus is here on the enactments, narratives and stories of the extraordinary or even miraculous as they are used as evidence for sainthood. Finally, a third theme highlights the processes and attempts at taming and domesticating sainthood by governmental as well as religious authorities.

The volume is divided into four parts. Firstly, we look at the way sainthood is *sustained* through processes of self-flagellation in Szanto's chapter about Syria and through martyrdom in Egypt in Heo's chapter. Secondly, both Bille and Werbner explore the *contested representations* in media representations, whether in museums, newspapers and television programs, or on the Internet, which, although located in Jordan, England and Pakistan, tie into much broader issues of global networks and notions of universality. Thirdly, Bandak in the case of Syria, and Frembgen in the case of Pakistan, explore the *indeterminate nature* of the claims of evidence regarding the position of the saint in social life. What makes a saint

different from a fool is not necessarily determined, and this indeterminacy may actually be the very premise of faith, belief and ritual practices. Finally, Kuzmanovic in Turkey and Haugbolle in Lebanon show how the functional equivalence of sainthood is modelled and contested in seemingly secular contexts that empower both leaders and dissidents through an excess of signification enacted through stories and material culture.

Despite the excess of signification that can be found in all the figures singled out as saintly or sanctified in the chapters, they are never under the complete control of any one set of actors. And it is in this fragility in applied notions of sainthood that both their danger and their possibility rest. Indeed it may be a central point in the efficacy for sainthood of producing subjectivities; that is, the potentiality of the unsettled. Our point in this volume is thus to show how fragility in its various understandings of precariousness, ambiguity, and volatility, is an inherent part of the social life of sainthood; if not in the saint, then in the practices and narratives surrounding him or her. While fragility is always a crucial aspect of social negotiations of figures and facts, the functional equivalence that is offered by modelling emergent figures in relation or opposition to other saints shapes a sense of recognisability that may produce faith, assurance or contestation. The exploration of the processes of singling out persons for particular attention is a promising one and perhaps especially so in the current changing landscape of the Middle East. In this climate we are yet to see how, where and why sainthood is to be used or denounced as a social force—existentially and structurally.

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PART ONE

SUSTAINED SAINTHOOD

CONTESTING FRAGILE SAINTLY TRADITIONS: MIRACULOUS HEALING AMONG TWELVER SHIʿIS IN CONTEMPORARY SYRIA

Edith Szanto

Introduction: Zaynab's Fragile Authenticity

"I doubt Zaynab is really buried here in Syria!" Um Ahmad, an Iraqi widow in her early forties, thought of herself as a devout Shiʿi, and she regularly visited the shrine, but she questioned whether or not Zaynab's tomb held the saint's remains.[1] Um Ahmad fled Baghdad and came to Syria after her husband died in an explosion in 2006.[2] Without stopping anywhere else, she moved directly to the Syrian shrine-town of Sayyida Zaynab, around ten kilometers south of Damascus, where thousands of other Iraqis sought asylum from the violence back home.[3] Um Ahmad was not the only Shiʿi I encountered during my fieldwork in Syria who did not believe in the authenticity of the shrine. Like many other Iraqi Shiʿi women I interviewed, she felt physically ill and spiritually exhausted. Besides becoming a widow, she had developed cancer. Yet in spite of her doubts, she visited the shrine and hoped to obtain miraculous healing and restoration from the saint.[4]

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[1] Sayyida Zaynab was the granddaughter of Prophet Muhammad and she is revered by both Sunni and Shiʿi Muslims, though her Syrian shrine receives by far more Shiʿi than Sunni visitors.

Fieldnotes, Monday, 14 July 2008.

[2] Note: All the names of interlocutors have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

[3] Since I left the field in 2010, the Arab Spring occurred and changed everything. Iranian pilgrims to Sayyida Zaynab's shrine have been repeatedly kidnapped and Iraqis are returning to Iraq en masse because they have been threatened. The Shiʿi community of the shrine-town and their practices, probably no longer exist the way I describe them here. However, because there are still Twelver Shiʿis in the Syrian shrine-town, I employ the present tense when describing piety there.

[4] Shrines in Arabic can be called either *qabr* or *maqām*. While *qabr* refers to a grave or tomb, *maqām* is more ambiguous. The latter term derives from a verb meaning "to stand" and as such, it can refer to a location, which houses a saint's remains or a place at which a saint spent time. Notable, the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab is colloquially referred to as both *qabr* and *maqām*.

Authenticity is not irrelevant for Twelver Shiʿis visiting the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, however, for many the shrine's reputation as a place of miraculous healing is more important than its authenticity. While stories of healing cannot verify the shrine, they do legitimate it. There are Shiʿis for whom the question of historical authenticity is essential. For example, the 'modern pious Shiʿis' in neighboring Lebanon, which anthropologist Lara Deeb describes, are very much concerned with authenticity and accept only authenticated rituals and narratives (Deeb 2006). For these Lebanese Shiʿis, many of whom follow Ayatollahs Fadhlallah or Khamenei as their *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* (lit., source of emulation),[5] Twelver Shiʿis in Syria are 'traditional', and lack 'rationality' because they value the miraculous over the rational. More specifically, Lebanese 'modern pious Shiʿis' consider Shiʿis in Syria irrational because many of them participate in hematic forms of self-flagellation (such as *tatbīr* wherein Shiʿis hit and cut the skin on their heads with swords) on ʿAshura, the tenth day of Muharram.[6] This difference in attitudes towards self-flagellation, rationalism, and the miraculous is not a nationalist or ethnic one, but rather a question of which *marājaʿ al-taqlīd* (pl. of *marjaʿ al-taqlīd*) are most influential in a particular area and what views they hold. In Syria, there are two dominant scholarly opinions on ritual self-flagellation, which rest on different understandings of health and healing, and which form the topic of the first part of this chapter. The second examines miracle stories and ritual practices, which are both symbolic and productive of healing and sustain the legitimacy of the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab.

Health and restoration are especially important in Sayyida Zaynab because many Shiʿis living there are impoverished foreigners and refugees. Twelver Shiʿis constitute only around three percent of the Syrian population. In Sayyida Zaynab, Shiʿis are socially heterogeneous; they include not only Syrians, but also Afghan, African, and South Asian seminary students, as well as long-term and short-terms residents from Iran and the Eastern Arabian Gulf. Over the last two decades (though this has changed with the 2011 uprising), a large number of Shiʿis who have come to stay in Sayyida Zaynab have been Shiʿi asylum seekers from Iraq.[7] Having fled a war-zone,

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[5] Lay Shiʿis are supposed to follow a living *mujtahid* (a jurist) who can answer his follower's legal questions. The highest ranking religious jurists claim the title *marjaʿ al-taqlīd* (or point or source of emulation).

[6] The practice is also popular in some parts of Southern Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and India. (For a brilliant history of the debate over *tatbīr* see Ende 1978: 19–36.)

[7] Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, Saddam Hussein exiled 40,000 Iraqis suspected of having Iranian affiliations. While many of these Iraqis left for Iran, there was also a

these Shiʿis seek physical, psychological, and interpersonal healing. They seek healing through Sayyida Zaynab, as well as the Prophet and his *ahl al-bayt* (his family and descendents) by emulating Zaynab, dreaming of her, and visiting her. Similar to Sayyida Zaynab's debated presence, the healing practices which surround and invoke her are contested by Shiʿis in Syria and elsewhere. The most controversial of these practices is commemorative self-flagellation, which according to its proponents, Zaynab first performed following the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE, wherein her brother Imam al-Husayn was killed. Moreover, many Shiʿis in Syria relate and discuss narratives of miracles that occur in and around the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab and dreams wherein Sayyida Zaynab appears. In these stories, Sayyida Zaynab functions as a role-model for pious behavior, as well as a patron saint who heals the sick and restores relationships.

This chapter looks at how Twelver Shiʿis in Syria prior to the Arab Spring responded to the ambiguities surrounding the female Shiʿi saint Sayyida Zaynab. Zaynab's sainthood is marked by questions regarding the authenticity of her shrine, her moral authority, and her miraculous powers. Besides skeptics, however, there are also many Shiʿis, in particular the sympathizers and followers of Ayatollah Shirazi, who sustain her fragile sainthood by visiting the shrine, by enacting her ritual precedent through self-flagellation, and by retelling stories about Sayyida Zaynab's miraculous healing powers. These practices create and strengthen bonds between the saint and her followers and thereby counter the ambiguities that designate Sayyida Zaynab's sainthood as fragile.

Part I: Debating Islamic Healing Practices

In his book, *The Birth of the Clinic*, Michel Foucault explains that in nineteenth century Europe medical doctors came to be perceived as sages, who were expected to be able to rid mankind of its afflictions eventually. In a sense, modern medical doctors filled the void left by discredited,

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large number that came to Syria (Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett 1987: 258). After 2003, another wave of Iraqis left Iraq for Syria. According to official estimates by UNHCR, at least 1.2 million Iraqis entered Syria between 2003 and 2007 (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, "World Refugee Survey 2009—Syria" [17 June 2009], http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a40d2b3a.html [accessed 28 December 2011]). Besides Iraqi nationals, there are also Iranian and Afghan Shiʿis who have come to Syria from Iraq. They were forced to leave the Iraqi shrine-cities of Najaf and Karbala following clashes there between the government and Shiʿis in the 1970s (cf. Louër 2008: 196). The situation has changed drastically since 2011 and thousands of Iraqis have returned from Syria.

medieval clergymen. Unlike Christian clergymen, however, doctors healed and saved material bodies, rather than immortal souls.[8] Since its emergence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, modern medicine has extended beyond Europe and North America via missionary clinics, aid organizations, and governmental health initiatives. While Western medicine has not replaced other forms of medicine, it has marginalized local medical practices, creating parallel systems of medicine that accord Western medicine social, economic, and political superiority.

In the Muslim world today, Western medicine has become the choice of the wealthy and the educated. It has by and large led to 'traditional' forms of medicine becoming associated with poor, uneducated, and rural populations. Concurrently, the relative inaccessibility of modern Western medical healthcare has contributed to a revival of 'Prophetic medicine' (*tibb al-nabawi*), medical therapies based on the practices of Prophet Muhammad. Unlike the medical doctors Foucault describes, practitioners of Islamic or Prophetic medicine claim to heal both the body and the soul by combining religion and medicine. Renowned Muslim polymaths such as Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina addressed and expounded upon 'Islamic medicine', which for them included cupping (or *hujāmah*), herbal remedies, as well as the recitation of specific prayers against the evil eye. While Muslims generally accept the permissibility of Prophetic medicine, Twelver Shi'is in Sayyida Zaynab continue to disagree as to whether or not self-flagellation (especially *tatbīr*) constitutes cupping. Proponents of self-flagellation draw on 'traditional' medicine and argue that self-flagellation derives from cupping and constitutes a miraculous healing practice. In contrast, opponents of self-flagellation draw on 'modern Western' notions of medicine and decry self-flagellation in the name of hygiene and public health, and representation, fearing that self-flagellation portrays a negative image of Twelver Shi'ism.

Hujāmah as Prophetic Medicine

Cupping is one of the most well-known and widespread therapies of Islamic medicine.[9] Cupping is praised in both Sunni and Shi'i hadith collections.

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[8] In "Birth of the Clinic," Foucault (1973) examines the emergence of medical institutions around the time of the French Revolution. He shows how the patient's body became objectified under the medical gaze, which has just adopted scientific procedures for examining symptoms as the basis for making diagnoses. Concurrently, patients' illness narratives became disregarded.

[9] As a side note, cupping was also widespread in France until at least the 1920s (cf. Gubb 1923: 639).

Books such as Andrew Newman's edited collection entitled *Islamic Medical Wisdom: The Tibb al-A'imma* lists sayings by Prophet Muhammad as well as the twelve Shiʿi Imams in favor of cupping. For example, (and I will omit the *isnād* or "chain of transmission" here) "Abu ʿAbd Allah, peace be upon him, said: 'The best ways in which you treat yourselves are through cupping, inhaling medications, steam baths, and clysters [or enemas].' " (Newman 2007: 63)

In the Syrian shrine-town, cupping is performed by both doctors trained in modern Western medicine and by practitioners of *tibb ʿarabi* (literally, "Arabic medicine"). While neither of the two hospitals in the shrine-town offer cupping services, there are dozens of independent doctors, at least three of whom perform cupping on patients. The healer with whom I spoke said that his patients include both Sunnis and Shiʿis, occasionally Christians, men, and women. However, there is a definite age-bias in that patients are typically adults or elderly.[10] Cupping is often done as a prophylactic or preventative measure, but it can also be used to treat headaches, back-pains, general fatigue, and pneumonia (Gubb 1923: 639).

Cupping is usually performed on a patient's upper back or on the nape, though it can also be done on the back or the top of head and on the lower back (Newman 2007: 67). After the skin is bared, the cups are applied. At the time of my fieldwork from 2007 to 2010, all of the traditional doctors I interviewed in the shrine-town had acquired Chinese plastic cups with suction handles. These cups can be applied directly to the skin of the patient and by lifting the suction handles flesh is drawn into the cups. Without these suction handles, pieces of cotton have to be lit on fire and placed into small glass cups. The cotton burns immediately. By burning the trapped oxygen, low pressure is created, and flesh is pulled into the cups (Glubb 1923: 639). After a few moments, bruises appear, and the cups are released. At this point, in the case of wet cupping (which is the most widespread form of cupping in Sayyida Zaynab), the doctor makes small incisions into the bruised skin and reapplies the cups. Small amounts of blood trickle into the cups and clot. The patient is then shown the 'bad blood' (or *dam fāsid*). According to Newton's volume, the Prophet recommended that patients look at the 'bad blood' before it is discarded (Newman 2007: 68). Seeing the clotted blood reassures the patient that 'bad

[10] Fieldnotes, Spring 2009.

blood' has indeed been removed from his or her body and thereby aids the process of healing.[11]

Contesting Tatbīr

According to Ayatollah Muhammad Shirazi, whose brother Hasan Shirazi founded the oldest and one of the largest seminary in the Syrian shrine-town, the sanguinary form of self-flagellation known as *tatbīr* derives from cupping and can therefore bring about healing.[12] As *tatbīr* draws blood from the head, Ayatollah Shirazi likens it to *hujāmat al-ras* (cupping on the head), which is one of the body-parts recommended by the Prophet for cupping. Besides comparing self-flagellation to cupping, the Shirazis[13] claim that *tatbīr* can bring about miraculous healing because it imitates Sayyida Zaynab, who was the first to perform bloody forms of self-flagellation out of grief over losing her brother Husayn. After the Battle of Karbala, Sayyida Zaynab and the other women and children were taken captive, and were brought to the court of the Umayyad Caliph in Damascus. On the way, the Shirazis insist, Zaynab was forced to walk behind soldiers carrying her brother's severed head on a spear. Seeing this caused her to hit her forehead against another spear, until blood appeared (cf. al-Bahrani 2010: 238–241). Hence, to follow and relate to Zaynab physically, emotionally, and ritually, some Shi'is perform bloody forms of self-flagellation on 'Ashura. In Syria in particular, men participate in public *tatbīr* processions, wherein they rhythmically march, chant, and cut the top-center of their forehead with a sword. In return, Zaynab may be more inclined to hear their requests for intercession and for healing.

Beyond imitating Sayyida Zaynab, proponents as well as opponents of practices such as cupping or *tatbīr* draw on a variety of notions regarding piety, health, healing, hygiene, and ritual cleanliness. As David Kinsley explains, traditional religious healing practices often invoke a standard set of themes, among which he counts confession, transference, objectification,

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[11] Bloodletting (or *fasd*) is sometimes mentioned in medical texts alongside cupping. However, I have not encountered any practitioners of bloodletting or any patients who had it performed in Sayyida Zaynab, though it persists in other parts of the Middle East.

[12] The Shirazis are a family of scholars, which was based in the Iraqi shrine-town of Karbala, until they were exiled by Saddam Hussein in the 1970s and 80s (for a more detailed discussion on the background of the Shirazis, see Louër 2008: 177–219; Szanto 2012: 287–291).

[13] 'Shirazis' is the English adaptation of the name *Shiraziyyin*, which designates a network of scholars and students who follow Ayatollah as their *marja' al-taqlīd* (cf. Louër 2008: 90).

and the assignment of meaning (Kinsley 1996). While Twelver Shiʿis in Syria do not generally assign moral failure to those suffering from illness, pious conceptions of healing do connote moral reformation or reconstitution (or *shifāʾ*). In other words, while sickness does not necessarily result from moral shortcomings, religious practice and virtuous improvement can nevertheless bring about both physical and spiritual healing.

For many Shiʿis in Sayyida Zaynab, especially those who follow Ayatollah Shirazi, moral refinement for the sake of healing does not imply rationalist or disciplined self-cultivation.[14] Rather, it connotes a cleansing. Modern reformers have often equated hygiene (or *nadhāfa*) with ritual cleanliness (*tahāra*). Yet, for understanding Shiʿi attitudes regarding cupping and self-flagellation during the Islamic month of Muharram, it is important to insist on an analytical difference between hygiene and ritual cleanliness. Generic dirt does not invalidate prayer, but ritual uncleanliness (or the lack of *tahāra*, caused, for example, by flatulence or drinking wine) does invalidate prayer. To posit a difference between *tahāra* and *nadhāfa* opens up spaces for thinking about healing beyond the Western medical model and for focusing on Islamic notions of healing.

According to Anisa ʿAliya, a young and unmarried female teacher at the Shirazi seminary in Syria, *tatbīr* and cupping resemble each other. Both reenact saintly precedents and affect miraculous healing. In both practices 'bad blood' is released from the body, which purifies and heals the body (Shirazi 1998: 146; al-Bahrani 2010: 105). During Muharram in 2009, ʿAliya explained that *tatbīr* itself constitutes a miracle because it does not cause any long-term damage to the men who perform it. Despite their loss of blood, the *mutatbīrīn*'s (or flagellants') continued ability to function normally is a 'miracle.' In contrast to other wounds that require medical attention, the wound caused by *tatbīr* does not need to be treated. ʿAliya emphasized: "Thus, there is no *dharar*, no harm." She reasoned that the human body is able to produce more blood. Therefore, the loss of blood in itself is not a reason for why it should constitute harm or danger, which is forbidden in Islamic Law.[15] Beyond purifying the body, the Shirazis hold that *tatbīr* is a productive pious practice. It produces personal, physical,

[14] Saba Mahmood (2005: 25–28) writes that the concern for the self in 'traditional' Islamic piety resembles Aristotelian notions of self-cultivation, which she contrasts with Kantian ethics. My Shiʿi example adds another dimension to her dichotomy by highlighting the difference between hygiene (*nadhāfa*) with ritual cleanliness (*tahāra*).

[15] Fieldnotes, Sunday, 4 January 2009.

and emotional relationships with Zaynab and Imam al-Husayn, which in turn yield intercession (*shafa'a*) and healing (*shifā'*).

Opponents of *tatbīr*, such as the Iranian Ayatollah Khamana'i and the late Lebanese Ayatollah Fadhlallah, argue against the practice of *tatbīr* by referencing hygiene and public representation. While neither Fadhlallah, nor Khamenei reside in the Syrian shrine-town, they influence local religious discourses by operating offices, seminaries, and *husayniyyat* (halls dedicated to ritual mourning gatherings). In December 2009, Ayatollah Khamenei's office distributed a pamphlet, in which the author, Wathiq al-Shammari, critiques the comparison between cupping and *tatbīr*. Al-Shammari underlines their differences: First, *tatbīr* does not use glasses to extract 'bad blood.' Second, the practice of *tatbīr* is unhygienic and therefore cannot possibly contribute to bodily healing. Al-Shammanri asserts that it can even cause illness if the blades used for cutting are not properly cleaned. Third, he argues that bloody forms of self-flagellation make Shi'ism look irrational and backward to non-Shi'is. Though al-Shammari is willing to accommodate cupping as a potentially effective treatment, he unequivocally decries *tatbīr*.

Similarly to al-Shammari, Lebanese Shi'is (particularly members and sympathizers of Hezbollah) denounce bloody forms of flagellation. They advocate that Shi'is should not participate in the 'useless' spilling of blood, but should rather donate their blood (Deeb 2006: 135–137). As Lara Deeb explains, Hezbollah organizes blood donation centers, which open during Muharram in Lebanon's Shi'i areas. Hezbollah assumes that *tatbīr* wastes blood and that the blood from self-flagellation is always at least potentially healthy and life saving. It can give life to the community of other Shi'is. In contrast, Ayatollah Shirazi and his Syrian followers do *not* view the blood spilled in the course of flagellation as wasted. They disagree with the idea that Muharram rituals can be reinterpreted as blood donations. For them, the ritual spilling of 'bad blood' is in itself a therapeutic and miraculous act, as it reproduces Zaynab's precedent (al-Bahrani 2010: 104–108). Donating blood creates bonds between Shi'is, but neglects the ritual bond between Shi'is and Zaynab and Husayn. It focuses on the community—not on individual devotees and the question of sainthood.

From the 1990s onwards, the largest Shi'i group residing in the shrine-town of Sayyida Zaynab has been Iraqi Shi'is, who were forced to leave their homes due to first oppression and then to continuing violence in central and southern Iraq. Impoverished, exiled, and disenfranchised, these Shi'is are not primarily concerned with the welfare of the Shi'i community at-large. Nor do nationalist feelings tie them to the other Shi'is

in the shrine-town, which include South Asian and African students, as well as Shiʿi visitors from Iran and the Eastern Arabian Gulf. The Shiʿi pilgrims who visit Sayyida Zaynab are different from the shrine-town's long-term inhabitants: many of them have money[16] and many of them oppose *tatbīr*. Iranian and Lebanese pilgrims, in particular, often oppose *tatbīr* because they follow Ayatollahs Fadhlallah or Khamenei. The Shirazis attract mainly long-term residents, including Iraqis, Afghans, and South Asians, who tend to belong to the working class. The two groups interact on the streets and in the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, but neither must take the other seriously.[17]

In short, Shiʿi authorities in Sayyida Zaynab espouse two different conceptions of health and healing, which inform Shiʿi views of Muharram self-flagellation practices such as *tatbīr*. On the one hand, Ayatollah Muhammad Shirazi and his followers conceive of physical and spiritual health as the result of ritual cleanliness. They categorize blood as either pure (*tāhir*) or impure (corrupt or *fāsid*) and argue that the ritual extraction of 'bad blood' not only heals Shiʿi bodies, but also links individual Shiʿis to Sayyida Zaynab and her brother Husayn. This connection in turn ensures intercession and healing both in this world and in the next. By self-flagellating, devotees inscribe their loyalty to Husayn and his family on their bodies and thereby, legitimate the saints. *Tatbīr*, according to the Shirazis, may be an act of violence towards oneself, however it concurrently produces healing. On the other hand, sympathizers of Hezbollah, as well as the followers of Ayatollahs Khamenei and Fadhlallah,[18] conceive of the healthy body in terms much closer to those of 'modern Western' medicine. They focus on hygiene, utility, and the community, rather than saintly or miraculous healing. Though they are not secular, they echo Foucauldian bio-politics in their concern for disciplining Muslim bodies.[19] For them, Shiʿi lay bodies are in need of disciplinary guidance in order

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[16] Pilgrims from the Arabian Gulf are usually wealthier than Iranian pilgrims who come to Syria. Nevertheless, both come and spend money in the shrine-town. The market just south of the shrine is even called the market of the Iranians (*sūq al-Iraniyīn*).

[17] Each Muharram I visited the shrine-town, I found increasing numbers of posters advertising blood donation centers in Sayyida Zaynab. Significantly, I also noticed that these posters were usually torn down within hours. Pro-*tatbīr* Shiʿis thereby visibly exerted their influence in public.

Fieldnotes, Wednesday, 7 January 2009 and Friday, 25 December 2009.

[18] Ayatollah Fadhlallah passed away in 2010, but his network of offices, seminaries, and *husayniyyat* continues to function throughout the world.

[19] Foucault (1997: 239–263) writes that in contrast to ancient empires and medieval kingdoms, the modern nation-state is dedicated to managing and disciplining populations

to achieve a pious and rational state, which includes donating blood for the good of the community. Unlike the act of flagellation, however, giving blood does not connect devotees to saints through the ritual transfer of fluids, nor does it seek to sustain Sayyida Zaynab's contested sainthood.

Part II: Miraculous Healing

One day, in the fall of 2009, after I had just renewed my visa for Syria, I walked by the nearby Iranian Cultural Centre. I thought to myself that I should go and look at their library and see what books they had on commemorative Muharram mourning flagellation. As I entered the building, Imam Khomeini stared down on me from a portrait—I could not tell if Khomeini was looking at me with approval or reproach. I was informed that the library was in the basement, and made my way down there. The library consisted of a large room lined with shelves and a desk in the middle. Behind the desk sat Samir al-Husayni, a Syrian convert from Sunnism to Shiʿism, who had obtained his PhD in Comparative Religion in France. He asked me what I was searching for, and I told him I wanted to see what books they had on Shiʿi mourning rituals. He said they did not have much, and suggested that I might have more luck at the Asad library. "But why are you interested in the topic?" Samir asked. I explained that my research topics are Shiʿi mourning rituals, sainthood, and notions of healing and that I was studying at various seminaries. He stiffened when I admitted to him that I regularly attended Ayatollah Shirazi's seminary. "They are populist and do not care about proper scholarship. Also, their conceptions of self-flagellation are all wrong." Then he proceeded to recount his personal miracle story.

The miracle happened in 1998, as he was about to present his first conference paper in Iran. Suddenly, Samir felt sharp pain in his throat. He felt as if his vocal cords had been cut. He wrote "please take me home" on a piece of paper and passed it to his colleague, the organizer. The colleague was bewildered, but when he saw that Samir could not speak, he escorted Samir home. Samir then visited the best doctors in Iran. All of them were pessimistic: "We are sorry, but you will never speak again." These medical doctors gave him painkillers but could do no more than that. Samir's wife cried, of course. He was supposed to come to Syria a week later and

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in order to maximize economic growth. The nation-state controls and directs populations by prescribing and enforcing a norm in terms of health.

he still could not utter a single word. When he and his wife arrived at the airport in Damascus, a friend was waiting for them in the arrivals area. The friend saw Samir's wife crying and thought she was crying out of happiness to be back in Damascus. Then the wife spoke up instead of her husband: "Samir cannot speak anymore!" The friend had organized for Samir to give a lecture the next day at 7 pm. Samir had not known about this and his friend had invited some forty professors and doctors. His friend was upset when he realized his plans would not work out. The next day, the friend took him to a well-known (and, Samir noted, coincidentally Shiʿi) doctor in Damascus who was an ear-nose-throat specialist. Again he was told that he would never speak again. Around 5 pm, Samir wrote to his friend: "Take me to Sayyida Zaynab." Once they had reached the doors of the shrine, Samir sent his friend away in order to pray alone. His companion sat down in the courtyard where he read the *ziyāra* (ritual visitation prayer), while Samir went straight to the center of the shrine, where Zaynab's tomb stands. There, he hung to the grid and prayed in his heart: "*Yā Sayyida Zaynab* (oh Sayyida Zaynab), there is an important talk tonight. If my words have any importance to you, let me speak. Otherwise, let me remain silent." Then he heard himself praying louder and louder: "*Allahuma salli ʿala Muhammad w-āli Muhammad! Allahuma salli ʿala Muhammad w-āli Muhammad! Allahuma salli ʿala Muhammad w-āli Muhammad!*"[20] Feeling blessed, Samir found his friend and said: "We can go!" His friend was astounded. That evening, Samir lectured for two hours. His friend sat across from him to make sure everything was fine because he could not believe it. Samir had no more pain and could speak without any difficulties. When Samir returned to Iran, his medical doctors asked him: "The doctors in Syria must be better than in Iran! Who was it?" And Samir answered: "It was a *tabība* (a female doctor)." They inquired: "Where did she study? In America, in Europe?" Samir astonished them: "No! It was Sayyida Zaynab! *Allahuma salli ʿala Muhammad w-āli Muhammad!*"[21]

In his healing story, Samir highlighted the place and the mediator of the miracle. Though he opposed the Shirazis' interpretation and propagation of self-flagellation, he did not doubt the healing powers of Sayyida Zaynab. By emphasizing that the miracle occurred at the Syrian shrine of Sayyida Zaynab, he affirmed Zaynab's legitimacy and power. His narrative began with a conference at which he intended to speak. Notably, it was

[20] "Oh God, send prayers upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad!"
[21] Fieldnotes, Thursday, 1 October 2009.

his first conference. He had not yet, but was about to begin his career as a scholar-activist in service of the *ahl al-bayt*, the Prophet's family. It was at this point that his voice, which he had hereto taken for granted, failed him. He was no longer in control of his own body. Next, he visited and submitted to the authority of medical doctors, which demonstrates his unquestioning acceptance of modern Western medicine. Even after various medical doctors failed to cure him, he did not immediately turn towards Shi'i saints. It was only when Samir's friend organized a lecture that Samir suggested visiting Sayyida Zaynab in order to ask her for miraculous healing. This time, unlike at the first conference, he asked the Shi'i saint to let him speak only if she found his message to be worthy. Her approval left traces on his body. His health became a boon of mercy. Zaynab legitimated Samir's speech through healing him and his recovery authenticated her sainthood miraculously, if not rationally. As a convert from Sunnism to Shi'ism (in a Sunni majority country), Zaynab's approval was symbolic of his acceptance at home. His PhD from Paris legitimated him academically and abroad, Zaynab's blessing sanctioned his speech as worthy religiously. It underscored his authority among religious scholars in Syria, where his extended Sunni family lent him no religious support.[22] It made him feel authoritative as he spoke on *Ahlulbayt*, an Iranian satellite television station dedicated to propagating Shi'ism in Arabic. Samir's narrative about Sayyida Zaynab's healing power highlights her religious prominence, establishing her sainthood as beneficent and effective. Samir otherwise insisted on rationalism and authentication, as he did when discussing self-flagellation and the Shirazis. However, when it comes to Zaynab's sainthood, it is her benevolence in granting miraculous healing that matters. The miracle, inscribed on the devotee's body, becomes part of the on-going relationship between a devotee and his saint (Betteridge 1985: 190–202).

Healing Women

Healing dreams follow a similar narrative structure when compared with Samir's miracle story. They begin with an illness, which the devotee

[22] Under Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad, there were some Sunnis and 'Alawis who converted to Twelver Shi'ism. Khalid Sindawi (2009: 82–107) even describes this as a 'trend.' Though nothing can be said for certain, these converts will probably suffer greatly following the 2011 uprising, because they are seen by average Syrian Sunnis as collaborators of the Ba'ath state.

intends to treat with normative modern Western medicine. The difference between such dreams and Samir's narrative is that Western medicine does not necessarily have to fail before miraculous healing occurs. Shiʿi women would recount such stories before and after ritual mourning gatherings. One Muharram evening, at the Husayniyya al-Wilaya just south of the shrine, the *mullaya* (a female leader of *majālis ʿazā'* or ritual mourning gatherings) related the following dream, which I heard several times elsewhere with only slight variations:

The *mullaya*'s elderly mother needed surgery on her leg. However, being afraid of doctors, the mother had delayed it as long as possible. The night before she had an appointment at the hospital for the operation, she dreamt that she found herself at the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab. There, a completely veiled woman came up to her with a glass of water in her hand. The mysterious figure instructed the dreamer to drink the glass of water, after which the former recited a prayer for the latter's leg. When the narrator's mother went to the doctor the next morning, the doctor informed her that there was nothing wrong with her leg and that she no longer required surgery.[23] In her dream, as in the case of Samir's miracle narrative, visiting the shrine was a prerequisite for healing. And though only the *mullaya*'s mother 'saw' Sayyida Zaynab both identified the saint as the source of their miraculous healing.

Dreams can both accompany and foreshadow healing and restoration for Shiʿi devotees and their loved ones. After a Muharram mourning gathering at an independent *husayniyya* in the Syrian shrine-town, Salma, an elderly Iraqi woman, raised her voice and recounted a dream wherein she saw Fatima al-Zahra, the mother of Zaynab. Salma knew that it was Fatima, because her face consisted of bright light. Salma's son had just been imprisoned and she had been very worried about him. In Salma's dream, she encountered both her son and Fatima Zahra. Fatima offered Salma a glass of water, which Salma gave to her son. The next day, Salma's son was released from prison.[24] Like in the afore-mentioned dream narrative, the transference of a pure substance (i.e. water) from a saint to a devotee creates a gifting relationship which enables healing and, in this case, release from prison. As anthropologist Amira Mittermaier brilliantly writes, "dreams-stories can open up critical spaces and possibilities" (2011: 2).

[23] Fieldnotes, Friday, 9 January 2009.
[24] Ibid.

Especially in times of crisis and war, Mittermaier explains that dreams matter, "*not* because they provide dreamers with a protective blanket of false consciousness of hallucinatory wish fulfillment, but because they insert the dreamer into a wider network of symbolic debts, relationships, and meanings" (2–3). It is in the context of these relationships, that healing occurs and Zaynab's contested sainthood is sustained.

The transactional aspect of the relationship between saints and Shiʿis is highlighted in the ritual of *nidhr* (making religious vows) and in the sponsorship of *majālis ʿazā'*. When Shiʿi women take an oath, they often promise Zaynab to visit her and/or distribute sweets at her shrine if they are healed. If healing does not take place, devotees are not obliged to hold up their end of the bargain (Betteridge 1985: 190–202). Shiʿi women I interviewed at the shrine reported coming to Sayyida Zaynab to obtain healing from diseases such as breast-cancer.[25] They would visit medical doctors, too. They pointed out that even expensive medical doctors could not guarantee complete recovery. The order of the *nidhr* is reversed when sponsoring mourning gatherings. In hosting *majālis ʿazā'*, women initiate an interaction, thereby pressuring saints to grant their devotees' requests.

Um Hasan, an *ʿalawiyya* in her mid-thirties from Basra with seven children, performed numerous private mourning gatherings at women's private homes in the shrine-town during Muharram and at the private Husayniyya Abu Fadhl throughout the rest of the year. She said she assists women in finding spouses and conceiving children by performing *majālis ʿazā'*. Once she helped a young Iraqi woman who did not receive any desirable suitors by performing a mourning gathering in the name of Qasim ibn al-Hasan, Zaynab's nephew who died at the Battle of Karbala while engaged to his cousin, Fatima, a daughter of Husayn. Though the wedding never actually happened, its reenactment fulfills the wishes of Qasim's mother, which makes the saints more inclined to heal and to intercede.[26] Um Hasan instructed the young woman to "wear the dress of the wedding of Qasim" (*labasat libās ʿurs Qasim*), to wear a black *abaya* (or outer garment) and a green cloth as a face-veil in order to ritually relate to and performatively become Fatima. The young woman played Fatima by carrying a tray with candles and henna paste, which symbolize weddings,

[25] For example, Sabrina Mervin (2009) writes that in 1950 a Pakistani businessman, following the healing of his prodigious son, donated money for decorating the tomb.

[26] Fieldnotes, Monday, 5 January 2009.

and by offering these to the participants of the mourning gathering (cf. Ruffle 2009). Within two weeks, the girl was engaged.[27]

If a woman has difficulty conceiving, she may sponsor a mourning gathering in remembrance of ʿAli Asghar (or Tifl Radiyʿ, an infant who was killed by an arrow at the Battle of Karbala). Alternately, a woman may make a religious oath (or *nidhr*), wherein she promises to either sponsor a mourning gathering or contribute milk to be distributed at a public mourning gathering if she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a child. In Sayyida Zaynab, Shiʿis mourn the death of ʿAli Asghar on the fourth of Muharram. On the fourth of Muharram in 2009, cradles symbolizing ʿAli Asghar were placed near pulpits in public *husayniyyat*, such as the Husayniyya al-Wilaya. After the *majālis ʿazā'*, some women rocked the cradle a little, others pinned money to it, and again others tied knots in the green cloth that veiled the cradle. Inside, there was a baby-size doll swaddled in green cloth, with an arrow stuck to the neck, which was painted red. There were also three Barbie-like dolls. I was told that the three smaller dolls were for Ruqayya, who was another child of Husayn present at the Battle of Karbala. When I asked about the cradle, an *ʿalawiyya* (a female descendant of Imam ʿAli and Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad) took the green cloth off the cradle and began wrapping it around the waist and stomach of a young woman. The *ʿalawiyya* began reciting prayers in order to help the young woman conceive. The *ʿalawiyya* made the young woman promise that she would have to name her son Haydar or ʿAli in recognition of ʿAli Asghar, whose blanket she had wrapped around the young woman.[28] By enveloping the young woman physically with the symbolic blanket of ʿAli Asghar, the *ʿalawiyya* bound the devotee to the saints. This binding allowed blessing to be transferred from the sacred item[29] to the woman. As with miraculous healing, the Shiʿi practices of *nidhr* and sponsoring ritual gatherings require, create, and maintain relationships between saints and their followers, which in turn sustain the legitimacy of sainthood in Shiʿism (Betteridge 1985).

Divine Proof

Along with miraculous healing narratives, Shiʿi women I met in seminaries in the shrine-town of Sayyida Zaynab recounted dreams and visions,

[27] Fieldnotes, Saturday, 7 November 2009.
[28] Fieldnotes, Monday, 21 December 2009.
[29] It was sacred, because it belonged to the *ahl al-bayt*.

which did not necessarily bring about healing. Rather, they strengthened the faith and re-enchanted the lives of devotees. They added substance to the relationship between a devotee and a saint generally, and substantiated Sayyida Zaynab's contested sainthood specifically. During breaks between classes at the Shirazi seminary one morning, I asked my classmates about miracle stories they had personally witnessed. My classmates were all long-term foreign residents in Syria. Most of them had originally come from Iraq, fleeing violence and persecution. One of the women, Um Mustafa, an early-thirties mother of three boys from Baghdad, said that during Ramadan in 2007, she witnessed a vision at the shrine. She explained that it was during one of the *layali al-qadr* ('nights of power', for Shi'is, *laylat al-qadr* is not specified but occurs in the last ten days of Ramadan).[30] Perhaps it had been between the injury and death of Imam 'Ali (from Ramadan 19 to 21). She and her husband, her sister-in-law, and her brother had been at the shrine and had prayed *fajr* (the dawn prayer) there. As Um Mustafa came out from the prayer hall, she noticed a beam of light in the sky which turned into a rider on a horse, whom she identified with Imam Ali. Then the image doubled and continued to multiply until it filled the sky, and under each figure there was a beam of light. Her sister-in-law wanted to leave, but Um Mustafa insisted on staying until the figures faded away with the light of day. A classmate cut in: "Those lights you saw were just reflections of the shrine's lamps in the atmosphere." While her classmate voiced skepticism, Um Mustafa remained firm: "No! I saw it with my own eyes!"[31]

Before she had children and came to Syria, Um Mustafa had been an English teacher. She had studied at the University of Baghdad and had met her husband, who was also a teacher, at her first job. She was one of the most educated female students at the Shirazi seminary. Um Mustafa liked talking about history, especially colonialism. Though she cared about the question of authenticity, but she also believed in miracles and sought them out.[32] During Muharram in 2009, Um Mustafa brought a 'miracle' with her to the Shirazis' seminary: an off-white sandwich box that held a piece of Syrian *khubz* or thin, flat, round bread. As flat bread is made in stone ovens heated by uneven flames, there are often discol-

[30] The night of power refers to the night during which Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation.

[31] Fieldnotes, Sunday, 1 November 2009.

[32] Um Mustafa also participated in private women-only performances of *tatbīr*. Fieldnotes, Sunday, 27 December 2009.

orations and even burn-marks on the bread. The burn-mark on this particular piece of bread spelled out "Allah" (God in Arabic). Less clearly, a smaller burn-mark on the side, spelled out "Muhammad." As Um Mustafa let all the women at the seminary see the bread, she said her husband had promised he would have the miracle authenticated (*muhaqaq*) by a high-ranking male scholar.[33] What does authentication mean in this case? Through seeking clerical approval and by showing it to others, Um Mustafa wanted to hold on to a miracle, which similarly to other miracles was fragile because dreams and visions pass and bread becomes moldy and rots. Her desire to prove saintly beneficence reverberates with many Shiʿis in Syria who seek to authenticate Sayyida Zaynab's sainthood by drawing attention to fragile miracles.

Faddak, a young *mullaya* from Basra, explained that Muharram and other religious holidays are often marked by visions. Faddak was in her mid-thirties and married to a retired high-ranking officer who was much older than her. She had no children and admitted that she had had a lot of 'empty time' (*waqt fādi*) before she became a *mullaya*. She was not yet an independent *mullaya* and usually performed with another, more experienced *mullaya*. Faddak's mother had been a *mullaya*, but had been unable to practice her craft under Saddam Hussein. By noting that her mother had been a *mullaya*, Faddak claimed legitimacy as a 'servant of the *ahl al-bayt*.'[34] She told me she became religious in her late teens, before she got married, when she first started seeing Imam ʿAli in her dreams. She recommended that I should say a short prayer, which she wrote down for me, so that I too would dream of Shiʿi saints. During one of the first days of Muharram 2009, I met Faddak at the shrine, wherefrom she wanted to take me to the *husayniyya* she was going to perform at that evening. She told me that just a couple of days earlier she had witnessed a miraculous vision at the shrine. It was late at night when out of nowhere a column of light descended upon the tomb. The shrine was packed, but even more people tried to enter as they too noticed the *muʿjiza* (or miracle). According to Faddak, the column of light was none other than Imam 'Ali coming to visit his daughter Zaynab.[35] In both Faddak and Um Mustafa's visions,

[33] Fieldnotes, Saturday, 26 December 2009.

[34] In Shiʿism, religious positions often 'run in the family', which has produced elite families of religious learning and authority. For example, the sons of famous *marājaʿ al-taqlīd* often study at their fathers' seminaries and eventually join their families' network of institutions as *mujtahidīn* (jurists capable of independent judgment).

[35] Fieldnotes, Sunday, 8 February 2009.

they identified the appearance of lights with saints. More specifically, the fact that they both insisted it was Imam ʿAli, the first infallible Shiʿi Imam and Zaynab's father, whose 'visit' implies that ʿAli himself legitimizes Sayyida Zaynab's sainthood and her shrine.

Conclusion

Michelle Zimney writes that the question of whether Sayyida Zaynab is really buried in the Syrian shrine-town named after her has been subject to debate since the ninth century (2007: 698). Moreover, she underlines that the shrine-town only became popular in the twentieth century. Zimney and Paulo Pinto (2007) have both offered convincing reasons for this rise in the shrine's popularity. Zimney credits the conscious efforts of Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin (d. 1952) who called for donations to extend the shrine, as well as the presence of other Shiʿi sites in the area (2007: 699–701). Pinto highlights political relationships and thriving markets around the shrine. I contribute to the scholarship on Sayyida Zaynab by drawing attention to the discourses on miraculous healing and how they legitimate Zaynab's contested sainthood. Shiʿis are engaged in two processes, which legitimize the fragile sainthood of Sayyida Zaynab: first, by performing bloody forms of self-flagellation and secondly, by eagerly listening to, empathizing with, and recounting narratives of miracles. Proponents and practitioners of self-flagellation, as well as narrators of miracle stories, stress that devotion to Zaynab (as well as other saints) can heal Shiʿi bodies. Even among those who doubt the authenticity of the shrine, there are many who participate in healing practices, which stress Sayyida Zaynab's healing powers.

Since the Syrian uprising began in 2011, everything has changed. Thousands of Iraqi Shiʿis who have lived in Syria for years, if not decades, have left. Ethnic and sectarian violence has swept over the shrine-town of Sayyida Zaynab. As both Hafiz and Bashar al-Asad derived their legitimacy as Muslims from Twelver Shiʿi religious scholars, Twelver Shiʿis in Syria have often been regarded as cronies of the government.[36] Now, Sunnis are

[36] In 1973, Hafiz al-Asad asked the Lebanese Twelver Shiʿi cleric Musa al-Sadr for a *fatwa* (or religious ruling) declaring ʿAlawis part of Shiʿi Islam. Al-Asad needed the *fatwa* in order to justify his rule, because the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood did not consider ʿAlawis Muslims and believed that only a Muslim can legitimately govern Syria (Seal 1995: 173).

taking their revenge on Shiʿis.[37] Though Twelver Shiʿis were seldom part of the government (because many of them were not Syrian citizens), the state allowed them a great degree of religious freedom. They were allowed to practice *tatbīr* while it was banned by Hezbollah in Lebanon and by Khamenei in Iran (Norton 2005: 147). Should Bashar al-Asad's regime fall, Twelver Shiʿis and the shrine-town of Sayyida Zaynab will need a miracle to survive and continue.

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[37] Since the beginning of the uprising in 2011, dozens of Iranian pilgrims have been kidnapped, Iraqis have been threatened, and one of the scholars working for the Shirazi seminary has been shot.

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SAINTS, MEDIA AND MINORITY CULTURES: ON COPTIC CULTS OF EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION FROM ALEXANDRIA TO MASPERO

Angie Heo

Minority Cultures and Cults of Revolution

On an afternoon trip to the Monastery of St. Menas, located some 30 miles southwest of Alexandria, I rode on a small bus with a group of Coptic Christians to visit the shrine of the 23 martyrs who had died eight months ago in a car bombing during New Year's Eve mass.

We were in the height of heat, entering the tail-end of an August pilgrimage. From the perspective of these pilgrims, over the past eight months in 2011, a series of unforeseen events had quickly unraveled in Egypt, suggestive of religious and political upheaval and potential transformation. The

Fig. 3.1. Coptic pilgrims remember the 23 martyrs of the Alexandrian bombing (January 2011) at the mausoleum shrine in St. Menas Monastery of Maryut (Photo by the author).

year began with the bombing of the Church of the Saints in Alexandria, then the spectacular momentum of the Tahrir protests, leading to the breathtaking downfall of the Mubarak regime. The unexpectedness of this political drama was perhaps most memorably captured in the summer's latest televised images of President Hosni Mubarak and Minister of the Interior Habib al-ʿAdly, caged behind bars and awaiting their sentences on trial before the international public. As formidable as the task may be, many analysts and scholars have offered a range of hypotheses for how and why the January 25 Revolution occurred at the moment and through the means that it had.

At one point in the bus ride to St. Menas Monastery, one of the ladies on the trip named Sophie, offered an interpretation: "Pope Shenouda—he is a saint (*qiddīs*). After what happened in Alexandria, he went on TV and said, 'We will soon find out who did this crime. And when the truth comes out, this criminal will be punished.' After he said this, what happened? Tahrir, the Revolution, and now, al-ʿAdly on trial!" Although hers is the only explanation I had heard that gives explicit credit to Pope Shenouda, it was not the first to suggest a causal link, however vague, between Alexandria and Tahrir. During my short fieldwork trip to Egypt in August,[1] my first since the fall of Mubarak and the problematic transfer of power to the state military, a number of Copts have suggested to me that it is the blood of Copts which has spurred the revolution onward, even serving as its origins. Indeed, the year 2009–2010 was deemed as the worst in the recent memory of sectarian clashes in Egypt, comparable if not surpassing the violence of the al-Kosheh massacres in the late 1990's and the outbreaks of violence in Zawiya al-Hamra in Cairo in the early 1980's. Though the glorious march in Tahrir—the symbols of "cross and crescent", of Muslim and Christian hand in hand—bespoke of the public ideals of national unity, the everyday conditions of co-existence proved to be more fragile than its expressions under more staged conditions.

This essay seeks to understand these linkages and tensions between Coptic minority cultures of martyrdom, on the one hand, and Egyptian imaginaries of belonging on the scale of national revolution, on the other. It is the *mobilizing trope of sainthood*, the political imaginary of foundational saints and martyrs, which I suggest here plays a significant role in the

[1] This article is based on roughly 24 months of fieldwork research conducted intermittently from 2004–2011, mostly in greater Cairo, but also as this article demonstrates, in pilgrimage sites throughout the Delta and Upper Egypt.

ways in which national movements gain momentum, against the marginalizing violences inflicted by the nation-state in the past. Within the terms of Coptic cults of sainthood, a 'martyr' (*al-shahīd*) is a category of 'saint' (*al-qidīs*), one who serves as a truthful witness to divine justice through bodily death. As the foundational period of the Coptic body politic, the golden era of martyrs ('the Diocletian era' or 4th century AD) is the originary beginning of the 'national' church, the Coptic Orthodox conceived of as the indigenous 'Egyptian' church. As I will further discuss in this essay, the mediating efficacy of a martyr very much hinges upon the collective imagining of his or her act of death. In other words, the capacity of the martyr to intercede and respond on behalf of others, to act saintly and as a saint, depends on the aesthetic styles involved in the public recognition of his or her act of dying. And of course, the broader field of intercession only occurs through the self-sacrificial precedent of martyrs which makes church belonging possible—Pope Shenouda himself understood not as a martyr, but saintly within the papal lineage of martyrs beginning with St. Mark.

By exploring the relation between sainthood and revolution, I examine the ways in which various forms of media technology and traditional practices of mediation illumine the convergences between religious and national sensibilities of death and justice. Sophie's valorized recognition of Pope Shenouda's saintly prophecy, as an imagined force which contributed to Egypt's revolution, is not grounded in his history as a sociopolitical actor or church personality. In fact, it is noteworthy that during the early stages of the Tahrir protests, Pope Shenouda, along with leading representatives of other religious groups including the Muslim Brotherhood, refused to throw his weight in support of Mubarak's downfall. Rather than analyze the political motives and strategies of the Coptic community and church, this essay draws attention to the broader public culture of apprehending and evaluating acts of sacrificial martyrdom, in their moral value and their political promise. This shift engages the mediating dimensions of memory, the *public* cult of remembering martyrs through the visual-bodily iconography of suffering and the mimetic commemoration of deaths. Here, my point is not to trivialize revolutionary action by relegating it to the margins of ritual veneration or reduce cultures of religious memory to the cult of 'secular' martyrs. What I wish to explore is how the mediating tradition of sainthood might be conceived of in its own right as a force of revolution.

This move to the particularities of the saintly mediation is otherwise an attempt to think critically about Coptic Christians and their role

as religious minorities in the overthrow of Mubarak regime, less as a numerically smaller mirror image of their Muslim co-citizens and more as a political contingency with its own particular capacities and prospects to demand political change. It is, in short, to track the particularly *Coptic Christian* aspects of minority martyrdom, aspects that render narrative accounts of how the revolution unfolded from the place of Alexandria, like the one offered by Sophie, more comprehensible for scholars of revolution interested in forces of change outside the secular promise of national unity.

To elaborate my approach to minority cultures of media and revolution, we might pause and reconsider the celebratory successes of peaceful protest in light of the more alarming dangers that the January 25 Revolution introduced. Within weeks of Mubarak's departure on February 11, a string of violent incidents targeting Coptic Christians and Coptic churches raised immediate concern for the political prospects of integrating religious minorities into a new era of Egyptian democracy. From the burning of the churches in Helwan and Imbaba (similar acts under different circumstances) to the atrocious massacres of Maspero televised for all to see, the consolidation of Copts into a coherent 'religious minority' has become more forceful in parallel to the dissolution of Egypt into sectarian strongholds. Rather than serving as a pivotal turning point in national history, the Tahrir Revolution thus appears in hindsight as more of a suspended interruption in a longer trajectory of sectarian violence that stretches from 2009 to the present moment.

My argument about the particularity of Coptic sainthood, and its part in the national cult of revolution, stems from my intuition that the coherence of Copts as a minority group is as much a social and cultural outcome of religious mediation as it is a numerical fact of political marginality. While it is clear that Copts currently face heightened levels of threat and violence in the post-Revolution moment, it is less clear what role religion plays in structuring these realities of exclusion and vulnerability. By exploring the public effects of martyrdom on Coptic belonging this essay seeks to assess the role that religious livelihood might play in the making of new public cultures of national integration and co-citizenry. For these days, it is precisely the issue of national loyalty that Copts find themselves against, whether they can be patriots of Egypt and whether Egypt can be likewise faithful to their ways of life. By examining visual and bodily cultures of death and political mobilization in ethnographic detail, I hope to advance a more robust account of Coptic Christian traditions of saintly commemoration, and the ways they intersect with national cults of martyrdom and mass media.

This essay is divided into three sections. In the first, I explore sainthood as a mobilizing force in overlapping realms of mediation, religious memory and political transformation. In the second, I examine the public making of martyrs and pain through televisually-mediated images of violence, with particular focus on two events: the funeral of the Alexandria martyrs in January 2011 and the interview of Wael Ghonim amidst of the Tahrir protests weeks later. In the third, I explore the Maspero massacres of October 2011, and how state media outlets serve as mass vehicles for both mobilizing religious minorities and rendering them vulnerable to military and popular violence. I end with brief reflections on the prospects of martyrdom cults and public signs of national imagination.

'Revolution of Saints': Religion, Media and Politics

In the historical and sociological literature on revolutions, the role of saints and sainthood has been accounted for with varied models of the related domains of religion and politics.[2] A most recent and sophisticated example is sociologist Malika Zeghal's article *On the Politics of Sainthood* (2009) which engages with the politics of postcolonial Morocco. In it, Zeghal argues that the 'religious and messianic repertoire' of saintly admonition serves as the central mode of protest against princely authoritarianism. Focusing on the letter of Sheikh Yassine to the king of Morocco King Hassan II, penned in 1974, Zeghal argues for an understanding of saints as 'potential political agents' and sainthood as 'situated at the intersection of faith and politics, bringing together religious meanings and questions pertaining to the foundation and organization of the political community' (2009: 589). Her model of sainthood as power suggests ways of framing religion as a mode of resistance and/or collaboration, saints in the mirror

[2] For example, in his early study, *The Revolution of the Saints* (1965), Michael Walzer argues that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Puritan and Calvinist ideology was foundational to the moral and social transformations of the English Revolution, a radical political movement brought about by 'citizen-saints' who were committed 'to a long and difficult struggle on God's behalf.' Much of his analysis of sainthood as a political force derives from his analysis of religion as a motivating ideology of faith. Much scholarship on sainthood and revolution has been consequentially influenced by Walzer's approach, as historian Dave Pretty demonstrates in his article on Russian revolutionaries in 1890's (1995). A striking contrast to Walzer's focus on the religious ideology of Puritan Calvinist saints is the historical work of his contemporary Donald Kelley on the mythical representation of martyrs of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in France (1972). See also Edward Said's noteworthy critique (1986) of Walzer's thesis developed for a more popular audience 'Exodus and Revolution' (1985).

image of political monarchs and critics, even if oppositional. Through her reading of religion as resistance, sainthood is thus a legitimating idiom for political action and authority, for a critical overturning of oppressive foundations of monarchical rule.

What power do saintly idioms of resistance and re-making have in contexts of repression? For Zeghal, it is the revolutionary repertoire of mimicry, the mimesis of kingly authority, that makes Sheikh Yassine an effective political critic. For Sophie, in her intuitive declaration "Pope Shenouda is a saint", it is the uniqueness of moral clairvoyance attached to saintly figures that makes the Pope an actor in the divine theatre of justice. The ability for saints to mediate under political conditions of repression and violence depends on the ways in which holiness and authority are publicly performed and made persuasive to broader audiences.

Here, I propose turning to the *mediating capacity* of saints, and more specifically, the *intercession* of saints as a ritual practice of memory and valuation. My turn to Coptic Orthodox sainthood and mass media is an attempt to track the particularity of the linkages between saintly intercession and technologies of mediation. Rather than assimilating sainthood into the realm of national politics, I wish to illumine the distinctiveness of saintly cults as a culture of mediation which converges upon other practices of national imagination. The intercession of saints (*shafā'at al-qiddisīn*) is best conceived of as a practice of political advocacy as much as it is a practice of bodily communication and divine mediation. In the explanation of one Copt to me, 'the saint is like an intermediary (*al-wasṭa*) who advocates for you: if you want something from Jesus, why not go to his mother to ask him for you?' In foregrounding the qualities of saintly commemoration and appeal, a politics of intercession is thus a politics of speaking and acting on behalf of others. Being saintly and remembering saints is thus not only an ideological condition for revolution, but also a communicative mode of mobilizing people to act in transformative mediation of one's political community.

Within the Arab world, and amidst the watchful eye of international spectators of the Arab Spring, the revolutionary role of mass media has been upheld as one of the key forces in the downfall of various regimes of corruption. Referred to by some pundits as the 'Facebook Revolution', Egypt's January 25 Revolution was understood to quickly unfold through the organizing efforts of mobile phone and internet users, particularly Egyptian youth who harnessed the 'liberatory' power of modern media technology. By identifying one of the major forces of revolution to be

'mass media', such commentaries and narrative accounts thus risked the reification of media technology as the a priori grounds for radical political action. By isolating media such as Facebook and Twitter from the contexts of their use and dissemination, they also obscured the larger social and religious infrastructures that make such interactive technologies effective as media of political communication possible in the first place.

As a ritual practice of mediation, saintly intercession intersects with public cultures of mass media and collective memory writ large. This approach builds upon a number of anthropologists who have engaged the logics of religious mediation in detailed relation to the cultural politics of expression and displacement. Across a range of historical and geographic arenas, close analyses of martyrs and spirit mediumship, in moments of political crisis and transition, illumine how mass-mediated images of death and violence create spaces of memory, resistance, and loss (Feldman 1997; Morris 2000; Klima 2002). Offering key ethnographic examples of martyrdom, Roxanne Varzi shows a gap between Iranian-state produced symbols of martyrdom and their more ambivalent reception among Iranian post-Revolution youth (2006), and Lori Allen draws on media of martyr representation to demonstrate the affective dimensions of international human rights activism (2009).

Coptic Christians are well-known for rehearsing the memory of their persecution under varied regimes of rule, as various subjects of marginalization and violence. In the words of one Coptic deacon who expressed frustration at what he understood to be the self-making of Copts as eternal victims: 'We suffer from martyr-complex.' In the current political present of Coptic vulnerability and the increased Christian memory of death and dying, it is worthwhile to consider what is afforded by the creative institution of martyrdom as a foundational act of belonging. For the heightened publicity of Alexandria and Maspero as sites of unjust death introduced newly critical reflection on the status of Copts—not only in Christian terms of persecution, but also in national terms of exclusion and alienation.

Specifying the role of Copts and Coptic Christian tradition in the unfolding of Egypt's revolution is certainly a difficult task. As a *minority* culture of mediation, the public cult of sainthood is also a political structure of representing national attachments, of enacting sacrificial death and remembrance for the sake of justice. In this way, traditions of saintly memory may serve as a medium of integration and political change.

Televisual Martyrdom: Mobilization of Pain and Blood

On New Year's Eve of 2011, at around 1 am, a car exploded outside the Church of the Saints in Alexandria: 23 Copts died and nearly 100 were injured. As speculations of who did it and why this happened permeated the public, the Coptic community were left terrorized, enraged, and anguished by the events in a swirl of confusion and rumors. On January 2nd, the funeral in honor of the victims was held in the desert Monastery of St. Menas in Maryout, a small town southwest of Alexandria. Thousands of Copts attended in a mass ritual of mournful commemoration and political protest, with youth bearing giant crosses of wood and crowds hurling insults at the city governor. The crowds were looking for answers: What do we do with this angry pain and shock? How do we go on from now? Evoking the genesis of sectarian strife signified in the murder of Cain, the presiding Bishop Yuʿannis declares: "the blood of your brother screams to me from the ground." As he announces the bodies within the coffins as those of martyrs, the roar of clapping and cheers echo throughout the space of the monastery.

In the days following the Alexandrian bombing, intervening gestures of national unity intermingled with the angry march of Coptic Christians outside the Patriarchate Cathedral in al-ʿAbbasiyya. After street fighting ensued between Coptic and Muslim youth, on the periphery of protests against the failures of the Egyptian state to adequately protect its Coptic contingency, Muslims and Christians rallied in the streets of nearby Shobra in order to display collective efforts toward national unity. Chants such as 'I am Girgis, I am Hussein, we are one, not two!' resounded through the streets as Muslims poured out into the public arena, in displayed solidarity with Christians after the violent attack of Alexandria. While the state pointed to evidence indicating the work of terrorists 'outside Egypt', its response also echoed these slogans with NDP (National Democratic Party) banners imprinted with cross and crescent in braided harmony.

For the millions of Copts who couldn't make the trip to Maryout, the two Christian satellite channels Aghapy TV and Coptic TV recorded the funerary events of the Alexandrian martyrs for home viewing. Days following the bombing, I found myself watching parts of the funeral in kitchens, through cell phones on buses, in waiting rooms. The same drama unravel on the screen in each viewing: the priest announces once again that the 23 are new martyr-intercessors for the church; and as the coffins are carried out of the monastery church, the clip issues a visual call to remember the

pain of participating in the divine body. Telescoping in and out of scenes of various origins, the screen offers up artifacts of violence: the charred carcass of the car, the stained walls and floors of the church, the bloodied portrait of Christ. The shots of victims on beds, with scarred faces, casted injured parts. In the background is the widely known song of devotion, sometimes even used to express romantic love: "What do I have without you, my Lord? My life is your will." At the centerpiece of the clip is Mel Gibson's Hollywood blockbuster *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), the selections of which capture the most grotesque heights of crucifixion. In a mosaic of mimetic suffering, the stylized violence of cinema is entangled with the visceral remnants of the bomb attack.

The commemorative ideology of martyrdom has been the subject for many historians examining the cultural politics of Christian violence and war, from the golden era of martyrdom in the ancient Mediterranean (Boyarin 1999; Castelli 2004; Davis 2001) to the late medieval period and religious wars of early modern Europe (Kelley 1972: Kleinberg 1992). As much of the historical and hagiographical literature details, the holy status of martyrs was established through brutally calculated tests of violence applied to the bodies of saints. Assessing the political value and force of collective meditations on martyr violence is a challenge. As mentioned before, in the opinion of some Copts, in 2007 before the onset of church attacks and the throes of revolution, the prominence of martyrdom in the imagination of Coptic Christians is the key reason for their crippling tendency toward self-victimization. This echoes the analysis of Catholic martyrdom paintings by art historian Todd Olson: "hero and victim are made equivalent" (2002: 111). The question is how to capture the politically agentive dimensions of martyr acts and memory.

It is the difficulty (*al-ṣuʿūba*) of the martyr's death that confers it with heavenly glory and mobilizes those who remember martyrdom to imitate in their own bodily acts of suffering. In his first words of address to the crowds in St. Menas Monastery, Bishop Yuʿannis calls listeners to imagine: 'Dearly beloved, the deaths were so awful and hard that we found parts all the way up on the 6th floor of the church. But because the deaths of these bodies were so awful, how much more glorious will their reception be in heaven!' According to newspaper reports, parishioners of the Church of the Saints in Alexandria refused to remove the blood stains on the church walls as a perpetual souvenir of martyrdom engrained in the church building. In the clips produced by Aghapy TV, portraits of blistered faces and injured parts of survivors trans-sect scenes of Gibson's crucified Christ on

the road to death. In combinatory relation, the stages of suffering displayed by these victims only make sense in relation to the narrative of Christ's passion. In substitutive relation with the parts of martyrs, the images of scarred parts are also signs of how *hard*, how recalcitrant a death of divine glory is. In a graduated recollection of pain and violation, such images compose a collective body politic.

Before the age of satellite TV and films, Copts have relied upon the iconography of saintly lives to imagine the efficacy of their powers in earthly form. Following the example of legendary artist Ishaq Fanous, Coptic Orthodox icon-writers are averse to portray the violence of Christ's crucifixion or saintly martyrdom as anything more than a few drops of blood: in the words of one icon-writer Magdy Gordon, "we want people to feel peace when they pray before the icons." The more recent genre of video hagiography finds value in recovering the visual depiction of the torture. In the fall of 2006, I interviewed film director Magid Tawfeeq, who has been making films since 1988, and is regarded the pioneer of video-hagiographies in the Coptic Orthodox community. Sold for about 15 Egyptian pounds per DVD, the films circulate in churches and homes, watched on television and computer screens so that viewers might learn more about the lives of the saints. Tawfeeq is committed to displaying all the gruesome details entailed in the trials of martyrdom staged in the image of Christ's passion. In his words, "it was difficult to technically produce St. Abanoub's stomach coming out. It's easy for an actor to just say—'Oh my stomach, oh my stomach!' It's heavy for the viewer to see the stomach come out, but I want people to believe the torture was really difficult." According to the Coptic Synaxarium, the child-martyr Abanoub is subjected to the following torture techniques: stomach-flaying until his intestines fall out, upside-down hanging, ingestion of snake poison, submersion in a vat of boiling oil, and more.

There are mobilizing consequences to the televisual dramatization of pain and the iconographic commemoration of martyrs. One Copt explains to me the life of St. George (*Mār Girgis*), in remembrance of the graduated stages of his torture at the hands of the Roman soldiers.

> So they put him in prison. And hit him, so that he would go back on his word. He told them no. And Christ appeared to him and he mended his wounds and his pains, his cuts. And they got people from the desert so that they would kill him through poison. 'Drink this cup.' So he drank the cup, but the poison didn't do anything. And then they put him in boiling oil. And they put him in a cauldron, and tied him up and ran him on the ground with a horse. Meaning, most of the pains that you can imagine. Very harsh pain.

> Who would be able to say that this man didn't really adhere in faith to God? I am telling you all of this, but I'd like to also give you some films on the saints. I'll put it on your computer.

In these imaginative exercises of saintly commemoration, the severity and intensification of pain shore up the reliability of saints. Visual pedagogies of remembrance include deliberate meditations on what a body is capable of enduring. In his recounting of the tortures of St. George, this Copt mentioned to me how his remembrance of martyr suffering helped him endure the difficulties and trials of his time in the military in Upper Egypt.

In other situations, the commemorative image of the martyr serves as a bona fide template for potentially becoming a martyr oneself. In November 2010, an unlicensed church building in al-'Omraniya, a district in the southwestern area of Giza, faced the threat of demolition. As government permits for church building and repair are notoriously difficult to acquire, the Copts who were building the church explained to me that they had been seeking a permit for many years without avail and they were not prepared to relinquish their hard work to the bulldozers of the Giza governate. In fact, clashes with the Giza police quickly escalated into an exchange of Molotov cocktails and the armed gunfire of the soldiers, resulting in the death of two Copts. As one of the youth construction workers explained to me, he was prepared to become a martyr: "Nothing comes easy for us. The church is built on the blood of martyrs." Echoing the famous saying of the early Christian father Tertullian, his words also had a ringing affinity with the slogan of Muslim co-citizens some months later: "there is no revolution without blood."

To what extent are these Coptic Christian acts of martyrdom public deaths mobilized toward national political transformation? In light of Sophie's narrative of revolutionary justice, the one which opened this essay, in what ways might we consider the killings in al-'Omraniya in November 2010 and in Alexandria in January 2011, a precursor and even part of the death toll necessitated by political overthrow? The bombing of Alexandria and the clashes in al-'Omraniya are often referred to as 'sectarian' incidents. But it is crucial to note that in each case, the tensions and incidents of violence were not characteristically one of Christians versus Muslims,[3]

[3] Here, I do not mean to undermine the substantive tensions that have been escalating between Christians and Muslims. For example, among Copts, there has been an increasing concern over the dissemination of militant and anti-Christian rhetoric issued from mosques. Much of this has contributed to their broader sense of victimization and

but of Copts mobilized against the Egyptian state: in al-ʻOmraniya, against the injustices associated with permit requisition, in Alexandria, against the failures of the state to protect endangered churches. The culprits held responsible were the governor of Giza ʻAli ʻAbdel Rahman and the former Minister of the Interior Habib al-ʻAdly. What the term 'sectarian' does is obscure the state's direct involvement in rendering Copts vulnerable to violence, or even their role as agents of the violence themselves. For many involved in the incidents of Alexandria and al-ʻOmraniya, as participants and as mass-mediated spectators, the imagined outcome of death and suffering was enough to mobilize a future politics of overthrow, with higher stakes of sacrifice and more prolonged periods of violence.

The televisual grounds of political mobilization were unmistakable. In widespread analyses and accounts of the successes of Tahrir, it was the tears of Wael Ghonim during his interview with Mona al-Shazly on Dream TV, a satellite channel, that spurred activists toward their public commitment to the square. On February 7, 2011, a few days before Mubarak stepped down, the now-famous Internet activist and Google executive deferred heroic status, directing his words to the viewing audience, "I am no hero." Famed as the creator of the Facebook page 'I am Khaled Said', in solidarity with the young victim of police brutality in Alexandria, Ghonim had been credited for largely catalyzing the revolution. Heeding deferential respect to the martyrs, the "sons and daughters who have died in the Revolution", Ghonim breaks down while watching their photographs unravel in front of the video screen for all to see. These images, mostly of young Egyptian men, urge not only commemorative respect from their spectators but participation in the broader political cause for which they died. In the words of Ghonim, "I am ready to die to bring change to Egypt." The morning after the interview, it was understood that hundreds had spilled out into the streets of Cairo to demonstrate and march, much in response to his call to honor what the martyrs had died for.

The fact that many prisoners and victims of Egyptian state violence had died prior to the events of Tahrir is no surprise. As many Copts understand it, the makings of the Revolution preceded the demonstrations and encampments, which began in earnest on January 25. The sensibilities of martyrdom and justice, the deference to televised icons of martyred

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vulnerability in a Muslim-majority context. However, I would argue that the most significant concern for Copts has always centered around the role that police and state authorities play in abetting or overlooking Muslim acts of violence and threat, which target Copts.

youth, served as much of the grounds for political mobilization and mass-mediated responsiveness. Through the political logic of saintly intercession, it was not only the church politic that required advocacy in the face of oppression, but also the nation-state in search of unity above religious marginalization.

Digital Testimony: Mobilizing Military and New Martyrs

Immediately after Mubarak stepped down from his seat of power, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed authority for maintaining public order and overseeing a fragile period of transition until the parliamentary elections scheduled for November. Indeed, it was the military, which was eerily welcomed as the guardian of revolution in the moments before Mubarak's departure. Currently amidst the throes of transition, months after the glorious celebrations of Tahrir, the voices of skeptics of military power resound more effectively in the public than it had in February and March. Many wonder if the remnants of Mubarak loyalists and the authoritarian legacies of police rule are more deeply calcified into the structure of military rule than had been previously imagined (Hussein and Malley 2011; Stacher 2011).

Perhaps the most striking evidence of mounting distrust is embodied in the Coptic Christians who find themselves in a heightened position of post-Revolution vulnerability. Weeks following February 11, a church burning in Atfeeh, an area just south of Cairo, brought Coptic demonstrators to the Maspero state TV building in Cairo, seeking military protection from violence.[4] In May, another church burning in Imbaba, in Giza to the west of Cairo, resulted in 12 deaths and burnings of surrounding Coptic-owned stores and homes.[5] Coptic anxieties concerned the military's lack of public accountability, their withdrawal of protection akin to those acts by the

[4] The causes and agents of this incident are still unclear, some reports suggesting that an illicit love affair between a Muslim woman and a Coptic man sparked the intervention of Salafi fundamentalist groups and others that plainclothes former police of the Mubarak regime used the situation to incite counter-revolution.

[5] The roots of the Imbaba incident lie in the contested kidnapping a Coptic woman Abeer Fakhri who was understood to have converted to Islam. According to my interview with Father Cherubim, the priest of St. Menas church, where she was understood to have been staying, the Coptic church was mediating her domestic problems with her Christian husband and did not know of her illicit love affair with a Muslim man in Minya (Upper Egypt).

Mubarak-led police. This string of incidents, of burnings, which specifically targeted Copts, forcefully demonstrated the ways in which minority violence was identified as an outcome of post-revolution instability. In such situations, in the view of many Copts, the political value of newly made martyrs, was no longer one in service of the national whole but of a persecuted body, singled out as a threatened religious community.

On the evening of Sunday October 9, the mass media and the military, what had both been considered vehicles of liberation during the January Revolution, collaborated in a spectacular betrayal of the Egyptian nation, and most particularly, its aspirations for a national unity that transcends sectarianism. In organized and peaceful protest of the burning of an unlicensed church in Edfu, in Upper Egypt's Aswan, Coptic Christians and many Muslim sympathizers marched from Shobra to the Maspero state TV building near Tahrir Square. But their calls were not merely for the rights to religious freedoms but for the military to cede its powers to civilian rule, a demand that has resounded among Egyptian activists writ large. The demonstration ended in what is now referred to as 'Bloody Sunday':[6] the Egyptian military's armored personnel vehicles reckless swerving through the crowds resulted in over 30 deaths and hundreds wounded. The crushed bodies and victims littered with gunfire were proof that the military's promise not to harm civilians did not prove true. In one first-hand account by activist Sarah Carr, white shirt-bibs carrying the slogan 'martyr under demand' (*shahīd taḥt al-ṭalab*) and worn by the front linesmen of the march, were found bloodied and strewn on the streets.

Who are the martyrs and the 'saints of revolution'? Who were the protagonists of violence and for what causes? The role of various media outlets was palpable, even as the Maspero events were quickly unfolding live before the eyes of the broader national public. Bloody Sunday introduced widely circulated footage, captured live on mobile phones and broadcast through television and Internet, of the gruesome details of military massacre. Here, in order to analyze the imbricated networks of mass media and martyrdom, of various kinds with different endpoints, we might consider how the images were mobilized.

First, as military clashes were intensifying near the traffic underpass, state-run TV stations broadcast images of the military tanks and the sur-

[6] The details of how the massacre began are highly contested. Although I do not deal with these debates in my essay here, they significantly reveal how the SCAF has defended its actions and ignored the egregious scale of violence. For more, see Mariz Tadros's analysis (2011).

rounding crowds. Subtitles to the footage included: "Urgent: The army is under attack by Copts." Reporting on the death of two officers who had been martyred, one announcer Rasha Magdy of state-run Channel One TV (O TV), appealed to all 'honorable citizens' to go out on the streets and defend the military from the throngs of Copts. Recalling the memory of the martyrs of the October 1973 war,[7] Magdy and others identified these heroes of the Arab-Israeli conflict with those of the soldiers against the Copts. The results were fatal. A number of viewers, mostly inhabitants of the neighboring Bulaq area, ran out to the streets and attacked the Copts, leaving at least one death by machete, sufficient evidence that the televised broadcast exercised enough force to mobilize the panic and national loyalty of its spectators. As citizens of Egypt were called to be 'martyrs' in memory of war, they literally responded to the call 'martyr upon demand.'

In his influential work on media as war technology, dubbed by some readers as 'technological determinism', Friedrich Kittler calls for independent histories of individual technological media in order to bracket the privileging of the human subject (McLuhan 1964) or consciousness (Hansen 2004; Hayles 1999) and to avoid instrumentalist castings of media. A Kittlerian approach is one many would intuitively resist to explain the atrocities of Maspero, in the ways that it begins with the technicity of TV and Internet, rather than the intentions of the state or the actors, as one of the conditions of military violence. But here, what I would like to point out is how 'mobilization' is conceived of as a force of technical means, and less as an outcome of political interest. In Kittler's view, the politics of media inheres in its historical origins with the industrial-military complex: "total mobilization" begins with war, through the "rhythm of escalating strategic answers" (1997: 121). Returning to the case of Egyptian state media, and their call for citizens to act like soldiers, we might consider how this form of political advocacy (i.e. 'interception' as intercession) makes martyrdom a saintly act of war. The crucial question here is what counts as being a martyr and if a different kind of technics might be envisioned for televisual media, other than one of strategic call and response, of telecommunications and control of a war front.

[7] In Egypt, October 6 is a national holiday which commemorates the crossing of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian army and valorizes the military's role in vindicating Arab states from the humiliation of the 1967 war.

Here is where I turn to the second type of media and martyrdom, one which converges more upon the sensibilities of Coptic martyrdom outlined in the first section of this essay. Within minutes of the Maspero clashes, uploaded footage of corpses and mangled bodies were disseminated through Facebook, Youtube and other social media outlets. On one Facebook page, a photograph of a young woman desperately holding her dead fiancée's hand, and then reposted onto several other pages. Youtube images of crushed skulls, dismembered body parts, even organs splayed in the streets, serve as new images of death and violence which call for a different kind of response. In the words of one reporter for the independent daily *al-Masry al-Yowm*, who visited the morgue of the Coptic hospital where many of the victims died: "A man asked if we were press, and whether we'd like to film the morgue if we 'were strong enough' " (Carr 2011). I was reminded of Lori Allen's work with Palestinians in the thick of second intifada. Handling the grisly photos of martyr casualties, her physician-informant says: "I want these pictures, of the clashes, from the hospitals, to go to the world. So they know who is killed, who kills" (Allen 2009: 161).

Scholars of media have suggested that digital technologies have enabled users to engage images more interactively, creating and circulating clips more easily. But new vehicles of social and digital media also serve as a new platform for visual testimony, one in which the cult of martyrdom converges upon human rights sensibilities about how to document truth and use media technology as a tool of eyewitness. The human rights concerned are not only religious freedoms but also freedoms of press. In the wake of the Maspero attacks, journalists have convened and organized efforts to hold state propagandistic outlets accountable for misleading the public. In response to propaganda, human rights initiatives and independent presses worked to offer competing reports to the formal denials of military involvement in the deaths of the protestors.

It is revealing that only certain forms of evidence are mobilized by Copts, much due to traditions of martyr commemoration. Many refused medical autopsy as 'the causes of death were known' and preferred to honor their bodies as those in service of Christ and also the future of Egypt. The moral impetus was to 'show the world' what had happened, to disseminate truthful accounts—and in the words of visual anthropologist Meg McLagan, to participate in the 'making of human rights claims' and 'new forms of media activism' (2003). At the core of saintly martyrdom is a meditation on pain but also the entire structure of confession under which truth claims are made credible and effective. That is, a poli-

tics of imagination that mobilizes. Here, aesthetic and technical sensibilities of how a martyr testifies in his or her death, are largely activated through a tradition of learning how to engage and identify with martyrs of the past. The death of those martyrs included soldiers (e.g. St. George, St. Menas) but those who had defied and in the end, abandoned oppressive regimes.

What is entailed in the truthfulness of images is identifying who the true martyrs are, for the nation and for the new future of a more just Egypt. According to a prominent international reporter and analyst of Coptic affairs, Mariz Tadros: "With so much sectarian violence now videotaped and circulated by satellite television and social media, the problem is not lack of knowledge. It is whose version of reality is given credence—and whose version Egyptians want to believe."

Conclusion

In the aftermath of Maspero, Copts have gained significant international attention as the target of sectarian violence and as the barometer of political prospects for a robust secular democracy in post-Revolution Egypt. In a press statement issued on October 9, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton warns the Egyptian military to stop 'tampering with its minorities.' In the height of military distrust and rising anxieties surrounding their place in national society, Copts have become more aware of themselves as 'minorities.' Following this trend of marginalization, imagined and enacted, the Coptic cult of martyrdom may be understood more as a 'minority culture', an expense for peace, than an integral sacrifice for national change, a necessity for radical political transformation.

What kind of deaths are those that resulted from the bombing of Alexandria and the bloodbath of Maspero, two attacks that flanked the historical glory of Tahrir on February 11? To what extent are the euphorias of a new democracy enmeshed, even indebted, to the killing of religious minorities?

Some public signs of national integration, of minority violence into a national imaginary of emancipation, remain muffled. They include one cartoon image, banned by the Egyptian state, which depicts two skeletons as martyrs for the nation: the first one from Maspero of 2011, the second of the War of 1973. Another image captures the public exchange of condolences, of the mother of Khaled Said, who had been brutally tortured by the Alexandrian police, with the mother of Mina Daniel, one of the

victims of Maspero. These are representations that Maspero martyrs, and their memory, bear the potential of becoming Egypt's national heroes, as 'Coptic' ('Egyptian') martyrs against political bodies of deception and repression.

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PART TWO

CONTESTED REPRESENTATIONS

ENIGMAS OF A PAKISTANI WARRIOR SAINT: INTERROGATING MEDIA CONSPIRACIES IN AN AGE OF TERROR

Pnina Werbner[1]

Preamble: Terror and Its Imaginaries

The fear of potential 'fanatical' revolutionary religious Muslim leaders has historically been deep-seated in the European social imaginary and was often magnified by colonial authorities, with the result that Sufi saints under colonial rule, particularly in Africa, were frequently persecuted even when they were pacifists.[2] Even in the twenty-first century, the 'fanatical Muslim leader' has remained a secular western trope that has never fully disappeared from the popular imagination and has been revived most recently with the spectacular rise of Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaida terror organisation. This secular fear of potential religious militants is reflected in the conception of the Pakistani Sufi saint discussed in this essay and is the driving force behind many of the media representations of this saint.

Since September 11, 2001, and indeed well before that—certainly since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan which led to the assassination of General Zia and was followed by renewed conflict between Pakistan and India in Kashmir—conspiracies about terror and counter-terror have flourished in the British and Pakistani press and media, and among ordinary people in Pakistan and its diasporas. Since the bombing of the London underground on July 7, 2005, security services in Britain and Pakistan have uncovered a

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[2] An example is that of the Senegalese founder of the Murid order, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, who was imprisoned for many years by the French colonial government despite his pacifism (See de Jong 2010: 135, 140).

range of alleged seditious terror plots involving young Pakistanis living in the diaspora who appear to have received their training in camps in Pakistan (on some of these plots and the British response see Werbner 2009). In Pakistan itself, Al Qaida and the Taliban have established strongholds in the tribal areas and, since 2008, Pakistan has been terrorized by suicide bombers targeting the police, army, crowded markets and mosques. Benazir Bhutto, the prime ministerial candidate, was assassinated in 2008, and there have also been other spectacular attacks such as those on the Sri Lankan cricket team and on a hotel and railway station in Mumbai. In 2010 the most sacred shrine in the whole of Pakistan, the Data Ganj Baksh shrine in Lahore, was bombed, causing many recorded casualties. Since then two other shrines, one in Karachi and one at Pak Pattan in Multan, have been targeted, with further casualties. There is no doubt that Pakistan is a fragile state; at times it seems almost ungovernable.

The question is: what implications do these events have for the role of anthropology as a discipline based on participant-observation? Anthropologists have laid claim to study the minutiae of culture and social relations, to see beneath the surface, to know people intimately in their daily lives. In the early days after 9/11 and 7/7, policy-makers thus hoped that anthropologists may be able to help shed light on hidden Islamic networks, beneath-the-surface conspiracies and the concealed values that motivate young diaspora Pakistanis to join Al Qaida cells and plot terror attacks. The problem has been, however, that anthropologists rarely if ever encounter such plots, and are mostly excluded from studying anti-Western Islamic groups directly. Moreover, the atmosphere of suspicion generated in Britain by the government and media, which has permeated the Muslim diaspora since 9/11 and 7/7, makes it difficult to create and sustain relations of trust and transparency with diaspora Pakistanis. Thus, although anthropologists aspire to comment on significant, world shattering events, their own fieldwork in fact restricts them to the 'small places' they study as fieldworkers (for further development of this argument see Werbner 2010). In these small places, they are unlikely to encounter anyone remotely connected to Al Qaeda or any other group plotting sedition. If they write about such matters, they mostly base their knowledge on reports in the media and press, relying—like most people—on gossip and rumour or on publicly available information.

During my years of fieldwork in Britain and Pakistan I have always assumed as a matter of course that I had never met an al-Qaeda operative. As it turned out, I may have been wrong. The present paper is an attempt to uncover as much credible information as possible about a

particular Pakistani figure, a descendent of a saintly family accused of being a militant member of Al Qaeda. Despite the public construction of Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, the saintly protagonist at the centre of this essay, as a violent militant, I argue in this essay that in reality, his career seems to have charted a path from militancy towards peacefulness. This movement towards increasing pacifism is consonant, I suggest in the paper, with a tendency among founding Sufi Shaykhs, saints, *pirs* or *auliya*, to espouse an inclusive ideology of peaceful co-existence among followers, irrespective of ethnicity or religion, *as their order expands*. Indeed, I propose, despite apparent historical examples to the contrary, Sufism is both organisationally and ideologically *intrinsically* peaceful, a striving for *tawakkul*, inner peace, and social, environmental and spiritual tranquility, *sukun* or *sakina.* For this reason a key feature of large-scale Sufi cults is their capacity to create an alternative moral and ethical order, opposed to the violence of the state (on this striving for inner peace, *tawakkul*, see Schimmel 1975: 119; on saintly discourses of peace and the experience of tranquillity at a Sufi lodge see Werbner 2003: 46ff, 131ff., 217ff., 274–275ff.). As Richard Kurin perceptively argued,

> [T]he spiritual ties which bind members are thought to be everlasting and eternal with especially great relevance to the afterlife. They are ties that occasion not the alluring heat of blood ties but the cooling shadows of blessedness. Such ties are generally associated with kindness, tranquility and peacefulness. (Kurin 1990: 108)

This is not to argue that Sufi saints actively deny the legitimacy of the state or politics. Sufi saints in British India supported the creation of Pakistan and the Sufi saint I studied, Zindapir, recruited most of his followers from the army, the police and other government departments. The point is that he created for these soldiers and government employees an alternative world of ethics, peace and amity whenever the attended his lodge.

In the light of this stress on peace, the rise of violent Sufi militants or martyrs, *ghazis*, is *not*, I contend, self evident, but calls for explanation. Here I want to introduce a cautionary note: although violent men may claim to be 'Sufis' or label themselves 'saints' (*pirs*) even when they have a very small following, my argument regarding the peace in Sufism relates to the peaceful tendencies specifically of charismatic founders of large-scale cults or *tariqas* who have an extensive, widespread geographical following, and to these founders' most prominent spiritual successors, who have actively extended their regional cults or *tariqa* during their lifetime. There is thus an important definitional distinction to be made between Sufi Shaykhs of

this type and 'Sufis' more generally, especially because as the descendents of major Sufi *tariqa* founders multiply in numbers, many become secularised or adopt non-Sufi Islamic tendencies while still claiming Sufi descent, a feature highlighted in the historical examples outlined below. Many other, otherwise 'modern' individuals also claim to be 'Sufis' because they engage in spiritual meditation (see Bruinessen & Howell 2007).

The second important aim of this essay is methodological: to demonstrate the difficulty of relying on Internet sources at a time when conspiracy theories have a tendency to go viral not only in Pakistan but in the USA as well. This was evident as I tried to piece together a picture of the alleged saintly warrior, Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani.

Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani

Until I met Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, I had never met a warrior saint, and at the time we met at a friend's house in Manchester UK, he had not yet embarked on his career as a Sufi militant. Shah Sahib, as he was known to his friends, was present at the birthday party of a friend's son in Manchester, in January 1979. At the time he was married to my friend's sister. He was, and is, a direct descendant of Mian Mir (d. 1635), the saint famed for his following among the Moghul emperors and for laying the cornerstone to the Golden Temple in Amritsar. In my fieldnotes I describe him at this first encounter as a 'man with a beard', a 'holy man', a 'Sufi' who is 'very important in Pakistan', 'very hard to see' (i.e. inaccessible). A month later, my fieldnotes record, I was told he had had a fierce argument with the Chairman of the Manchester Jami'a Mosque over whether prayer was enough to save a person, whatever his deeds (i.e., without the need for intercession by a *wali*). The Chair, it seems, was a member of Tabligh-i Jamaat. Shah Sahib had been to Manchester three years earlier, and had spent several months living in different homes of Pakistanis in the city while he prepared his book on Islamic medicine for publication. By the time he arrived in Manchester in 1976, Shah Sahib was already a very devout Muslim, and he spent long hours in conversation on religious matters with a local Deobandi follower, who became his close friend. He was described to me by several close friends as a 'very nice' person. When I asked his wife's sister if he ever earned any money, she laughed and said that, on the contrary, he spends it. The family is wealthy so it doesn't affect her sister who lives with her in-laws. 'That is their culture,' she said, referring to the customs of saintly families. He might earn some money from healing, but not enough she thought.

When I began my research on Sufi orders in Pakistan in 1989, it was suggested that I visit Shah Sahib in Lahore. I never did. The next I heard of him was in early 2008, visiting a friend in hospital. He pointed out to me casually that Shah Sahib was mentioned in *Frontline Pakistan*, a recent book by a Pakistani journalist, Zahid Hussain (cf. Hussain 2005). Hussain reports that Daniel Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* journalist who was abducted and assassinated by Al Qaeda,

> . . . had pursued a story on the Al-Qaeda network in Pakistan for several weeks and had been promised an interview that evening with a Muslim cleric, believed to have close links with Richard Reid, the 'shoe bomber', who was facing trial in the USA for attempting to blow up a passenger airliner. Reid . . . was said to have trained with Al-Qaeda. The man Pearl thought he was going to meet was Sheikh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, leader of a shadowy militant group called Tanzimul Fuqra, which had long been on the US State Department's list of terrorist organizations. (Hussain 2005: 123)

The same story appears in the film about Pearl's abduction in Karachi, *A Mighty Heart*, based on the book by Mariane Pearl. With a nationwide search for him, after a week Shaykh Gilani emerged to pronounce that he knew nothing about Pearl and had never arranged to meet him. Pearl was tricked by an unrelated al-Qaeda operative (Hussain 2005: 123). Gilani disclosed himself to the authorities and was freed after questioning.

Sufi Militancy

Sufi militants are an unusual breed. Most Sufi myths in South Asia tell a story of tolerance, inclusiveness and peace, and this is certainly true of Lahore's Mian Mir shrine and its saintly traditions. Even in the case of the 'warrior' saints described by Susan Bayly (cf. 1989), the majority were Sufis who had established their cults by peaceful means; the warrior myths about them appear to be later accretions, added to an original mythic corpus during a period of extreme political violence several hundred years after these saints' death (Bayly 1989: 190). Other warrior saints were Muslim soldiers canonized *after* their death as martyrs (Bayly 1989: 200; See, Schwerin 1981: 143–161).[3] It is conceivable that dying in battle in

[3] The cult surrounding Masud Ghazi's alleged tomb developed 200 years after his mythologised death in battle and encompasses Hindu and Muslim worshippers, mostly of the lower castes. Rather than martyrdom, the key focus of this cult appears to be the saint's unconsummated 'wedding', which is elaborately ritualised and celebrated annually. The shrine is managed by a caste of drummers.

the name of Allah is regarded by disciplines as imbuing martyrs posthumously with saintly *spiritual* power.

Historically, only on very rare occasions have Sufi saints led real battles, usually in the face of extreme external threats. The original founder of the North African Sanusi order in the nineteenth century, a renown mystic of great learning, established hundreds of lodges from Arabia in the east to Algeria in the west and across the Sahara to the south (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1949: 24–25). Distinctively, it was in Cyrenaica among the acephalous Bedouin that Sanusi lodges were systematically distributed in every major tribal segment, thus creating a unified organization connecting the tribal groups that came over time, Evans-Pritchard argues, to form a 'proto-state' representing the Bedouin in their dealings with external powers. As head of the order, Al Sanusi located his centre in Jaghbub in the South, beyond the territory of any single tribal segment. The order's lodges were endowed by the tribes with hundreds of thousands of hectares of arable land, palm trees, livestock and wells, and they in turn provided religious, educational and moral leadership, mediated disputes and constituted points of stability for a nomadic population across a vast area. Over time the Bedouin came to be identified with the Sanusi in the eyes of colonial powers, and it was thus inevitable that in response to the Italian colonial invasion, from 1911 onwards, the order would lead the religious-cum-nationalist struggle against the invaders, who were intent on colonising the plateau for Italian settlers. By this time, two generations from the original founder, Evans-Pritchard says, the Sanusi order had transformed itself from a purely religious movement to become a "political organization" and, indeed, an "embryonic state" (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 228). The Italian colonists expropriated tribal lands on the plateau and destroyed the Sanusi lodges, appropriating their vast property. In the face of Bedouin resistance the fascists created huge concentration camps, killing half the population. The grandson of the order's founder was forced to flee to Istanbul after a sustained military struggle against superior odds, and his successor, Sayyid Idris, escaped to Egypt. In 1943, after the British defeated the Axis powers in the Western Desert during World War II, a war effort to which the Sanusi and Bedouin exiles in Egypt gave strategic assistance, Sayyid Idris visited Cyrenaica for the first time since 1922, to be "received with wild enthusiasm by the whole country" (Evans-Pritchard 1949: 227). In 1951 Libya became a constitutional monarchy with Sayyid Idris as its first king.

The move from Sufi leader to political founder of an embryonic state repeated itself in the case of the Swat in South Asia. The Akhund of Swat,

also a world renouncer and charismatic saint, played an important role in "pacifying the tribes" (Ahmed 1976: 94–95). Although he did participate in two early battles, one against the Sikhs and one against the British, he was accepted by the British as a "genuine man of peace," interested in creating an area of stability and restoring social order (Ahmed 1976: 92–94). Rather than ruling himself, he chose to nominate an external figure as "King of Swat" and remained thereafter a practising ascetic in his lodge at Saidu (Ahmed 1976: 97). It was once again his grandson who became the Wali of Swat, rising to power after feuding among cousins that left him the only direct descendent of the Akhund. He ascended during a period marked by a 'proliferation of charismatic leaders of millenarian movements in the North West Frontier region, claiming the 'appointed' time had come and salvation from the British was at hand' (Ahmed 1976: 107). These charismatics, who appropriated the title of 'Mullah', calling for 'jihad', 'promised a land free of the infidel' (Ahmed 1976: 107–108); they were opposed by local political tribal leaders, the Khans, who feared their disruptive impact (Ahmed 1976: 113). It was in this context that the Wali gained tribal and British support and, after neutralising all external contenders to leadership, became head of state. Despite an early period of violence and internecine feuding which left him the sole heir to the Akhund, and although he led military expeditions against external contenders (Ahmed 1976: 116–117), the Wali remained a very religious man (Ahmed 1976: 114). He unified Swat and built a peaceful state before abdicating and retiring to a life of asceticism. He thus moved over his life from violence to peace (Ahmed 1976: 122).

The stress on peace, order and stability is thus apparent in both the Sanusi and the Swat cases, despite their resort to violence against external threats. In both cases, the founding saints were almost entirely peaceful. By contrast, some militant Sufis turn out on closer inspection to be less Sufi saint and more puritanical reformist, albeit of Sufi descent. Such was the case of Sayyid Ahmad Bareli, discussed below, and of Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, the Sudanese Mahdi, who began his life as an ascetic Sufi Shaykh before proclaiming himself the Mahdi, the divinely ordained messianic redeemer of the faith. Voll suggests that Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi can more accurately be described not as a false messiah but as a Muslim reformist-'fundamentalist' or 'renewer', who rejected Sufi notions of immanence (cf. Voll 1979: 154–155). He raised an army to fight against the 'corruption' of the Turks (Voll 1979: 159), defeated the Turco-Egyptian rulers of the Sudan and ruled for four years, from 1881 to 1885. Even after his death, the movement continued its expansion and was only finally defeated in 1896 by a British colonial force led by Lord Kitchener.

On the whole, then, where Sufi-led violence by established saints has occurred on rare occasions, as in the so-called Hurr rebellion in Sindh, this is often in response to direct provocation (Ansari 1992). Originary saints like Zindapir, the saint I studied resident near Kohat in the North West Frontier Province (now renamed Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa), have a stake in peaceful co-existence and tranquility, *Sukun*, which enables them to expand their order's networks across administrative boundaries and regions and to reach different constituencies, whether political, ethnic or religious. The very inclusiveness of the order's membership and its pragmatic accommodation to different regimes militates against violence.

Prominent Sufi Shaykhs often fulfil the role of mediators and peace makers between adjacent tribes, as studies in North Africa in particular highlight (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1949; Gellner 1969). Though honouring politicians behind the scenes, they do so to gain boons for their orders. Their main interest is, above all, in the expansion and glorification of the regional and translocal cults they lead, centred around their central lodge. Their orders cut across administrative and territorial boundaries and gather together disciples from a wide catchment area. The ethnic, regional and even national heterogeneity of followers means that disciples' political affiliations, interests and commitments are often mixed or conflicting. For this reason alone, taking a political stand would be unpolitic for Sufi saints who head Sufi regional cult orders, since it could unnecessarily antagonise at least some followers, though Sufi Shaykhs did historically support the creation of Pakistan.

There have, however, been exceptions to the general rule of non-violence. The exemplary warrior saint of South Asia was Sayyid Ahmad of Rae Bareli in Oudh (1786–1831) who claimed to be a 'renewer' of the faith and led a holy war against the Sikh rulers of the Punjab at the time. Born in 1786 to a family of Naqshbandi Sufis[4] and scion of a learned Sayyid family, he was, according to Metcalf (1982: 52–53), a reluctant student-scholar who ultimately abandoned his studies to become a cavalryman for a local *nawab*. On his return to Delhi, Sayyid Ahmad began to initiate disciples and conduct a campaign for reform. Unlike other Sufis, however, he condemned all veneration at saints' tombs except for the reading of the *fatihah* and distribution of food at their graves. He also opposed Shi'ah customs, advocated performing the *hajj* and widow remarriage,

[4] He claimed to be a direct descendent of a famous Naqshbandi khalifa (See Gaborieau 2005: 26).

and denounced expensive ceremonial rites of passage such as weddings. At the same time, he did not denounce Sufism and was, indeed, himself a 'Shaykh' who accepted *bai'at*, the oath of allegiance, initiating followers into the so-called *tariqat-i muhammadiyyah*, claimed to unite and transcend the four main Sufi orders in India. He was also, according to Marc Gaborieau (2005: 26 ff.), the renewer of the obligation of *jihad* as armed defence or expansion of the 'land of Islam', a medieval rather than modern concept of *jihad*.

Like many Sufi saints before and after him, Sayyid Ahmad and his followers toured North India preaching his reformist message and recruiting new disciples. By the time he reached Calcutta on his way to the *hajj*, he had gathered 600 followers (or 752 disciples according to Gaborieau 2005: 26 ff.) prepared to follow him. In 1826 he finally began his career as a holy warrior, travelling 3,000 miles to the Frontier border with Afghanistan to launch his jihad against the Sikh rulers of the Punjab at the time. After winning a battle against the Sikh army at Akora Khatak, he was killed in a subsequent battle with local Frontier tribes and their rulers, who disliked the excessive reforms demanded by his *mujahiddin* (Metcalf 1982: 62). According to Gaborieau (2005: 26), he was defeated and killed by the Sikh army in Balakot. The remains of his army were finally defeated in 1860 by the British.

According to historical research conducted by Gaborieau,[5] Sayyid Ahmad not only claimed to be a *pir* or *Shaykh*—he claimed to be the renewer, *mujaddad*, of the thirteenth millennium, and the *imam* who invites non-believers to convert before engaging in *jihad.* His ambition was not to become a Sultan but *amiru'l-mu'minin*, that is, the caliph, the supreme authority over temporal rulers, and the *mahdi* of the 'middle of time'. This latter millennial aspect was expressed in the belief of followers that he did not die at the battle of Balakot but would reappear as the *mahdi* (cf. Gaborieau 2005 34, 35–7, 38).

What can we conclude from this case study of a Sufi militant *jihadi*? It appears that volatile times and fragile states give rise to individuals who claim charismatic authority, whether by descent or divine inspiration, and lead utopian oppositional millennial movements. Sayyid Ahmad was evidently a maverick, acceptable neither to the Deobandi reformists (or 'Wahabbis') or the Barelwis ('Sufis'). The expedition he embarked upon was highly individualistic and ultimately doomed. In his appeal for

[5] See also Gaborieau's new book (2010) on Sayyid Ahmad.

support he combined elements both from Sufism and reformism, much like the leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaida do today (Werbner 2003: 283; see also Gaborieau 2005: 30; on al Qaida see Devji 2005: 42–44). The case of the ambiguously militant Shaykh described below who arose during a highly volatile period in Pakistan's history is also that of an unusual person, a maverick who is both a Sufi and—for a while at least—was apparently a militant.

The Shrine of Mian Mir in Lahore

In the modern era, most religious reformers in South Asia have been not *faqirs*, world renouncers, but learned clerics or laymen (as in the case of Mawdudi) who founded their own movements, albeit with Sufi organizational undertones. Few have been direct descendents in the line of outstanding saintly families. The subject of the present paper, Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani, is an exception in this regard. Shah Sahib's illustrious ancestor, Mian Mir, was a Qadiriyya who had come to Lahore from Sind and who became the spiritual guide of several of Moghul emperors and Sikh Gurus (Schimmel 1975: 433).[6] His *mazar* (shrine) still attracts hundreds of followers daily and is revered by many Sikhs as well as Muslims. Shah Sahib's grandfather was, I was told, the *sajjada nasheen* ('seated' on, i.e. inheritor of the throne/carpet). Although the media provide few details, according to Alix Philippon who has studied the shrine since 2004, it seems that the established saintly successor or *gaddi nasheen* is Syed Chan Pir Qadri, a practising Sufi who claims to be the nineteenth descendent of Mian Mir or his first *khalifa* (vicegerent).[7] Another person claiming to be the *sajada nasheen*, whose videos appear on Youtube, is Syed Haroon Ali Gillani. Philippson reports that Chan Pir has challenged the Awqaf Department's attempt not only to manage the shrine but to control the rituals performed there, and has contested this right in the courts. The appointment of Yousaf Raza Gilani as prime minister in 2008, himself scion to a saintly family in Multan who favours Sufi traditions and is indeed related to Chan Pir—and his intervention—appears to have

[6] See the excellent summary and links on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hazrat_Mian_Mir.

[7] See, for example, Tribune News Service, Amritsar November 12 and 13, 2006.

tilted the dispute with the Auqaf in favour of Chan Pir.[8] Mian Mir's shrine occupies a huge courtyard, located in Mian Mir village or *basti*, itself now a large suburb of Lahore and a very valuable chunk of real estate. Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah himself does not appear to have ever contested the custodianship. The shrine is famous for its huge, colourful ʿurs celebrations, attended by the urban population of Lahore and by many dignitaries, in which a ceremonial washing of the grave is performed by the shrine custodian. In 2009 Mian Mir celebrated its 386th ʿurs.

Early Career

Why did Pearl want to meet Gilani in connection with Richard Reid? As I pieced together a portrait of 'Shah Sahib' in the following weeks from anecdotal stories told to me by my Manchester friends, supplemented by online websites, a picture emerged of the man I had briefly met. An idiosyncratic and flamboyant character, he fitted neither the image of a saint nor a terrorist. Indeed, my friends repeatedly protested that he was a peace lover who condemned violence, as befits a Sufi saint. They also told stories about his many miracles—for example, mere contact with my friend's son, the birthday boy whose party the Shaykh and I both attended, had blessed women with sons, the boy's father told me. The father told me that he took one of his friends to meet the Shaykh in Pakistan because his wife was childless. Despite the fact that the queues to see the Shaykh in Pakistan were very long, Shah Sahib accepted him and his friend ahead of the queue. He never forgot his old Manchester friends and always welcomed them ahead of everyone else. He received the childless man and now the latter's wife is pregnant.

When he was young, Shah Sahib was a keen mountaineer. Indeed, as I learnt later, in 2011, he was a member of the famous 'Lahore Scouts'. He met his first wife, my friend's sister, when he was a leader of youth who took young middle class women and men from Lahore on hikes in the mountains of Northern Pakistan.[9] They used to sit around fires chatting,

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[8] Paper presented at the Conference on 'Shrines, Sufis and Wanderers in Muslim South Asia'.

[9] As part of the rumour mill, one highly suspect website says that 'Musharraf had patronized Gilani in 1966, encouraging him to set up the "Climbers Club of Pakistan," a front for training the Special Services Group (SSG) commandos in mountain climbing. Members of the unit were used, it claimed, in the 1985–1987 attacks on Indian positions at Bilafond Pass. They successfully captured two intermediate posts before being pushed

she told me, much like youth do anywhere in the world. This was where romance blossomed with her sister. It was not an arranged marriage. The Shaykh, his wife and followers often went into the mountains, she said. They meditated there or communicated with spirits. This story seems to fit newspaper interviews which cite Shah as having a theory of jinns or unseen cosmic forces permeating and determining world history.[10]

Later, Shah Sahib took a second wife, daughter of the Governor of Punjab, who divorced him. He was still young at the time and not very religious. My friend's sister brought up the second wife's children as well as her own. Eventually, she too left him, when he took his third wife, an African American woman with whom he ultimately opened an English-medium school in Islamabad.[11] A Pakistani friend's daughter attended the school.[12] Indeed, unknown to me Shah Sahib and his third wife lived in the very same middle class enclave in Rawalpindi where I too stayed on my visits to the capital during the time I was in Pakistan studying Zindapir's Sufi order. The family in 'Pindi was thus all too aware when one day, shortly after Pearl's abduction and assassination, the couple vanished and the school closed down.

During his stay in Manchester in 1979, Shah Sahib asked one of my friends, he told me, to advise him on how he could raise money to buy a tank to fight against the Russian invaders in Afghanistan. Bemused, my friend told him that this was a matter for governments. It was, however, the start of Shah Sahib's career as a global fund raiser for the war in Afghanistan and recruiter of *mujahidin*, initially to fight the Russian infidels.

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back. Several others have also been detained and interrogated but none have been charged or tried. A common element among all the accused is their association with organizations active in helping al-Qaeda and Taliban elements regroup in Pakistan.'

[10] One source, a CBS 60 minute report, cites the Shaykh as saying 'There are beings who are not visible to you, . . . But they inhabit this earth. And they are damaging, causing psychotic diseases, fits, epilepsies. And controlling the agents, controlling the human beings." According to the report, Gilani says he can control those evil forces. He says that he is not a threat to the U.S., but could be its salvation. To understand why, he points to an American television show "The X-Files." He says the mind control and evil influence that aliens wield over human beings in the programme is much like the power of the invisible forces he believes in.

[11] According to the Boston Globe, he subsequently took a fourth wife, and my Manchester friends thought that in total he had taken five wives at various times, three of them African American.

[12] According to Alix Philippon, after the Auquf took over the shrine, Chan Pir had opened a chain of schools called *Crescent Schooling systems* (Philippon forthcoming, based on her paper presented at the colloquium on *Shrines, Pilgrimages and Wanderers in Muslim South Asia*, EHESS, Paris, 23–24 September 2010). On all the shrine's activities see http://www.mianmir.org/index.htm.

A hint of this hidden career was a story I was told in Manchester about an African American who sent a letter to Shah Sahib's Manchester relatives from a United States State Penitentiary, addressed to Shah Sahib. He wrote that he had been a condemned prisoner on death's row, awaiting execution, when he had a dream. In the dream Shah Sahib appeared before him and promised him that the charges against him would be dropped and he would be released from prison. He vowed that if the dream came true he would convert to Islam and follow Shah Sahib. One day, my friends told me, he arrived in Manchester. By that time however, Shah Sahib had already left. The man, an African American, stayed in Manchester a couple of weeks at my friends' house, before following Shah Sahib to Pakistan. There he converted to Islam, they heard, and went forth to spread the word of Allah in Africa.

The African-American Connection

The African-American connection, hinted at in this apocryphal anecdote told to me in Manchester, becomes the dominant narrative once one turns to the numerous websites about, or belonging to, Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani. The websites report that in the 1980s, shortly after his visit to Manchester, Gilani founded Al-Fuqra, 'the community of the impoverished', in the United States. Its members are primarily converts from the African American community. Shah Sahib did spend some time in America, my Manchester friends confirmed—his sister or niece were living there. Al Fuqra, also known as Jamaat-ul-Fuqra (JF), is sometimes alleged to be a splinter group of the extremist Jaish-e-Muhammad, the Army of Muhammad (JeM), a Pakistani jihadi organization operating in Afghanistan that was banned by Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in 2002 (see also Hussain 2007: 67). This seems unlikely, however, since JeM was only formed in 2000 (cf. Abou Zahab & Roy 2004: 28), and was renamed, in 2001, Tehrik al Furqan (Hussain 2007:31).[13] The various websites duplicate each other in a spiral of rumors and half truths; they all cite the fact that Al Fuqra is described in the State Department's 'Patterns of Global Terrorism' as early as 1998 as an organization that

[13] Hussain speaks there of Jamaat-e-*Furqa* (2007: 67), and calls Gilani's group Tanzimul Fuqra (2007: 123). It seems unlikely that he is referring to the same organization.

> . . . seeks to purify Islam through violence. Members have purchased isolated rural compounds in North America to live communally, practice their faith and insulate themselves from Western culture. [Al] Fuqra members have attacked a variety of targets that they view as enemies of Islam, including Muslims they regard as heretics and Hindus.[14]

In a rumour gone viral, other websites report attacks by Al Fuqra members on Hare Krishna, Yoga and Ahmadiya Centres, Sikhs and Buddhists. It is also alleged that JF documents seized, including maps and lists, contained details of potential JF targets and victims in Los Angeles, Arizona and Colorado, including oil and gas installations and electrical facilities, a US Air Force Academy and other military sites, and people in 12 US states and Canada with Jewish or Hindu-sounding names. One of Gilani's works published by the Quranic Open University in the US advocates jihad against 'oppressors of Muslims'.[15]

The websites also allege that Al Fuqra has close ties with the ISI, the Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence services. Al Fuqra is also linked to another allegedly extremist organization founded by Shaykh Mubarak, Muslims of America (MOA), which claims to have six offices in North America and Canada, and is also said to be virulently anti-Semitic.[16] Several websites, obviously reproducing their information from the same single source gone viral, allege that Al-Fuqra has committed firebombings, fraud and murders on U.S. soil, and it is also accused of money laundering and smuggling. Many of the websites are disguised Christian, Indian or Jewish websites, intending to expose Islamic terror. There is no way of checking their reliability, and this is true even of journalistic accounts.

In 2006, one website, 'CP',[17] reported the existence of 'an encampment in the Catskill Mountains near Hancock, N.Y., called 'Islamberg', allegedly conducting military-style training. Neighbours were said to complain that they constantly heard bursts of gunfire from the place. The road leading to the community is reported to be called 'Moslem Road'. 'We don't even dare to slow down when we drive by,' one resident was reported to have said. 'They own this mountain and they know it, and there is nothing we

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[14] The State Department is not always reliable (personal com. Mariam Abou Zahab).

[15] See especially http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/jamaat-ul-fuqra.htm, for the most detailed allegations (accessed July 2012). SATP is an Indian agency, which often spreads disinformation (personal com. Mariam abou Zahab).

[16] This is the so-called 'Vanity Fair' site http://s3.amazonaws.com/911timeline/2002/vanityfair0802.html (accessed July 2012).

[17] http://www.hyscience.com/archives/2006/02/welcome_to_isla_1.php (accessed July 2012).

can do about it but move, and we can't even do that. Who wants to buy property next to that?' One website reports that there is a road named after Sheikh Gilani in the vicinity of Virginia. Al Fuqra is said to have a school at Hancock, the 'International Quranic Open University', located on 70 acres of remote land on the western edge of the Catskill Mountains, about 40 miles southeast of Binghamton, NY. Gilani, who calls himself the sixth Sultan Ul Faqr, is also said to be founder of a village in South Carolina called 'Holy Islamville'. The website claims that Jamaat ul-Fuqra recruits disciples through various social service organizations in the US, including the prison system. According to the websites, there are between seven and 30 *jamaats* in the US, with between 1000 and 5000 members (different websites give different figures). The communes are inwardly focused and set themselves apart from the wider culture. Several are said to have training camps. Although the US authorities have probed the organization for charges ranging from links to al-Qaeda to laundering and funnelling money to Pakistan for terrorist activities, the organization or its affiliates appears not to be on the US banned list of terrorist organizations, or at least, not any longer.[18] Despite this Hussain reported as late as 2007 that Tanzimul Fuqra, Shaykh Mubarak's militant group, has 'long been on the US State Department's list of terrorist organizations' (Hussain 2007: 123). Against that, however, what seems like a relatively reliable interview on YouTube explains that the CIA investigated the allegations and decided not to ban the organization.[19]

One of the websites links the American organization with the *mujahidin* struggle against the Russians in Afghanistan:

> Sheikh Gilani found his first American recruits by raiding the ranks of an existing American Muslim organization, the Dar ul-Islam. At a Brooklyn mosque, Gilani, sporting ammunition belts, preached Islam as the path to a better life and called for fighters to join the holy war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.[20]

In 1993, the website reports, Gilani was sighted in Khartoum, along with delegates from various Palestinain militant groups and a Pakistani

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[18] Vanity Fair reports that 'After interrogating Khawaja—who backed Gilani's story—police began having second thoughts. Ul-Fuqra had never been involved with violence in Pakistan and indeed had become so inactive of late the State Department had dropped it from the terrorist list. Someone had set Gilani up.'

[19] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anEAfDDEydQ&feature=related (accessed July 2012).

[20] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=osU5Nrfbqr4 (accessed July 2012).

delegation, including a former general and head of the ISI. At the time, the website points out ominously, Osama bin Laden was living in Sudan.[21]

A New Sufi Tariqa?

Nevertheless Gilani insists that he advocates peace, not violence, and has hit back against the slander by his opponents on his own websites.[22] He categorically denies the allegations against him and points out that after Pearl's kidnapping he was interviewed by the Pakistani authorities and released. His communities in America, mainly composed of African American converts to Islam, are described as epitomising truth, beauty, modesty, peace and humility. Despite the impoverished inner city background of the followers, their children with few exceptions have sought higher education and become doctors, lawyers and other professionals. In an odd aside, Gilani's website praises General Musharaf as a 'courageous individual . . . an ideal Muslim ruler, who single-handedly brought forth truth in defense of the Noble family, and sought to expose such conspiracies.'

Another of the pir's websites contains letters from devoted murids, telling how the pir enabled them to rid themselves of the 'filth of the cities'.[23] He has

> . . . taught thousands how to lead better lives; to be honest and honourable, upright and true. He teaches the men how to be men, telling them to wed their women and work to earn for their families, and they have. Thousands of marriages and hundreds of children from many hundreds of families still intact with the father as head of household and children not on the streets is testimony to the benefit our murshid has brought to this society. How many of these men would have died of drug overdoses, in prison or beaten somehow on the streets by this society's cruelties if not for his instruction on how to lead a clean life in accordance with the dictates of our creator Allah Almighty.

Disciples' letters speak of the love of the Shaykh, the 'true Sufi master'. They speak of being saved and guided in the path of love. The last letter on the website concludes:

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[21] http://politicsofcp.blogspot.co.uk/2006_07_01_archive.html (accessed July 2012).

[22] http://www.iqou-moa.org/rebuttals/slander_against_muslim_communities_miss_the_mark.htm (accessed July 2012).

[23] http://www.iqou-moa.org/open_letters/index.htm (accessed July 2012).

> There is no one on the face of this earth more broad-minded, caring and just. His knowledge is without limit, and his teachings are made available to all, Muslim and non-Muslim, without his asking for anything in return, only with the hope that mankind may be guided and loved by the Almighty in order to reach the true purpose of their being created.

In an interview Philippon conducted with Khaled Khwaja in 2008, before he was mysteriously killed in the tribal areas, he told her of Shaykh Gilani:

> Most of his followers are in America. I don't find many of his followers here. And they are very committed and strong followers. When I gave an interview I said OBL [Osama Bin Laden] doesn't have one follower as strong as MG [Mubarak Gilani] has. . . . they follow him to a great degree! Anything he asks them . . . I've seen very strange things. (. . .) people obey anything. He makes them strong. They obey his orders to any degree. One of them told me if we are asked to cut our hand and foot and stay with him, many would agree to that. So this is a kind of a strange following he has in America. They are all converts. The strongest piri-muridi I have ever seen is Mubarak Gillani. I haven't seen that sort of strength in any other piri-muridi (. . .) The commitment of his followers, if he asks them to do something, is very strong, like you can imagine, I have a school, and I needed some teachers, I told Gilani and he immediately called three, four women teachers. One of them was just married one month back, one of them had a child of about two months, and they immediately came here from America. They were earning there 2000 dollars, I would only give them 200 dollars. So they could sacrifice all this because they wanted to stay close to their Shaykh (. . .) Initially I wasn't convinced, I thought maybe himself he is a CIA agent. 'Cause I could see so many Americans around him. I first met him in 1988, he also believed in jihad, he is a great leader and his mission is jihad.[24]

Khawaja is ambiguous in his evaluation of the Shaykh, insinuating 'strange things', while describing him in terms which are in reality no different from the usual devotional panegyrics Sufi followers attribute to a living saint (Werbner 2003). Although he is said to be a 'great leader of jihad', the Shaykh denies ever meeting bin Laden or having any links to al-Qaeda. His followers contribute to relief funds for natural disasters, from Hurricane Katrina to the earthquake in Kashmir. He instructs his followers to be patriotic Americans.

I watched the film, *A Mighty Heart*, with my friends who know Shah Sahib very well. They watched the unfolding events in horror but when it came to the cameo actor's depiction of the Shaykh as the strident cleric

[24] Personal communication of this recorded interview from Alix Philippon.

they objected vehemently. He was not at all like that, they told me; he was not in any way aggressive and ignorant-looking. He was educated, soft-spoken, with a look of open generosity and kindness. But above all he was, they implied, enormously powerful, attractive, charismatic. If he started to talk, they said, you would not be able to stop looking at him. He drew you to him. Such generic descriptions are appropriate to a saint.

At a Muslim Boy Scouts celebration which took place in 'Holy Islamberg' in Hancock, New York State, representatives of the FBI and police presented special awards to the Muslim Scouts of America,[25] while in 'Holy' Islamville, South Carolina, the head of the local state FBI, Les Wiser, gave a speech waxing lyrical about the scouts and diversity, and saying he had come to 'build trust'.[26] Such invitations to local civic and political leaders are common among all ethnic groups in the United States, and point to a far more benign image of the rural communities founded by Shaykh Mubarak.

Between Rumour and Truth

What are we to make of these conflicting claims and counter-claims online and in the press and media? Some things seem clear from my Manchester friends: Shah Sahib did support the *mujahidin* war against the infidel Russians, recruiting young followers and in all likelihood fund-raising for this cause. He may also have fund-raised for militant groups fighting in Kashmir. Until September 11, international funding of Pakistani militant groups was not subject to much scrutiny. It is also believable that Shah Sahib had good contacts with the ISI, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, which for a long time supported the Taliban in Afghanistan, and was intricately enmeshed with the American CIA. The Shaykh's links to the ISI were mentioned twice by a friend in Manchester who knew him well. He told me that General Hamid Gul said 'If only I had people like Shah Sahib fighting for me, the war would be over in no time.' But, my friend told me, the Shaykh, 'Shah Sahib', hated President Zia ul Haq (a Deobandi) and Gul himself, a fanatical Jamaati. The saying attributed to Gul is later reproduced as attributed to another ISI commander, Khawaja, the same man

[25] http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/3814 (accessed July 2012).

[26] Ibid. and for his speech on video see http://www.iqou-moa.org/muslim_scouts/les_weiser.htm (accessed July 2012).

interviewed by Philippon and quoted above, who was even said on one website to have joined the Shaykh's organization.

Shah Sahib belonged to a high-status Lahore family and married into middle class or elite families in the city, so no doubt he had many contacts among Punjabi politicians and army personnel. But his personal career appears to have *shifted* over time, I want to suggest, from the militant pole to the Sufi, spiritual and organizational pole. For the African American converts whom he rescued from inner city ghettoes he was a charismatic spiritual guide, a beloved pir or murshid. He inspired them to seek (secular) higher education and to aspire to middle class familial values. Locating them in small settlements in the American wilderness, away from the cities, chimes with his reported love of the mountains as a young man.

Allegations that he preached a violent Islam in America or was closely connected to al-Qaeda are hard to substantiate, though it is conceivable that a few of his more ardent followers engaged in violence against other religious groups. Like most Pakistanis, the Shaykh clearly accepts the prevalent myth among Pakistanis that it was the Jews who destroyed the twin towers on 9/11. Online, he speaks mysteriously of the 'illuminati' who are threatening America, no doubt inspired by Dan Brown's second novel, *Angels and Demons.* But this does not make him a militant jihadi.

In a 2003 survey by Karen Leonard of Muslims in the United States (Leonard 2003), including African Americans, neither Al-Fuqra nor the Muslim Organization of America get even a mention. This implies that they are insignificant in the spectrum of American Muslim organizations and networks. Nor is Al-Fuqra a banned organization, as we saw. An investigative report on Islamberg in the Catskill mountains by a TV reporter from Al Arabiyya found an isolated community but little to confirm allegations of militancy.[27] Indeed, members of the Shaykh's community were said to have extended their help during floods in the neighboring town. More importantly, however, Shah Sahib's base was and has remained throughout in Pakistan, though a son from his first wife lives in the US.[28] Despite all the allegations he was never imprisoned and the accusations of his involvement in Daniel Pearl's abduction and assassination were dropped. It is most unlikely that he ever knew Richard Reid who was radicalized by

[27] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSOWKdeuNA8 (accessed July 2012) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6C3T_fM3–QY&NR=1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coxk45IJVj4&feature=related (accessed July 2012).

[28] Some websites accuse him of fleeing the US because of suspected involvement in the first attempt to bomb the World Trade Center.

Abu Hamza at the Finsbury Park mosque in London, despite the report of his links to Al-Fuqra in the Boston Globe (1/6/2002) which set Pearl on his mission to meet the Shaykh.[29] Shah Sahib opened an English-medium school in the capital Islamabad for the children of middle class residents, hardly the act of a Taliban supporter. Yet the fact that not he but another kinsman is the custodian of the Mian Mir shrine may indicate that he does not quite fit the Sufi mould in the eyes of his family.[30]

Nevertheless, the transnational organization Shah Sahib built up as a 'living' Sufi saint is in fact quite remarkable, highlighting the extraordinary qualities of inventiveness and imagination he has brought to this project, and his willingness to explore the unknown and transgress conventional boundaries. If it were not for the suspicions cast upon him, Muslims of America (MOA) and/or Al Fuqra's North American and Caribbean Sufi cult would make a marvellous anthropological research project. The ambiguities surrounding the study of terror, terrorists and terror networks are highlighted by the case of this Sufi warrior (if he is one), making evident that truth is stranger than fiction; *that however much security forces attempt to profile the ideal-type terrorist there is no single identikit that can portray the reality on the ground.*

In early 2010 my friend, the former sister-in-law of Shaykh Mubarak, went for a visit to Pakistan during the course of which she visited the Shaykh. I had previously been told that he was probably in 'Gilgit', implying that he was in hiding way up in the North where terror groups hang out. In fact, however, she visited him where he was living at his ancestral shrine in Mian Mir, though she said it was quite difficult to be allowed to see him. Despite being by now an elderly man close to 70, he had a young European wife, she told me. He blessed her and wished her happiness.

Anthropological Fieldwork 'Truths'

What happens when the hyperreality of cyberspace confronts mundane reality? The quest for online information about a supposed Sufi warrior or Islamist, allegedly involved in an Al Qaida plot to assassinate an

[29] http://s3.amazonaws.com/911timeline/2002/bostonglobe010602.html and http://www.militantislammonitor.org/article/id/847 (accessed July 2012). See also Gilani's defence and story of what occurred on http://www.holyislamvillesc.org/sheikh/publications/new-years-message.html (accessed July 2012).

[30] I have been unable to obtain a genealogy of the shrine that would give his exact genealogical relationship with the previous custodian.

American-Jewish journalist, was from the start interwoven with flashes of real-life anecdotal cues. As my journey progressed I became convinced that most of the online rumours were false and that Shaykh Mubarak Ali Gilani had become in many respects a typical, if somewhat unusual, originary Sufi saint. A visit in December 2011 to one of the saint's rural communities in America, Holy Islamville in South Carolina, founded in 2002, convinced me that for his followers, Shaykh Mubarak was a truly charismatic saintly figure who preached peace and co-existence.

There were some surprising aspects to the visit. Despite its apparent remote anonymity, Holy Islamville had been blessed by a miracle, and it also had its own *wali*'s (saint's) *mazar* (grave). Hazrat Najah Begum was a pious woman, a dynamic leader of the community, who had died a few months previously and was buried besides the 'Beitoon Noor', a large, domed, purpose-built red-brick structure, built over her home with voluntary labour she herself had mobilised (see Figure 4.1).

Her shrine was still under construction. I watched the current leader of the community as he knelt beside the grave and kissed the feet of the wali buried there (see Figure 4.2).

The Shaykh himself had advised the community of her elevated spiritual status. It was on her watch, in her house, that the miraculous event had occurred—the appearance in psychedelic rainbow colours of letters spelling *Allah Azza wa Jalla* in Arabic on one of the walls. Our guides claimed to have seen the writing with their very eyes. The miracle happened after the Shaikh's *dua* (supplicatory prayer) had been faxed to the community, and the fax machine is still kept in the room where the miracle occurred, on a high stool. The wall itself, clad in marble, has a plaque in rainbow colours, screened by a black-and-gold tapestry embroidered with Arabic inscriptions. The top edges of the walls are inscribed with the attributes of God in Arabic (see Figure 4.3).

One room in the Beit Noor has a large flat-screen television linked to a computer. This is where the congregation communicates with the Shaykh in Pakistan on Skype, we were told, consulting him regularly. Most of his disciples have visited the Shaykh in Pakistan, and spent several months both at the Mian Mir shrine in Lahore and at one of his homes in the mountains to escape the overwhelming heat of the Punjab plains. They were hosted with lavish hospitality, they said. The present leader of the community, a practising *hakim* (healer), first met the Shaykh in Philadelphia in the early 1980s. At the time he was the follower of another leader, he told us, but the Shaykh was able to 'lift' him and the other disciples to the 'highest platform' (presumably of Sufi esoteric knowledge), so they

Fig. 4.1. The Beitoon Noor (photo by the author).

Fig. 4.2. The *mazar* under construction (photo by the author).

Fig. 4.3. The miraculous wall (Photo by the author).

moved to follow him. The leader had spent many months in Pakistan along with his wife learning to be a healer, travelling widely. Followers call themselves '*talibs*' (students), not '*murids*' (disciples) though they refer to the Shaykh as their *murshid* (guide or teacher). They call the settlement a '*darbar*' (lodge).

The 45-acre site purchased by members of the founding community in upstate New York seemed remote, located in the midst of woods in a scattered settlement outside the town of York, but its choice was explained by the fact that some members of the order living in upstate New York came from families in South Carolina. All the followers we met were African Americans, and they spoke of escaping the crime and drugs of the inner city to come to this place of peace and security. Some were converts, others were born Muslims who had discovered Sufism. In addition to the shrine the community also has a mosque, a school, a store and homes scattered throughout the site. But not all followers live in the darbar—most have jobs as nurses and other professionals in Charlotte or York.

What connected the American order to Sufism? It did not celebrate Eid Milad un-Nabi or an annual *'urs* and seemed unfamiliar with the word. Followers clearly practised a highly reformist, orthodox version of Sufism, perhaps in the Qadiriyya tradition (see Figure 4.4).

Fig. 4.4. Pious followers of the Shaykh (photo by the author).

The biggest communal event they hold annually is, they said, Eid al-Akbar, the Great Eid, when they gather either in Islamberg or Islamville (or both) to pray and hold a sacrifice. They also convene large inter-faith dialogue conventions and a women's 'study retreat', which gathers members from other communities. This Christmas they were expecting 200 participants from the wider region. There were communities of followers of the Shaykh in Virginia, Trinidad and Canada, and possibly elsewhere. The communities are ranked, with Islamberg in New York State being the most senior (a miracle occurred there too) and Holy Islamville ranked second. The Shaykh never attends the American gatherings 'for obvious reasons' they said. They asked me to promise to say good things about my visit, to let the world know the truth.

From a methodological anthropological perspective, it is true that a short visit of three hours can barely hint at the fascinating cultural complexity and inventiveness of this evolving Sufi order. It cannot refute Internet rumours once and for all. Even in this short visit, however, it was evident that the Shaykh was an ever-present reality in his followers' lives, despite his geographical remoteness; it was equally evident that followers were not brainwashed Islamic radicals—they were independent,

dynamic, thoughtful, intellectually alive and morally conscious subjects, seeking a higher truth. If they believed in Shaykh Mubarak and his miracles, despite the rumours about him (of which they were clearly aware), it was because they perceived him to be a man of the highest moral calibre and ethical stature.

Conclusion

This case has aimed to show the difficulties of piecing together information based on the Internet, rumors and half-truths. As an anthropologist I accidentally met Shaykh Mubarak and heard intermittently about him from different acquaintances, but this hardly gave me a handle on the truth about this secretive character. Clearly, he no longer appears in public, but equally, he has not been banished from his home in his ancestral shrine village in Lahore. The case makes clear that Internet sites need to be scrutinized with the utmost suspicion and that allegations often go viral and are repeated on different sites. Some sites have a stake in discrediting Islam or American Muslims. Others spread conspiracy theories. Information is available online but much of it is excessive or simply false. How to distinguish between reliable and unreliable Internet sources, when even experienced journalists often get it wrong, is a task regarding which most anthropologists have no training. At the same time stock generic phrases familiar from anthropological fieldwork can perhaps give clues to the reality behind the rumors.

On balance Shaykh Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani's career seems to have been one in which he increasingly moved from militant activism towards becoming a full time charismatic living saint as he succeeded in building up his own Sufi trans/regional cult. It seems that over time he gradually decreased his involvement in militant activities, which were most prominent during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. At the same time, his past and tendency towards secrecy continues to follow him and define him as a 'dangerous' man despite little tangible evidence of his warrior qualities.

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THE SAMER, THE SAINT AND THE SHAMAN: ORDERING BEDOUIN HERITAGE IN JORDAN

Mikkel Bille[1]

Introduction

On July 22, 2006, the 'Al Samer Song and Dance Troupe' stepped onto the stage of the Roman Amphitheatre in Amman, Jordan, to perform their traditional song al-*Samer* in a festival celebration of Jordanian cultural heritage. The troupe consists of nine men from the Ammarin Bedouin tribe, located in the Petra region of southern Jordan. The men wore the best of their newly-pressed white dresses and perfectly-ironed red and white chequered headgear, thus embodying the image of the Bedouin in Jordan. In front of the group was the leader, in the figure of the *hashi*, in his black coat with golden rim. He carried a swaying stick in his hand, and the eight other men followed in a slow walk behind him, forming a straight line, clapping their hands in time and singing their song. Presented alongside other cultural performances, such as the popular *dabka*[2] dance by a group from Ma'an, and a Roman gladiator fight, the Ammarin tribe represented Jordanian Bedouin culture;[3] a distinct honour in a country that persistently lauds its Bedouin roots (cf. Layne 1994; Massad 2001; Al-Mahadin 2007; Shryock 1997).

I had, however, come across a press release for the Al Samer Troupe, which presented the *Samer* as a 'shamanic séance' in which the leader of the troupe, the *hashi*, performed the role of a *shaman* entering a trance. Furthermore, by living close to Petra the Ammarin take part in the heritage industry, and have established a Bedouin camp for tourists. On the webpage promoting the Bedouin camp, deceased members of the Ammarin tribe, along with their descendants, are presented to the English-speaking

[1] I would like to thank Geraldine Chatelard and staff at Centre for Comparative Cultural Studies for useful comments on an earlier draft. Variations of this chapter have been given in a heritage seminar in Cambridge and at Aarhus University.

[2] Literally meaning: "stamping the feet".

[3] The term Bedouin is here understood as a social identity rather than as referring to people actively practising a pastoral nomadic mode of subsistence (cf. Cole 2003; Young 1999).

tourists as having 'shamanic abilities'. In Arabic, these people are considered *fuqara* (singl. *faqīr*), a religious figure characterised by poverty, much like a Dervish. The *fuqara* are highly esteemed by the various tribes in the area, and play important roles in the negotiation of reputation among their descendants. In much literature, figures such as the *fuqara* and related figures like the *sālih* and *derwish*, are collectively translated as saints, without insinuating any Christian conceptualisation (Bandak & Bille this volume; Eickelman 2002: 266–267; Denny 1988: 69–97; Meri 2002). Yet to the tourists and the heritage industry at large, they are not conceived of as 'saints' but as 'shamans': the same term with which the *hashi* in the *Samer* was presented. Two very different versions are thus at play. Both are oriented towards a religious figure, but saints and shamans point in very different directions.

When it comes to ordering the past, dissonance is ever lurking in the representation of tradition (Asad 1986: 17; Tunbridge & Ashworth 1996). What is intriguing about the trope of shamanism in the conceptualisation of Bedouin traditions is that shamanism appears diametrically opposed to the influence of the Islamic Revival discourse that is developing among the Ammarin themselves and in the wider Middle East, and which has been the focus of much recent literature (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). Among the Ammarin, the practice of Islam, and the moral and pious life this cultivates, has recently taken a more scriptural turn, inspired by the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. A very immediate sign of this is that, within a five-year period from 2002 to 2007, one quarter of all female heads of household had started wearing the *niqab*; a type of veil previously unseen in this area that covers everything but the eyes with a black cloth. Shamanic séances in the press release and on the webpages, including spirit manipulation and individuals entering trances through drum playing, seem absolutely incompatible with the emerging moral ideals of the Islamic Revival, wherein the *Samer* and *fuqara* are presented as renowned cultural traditions and saints.

Taking what appears to be a traditional Bedouin oral performance as my starting point, I will show in this chapter how cultural practices and religious figures from the Bedouin past are not just cherished traditions but are framed and contested in contemporary negotiations over the past in the present at various levels of Jordanian society and extending to global narratives of spirituality and heritage. My main interest is thus to understand how multiple versions of the same figures, which may initially seem incompatible, can co-exist. These multiple versions are not just about representations of culture, but more precisely questions about shaping

the very possibilities and moralities of human action: Can one manipulate the spirits and still be a saint? Is the *hashi* in a spiritual trance, or is the figure merely energising the other men in their cultural performance?

Ordering the Past in the Present

What appear as conceptual gaps between the saint and the shaman are, I argue, constantly rearticulated through parallel modes of ordering that are tied together by the social networks and material infrastructure forged by the saints' graves, cultural performances and tourist industry. This points to the way in which multiple ordering processes, rather than a single order, emerge. As John Law notes, "Perhaps there is ordering, but there is certainly no order" (1994: 1–2). There is no single order, and orders are never complete. If such compromise or closure exists, it "does not imply the stability of a single outcome" (Dugdale 1999: 131–132). Instead as Law notes, "they are more or less precarious and partial accomplishments that may be overturned" (1994: 1–2). Between various modes of ordering emerges the productive space for reconfiguring knowledge that draws on various scales of legitimacy, in this case Islamic, heritage and New Age conceptualisations. While the *Samer* and the saint may appear quite different at first, they connect in one ordering process in the guise of the shaman, and in another process of ordering the past in the present, they merge as performances of the historical consciousness of cultural traditions from which the Bedouin are being rapidly dissociated.

Focusing on the ordering processes enables us to highlight some of the inconsistencies and gaps in engagement with the past that are also present in the lives of people in the Middle East. To frame the inconsistency that erupts in the slipstream of showcasing traditions and of the emerging heritage industry, I will take the *Samer* as a point of departure but also as a performance that strikes a cord beyond the confines of the heritage industry and instead relates to questions of the conceptualisation of spirituality and the role of the Bedouin in contemporary Jordan. This article is based on thirteen months of anthropological fieldwork, from 2006 to 2007, living among the Ammarin—a formerly semi-nomadic Bedouin tribe whose members were settled twenty years earlier in the village of Beidha, north of Petra, Jordan.[4]

[4] The Ammarin themselves estimate that they number between 1,500 and 2,000 in Jordan. Around 350 of them live in Beidha.

The aim of this article is hence to explore the tensions, gaps and dissonance between the articulations of heritage, shamanism, sainthood and forging of pious subjects. I will do this by discerning how parallel versions of various renowned characters from the past (and present) are employed in contemporary Jordanian heritage discourse. The *Samer*, the shaman and the saint all figure in complex ways in this heritage discourse. By exploring the apparent gaps between these versions, I will argue that a precarious, even uncanny, relationship exists between shamanism and sainthood, which is continuously ordered through oscillations between the minimizing and maximizing the gaps. The three versions of the figures may be singular in that they share the same object, yet as also becomes evident they are also multiple in the sense that they do not share the same part (Mol 2002). This selection of and oscillation between parts shapes partial connections that are used intentionally by some to promote shamanic or heritage discourses while others move between foci and include other aspects to shape other moral and social regimes.

More than simply a matter of exploring a particular ethnographic context, it is a discussion of the practical influence of such diverse universalising processes as the Islamic Revival, UNESCO heritage and New Age movements, which cannot easily be separated into distinct spheres of social, moral or economic life. This will take us from the stage of the Roman amphitheatre in Amman to the impact of the Islamic Revival on saintly intercession in a small village in southern Jordan, and through New Age ideas about shamanism to the halls of UNESCO world heritage proclamations (see also Bille 2009; 2012). Before we embark on the details of Bedouin heritage, let us return to the *Samer*, with a brief explanation that will join up the dots.

Celebrating the Samer

According to the Ammarin, the *Samer* is one of the oldest dance traditions in Jordan, whereas they see the *dabka* performance as a Lebanese/Palestinian cultural tradition deriving from farming communities that lacks roots in 'real' Jordanian culture. They are thereby contributing to the sensitive politics of identity in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which has a substantial population of Palestinians, Iraqi refugees and guest workers but in which the Bedouin have remained a central figure in the national identity politics (Al-Mahadin 2007; 2007b; Layne 1994; Massad 2001). The *Samer* originates with the Bedouin, and *they*—the members

of the Ammarin tribe—were, as a result of their presentation in the theatre, the group to present it at public cultural performances around Jordan. The Ammarin thereby came to personify Bedouin culture—knowing full well that with their now settled, goat-herding lifestyle with tourists around Petra they could not lay as strong a claim to being 'real' Bedouin as could the long distance camel herding tribes living in tents in Wadi Arabah or the Eastern Deserts. Nonetheless, through these cultural performances, the Ammarin, and Bedouin traditions more generally, are valorised and preserved in the public imagery of Jordanian cultural heritage. The Ammarin and their *Samer* performance are even famed for being part of the Bedouin traditions celebrated on UNESCO's new Cultural Heritage list of '*Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*' since 2005 (Bille 2012).

The *Samer* is performed at weddings and other celebrations, and includes an improvised poetic style. Due to changing ideas in recent decades concerning gender separation, most often substantiated by claims to Islamic morality, the role of the *hashi* as the head of the group is today performed by a male.[5] In the application to UNESCO, the *Samer* was presented as follows:

> The samer song is a vocal genre that accompanies the Samer dance which is specifically performed by men. At a later stage, and in an attempt to rouse more excitement and reinvigorate the dancers, the storyteller ends his song and invites a hashi, a female member of the tribe, to join the dance in the centre of the dance area. With a veil covering her face, she steps in wielding a sword, with which she defends herself against being touched by any of the dancers. Dancers and spectators alike become very excited and the energy level rises tangibly almost reaching trance. At the height of the excitement, the dahiyyah escalates into an ignited dance, wherein the clapping men advance to a short distance from the hashi repeating the word 'dahu' until she succeeds in slipping out of the dance ring. (Third proclamation of Masterpieces).

According to the late official Ammarin, Sheikh Suleiman,[6] the idea of creating a cultural performance of the *Samer* came from the Ammarin themselves but they needed experienced people to create it as a showcase of cultural tradition. The Ammarin Tourist Association, established

[5] Only once during my fieldwork was I aware of a woman performing the role of the *hashi*.

[6] Informants are represented by pseudonyms unless their statements relate to their official position, as tribal sheikh, journalist, mayors or company owners. All named informants have declined my offer of anonymity.

Fig. 5.1. Ammarin men performing the *Samer* in Amman, Jordan (photo by the author).

to present one voice for the tribe amidst growing tourism industry around Petra, collaborated with two businessmen from Amman, Ziad Hamze and Rami Sajdi, to construct the showcase of Ammarin Bedouin cultural heritage. The *Samer Troupe* was promoted through the PR Bureau 'I♥Jordan'. Although no longer in use, the press release was sent to major magazines and cultural interests in Jordan, and is here quoted in rather long excerpts since it is here that the first spiritual interpretations were disseminated to the broader public:

> The magical performances that Al Samer Song and Dance Troupe perform are a modern replica of what is known in archaeic [sic] cultures as a 'shamanic séance'. A séance is a spiritual journey of the body and mind that is enacted by a tribal healer in the company of the tribal members [...] The Troupe conductor symbolizes the shaman-doctor who heads the spiritual performance. A shaman is most clearly defined as the spiritual leader of a society, with his knowledge of healing and his capacity as a mediator between spirits and human beings [...] The healer, through a controlled state of consciousness, puts his power into practice and journeys to the underworld of the spirits [...] When possessed by the spirit, the shaman shrieks in a high-pitched voice similar to a woman's. The piercing voice is that of the spirit's and is therefore attributed to that of a female. In Al Samer Troupe, the black-cloaked conductor swaying in abrupt gestures signifies a female persona [...] The final art of the séance takes place with a *dehiyyeh*—a

> traditional Bedouin chant. Historically, when a shaman is possessed, a stream of incoherent words pours from his lips. The shaman is used as a medium for the spirit to communicate with its audience by revealing the secrets of the other world, which will consequently solve the problem that the tribe wants to address [...] The Troupe has therefore successfully managed to contribute to safeguarding the intangible Bedouin heritage concealed from our day-to-day 'civilized' lifestyles.

Through the PR Bureau, the Ammarin had thus entered a much broader commercial market for cultural performances than before, when the *Samer* was performed mostly at local celebrations. The press release explained the 'shamanic' roots of one of the Ammarin's most valued cultural traditions. It explicitly states that the Samer has "less spiritual edge to it" and is "dissociated from any spiritual significance" today. However, the official presentation of Bedouin culture as containing 'shamanism', spirit possessions and trances illustrates the potency of defining the past. Among the Ammarin, it is clearly at odds with emic understandings of the past and current standardisation of Islamic practice whereby spirit possession, or manipulation, and trances, if even possible or effective, are seen as religious deviance or heresy.

The promotion of the Samer Troupe as a shamanic séance in the press release also sparked interest in the Jordanian media. In an article in *JO magazine*, one of the larger international magazines in Jordan, journalist Nicholas Seeley wrote an article on the Ammarin (2006). Seeley interviewed some of the Ammarin working with tourists, as well as the Amman-based French anthropologist, Geraldine Chatelard, who has published widely on the Bedouin culture. Chatelard particularly addresses the issue of shamanism arguing that, "You can use 'shamanism' when you're talking about animist societies that endow every living being with a spiritual persona [...] but you can't use it here: 'The Bedouin identity is Muslim' " (Seeley 2006: 91). The article further states that, "New-Age mysticism goes down like gangbusters with today's spirituality-seeking Western tourists, according to the PR people" (Seeley 2006: 91). In response to this I questioned my Ammarin informants about the alleged shamanic practices. They fiercely contested this version of the *Samer*, which was inherently un-Islamic. Even the informants from the Ammarin Samer Troupe that I talked to had no idea about the press release.

Hamze and Sajdi no longer use the press release, and yet the shamanic versions of Bedouin traditions extends beyond this press release to religious figures of tribal pasts known as saints or 'friends of God'. The *hashi* in the *Samer*, it will become clear, is not the only figure from the Ammarin

past that has been cast into a 'shamanic' terminology, thereby highlighting the instability and potency of religious categories.

Sainthood as Heritage

Sites and shrines associated with renowned figures from Biblical history have been capturing the attention of the heritage industry in Jordan for quite some time. Mount Nebo (associated with Moses) and Jebel Haroun in Petra (associated with his brother Aaron), and Bethany beyond Jordan (associated with John the Baptist and Jesus) are but a few cases in Jordan. Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing focus on Islamic heritage, not least due to the growing number of tourists (and refugees) from other Arab countries. Shrines, mosques and other sites from Islamic history have been excavated, restored or otherwise brought to the awareness of Jordanians and foreign tourists alike. For example, the recent renovation of the shrine of Abu Ubaidah Ibn Jarrah, one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, has placed it in a prominent line of sites that celebrates the Islamic history of Jordan. Members of the Royal family—Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed (1998) in particular—are also presenting a wide range of both Islamic and Christian shrines as Holy Sites important to Jordanian cultural heritage.

By featuring Islamic figures and history more prominently, the importance of Islam in Jordanian national heritage is being reasserted alongside the Christian heritage. Saints, prophets, companions and otherwise recognised religious figures have become players in the heritage industry, both in terms of diverting the geography of tourism and shaping the representation of Jordanian history. Aside from these renowned people and sites, many more shrines of local figures associated with various versions of sainthood (*fuqara, awlia, dervish* etc.) are located throughout the landscape, where they act as anchors in tribal historiography, especially around Petra, where the Ammarin live.

The village of Beidha, north of Petra, was constructed in the mid-1980s as part of the modernisation and settlement policies aimed at the seminomadic Bedouin tribes around Petra. Their land had fallen under the regulations of UNESCO's heritage protection when Petra became a World Heritage site in 1985. For the now relocated Ammarin, two shrines figure prominently in the landscape and in their pilgrimage traditions (see also Bille forthcoming). One is south of the village, where the aforementioned shrine of the prophet Aaron is located on the top of Jebel Haroun.

Following a vision in a dream, a local Dervish would announce the beginning of the collective pilgrimage to the shrine, where songs and rituals would be performed asking Aaron to act as their intercessor with God. Although it is recognised that this practice is no longer performed, it plays a prominent role in the UNESCO intangible heritage application, as we shall shortly see.

Another site, a few hours' walk west of Beidha, is the graveyard of the Awwad branch of the Ammarin tribe. Here lies buried the renowned forefather Salem Awwad. He lived seven generations ago, and is considered a *faqīr*: a poor man but, in the particularly religious sense, a man blessed by God—a saint. As one informant today described a saint:

> The saints are good people, from God Almighty. An honest, believing human. His heart is with God [...] With the belief that this good person prays to God [...] you bring the sick person to him [and] he will pray to God and say: God, I am an honest, poor and weak person, please heal this sick person. So God grants him this wish!

Salem Awwad's shrine has been used for centuries for saint intercession—practising what has often been associated in the literature with 'folk Islam' (for example Gellner 1981; but see Makris 2007: 49–51). The saint also holds a prominent social position in Ammarin tribal history by offering deep historical links to the landscape that they are now largely removed from, and through genealogical ties, important in contemporary local politics and power structures. Today, people from the Awwad family line for example enjoy social recognition because of their saintly genealogical ties.

Since the mid-1990s, however, religious practices have changed as a renewed Islamic awareness has gained impetus in Beidha through increasing access to public schools, televisions and mosques, intensified by settlement. This religious development ultimately seeks to purify the world from 'magic' and 'return' to an Islam as allegedly practised at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, shaping stronger associations of religious homogeneity in a Muslim collectivity, the *Umma*. The moral and pious influence of this more scriptural understanding of Islam has meant that the bi-annual pilgrimages to Jebel Haroun, along with visits to Salem's grave, have ceased, and they are now surreptitiously visited by only a few people. To most Ammarin today, the saint is a person God has chosen and bestowed with *Baraka*. But he is no more than a human being, not one to be set beside God or capable of transmitting messages or wishes through saintly intercession or contagious magic at his grave. These practices are explicitly termed *jahiliyyah*—belonging to the 'age of ignorance'.

Fig. 5.2. The grave of Salem Awwad (photo by the author).

Oddly enough, then, in light of the uniformity of defining the saint as a "good and righteous man" among the Ammarin, I kept running into versions—as in the case of the *Samer*—in which the understanding of the *faqīr* somewhat diverted from the Ammarin versions, and where the trope of shamanism had had its impact. To find out more, we need first to take a brief detour from the influence of one modern process of standardising Islam to an equally modernist and universalising agenda that finds its sources in the past, namely UNESCO World heritage politics.

Sainthood as UNESCO Heritage

UNESCO's newly developed recognition of intangible heritage as Masterpieces, is not intended to preserve specific lyrics or practices but rather to allow for the continued practice of the tradition and enable it to develop (Nas 2002; Ruggles & Silverman 2009; Smith & Akagawa 2009; UNESCO 2003). But like UNESCO tangible heritage, the intangible heritage list also plays a role in performing and shaping social, local and national identities (Scholze 2008; Winter 2007; Hafstein 2009). This is no less so in a Jordanian context, where the large-scale nomadic pastoral economy has almost ceased due to modernisation politics, to the bemoaning tones of the loss

of authenticity and the increasing incorporation of Bedouin culture into the tourism industry (cf. Cole & Altorki 1998; Hazbun 2008).

Jordanian national heritage discourse is shaped around narratives of the continued role of the tribes, the Bedouin in particular, the Great Arab revolt, the Hashemite's genealogical link to the Prophet Muhammad (Layne 1994), and the iconic imagery of Petra built by what is understood to have been a nomadic proto-Jordanian Arab tribe, the Nabataeans (Taylor 2005: 3–4). This focus on heritage follows Timothy Mitchell's insight that, "One of the odd things about the arrival of the era of the modern nation-state was that for a state to prove it was modern, it helped if it could also prove it was ancient" (Mitchell 2001: 212). Cultural heritage, in this sense, has a prominent role in shaping national identities, particularly in Jordan, where the Bedouin past is consistently brought into contemporary debates about what it means to be Jordanian, in a country with a substantial population of Palestinian descent and Iraqi refugees. The Bedouin offers a potent source of what was, and is, a central feature of Jordanian history.

Paradoxically, as alluded to above, the Bedouin tribes around Petra that have now been settled due to UNESCO world heritage protection were proclaimed UNESCO '*Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*' in 2005.[7] Among the many practices highlighted as Bedouin intangible heritage were both the saints' pilgrimages and the *Samer*. Aside from committing the Jordanian state to making efforts to safeguard this heritage, and the many good intentions and moral obligations of the 'salvage paradigm' (Clifford 1987) regarding the antiquities and traditions of the late 20th century, announcing cultural heritage is also a method of highlighting and ordering a selected part of the past in ways that consolidate claims to belonging, rights and cultural distinctiveness. Both Petra and the Bedouin play a central role in the presentation of Jordanian national identity and, through UNESCO these narratives are further consolidated and valorised (Al-Mahadin 2007; Bille 2012; Smith 2006). UNESCO intangible heritage is thus not only a means of shaping a heritage of our common humanity but also a tool to strengthen national identities and legitimise existing versions of heritage order.

So while the Islamic Revival seeks to rid the world of magic, and the modernisation process seeks to abandon pastoral nomadism and shape

[7] Which also includes the Bedouin in Wadi Ramm.

citizens out of the often insistently autonomous Bedouin, another universal process, argued by some scholars to be an effect of the modernisation process (Lowenthal 1998), is seeking to safeguard what remains of "outstanding value to humanity": the Bedouin intangible heritage. The settled Bedouin are now celebrated as UNESCO World Heritage for the way in which they relate, through mobile pastoral skills and oral traditions, to the landscape they no longer inhabit due to UNESCO's tangible World Heritage.

Ziad Hamze, who helped the Ammarin to promote the *Samer* performance, was one of the main players in formulating the application to UNESCO. The application was submitted through an NGO (JOHUD, Jordan Hashemite Fund for Human Development) headed by Jordanian Princess Basma, who also chaired the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Committee. It included the oral traditions, camel herding, tent making skills, and particularly the rituals of hospitality[8] that are lauded in the Jordanian heritage discourse as a general characteristic of their Bedouin origin (Shryock 2004; Hazbun 2004; 2008). Among the many things celebrated, the aspect that really located the intangible heritage in this particular landscape—rather than taking the Bedouin from any other area where they may actually still predominantly be living a nomadic pastoral life—was the pilgrimage to Aaron's shrine at Jebel Haroun. In other words, it is pilgrimages and sainthood that locate UNESCO Bedouin intangible heritage more than the specific people or any of their other individual practices.

The various version of the saint, is however, also present in the application to UNESCO. In the 10-minute video presentation that the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Committee was given as part of the application, a brief scene shows Ziad Hamze explaining how descendants of the saint Salem Awwad were "shamans and healers". Similarly, in the actual application, the word 'shaman' also occurs. While the word does not play a prominent role, shamanism just slips in, and yet seems somewhat misplaced in the Ammarin conceptualisations of religious figures.

Shamanism is usually something anthropologists associate with Siberia or the Amazon: magic, mental trances and spirit manipulation. Even the broadest description of a shamanic practice in the anthropological literature includes direct contact with spirit 'entities', control over the spirit and altered states of consciousness. Both the pilgrimage and the notion of the shaman were now in the UNESCO application, and while that may not

[8] Hospitality was already celebrated on the UNESCO Harmony List in 2004.

have been the main reason why the Bedouin of Petra were selected by the UNESCO committee, the narratives that were the reason for their initial incorporation had been legitimised, at least for those who wrote them.

How could this shaman have anything to do with the saint who, after all, was just a man to the Ammarin, "a good and righteous person" selected by God? Perhaps the question is just one of semantics that seeks to slip in between anthropological categories to capture local history in ways that reflect popular interests? That is, as a question of translation both conceptually and linguistically. Perhaps 'shaman' is just another word for *faqīr*, in the sense of being a blessed poor person, one that works better in English, rather than a person with supernatural abilities and spirit contact, as the term 'shaman' normally suggests? To ascertain this, we need to turn to a brief overview of some of the literature on the *faqīr* as presented to the Western audience.

Defining a Saint

Looking into the early travel literature on the Bedouin in Jordan, the image of what the *faqīr* does becomes increasingly ambivalent. Ethnographic descriptions of the *faqīr* rarely correspond with the explanations Ammarin informants provide of a just and good person who emanates *Baraka*. The French priest, Antonin Jaussen (1908; Jaussen & Savignac 1914), and also the Czech explorer, Alois Musil (1928: 400–407), for example, have left detailed descriptions from the early 20th century in which they discuss several religious figures. Jaussen specifically refers to them as *fuqara*, and describes them as performing spirit exorcism by playing the tambourine, burning incense, reaching ecstasy, and even having visions of disappeared objects (1908: 386, 387).[9]

Alois Musil does not use the precise term *faqīr* but describes what they do in much the same way as Jaussen. He describes encounters between 'seers or sorcerers' and the Rwala Bedouin tribe. These sorcerers[10] are considered to have supernatural powers. The sorcerer has disciples who follow him, and one of their duties is to carry a little drum and other musical

[9] In Doughty's (1883) travels in the Arabian desert, the *fuqara* is a term used for a tribe, without spiritual connotations. In Petra, one branch of the Bedoul tribe, previously living around Jebel Haroun, is also called *al-fuqara*, and are by some claimed to have the same divine blessing as Salem Awwad.

[10] The Rwala call them sorcerers, while they call themselves 'owners of Islam'.

instruments. The 'gift' of seeing is hereditary, yet at times the disciples of the sorcerer also claim to have received the blessing of God through being a disciple. When curing people, the sorcerer seeks ecstasy, according to both Jaussen and, here, Musil:

> If the sorcerer wants to call the spokesman-angel to him, he beckons the disciples to play, while he himself squats with his head bent down. After a while he begins to move, stands up, stretches out his hands, jumps about, contorts his body, and puts his hands, feet, and even his head close to the fire, clapping his hands. The Bedouins say of this that he is just playing, *jel'ab*, but his disciples call it yielding to the influence of the *islâm*, ecstasy. (1928: 401, see also page 403).

These ethnographic descriptions suggest that practices such as drum playing, spirit exorcism and trance states reminiscent of Sufi traditions and non-conformist peripatetic religious figures elsewhere have occurred in the territory now known as Jordan.

Even more recent studies in medical anthropology have pointed to the practices of the dervish, generally among the Ammarin and literature alike, considered another word for the *faqīr*. In terms of healing psychiatric illnesses, in particular, these studies have described how trance, spirit communication, incense burning and drum beating are used in ways that much resemble that of the early 20th century descriptions (Al-Krenawi & Graham 1996; 1997; Al-Krenawi et al. 1996; Makris 2000). Yet it is important to note that these practices are framed within an Islamic context, with references to the Koran.

While there may be local differences, the ethnographic sources suggest that there may be aspects of past practices that are being reformulated in the present to fit with current religious traditions. Dale Eickelman also demonstrated this in terms of the *marabout* in Morocco, when he noticed how:

> Many of the Sherqawi elite dissociate themselves from the *maraboutic* interests of some of their kinsmen because such activities would open them to attack and ridicule from educated persons. Such Sherqawa seek to redefine the activities of some of their kinsmen and ancestors in light of the formal doctrines of reformist, modernist Islam. (1977: 15).

Judging from the above, there are certain indications that much of the same ordering of practices is occurring among the Ammarin. To my Ammarin informants today, the *faqīr* is a saint—'a good man' who does (and did) not perform drum performances, spirit communication or ecstasy but rather has a knowledge of plants, good judgement, is poor and

blessed by God. It would appear that the relationship between sainthood and shamanism is not necessarily one in which the nuances in theological terminology are as crucial as the association with any of the types. It is not, as such, the intention here to determine which version of the figures is correct, or lay claims to what the past was *really* like. Rather the intention is to explore the gaps and tensions that emerge in the guise of the *Samer*, the shaman and the saint.

Making a Shaman of a Saint

After many interviews with my Ammarin informants about the *faqīr* as a renowned saint (*weli*) and having received consistent explanations of what s/he does (as indeed both men and women can become saints), surprisingly, in the web pages that promote the Ammarin Bedouin camp to tourists and elsewhere, the *faqīr* is presented as a 'shaman'. The *faqīr* is described (particularly in relation to the Bedoul tribe in Petra) on the website of the Ammarin Bedouin camp as follows:

> In Arabic, the word fuqara means literally poor people. Among Bedouins it signifies in addition, a shaman or a person endowed with supernatural powers, somewhat like the Indian Fakirs [...] Part of the skills of the Fuqara is to prepare for the Bedouls [sic] talismans in the form of bracelets made of cloves, and necklaces made of Syrian Rue, which is central to their mythology.[11]

One sign in the tourist museum of the Ammarin Bedouin camp specifically describes how Salem Awwad "had fame of having supernatural and telepathic abilities to bring news from far away places about his tribe members. He was able to light Almond branch without matches". Not only is the representation of the *faqīr* as possessing supernatural powers unlike anything the Ammarin recounted about their 'saint', but people from the very recent past are also presented as "the last respected shamans" and direct descendants of Salem Awwad, both in the Ammarin museum and on the web page promoting the Ammarin Bedouin camp. While stating that the "the branch of Eyal Awwad have another claim to fame, that of having supernatural abilities",[12] tourist trekking routes are promoted as passing "Haj Shtayyan's pool, the shaman's pool" and

[11] http://www.bedouincamp.net/mawasa.html accessed 6/5/07.
[12] http://www.bedouincamp.net/fuqara.html accessed 26/2/07.

"visiting the Ammarin's shaman houses".[13] Haj Shtayyan is one of three, now deceased, siblings presented in the Ammarin Bedouin Museum in sepia-toned photos as shamans, although taken in the 1990s.

These public statements are problematic to many Ammarin in more ways than just by raising awareness of alternative modes of ordering. Hajj Shtayyan is the father of prominent members of the Ammarin in Beidha today. Even if they say that their father was a saint (although not in the same league as Salem Awwad) and even if they may lay claims to having been hereditarily blessed with *Baraka*, they denounce all stories of supernatural abilities, performing trances or entering into states of spiritual ecstasy. This is, of course, not to say that these people do not use or recognise traditional healing, such as Koranic healing, which is still widely used, or have a knowledge of herbal medicine as passed down the generations and held particularly by the elders, quite the contrary. They are simply not shamans manipulating spirits—they are saints blessed by God.

The representation of shamanism among the Bedouin appears to have a particular audience. The promotional pamphlets for the Ammarin Bedouin camp, produced by Rami Sajdi and Ziad Hamze, stress—in the English version—that one can learn about medicinal and spiritual therapies, and how Ammarin shamans use stones and plants. The Arabic version of the pamphlets, however, explains nothing about 'shamans', saints or spirituality. Instead it briefly states that traditional herbal medicine is displayed. Similarly, all explanations about shamanism and supernatural abilities in the museum are in English, not Arabic. In other words, in the public English representation of the Ammarin in the museum and on the Internet, the *faqīr*, of whom my informants only truly recognize Salem Awwad, is interpreted as a shaman rather than a saint. The houses and places of the recent generations of the Awwad family branch, who lived only a decade ago, are presented as shamanic tourist destinations.

As the main contributor to the public representation of the Ammarin past, Rami Sajdi explained to me how he discussed these issues with the most recent shamans (i.e. the three siblings) when they were alive, as well as elsewhere in southern Jordan. Sajdi came into contact with the Ammarin shamans in spring 1996 when he was investigating the spiritual properties of the Peganum Harmala. He discovered that they were using Harmala seeds:

[13] http://www.bedouincamp.net/trekking.html accessed 5/5/07.

> Burnt with certain incense 'gum-resins' [were] used for curing people possessed by the *jinn*, a treatment that often includes the beating of drums and the recitation of Koranic verses. The techniques was tought [sic] by an Ammarin elder who lived in the early nineteenth century [Salem Awwad]. A man that held many sacred keys and certain ancient knowlegde [sic] in relation to the spirit of the lands he dwelt in.[14]

Sajdi's homepage also has extensive information on the Bedouin, both Ammarin and Bedoul, but also New Age interests such as 'ley lines', 'energy zones' and 'sacred crossings', and the pages concerning the Bedouin highlight the magical and healing properties of certain plants, stripped of any Islamic context. According to Sajdi, shamanic abilities are ancient knowledge, inherited and passed on from parents to children, which allow the person not only to act as a judge and herbal healer but also to perform exorcism, for example to heal epilepsy.[15] Becoming a shaman, in this sense, and referring to the *fuqara* in Beidha, involves a change in consciousness:

> After the initiation, nothing is hidden from them any longer; not only can they see things far, far away, but can also discover souls, stolen souls, stolen objects, hidden treasures, hidden remedies and other intelligence gathering. The Fugara makes a journey during which he is spoken to by the spirits, or they may appear to him in the form of visions or even in physical form [...] All shamanic practice aims to give rise to ecstasy. Drumming, manipulating of breath, ordeals, fasting, theatrical illusions, all are time-honored methods for entering into the trance for shamanic work.[16]

Sajdi believes that these shamans (as, in this description, their actions would conform to most anthropological definitions of what constitutes a 'shaman') have passed on knowledge from ancient times, from even before Islam, when there were more accepted deities etc., and that they thus represent a sort of original spirituality that is universally shared around the globe among indigenous people. As he explained to me during an interview, "We have nothing called Bedouin shaman, we have something called Bedouin fuqara. So, to connect, what is fuqara? I used the word shaman for these people so all of the others in the world and anthropologists will realise that I am talking about shamans".

Sajdi further stresses that, aside from being someone who contacts the spirits, the *faqīr* may also be a healer or a judge. According to Sajdi,

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[14] http://acacialand.com/rami.html accessed 15/4/07.
[15] http://acacialand.com/Hamad.html accessed 28/1/07.
[16] http://www.acacialand.com/ndex2.html accessed 26/5/07.

equating 'shamans' with '*fuqara*' forges a connection between different indigenous populations around the world, and is intended to show the authenticity of this original spirituality and close relationship that the Bedouin have with Nature; it is a moral obligation to cherish and safeguard this original and somewhat pure spirituality of humankind.

I also took up the topic with Ziad Hamze (and his companion) since, aside from administering the Bedouin camp and museum, he was also responsible for the camp's website and the UNESCO application. He facilitates contact with tourists via the Internet, and presents the *Samer* to a broad audience. I asked him, "Who is the *faqīr*?":

> *Hamze*: It is someone who is very much connected with God. Naturally. By blood [. . .] So they are healers, they are good judges, they always settle problems; very wise. This is characteristic of a *faqīr*. And these guys, the guys you saw pictures of [in the museum], their grandparents were *fuqara*. [. . .] There are some [left], but it is a dying generation. Because it is blood lineage there must be someone coming up. [. . .] It is not a sect. It is not religion. It's a way of life. It is nature. The prophet was a *faqīr*. This is why he got it [the message from God]. I am not saying they are on the level of the Prophet, they are spiritual people, they are very much connected with God. They are healers, they are wise, and they are powerful.

In a sense, Hamze here takes on the blessed version of the figure rather than the spirit-manipulating version. After this, his companion interrupted with a reasoning that tunes into the New Age reasoning:

> *Companion*: Because they are in tune with nature. With God and nature. Not even the earth, the whole universe. They open up. Their consciousness is very open. Their awareness is open to receive. So they become earth messengers. To give something . . . and God is using those people to facilitate or to give certain messages or a certain mission for the benefit of the human. [. . .] So what we are trying to tell you is, now the Bedouin have information . . . not information . . . the instinct which leads them to do whatever. We the educated people, we want to know more, so we gather information and transform this information into knowledge, to understand why. Because we want to know: Curiosity. I read books, I study books, I read about healing, I am a healer, I know reiki, I am a pranic healer also, I study energy, I study energy for human beings. I know about earth energy. The more you become conscious and aware the more you become 'I want to know, I want to know, I want to know'. But for them they just do things by nature.

On the one hand, I was becoming aware that the Ammarin were increasingly dissociating themselves from previous practices, such as saintly intercession—but not the saint. Yet, in presenting Bedouin heritage to tourists or in cultural performances, the spiritual aspects of a renowned

figure are highlighted in ways that are not compatible with most local people's understandings of the past, or of religiosity for that matter. These various versions of the *faqīr* as shaman or saint and, indeed, the *hashi* as shaman, must therefore also be viewed in the context of a broader relationship between the increasing influence of a particular Islamic theology over the Bedouin communities and the way settlement has reshaped traditions.

In response to such changes, other non-Bedouin are trying to protect and gain further insights into what they see as traditional practices. This is not only a matter of presenting 'authentic' Bedouin culture to tourists; there is more at stake, it seems. People like Hamze and Sajdi, in different ways, felt that the Bedouin represented an authentic relationship with nature, which has kept some of them in tune with the spirits by being gifted from God (Sajdi 2007: 95). This authenticity is rapidly disappearing, however, as literal Islamic teachings and modernisation increase. People working and living in urban areas, according to this line of thought, are removed from this authentic relationship with nature.

Looking at the shaping of the *hashi* as shaman and the religious figure of the *faqīr* as a shaman or saint, the Ammarin Bedouin camp becomes a place of relaxation and engagement with nature and authenticity. This site-specific element of contemporary negotiations of spirituality is also expressed in reiki healer Susie Tamim's autobiography (2005). According to Tamim, the Amman-based owner of the Bedouin Museum, under the pseudonym of 'Sami', had advised her to visit Jerusalem, Masada and Petra.[17] In each of these places she experienced a revelation. In Petra, this would come after visiting the Ammarin Bedouin Museum, where she would inhale incense and touch magical stones on display there and, finally, when walking through the mountains afterwards, she would witness a figure of the Virgin Mary with Baby Jesus in her arms carved in the sandstone. The Bedouin and the mountainous desert became the vehicle for spiritual enlightenment. This potent role of the desert is not only a phenomenon among a few urbanites in Jordan, such as the Circle of Friends[18] in Amman, who also use Petra as a location for workshops on holistic therapy etc. Even beyond Petra, desert areas in the Middle East are now becoming places of such refuge, of getting away from it all in order to experience a close relationship with nature, such as the

[17] Which is argued to follow the ley lines of the star sign Orion's belt, also known from some explanations of the Giza pyramid's off-axis positioning.

[18] http://www.ammancircleofriends.org/ accessed 24/1/2008.

Rainbow Gathering in 2007 in Wadi Rum. Thus, while one version is that the *faqīr* was 'a good man'—a salient saint—another version claims shamanic practices, some more supernatural and telepathic than others, and which tap into a broader New Age movement. There seem, in other words, to be gaps in the various modes of ordering the world, gaps that cannot easily be bridged.

Parallel Universalities and the Uncanny Saint

In the above, we see three very different ways of ordering the past in the present. One ordering process presents the *hashi* in a male metamorphosis and the *faqīr* as a particularly good and righteous person, a saint. This process is the predominant one among the Ammarin. It is clearly enacted within the context of a growing awareness of the moral and pious obligations of being a modern Muslim. It is a moral regime that finds its source in a distant past—a 'discursive tradition' (Asad 1986) if you will—but one that also explicitly aims to discard certain traditions that have hitherto been understood as Islamic. Thus rather than imputing trance and spirits to the saints, it focuses instead on piety, in the same sense as the 'pious ones' in North Africa (Eickelman 2002: 266–267). The process is framed within a universality shaped in a modern (and modernising) context among the Ammarin that aims to order the past through the potency of proclaiming ignorance of certain traditions and practices (Gilsenan 2000). That is, ordering knowledge through processes of not-knowing and the moral judgment of ignorance (Dilley 2010; High et al. 2012).

In another version, both the *hashi* and the *faqīr* are ordered in shamanic narratives. This mode of ordering is similarly employing an idea of universality, nurtured globally by indigenous populations and urban segments within the framework of New Age spirituality. The premise is that there is an original spirituality, shared across the globe, which people have detached themselves from in modern times, and no less so with the Islamic Revival. Yet some people, such as the Bedouin shamans, still have some kind of access to it. The New Age movement—or 'alternative spirituality' as some adherents would rather call it—is equally a modern phenomenon, which, unlike the competing Islamic universality, aims to sustain and reclaim past practices through the trope of shamanic authenticity. It does so, however, by de-contextualising the actions, for example by stripping healing practices of their Koranic framework. Within the New Age framework, once existing vehicles or media for communication are

lost. However, they do not see themselves as filling in the gaps of lost knowledge (cf. Strathern 2004: 97–98). Rather they make do with what is present—or on the verge of extinction—including borrowing from what they see as related indigenous groups in the Amazon and Siberia.

It initially appears that we are dealing with two versions of the same object, which in no way can be reduced to each other. To the Ammarin, the *faqīr* cannot be both a shaman and a saint. Yet despite the transformations of the *hashi*, shamans and saints, they still share some sort of link: these versions are not fragmented or isolated. Rather they connect in the ambiguity relating to the possibility that the figure *could* be something else. Each version partially ties to some aspect of the other version, although far removed in the long line of interpretations and ordering processes that have taken them in different directions. As Marilyn Strathern states, these "semantic transformations are the outcome of the way specific metaphors are elaborated, leading people's interpretations in different directions. There is no single body of knowledge any more than there is a single [...] culture, but a number of small local centres" (2004: 96).

Aside from the museum and tourist information, the main meeting point is found in the third version of the saint, the heritage version. In the universal scope of UNESCO's heritage discourse of safeguarding material and practices of "outstanding value to humanity", the Ammarin (and neighbouring tribes) are represented as having special knowledge and skills in relation to the landscape. This discourse—like that of the New Age movement—seeks to sustain the cultural diversity of people and their heritage. This heritage trope is equally a product of modernity, and equally—although perhaps unintentionally—it seems in this case to strip the representation from its context; that is, from the fact that the Bedouin were relocated due to UNESCO tangible heritage. The problem is that UNESCO heritage is dependent on situating the heritage in a specific place within a nation state. Camel (and goat) herding skills, oral traditions and weaving skills are practised among most Bedouin groups in the Middle East but, by highlighting saint veneration, Bedouin culture comes to be situated among the Ammarin and neighbouring tribes in Petra, regardless of whether other Bedouin tribes are more comprehensively living the 'Bedouin culture' that UNESCO is seeking to safeguard.

Authenticity is as much at the heart of the heritage discourse as it is in the return to a pure Islam, or original spirituality among the indigenous groups in the eyes of a New Age movement. Authenticity, however, is not an object but a relationship. Within a heritage discourse, authenticity becomes a tool for legitimising a particular narrative of the past through

international heritage proclamations. For the shamanism trope, it is a mode of ordering both the *Samer* and the saint as shamanic practices, whereby the potency of the past to transgress time is an aspiration of an urban segment for whom the Bedouin represent an original human condition.

To the Ammarin, however, it is a relationship of ordering the nature of the presence of the past. The specific feature of sainthood is multiple and remains ambivalent and precarious, as the figure performs a powerful social role, yet is also entangled in the practices of contemporary Islamic morality. The *faqīr* is precariously positioned between being a salient saint and a shameful shaman.[19] While there may appear to be a gap between these versions, they also co-exist, however volatile their connection may be with the source they share. To the Ammarin, the pivotal, contemporary role of the saint, Salem Awwad, lies in his ability to offer social recognition of divine closeness for his descendants. To both the Heritage and New Age discourse, it is crucial that the object of interest is situated "just prior to the present" or at least threatened by the present (Clifford 1987: 122). Certain pasts may, to the Ammarin, thus be in a state of abjection within a discourse on the past, neither too detached nor too attached to the present day (Chadha 2006). Saintly veneration may today belong to the Age of Ignorance to the Ammarin but many of the same people now denouncing the pilgrimages did themselves perform them in the past, and they still rely on the social potency of lineage and the sense of belonging that the saint graves instil. The saint becomes meaningful on an individual level as both a figure of commemoration and disassociation; an ambivalence that is productive in bridging presumed gaps between modes of ordering. The multiplicity of versions allows for the same person to simultaneously denounce the shamanic version while also bringing tourists to the shaman's pool, or simply by being knowledgeable about alternative versions, but indifferent, leaving it up to God's will (Marcus 1985: 456). Many of my Ammarin informants may, on initial questioning, be absolutely certain of what a saint is. Yet they also accept the uncanny possibility that the saint could be something else. He is not a shaman, yet he is also not *not* a shaman—at least to someone else. By remaining precarious and ambivalent, the uncanny possibility of the *faqīr* being something other than a 'good person' allows for the continued co-existence of versions. This inde-

[19] The term "shameful shaman" was coined by Geraldine Chatelard (Pers. Comm.).

terminacy in orderings allows, at times, for a bridging of the gaps through partial connections between what may initially seem as incompatible versions of the same object.

Conclusion

What I have wished to show in the above is that the three competing universalities may, as analytical categories, be separate or even opposites. Yet rather than fragmented versions of the same object, there seem to be productive gaps forged through fragile connections which have evolved through transformations that have taken different directions. To the Ammarin, the subject of sainthood is, on one level, rendered an object of shame in the guise of the shaman. This goes, too, for the representation of the *Samer*, which, although in nature unlike the saint, is also ordered within the same trope of shamanism by Sajdi and Hamze. Yet, simultaneously, in a community such as that of the Ammarin where tourism, heritage, modernisation and an Islamic Revival go hand in hand, such connections allows for multiplicity.

None of these three versions stands alone. The moral obligations of an emerging Islamic pious awareness are not completely detached from obligations to know and cherish one's history, or make money from tourists attracted to the narratives of authenticity that the shaman affords—or take pride in being selected as UNESCO Intangible Heritage for practices no longer performed, such as the pilgrimage.

The problem for the Ammarin thus lies not in deciding what the saint *is*; the problem relies on being confronted by what the saint *could also* be. It is in the gaps between modes of ordering that the socially productive tension and potency of presenting the past resides. And it is in the gaps, which have emerged through semiotic transformations that the question of sainthood takes on a potent role of carrying with it an uncanny potentiality and sustained indeterminacy in the multiple orderings of the world. The point is thus that three very different modes of ordering exist in parallel and compete to enchant or disenchant the world. All seek recourse in the past to shape the future, where both the New Age and the Islamic Revival claim some sort of pure spirituality. Thus, while these versions are very different, the gaps and connections appear productive by not being completely determined, and allow for co-existence.

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PART THREE

INDETERMINATE SAINTHOOD

OUR LADY OF SOUFANIEH: ON KNOWLEDGE, IGNORANCE AND INDIFFERENCE AMONG THE CHRISTIANS OF DAMASCUS

Andreas Bandak[1]

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the nature of evidence as it is negotiated among the Christians of Damascus regarding the contemporary Christian stigmatic and visionary Myrna Akhras. In late November 1982, Myrna started to receive apparitions of the Virgin Mary, and both her body as well as an icon in her home began to exude oil. In the years that have followed, Myrna has on several occasions had stigmata, the six wounds of the crucified Christ, marking her body. Furthermore, on numerous occasions she has received messages from either Christ himself or Mary (Zahlawi 2008; see also Arjakovsky 2010; Khoury 2005; Ravaz 2009). Myrna soon attracted a huge gathering. Devout Christians, curious Christians, alongside Muslims and Druzes poured to her home, which was eventually made into a shrine. The phenomenon was soon named after Soufanieh—the Christian quarter in Damascus where Myrna and her husband live. The phenomenon of Our Lady of Soufanieh drew a variety of reactions from the very onset of the events. A great number of people were highly skeptical, doubting the veracity of all narrations of the miraculous surrounding Soufanieh. Yet others were indifferent, or tried to remain so by not frequenting the home turned shrine. Our Lady of Soufanieh and Myrna also attracted a more pious following, which terms itself the family of Soufanieh and which comes to daily prayers, weekly services and novenas in the home, seeing this as God's divine plan for the redemption of mankind in and through Damascus.

In this chapter, I argue that the often found lack of attention from local society towards seemingly miraculous events necessitates different

[1] I want to express my gratitude for productive readings of previous versions of this paper by Tom Boylston, Matthew Engelke, Alice Forbess, Willy Jansen, and Joel Robbins. Also I want to thank the participants in the research project *Alternative Spaces* for comments at a research seminar at the Danish Institute in Damascus.

strategies to make what the extended family of Soufanieh experience as the gift of God visible and audible. I examine this as a cross-field of indifference and knowledge, where mixed motivations exist in the relationship with Soufanieh in that most Christians know of the place and Myrna but only few frequent it regularly. For some, this scant frequenting, if at all, reflects an enmity in which Soufanieh and Myrna are suspected to be a source of evil but, for most, a lack of attention or even outright indifference is the most typical attitude. Here, I focus on the explanations and justifications both inside and outside of Soufanieh's extended family for sustaining or suspending relationships with the divine. Instead of separating Damascus into a multiplicity of fields, such as that of many denominations, families and areas, I contend that the ideas of unity that Myrna propagates animate general concerns and must subsequently be treated as a single field rather than a diversity of fields (cf. Hage 2005). The local negotiations over Myrna's person lead us to a discussion of Christian claims to sainthood and saintliness and the inherent fragility of such claims.

The French radical phenomenologist and Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion has perceptively reflected on a number of these themes and he establishes a basic paradox as follows (2009: 705): "The holiness of anyone remains for us (*quo ad nos*) undecidable; the saint consequently remains for us formally invisible. The question of the saint's holiness paradoxically begins to be raised from this invisibility." The basic conundrum, then, according to Jean-Luc Marion, is that a saint can never say that he or she is a saint for, in the very act of so doing, the transfer of attention would be severed and any claim to sainthood would then, as it were, be rendered fraudulent. Holiness, on the other hand, must be performed or attested to by the believer, in the act of imitating Christ or the life of venerable saints. Bearing witness, in this sense, is the difficult but not insurmountable task bestowed upon the followers of Soufanieh. The critical category of evidence is hereby opened, in that various Christians negotiate the status of the events. In this chapter, I therefore explore the nature of evidence as it relates to forms of knowledge, and this involves the opposite equally as much, namely indifference and ignorance. I shall start by describing a heated discussion on Soufanieh that took place among a Greek Orthodox family at some length. From this, I go on to consider other responses from perspectives that are both supportive and suspensive of Soufanieh.

New Year's Eve with Tony and Hanan—Negotiating Sainthood and Saintliness

I got to know Tony in 2005.[2] He is a devout Christian and a highly intelligent engineer. He is now working for an American company in the Gulf and often visits his in-laws in Damascus. His wife Hanan is also a devout Christian and works as a lawyer in a prestigious company in al-Malki, one of the most prestigious areas of Damascus. One evening, Tony and Hanan saw the three-volume book *aṣ-Ṣūfāniyya khilāl khamsatin wa ʿashrīn ʿāmān, 1982–2007*, a 1,500-page tome on the first 25 years of Soufanieh by the cherished Catholic pastor and proponent of Our Lady of Soufanieh and Myrna, Abuna Elias Zahlawi, standing on my bookshelf. I handed the heavy volumes to them and, after a brief examination, sifting through the pages, Tony soon pointed out how expensive the glossy pages and hardcover must be. His gestures and way of handing the book on to Hanan showed an expression of disdain. The comments on the book by Zahlawi and the price of it were only the first reactions of a much deeper resentment towards Myrna that I was to find among many Greek Orthodox Christians. Tony was quick to say that, to him, the veracity of the miracles and their fruits was the most important thing. Hanan fell silent on this point. Contrary to their otherwise standard behavior, Tony and Hanan did not embark on a long discussion but instead pointed to the great hostility Myrna had provoked. At the same time, both of them admitted to not knowing much about the details of her life and deeds. In this sense, even as devout Christians, Tony and Hanan are indicative of much broader structures of knowledge and ignorance.

Some months later, on New Year's Eve 2009/2010, I am invited by Tony and Hanan to celebrate the occasion with her family. My thoughts are barely with Soufanieh as I enter their home that evening. And nothing seems to indicate that a heated discussion is about to occur as we enjoy the splendid food and whisky placed on the table. During the evening, the talk revolves around the year that has passed and many comments are made on the witty programs on television and on the weight gained by some of the male members of the family. At some point after midnight, one of Hanan's aunts wants to know what I am doing my research on. On hearing that it focuses on ideas of unity among Christians in Damascus

[2] Ordinary persons appear under pseudonyms while official and known persons appear with their original names.

and Syria and that I am using Soufanieh as a case study, one of the aunts instantly exclaims: "Why Soufanieh?!" She is joined by her sister and Umm Hanan, the lady of the house: "Yes, why Soufanieh?" All express visible disdain in both their voice and facial expressions. "There are many miracles that are prettier than this . . . Why then Soufanieh?" Hanan's aunt continues. I say that I find Soufanieh interesting because it always leads to conversations on the topic of unity among Christians in Damascus and Syria. I remark that I am not for or against Soufanieh, that my aim is to be neutral. "I am against Soufanieh!" the aunt states vehemently, in opposition to such a stance. She continues by expounding a story of the house in which Myrna lives, in order to render it suspect. Immediately upon this, she continues: "Do you know that, at first, the icon was taken to *Kanīsat al-Salīb* [the Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross], but nothing happened, nothing!? After this the Orthodox Church opposed it, this was already in the first year . . . You know the icon was taken to *Kanīsat al-Salīb*, but it did not shed oil . . .?" Hanan's aunt reiterates this part as if to prove her point. Mereh breaks into the conversation: "We went there in the very beginning when all the stories were circulating, and we didn't see anything . . .! So I don't believe it . . ." The aunt takes up the cause: "All churches but the Catholic Church renounce Soufanieh . . ." After a short pause, she continues with renewed force: "You know, they were really poor before, but see how they are now . . . They have a house in Saydnaya, where they give parties! It is the same with Abuna Zahlawi, he was poor as well, but because of his ties with France he is well off now. They have gained a lot from this . . . Everybody in Saydnaya knows this!" The aunt hereby transposes her attack onto other domains. The other aunt, who is still eating, supports this. "Yiiihh, they have a lot of parties in Saydnaya . . ." The onslaught develops ever more fervently, attacking both the family and Abuna Elias Zahlawi: "Once Myrna was asked to see a sick person, and she was very rude, do you know what she said? She said: 'I can see this person another day, not now' . . . She ought to have seen her!"

After this first series of attacks and incriminations, the aunt steps up yet again: "And why go making it public like that? There are many places where similar miracles have been kept for the home . . . I have experience of other such miracles where icons have shed oil . . . in Saydnaya and in our family, but people do not just go and make their home a public place. Now, they are making it into a church!" She continues: "And why film it and make DVDs? Why make it public like that?" The aunt thus implies that the very form of publicity is only intended to gain something personally and is therefore, concomitantly, a highly suspect practice.

"And the relationship with the state, do you know about that?" The aunt is again backed up, but this time by Nabil, Hanan's father, who says: "You do know that they are on good terms with the state . . ." This point is not continued but it is very interesting that it is raised, since Christians typically hold ambivalent sentiments towards the Syrian state as both a guarantor of security and, at the same time, a strict regime (Wedeen 1999; see also Bandak 2013). It is significant to note that the first apparition and miracles happened the very same year, 1982, in which the infamous atrocities occurred in Hama, where several thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood were killed by the Syrian regime (van Dam 1996: 111; George 2003: 16; Lesch 2005: 44; Perthes 1995: 137). Even though there may not be a direct link, this is one of the critical backdrops against which the apparition of Our Lady of Soufanieh and the stress on unity must be understood (cf. Christian 1996; Jansen 2005; Turner & Turner 1978). Even members of the extended family of Soufanieh see the beginning of the whole phenomenon in 1982 as God's and the Virgin Mary's way of signaling His path in a time of turmoil and—as it were—fragility. The idea of fragility is not just inherent to the image of Syria at this particular time but rather the whole region, and this is what made the later messages Myrna received intelligible, and which members of the extended family believed foretold, for instance, the first Gulf War and what was to come.

For some Christians, such as the aunt, the acceptance *qua* non-intrusion of the Syrian state casts Myrna in a dubious light. Is the message of unity promulgated by Myrna on a par with national unity? The aunt leaves this as an insinuation but continues after just a moment's respite: "Myrna has had something in her psyche, *nafs*, where and when have you heard of stigmata in the history of the Church . . .?!" The aunt goes on, assisted by several of the others present, in particular Hanan's sister and father, who ask: "What is the benefit of stigmata?" At this point, Tony and Hanan attempt to explain that she is most definitely not the first person in the history of the Church with stigmata: "Saint Francis was the first to have stigmata, and this isn't contested, is it?" they interject. The aunt makes to continue but this time Tony manages to make himself heard: "Wait a moment, there are others, for instance Father . . . Pio, wasn't that his name, Andro?" I confirm that he was one of them, but that several more had been reported as having had stigmata.[3] "These are all western

[3] There exist a corpus of scholarly work on stigmatics, including for instance Catherine of Siena, Christina of Stommeln, Francis of Assisi, Lukardis of Oberweimar (Kleinberg 1992;

saints!" the aunt retorts, thereby emphasizing the difference between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, which in Arabic are designated as Eastern and Western. "But who would argue that Saint Francis' stigmata weren't genuine? It was due to his faith that these marks were revealed on his body!" Tony insists. Tony's certainty of this revealed message is not returned by the others. What is revealed, however, is the difficult idea of unity. This difficulty rests upon the history of Catholic intrusion into the Levant, first, following Pope Clement V, who replaced military conquest with conversion (Degeorge 2004: 159) and then, in particular, Pope Gregory XV who, in 1622, established the *De Propaganda Fides* congregation to promote mission in the East (Masters 2001: 68ff.). This mission and proselytizing was initially directed at Muslims but, finding it too difficult, it was soon redirected at the Orthodox churches, with the ensuing implication of sedition. As a lasting consequence, to this day, the idea of unity (even if lauded by many, the laity in particular) is difficult to achieve due to a trajectory of animosity between the establishments of the various churches. Furthermore, this ties into the idea of unity propagated by Myrna and the extended family of Soufanieh. Myrna herself is from a Greek Catholic family whereas her husband, Nicolas, is from a Greek Orthodox one. Her followers believe their marriage gives substance to Christian unity whereas her opponents are more concerned with her morals, public image and the interest the Greek Catholic Church has shown in Myrna's case.

The aunt goes on by recounting how miracles of, for instance, the scent of incense arise in a home, or of icons exuding oil. "I don't think that there are such things in Soufanieh . . ." she says. I listen, and then give the example of a miraculous healing I have been told of by the Frenchman, Gérard Challet. Challet was allegedly cured of severe cancer, while in a coma, by having a photo of the icon placed on his stomach.[4] "That's different! That's the icon—it's not Myrna as a person! We believe that God can heal and can do so through icons . . . We believe in Our Lady!" the aunt says, assisted by Hanan's mother. The aunt refers to a somewhat similar miracle of a young child being cured. At this point, I choose to introduce what the people from the extended family of Soufanieh often refer to

2008: 224–246); Gemma Galgani (Orsi 2005: 110–145) and Francis of Assisi (Davidson 2009; Belting 2010).

[4] Gérard Challet gave his testimony upon a visit to Soufanieh for one of the Tuesday evening novenas, which I recorded.

as the critical point of distinction, the messages Myrna claims to have received, messages of unity, love and faith. But this is not something that the aunt knows anything about. "They are all about faith, love and unity, right?" Hanan states in response, which is just as much directed at me to correct me. This lead is not followed and Tony tries to broaden the perspective by saying: "For me, I am just a Christian!" Both Hanan's mother and the aunts have their eyes wide open after this comment. "Of course, we are all Christians, but there are differences . . .," the aunt says.

Accusations and Responses—Sinner or Saint

What we learn here is that miracles as a general phenomenon may not be rendered as problematic but their actuality always conjures up wider discussions on the source of the miracle, whether it is credible or not. The heated talk this New Year's Eve, in this sense, signals the explosive material contained in the talk of unity among the Christians of Damascus, and Soufanieh and Myrna as well, particularly among the Greek Orthodox. Of course, not all are as learned or as vehement regarding the issue as the aunt we just got to know but many do hold a profound skepticism towards Myrna. Even a lady such as the skeptical aunt, however, is unaware of what many in Soufanieh regard as the most significant part of what has happened, the messages Myrna has received. On a popular level, many other accusations circulate that entail Myrna allegedly frequenting public swimming pools dressed only in a bikini. This is presented by some Greek Orthodox as the ultimate token of a lack of modesty on Myrna's part. In addition, the fact that Myrna does not cover her hair and is a married mother of two is seen as problematic and less than conducive to the corroboration of Myrna as a living saint. The image of a Christian saint for many is and has been tied to the image of the young girl, virginity or a monastic life and there are very, very few women that have entered the number of those officially blessed and sanctified as mothers (see also Christian 1981: 198; 2012: 71; Macklin 2005: 6; 20; Woodward 1990: 337). Some would not simply insinuate that the miracles in Soufanieh are false or made up, as the aunt does, but would even suggest that this trickery was brought about by placing tubes in the frame of the icon from whence the oil was then able to flow. No such fraud has ever been proven. This does not lessen the accusations, however, as they flourish on moral issues such as extravagance, illicit economic gain and immoral behavior, all of which summon up a somewhat different image of Myrna and Soufanieh

than what is strived for from within. Furthermore, the paradox we already encountered in the introduction to this chapter on sainthood and visibility is played out regarding the publicity Myrna has attained; too much visibility would amount to a discrediting of Myrna, too little and she risks being forgotten altogether. As Marion has aptly demonstrated, it is from the very invisibility and undecidability that issues of sainthood are raised (2009). So when the aunt so vehemently opposes the public presentation of the miracles by Myrna and her followers, it shows the precarious nature of any actual claim to sainthood. Polemics and incriminations, however, appear to accompany all claims to sainthood, not just as mere happenstance but as a productive force (Elsner 2009). It is precisely the lack of recognition that is a driving force in claiming the saintliness of Our Lady of Soufanieh and Myrna on the part of her followers.

The negative backdrop of persistent claims of extravagance, immodest behavior and illicit economic gains exists and is quite frequently addressed by either Myrna or the people around her. If I brought these accusations up in interviews or conversations with the extended family of Soufanieh, they would quite quickly be put down or silenced. One of Myrna's confidante's, Salwa, would derail such accusations quite easily, but not without being troubled, if not saddened. A couple of days after New Year's Eve, Salwa is taking me to the office of Fawaz, the official photographer hired to document all the events of Soufanieh. On the way, she asks me if I had a nice New Year's Eve. In fact, she had already asked me if I wanted to celebrate the evening with her family, but I had declined due to the prior invitation from Tony and Hanan. I tell her how we ended up in a heated discussion over Myrna and Soufanieh. Instantly, Salwa asks for details of how the topic was framed and my responses. I recount the position of the aunt, in particular, and her skeptical stance. Salwa retorts with a saddened look: "And they have never been there to see for themselves? Have they?" In saying this, she gets more worked up at the criticisms and, before I get a chance to answer, she continues: "What is it? Some like you travel from the other side of the planet just to see this, but people here in Damascus just don't care!" I venture upon the line I have heard used in sermons in Soufanieh that paraphrases Jesus, in that a prophet is never accepted in his . . . Salwa concludes the sentence:[5] "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country."

[5] Cf. Matthew 13:57; Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24.

As we continue our walk, I bring up the topic of expenses with regard to Abuna Elias Zahlawi and the money for his most recent book, namely where they come from. "They come from certain highly trusted persons . . ." Salwa pauses and is not speaking out loud and clear it seems, as if withholding information. "Whenever something is needed, it can be asked . . . They are of enormous importance to Soufanieh . . ." Money, in this sense is an important factor, but problematic and even a dangerous topic as the accusations uttered in the Greek Orthodox family attest to. In the home of Myrna, signs announce that donations are forbidden. Pilgrims and guests are typically asked to give donations or votive gifts to churches, not to Our Lady of Soufanieh. The secrecy surrounding the followers' economic support, however, only leads to further suspicion on the part of the skeptics. In interviews, Salwa would emphasize the costs of giving up an ordinary life for Myrna and her family. "Imagine . . ." she ventured, ". . . that you are put under scrutiny all the time, that people notice the slightest thing you do! [. . .] That people come at all times of the day and even at night expecting you to be only happy and welcoming!" In stressing Myrna's demanding life, Salwa at this point designates this as the real miracle: that the home has been open for 27 years in a row. Emphatically, Salwa renders Myrna's acts in a light whereby the saint, and not the sinner, in her can be seen and heard. In this sense, Salwa and many others from Soufanieh's close circle do not simply testify to the veracity of the happenings in Soufanieh; an important part of their task is to challenge the spread of slander and gossip from people aimed at vilifying Myrna in her act of witness. And this, at times, may seem as bordering on an insurmountable task.

Bearing Witness—Testimony as Proof

A critical task for the extended family of Soufanieh is to become a witness. This is what Salwa strives to be in word and deed. It is worth expounding on the particular act of witnessing at some length. In testifying to what the individual believer has seen and heard, the status of the individual becomes that of a witness and living proof to others of what has happened and can happen in Soufanieh. What you are supposed to see in miracles is directed by what you hear and listen to, and therefore you have to tell and be told what has happened here in Soufanieh. The act of witnessing can also be seen as a defense against the forgetfulness and neglect that easily refashions what was initially taken as a miracle and sign only later

to become mere coincidence or a stroke of luck—as Walter Benjamin neatly captured in the image of Penelope's thread, which has to be started over again every morning (1968: 204).

The miracle, which is taken to be such a transformative source of evidence, is in this sense prone to reinterpretation. There is a particular vulnerability related to the conceptualization of the proof in that it is never fully sufficient to waylay doubts completely. This is not necessarily problematic in practice, however, where doubts and misgivings can be productive and creative, as the conditions upon which beliefs are formed (Taussig 2006; see also Bandak & Jørgensen 2012; Shenoda 2012). Acts in spite of a lack of belief or impossibility of belief are, in a certain sense, ways of extending the effects of a continuing re-inscription of the importance of Soufanieh. The miracle, then, is not just a miracle by mere chance but as much by its reinvigoration in the form of both individual and communal practices of retelling.

The act of witnessing therefore works precisely as a collective form of what I would term *evidentification*; an identification of evidence properly suited to attest to the divine workings in and through Soufanieh. By this, I wish to underline that not every happening counts as a divine working but must be tested and discerned to find out the proper source—if it is from God, man or the Devil (see also Apolito 1998; Gilsenan 2000). Human expectations may, in this sense, override divine plans and only careful examination and the search for a particular message genuinely reflect the Christian spirit as promulgated in Soufanieh. In an interview on miracles, Fadi, a devout follower of Our Lady of Soufanieh, explains how he heard of an alleged miracle in the suburb of Dweila. Fadi, not satisfied with only hearing of the miracle, goes there to see it for himself. His assessment was that this was not a genuine miracle but that a natural explanation could be given. Furthermore, no message was pronounced, which to Fadi epitomizes the utmost mark of divine intention. By downgrading this incident in Dweila, Fadi yet again makes a comparison or rather, as Jas' Elsner has aptly phrased it (2009), places Soufanieh *beyond compare* (see also Harris 1999: 91–109; Taves 2012: 64; Zimdars-Swartz 1991: 57–67). The message of Soufanieh is taken by Fadi as proof of the veracity of the miracles which, through their absence in Dweila, cast the alleged miracle into doubt. Soufanieh, in this sense, is regarded by most of the followers not just as any ordinary Christian revelatory phenomenon; it is rather a contraction of the Christian message in and through Damascus, which they all see prefigured in the conversion of Saint Paul on his

Fig. 6.1. Photo of the icon in Myrna's home (photo by the author).

way to Damascus some two millennia ago. Fadi is therefore an active proponent of Soufanieh and goes out of his way to tell of the miraculous happenings, both in his own neighborhood and in other areas, and which he has great plans to bear witness to.

Everyone in the Soufanieh family are, like Fadi, instigated to participate in spreading the message. Raif, a man in his forties, used to emphasize that every single person would be used by Our Lady in terms of the gifts he or she had, whether this be producing web-pages, driving an icon of Our Lady on trips for veneration purposes, recording and distributing DVDs and booklets on Soufanieh or decorating Myrna's home for celebrations. The status of witness is hereby transformed from being a mere passive recipient to an active proponent and hence a part of divine history as it manifests itself over time. The witness is participating in making divine history.

As with saintliness in a general Christian formulation, it is the imitation of Christ in his life and death that has been the diacritical mark through history, both when heroic virtue has been emphasized and when the thaumaturgic wonderworking has been so (Kieckhefer 1988; McBrien 2001). Christ, in this sense, is a model for imitation and all witnesses are seen to partake in the model by themselves modeling their life upon his by emulation. As already pointed out in the introduction, it makes sense to paraphrase and reformulate Clifford Geertz (1993[1973]) when he says that, for the Christians of Damascus, there exist both models *of* sainthood and models *for* sainthood. The first involves recognizing particular forms of saintliness and holiness which, as we have already seen, is not a problem as such for many Syrian Christians. The problem arises with the model *for* sainthood since it is deliberately used to form particular lives and characters, and here people are drawn into the apologetics and defense, or polemics and a lack of desire in that this is something only some adhere to, not all. Bearing witness, to the believer, in a particular way encapsulates the ultimate reality which has marked individual life with a divine touch and which, by being conveyed to others, renders credible what goes beyond human understanding. The act of bearing witness in this sense is to testify to what has happened and is hence a way of proving the veracity of the miraculous deeds that happened in and through Soufanieh; it presents the possible transition from the model *of* to the model *for* sainthood.

Objects of Evidence in Anthropology and Beyond—Signs and Evidentification

If we turn back to the miracles, then one critical observation is that they have a fundamental ambiguity about them from a Christian tradition. On the one hand, miracles are important and taken as evidence of a certain reality to which they point. On the other, miracles lack ultimate force since they will never be able, once and for all, to settle the matter; some will always contest the veracity of the miracle. It is not a novel phenomenon to render people more superstitious of previous times; rather as the anthropological record amply demonstrates, certain thresholds exist across time and cultures, after which no solid explanations can be given (Douglas 2002[1966]: 74; 1970; Evans-Pritchard 1937). Even Christ, in his sayings in the gospels, appears to have a dual stance towards miracles. In the gospels, miracles are designated as *signs*, as both something given to the populace to convince but, at the same time, something you cannot demand. Some will not be convinced, but only stop short at the wonder and not the divine and invisible to which the miracle as a sign is believed to point. It is precisely this dilemma that is negotiated by the followers in Soufanieh. Whereas the miracles are constantly referred to as a source of joy and happiness by my informants, several of the core members criticize the tendency of the world, a designation of Damascus and Syrian society, to show up only if they hear about miracles they want to see for themselves. Miracles, in this sense, are not seen to produce conviction but joy. If only a marvel is seen in the miracle and not a sign, then the miracle is happening in vain for the believer. This is also the reason why Robert Shanafelt, in his review of the literature of miracles in anthropology, stops short of arriving at a satisfactory explanation (2003). Shanafelt rightly asserts the anthropological problem with miracles. When he makes the easy transposition of miracles into marvels, however, he cannot aid an understanding of the miraculous as never arriving at certainty in itself. Miracles rather produce chains and logics which, with perseverance, must be reasserted. And, on the other hand, it is precisely because the miraculous could have happened that it is not easy to discard altogether.

Again, the central miracle is transferred from the icon or the hands of Myrna exuding oil or blood, and the healings of sick people, to the particular message of Soufanieh and a change of heart and lives for those brought into contact with Our Lady of Soufanieh. Jean-Luc Marion frames this as the experience of *signa* (1991: 8–9; see also Ward 2011: 150; Weddle 2010: 141f.). The devoted Christians around Myrna use the terms *muʿajizāt* and

ʿajāib to render miracles,[6] but what is critical here is again their specific status as signs, *rumūz*. Since many just come to see the wondrous workings, without taking the particular message of Soufanieh into account, however, a major concern for the followers is to substantiate the message. As Robert Orsi has noted, clerical authorities hastily attempt to tame and direct the uncanny presence and excess of the miraculous (2008). The identification of evidence, what I term *evidentification*, is important in that it is this very attempt at taming or directing the excess of the miraculous that points to its particular quality as a sign. Precisely because of the lack of certainty, the problems in fixing any single meaning on such excessive events, proof and evidence is needed to corroborate indexicalities that mark out what should be seen in the miracles. The indexicalities are created through words which, in the community of believers, are aimed at molding characters that do not see everything but focus on the sign in the miracles. This process takes place in sermons and testimonies, in which an attempt is made to fix the miraculous as a sign of grace.

The Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg addresses the question of evidence, regarded as clues, in several of his works (1980; 1999). Clues mark the work of art or history in traces of its originator which the attentive eye can detect. A similar feat has been captured by Edwin Ardener as *vestiges of creation* (1989). These traces, as clues, point to those who have been taught to see in them the sign more than the wonder. In this respect, it is significant that, during the Enlightenment, the Catholic Church chose to decree that no one should designate a phenomenon as a miracle until the Church itself had approved of it as more than just hearsay (de Certeau 1992). During the Enlightenment, a positive regime was established, and not just in terms of skepticism towards religious or transcendental powers, whereby stories or the testimonies of others alone were not enough to establish the credibility of a supernatural occurrence. Not only science in its modern inception in this period but also the Church demanded evidence before declaring a phenomenon to be a miracle. David Hume famously captured this modern form of skepticism by placing the senses over and above tradition and oral testimony (1975[1777]: 109): "Our evidence, then, for the truth of the *Christian* religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses." To Hume, then, the testimony is rendered

[6] Significantly, Muslims do not generally use the same terms for miracles; the term *karamāt* is instead used (cf. Pinto 2004: 197; Mittermaier 2011: 156). However, in some places it seems that Muslims may also use the terms interchangeably (see Gilsenan 1982: 79ff.).

suspect since it can only vicariously approximate what has occurred whereas the senses in his optic have an unprecedented primacy. Testimony as proof is, from such a skeptical perspective, then, never enough to establish the facts even if, as a secondary source, it demands attention. If testimonies alone are counted as proof, as the entire proof, then Hume is not willing to accept this as a source at all. Here, Hume asserts that we have proof against proof since (ibid.: 114): "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience possibly can be imagined." Where Hume, then, like the Enlightenment tendency in general, formed a novel and skeptical assessment of miracles altogether, it was however not able to eliminate the uncanny experiences such as those found in mystics and mysticism altogether. Hume and the likes would relegate these forms of conviction to remnants of superstition and ignorance. But in fact what has happened is that modern science, as well as testimony, has been used by the Church to establish what counts as a miracle, albeit with one major difference: for the Church to establish a phenomenon as a proper miracle *ipso facto* is to make it stand for something else, to make it establish the evidentiary force of the divine, whereas modern science typically prefers to gloss over miracles as merely what has not been explained by natural causes *yet* (Woodward 1990: 191f.). In Damascus, the miraculous—as we have seen—has not lost its force altogether although, for various Christians, the concrete instantiation is always up for negotiation. Even more so when the modern state—as pointed out by Carl Schmitt (2005[1922]: 42)—is working against the miraculous both as an exception to natural order and also as a divinely ordained realm in order for the state itself to become the miracle, albeit of a modern, secular nature. The Syrian state, with a similar logic to date, only reluctantly or when under pressure uses the religious domain to emphasize its own agenda (Pierret & Selvik 2009).

The quality of the evidence itself has been taken up in recent anthropological writing (Hastrup 2004; Engelke et al. 2008). One of the critical aspects that has emerged is how evidence is made to stand for something else and thereby obtains the status of a sign value, a process in which the senses are incremental in making evidence seen, felt or heard (Keane 2008). Maurice Bloch asserts that a fundamental part of evidence rests on the eyes (2008). Whereas Bloch may be right in attributing this primacy to the eyes generally—it is also the case in Syria and Damascus that people want to see for themselves and not just be told stories of the

miraculous—a central feature he overlooks is the cognizant part the ears play in forming *what* to see. The problem with the obsession with cognition and vision, as I take it Bloch is embellishing, is that he is not attentive to the way in which the human senses work in tandem to give one unified perception, one perception where we, at times, hear with the eyes and see with the ears (Deleuze & Guattari 2004[1980]: 342f.; Ingold 2000: 245; Schmidt 2000).

A particularly fertile way to conceive of the process of making and giving evidence is found with the neologism *infinition*, which Martin Holbraad dubs the unfinished character of proof (Holbraad 2008). What has counted as proof at one point in time only necessitates further proof at later stages by craving recounting and narration. A series of instantiations is, however, created whereby what was regarded as evidence is used as such in narration and hence proves something else. Because the human memory is frail and people may reinterpret past incidents, the individual needs to be retold in order to relive and redirect the focus on the force of the proofness of the proof. Holbraad therefore aptly captures the unfinished nature of much evidence, as well as its infinite status, where divine touch remains so only in a constant re-inscription. Rationality is, in this sense, not a property that belongs solely to either anthropologist or interlocutor; rather it resides in between, as a contested and negotiated space, where different experiences, traditions and articulations are made. Negotiations over the possibilities of icons exuding oil, apparitions of the Virgin Mary and Jesus are present in Damascus and, as responses vary from person to person, even the same people would have different opinions over time. Evidence therefore pertains to domains of knowledge and thus to a variety of situated epistemologies. Here, the desire to see, to listen and to touch has different economies within the same society. Where some are convinced, others are not; where some are thrilled by the narration of the miraculous, others are only reluctantly so; and where some aim to come to Soufanieh, others hesitate and even fear to do so. In this regard, the decision of what to regard as fantastic, supernatural or miraculous is critical (cf. Todorov 1973) even if, or better yet, precisely because, it is not necessarily possible to settle the matter once and for all.

Suspensions of Belief—A Miraculous Cure

Another standard reaction towards Myrna and Soufanieh among many Christians was not one of outright enmity but rather of indifference.

Typically, I would embark on conversations with a variety of Christians who would all know of Myrna and Soufanieh but would be more hesitant towards deciding on what to infer from the stories. "I don't know . . ." George would say, as we and three other young men sat in Steeds, one of the fancier restaurants in the Christian quarter of Qusour. "I mean, I live only a couple of hundred meters from her home and I never went there, ha ha ha . . ." George laughs. I know George and the other young men from the Melchite Catholic Church of Our Lady of Damascus, *Kanīsat al-Sayyida Dimashq*, where I met them in the *Legio Mariam* which I attended on a weekly basis for six months in 2005. George works in computer engineering, and the other two, Ziad and Ilyas, work as a goldsmith and lawyer, respectively. The three men have all been or still are involved in the activities of the church. George and Ziad participated in the Catholic World Youth Congress in Australia in 2008 and hence must be said to emphasize putting their faith into action. Obviously, however, there is a hesitant stance among all three of them when we touch upon Myrna and Soufanieh. They applaud the fact that I am undertaking this research but they do not want to go and have a look for themselves. This would appear all the more interesting as Abuna Elias Zahlawi is one of the three pastors in the very same church they attend. In other words, even though they all greatly admire Abuna Elias Zahlawi, he has not yet succeeded in bringing a focus to Our Lady of Soufanieh, or not so much as to have these three men frequent the place.

This points us in the direction of the mixed motivations and forms of indulgence with which saintly figures are met (James 1982[1902]; see also Bandak & Bille this volume). Frequently, I would hear people advise me not to believe anything I had not seen with my own eyes. In this sense, I would be warned not to be fooled. My local hairdresser and a good friend of Myrna's husband, Nicolas, would laugh and stretch his arms out and look upwards when asked his opinion of the happenings in Soufanieh: "I don't know . . . only God knows!" He would add and then laugh. This cautious stance was countered by a great many that had actually seen miraculous happenings but still remained reluctant to get drawn into the community of the pious. In this regard, the recent spate of studies on pious Muslims in the Middle East (Deeb 2006; Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005) runs the risk of placing a greater uniformity on the pious subjects than is actually the case (Schielke 2009a; 2009b; 2010; Soares & Osella 2009; Starrett 2010). Even though this study does not delve into Muslim identities but Christian ones, it is quite clear that a great variation exists in how identities are articulated in relation to ideas for or against piety. These

are not fixed positions, however; rather they are fluid in the sense that they are used in time of need (Bandak 2012). Nabil, a young estate agent I have known for several years, had some interesting stories to tell when one day we started to discuss the miracles of Soufanieh at great length. Some years back, before serving his time in the army, Nabil fell very sick with a particularly malignant form of skin disease. He went to several doctors with his mother but none of them could give him a remedy; quite the opposite, the diagnosis was that it was a severe disease with dire implications. He would not be able to join the army. Although one's stint in the army is considered a harsh time by most Syrian men, Nabil considered it preferable to a severe disease. At night in his home, while the family was asleep, his mother Umm Fawaz had a dream in which Saint Anthony met her in a church with Nabil lying on the floor of the church in front of them and told her that her son would be cured. When she woke up, an icon of Saint Anthony in the home shed drops of blood and, as Nabil awoke, they learned that he was healed. Nabil added another miraculous event to this. Now no longer exempt from military service, he joined a unit in the vicinity of Damascus. A presidential decree changed the rules, however, so that everyone had to be posted a greater distance from their homes. Nabil was initially annoyed at this but nothing could change the new decree. A week after his transfer, the remaining seven members of his unit rolled the vehicle which they always drove, killing them all. "God must really like me! It was a second miracle . . . Think of this, God used the president to save me!" Nabil here left out all sorts of bad conscience over being the only one spared.

Nabil saw his life changed by these two miracles. He emphasized the certainty of his faith. At the same time, he would suspend many of his moral choices, as in his sexual relationships with Muslim girls. When asked about Soufanieh, Nabil would contend that there was no surprise in the miracles, and that he had twice experienced miracles on his own body. He would also praise the message of unity, saying that it was greatly needed among the Christians of Syria. A unification of Easter would signal that the Christians were one people and not many. Regarding the consequences for his own life, however, Nabil would rather not go to Soufanieh. He emphasized that he somehow felt prevented from actually going there, afraid of what would happen to him if he should actually step over the threshold. He thus preferred to leave it to the grace he himself had experienced and not embark on any investigation of the details of Soufanieh, suspending any form of judgment until later.

Knowledge, Ignorance and Indifference—Strategies of Intensification

A central feature for the various people I have presented so far in this chapter is the differing attitudes held regarding the status of the miraculous. In a certain sense, the choice not to go into the details of the happenings of Soufanieh is a specific strategy of not getting involved but remaining unaffected through a dual suspension of both belief and disbelief. Ghassan Hage has termed such a process by which certain realities are invested in as *strategies of intensification* (2002). By placing or not placing a stake in a given reality, it can become more or less intense. If a person follows Soufanieh as Salwa, Fadi or Raif do, all the minor details hold the divine seeds of knowledge and must be attended to. It is the opposite for people such as George, Ilyas, Ziad or Nabil, who deliberately postpone any judgment on Soufanieh. And, yet again, for people such as Tony and Hanan's family, the aunt in particular, the reality may be a present one but representing the opposite of what the followers of Soufanieh would want it to. By focusing on the differing strategies people have for letting or not letting the miraculous seize them, we embark on a classic discussion with social, theological and existential ramifications of how knowledge affects choices and attitudes held. The choice not to visit Soufanieh, even if the place is known, indicates a fear or uneasiness with the uncanny in the form of the miraculous as if it is common knowledge that it could actually affect the life of a George, Hani, Ziad or Nabil. For these figures, however, personal change is not strived for. Rather, a certain distance, knowing of it but not divesting too much time and energy in it, is found to be a suiting response in an otherwise busy daily life. Here, the choice is not to let this reality affect the person. This is a highly significant form of indifference, which is formative as the background upon which Our Lady of Soufanieh has to be heard and seen. Where the motives and situations of the people described may vary, what—from the perspective of the Soufanieh family—is encountered is the dangerous couple of indifference and ignorance. By not taking a stand but remaining in the gap between belief and disbelief, general society proves how difficult it is to listen for the voice of God. This theme would often be underlined by the pastors in Soufanieh in novenas and sermons: that, at a particular time, God's specific timing that is, everything will be revealed and the whole world shall come to acknowledge who He is. Abuna Elias Zahlawi would emphasize this reality in a sermon by telling of an old friend of his who does not *yet* believe. Here perhaps, however, lies a deeper problem as to why the

world cannot, or will not, see. And it was this more troubling theme that Abuna Elias Zahlawi labored upon on the anniversary of the first apparition of Our Lady of Soufanieh. The problem, Abuna Zahlawi ventured, is that people will not see.

In this sense, what we encounter is a problem of knowledge. Why is it that not everybody accepts the signs of Soufanieh and, more widely, God? Why is it that the miracles do not once and for all settle the matter? By making the claim that this is due to ignorance and indifference, the pastors and followers can render the choice not to see the workings of God in the mundane and extraordinary life of Myrna and Soufanieh completely irrational. The evidence and *evidentification* is found in Myrna, the stories, and the life and becoming each individual strives for and the followers therefore themselves participate in producing. Only ignorant or indifferent people would not accept this. In this respect, even the ignorance of the wider society can be taken as further evidence of the veracity of Christ's sayings on misjudged prophets. This points to an interesting coincidence in the evaluation of indifference, as the explanation can be found in a sermon such as the one given by Abuna Elias Zahlawi, but also among people such as Nabil. For some, there is too much to take into account to settle on just one dimension, and hence the dual suspension of both belief and disbelief locates the individual in the gap, where a choice can be taken at a later stage. For the followers of Soufanieh, this is a dangerous strategy as you never know if you will be able to listen if you postpone the moment. Deaf ears and blind eyes are a dangerous coupling.

What we encounter, then, are problems of knowing and knowledge. The problem of knowledge has been addressed both in recent anthropological discussions (cf. Barth 2002) as well as older philosophical discussions (Foucault 1970; Kuhn 1962). A focus on which forms of knowledge people put to use in different times, situations and contexts hence offers a more sensitive framing of social stakes across scales and cultural settings. More recently, discussions of epistemology have been broadened by a focus on what people do not know, be this purposely held zones of not-knowing, which Clifford Geertz has phrased as *passions of ignorance* (2000: 259) and Michel Foucault as *a will not to know* (1980[1976]: 55), or structural blind spots, which paradigmatically fall outside the zones of attention. In his recent work, anthropologist Roy Dilley addressed these forms of ignorance which, as he eloquently puts it, always mark knowledge as its shadow (2007; 2010, see also High, Kelly & Mair 2012). Dilley takes his point of departure as the conceptual innovation of James Ferrier (1854) who, besides the typical use of ontology and epistemology, coined

and introduced the term *agnoiology*. The term, admittedly not too elegant, covers what people are not interested in knowing or cannot know and is a significant contribution to our understanding of the social life of a phenomenon such as Soufanieh. In this sense, there exist two ways of not knowing. One which admits to being unaware of certain features and one which deliberately aims at not knowing. Dilley also crafts parts of his most recent version of the argument around different assessments of ignorance in Christian traditions. On the one hand, ignorance can be considered innocent, as the state before the Fall of Man. On the other, ignorance can be considered a willful and evil condition in which people do not want to know. The different stances held by Christians in Damascus attest to the different perspectives of what counts as knowledge and which forms of evidence corroborate this knowledge as fact. Implicit knowledge is also constitutive in this regard, alongside what people do not want to know or just simply cannot know.

We thus turn to a final issue that I wish to address, and one that is also significant as a specifically Christian topic. As Abuna Elias Zahlawi emphasized in the sermon previously alluded to, a split in humanity is present when regarding miracles as signs or simply marvels. Here, even Jesus voices criticism of the popular demands for signs, since people should believe the scripture and signs can be understood only insofar as the scripture is believed. If miracles only instigate curiosity and marvel, they lose their pertinence as signs and cannot aid personal transformation. The sign-value of the miracle is not able to force people to another conviction but, on the other hand, it always has the capability of destabilizing the normal situation and knowledge, and rupturing how things are understood to be. This is not something that the followers, Myrna or the pastors can control. What they can, and what they do, however, is to direct and re-inscribe the importance of the particular message of Soufanieh as it is manifested in the miracles as signs of grace. But these signs of grace—as this chapter has tried to demonstrate—are always resting upon and even nested by fragility and undecidedness, which leads to further negotiations of what counts as evidence, what a witness is and what counts as knowledge, ignorance and indifference.

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ECSTATIC SAINTHOOD AND AUSTERE SUNNI ISLAM: A MAJZŪB IN NORTHERN PAKISTAN

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen

Introduction

Apart from group-oriented, hierarchical '*tarīqa* Sufism', there is a fascinating, idiosyncratic type of Islamic ecstatic found from North Africa across the Middle East to Muslim South Asia. The *majzūb* is an enraptured and bewildered person, inspired and seized by God, spiritually intoxicated by His love and abandoning himself to Him (For a general overview see Frembgen 2008: 73–82). In the words of Carl W. Ernst, he is "attracted" by Allah "with such force that his intellect has been overpowered" (Ernst 1997: 115), and following Scott Kugle he is "one whose spirit has been drawn forcibly to God" (Kugle 2007: 100). Oblivious to mundane considerations, the *majzūb* transgresses boundaries of normalcy—in short, he belongs to the Friends of God (*awliyā' allāh*) "at the wilder end of the Sufi spectrum", as Simon Digby once aptly put it (Digby 1986: 67). His appearance, deviant behaviour and veneration by devotees differ considerably depending on the specific localized religious milieu.

As I pointed out in several case-studies, the category of the *majzūb*—or in the Indo-Pakistani context the *mast-bābā*—is many-faceted (Frembgen 1998; 2006; 2008; cf. Green 2009). From the 'holy fool', the 'wise fool' and the divine 'madman' to the ascetic and the enraptured eccentric, different connotations can be attributed to such charismatic figures. Thus, 'holy folly' is by no means the only defining characteristic of this state of ecstasy conceived as *jazb* or 'attraction' to God. Of course, the line between sainthood and folly is thin, depending on the *barakat* (blessedness, spiritual power) attributed to the respective individual (cf. Frembgen 2006: 242). Also historical and geographical factors, such as the existence of a dense 'religious landscape' dotted with saints' shrines, can have a profound impact on the way a *majzūb* is perceived by the local population. Thus in a given region where the veneration of saints and holy men is culturally and historically not embedded in local religious practice, newly emerging sainthood might remain in a state of fragility, whereas the situation could be different in another area. In the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent, for instance,

Islam and Sufism in particular have been over the centuries more centred on local devotional traditions and less oriented on Mecca (for a discussion of Annemarie Schimmel's basic dichotomy between 'India-oriented Islam' and 'Mecca-oriented Islam' see e.g. Lassen & van Skyhawk 2008: 6, 11–12, 111, 182). In Punjab, Sindh and other lowland parts of the subcontinent, *majzūb*s and *mast-bābā*s are therefore not only tolerated, but often highly respected and venerated in their lifetime as well as after death, the moment of mystical union with God which is celebrated through colourful and symbolically rich rituals. Often living *majzūb*s reside in their own lodge and when they pass away, a splendid mausoleum is erected for them. Thus the veneration of a *majzūb* often develops into a full-blown popular shrine-cult with hundreds and thousands of devotees regularly visiting the living saint or his grave. However, on the borders of South Asia and the Middle East, for instance in the mountains of Northern Pakistan, there is a different 'religious climate' characterized by less emotional and ecstatic and more 'scripturalist' versions of Islam where the veneration of saints is not considered acceptable and therefore contested. Apart from a large number of holy fools and madmen remembered by the people in the valleys of the Hindukush, Karakoram and Western Himalaya, only a single *majzūb* is said to have lived in this high-mountain region since Islamisation (18th century) (Frembgen 2006: 236). This extraordinary figure is known as Majzub Baba (d. 1999) from Chilas, a small town situated on the left bank of the river Indus in the shadow of Nanga Parbat.

Majzub Baba—An Old Man in Tatters or a Saint?

While the dominant religious code among Sunnis and Shias in Northern Pakistan is rather strict, orthodox and scripturalist, the town of Chilas, the centre of the Shina-speaking Shinkari area, can be considered a stronghold of austere Wahhabi-inspired Sunni Islam where the missionary faith movement of the Tablighi Jamaat has flourished since decades. Therefore it is particularly interesting to learn how an eccentric *majzūb*, who incorporates a marked cultural otherness in comparison to ordinary people, could be accommodated in a puritan religious milieu where the Sufi tradition is rejected outright. Is his otherness conceived and recognized as a veritable form of sainthood and if so is this quality of sainthood durable and solid or fragile? In short, is Majzub Baba considered to be a saint or just an old man in tatters?

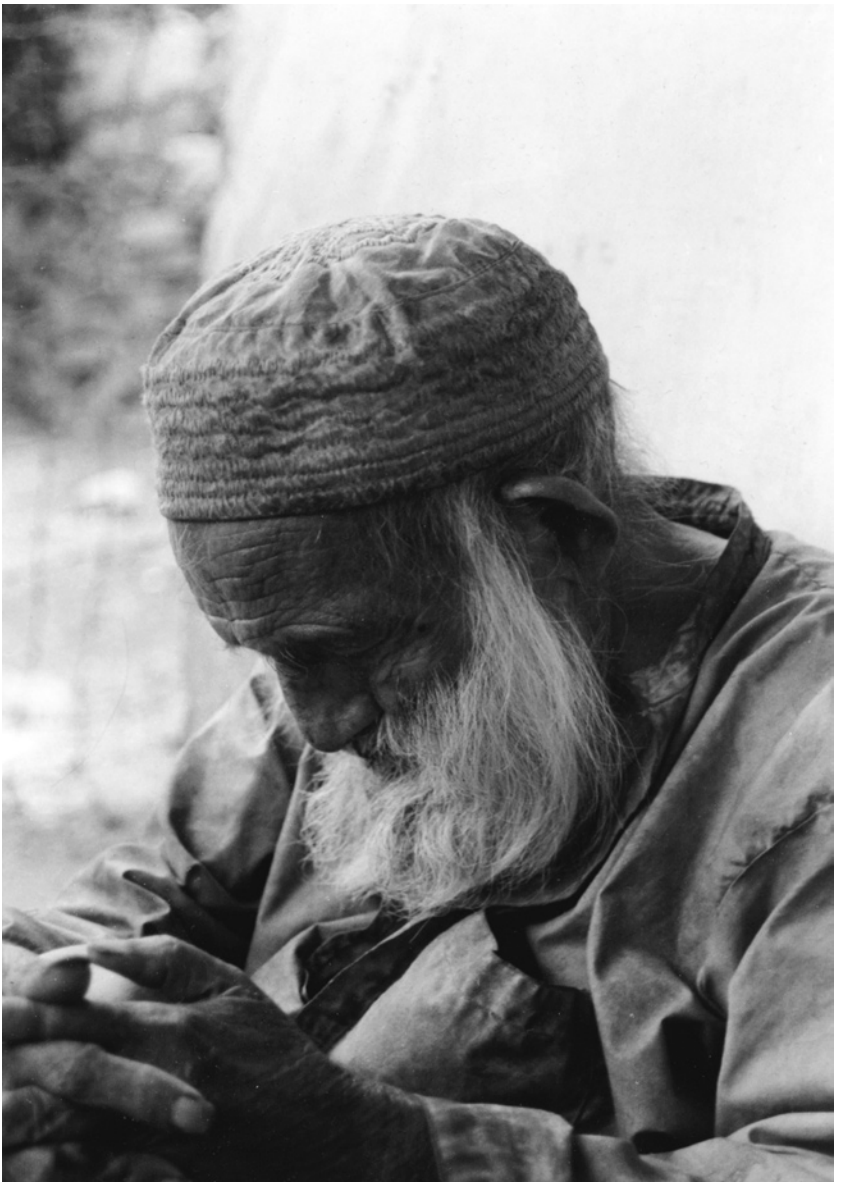

Fig. 7.1. Mazjub Baba (photo by the author).

In October 1996 my close friend Abdul Qayyum, a practicing Sufi from Gilgit (the main urban centre of Northern Pakistan), first told me about Majzub Baba whom he had met several times. It triggered my curiosity when he said that the Baba, who allegedly had been a *mawlvī* (Mullah of higher learning)[1] himself, collected writing pads and exercise books, loved to eat bananas and uttered strange remarks in the public such as "Muslims are frogs". The *majzūb* also asked my friend if he thought there were more human beings alive in this world or dead people. Later I found out that this question was, in fact, posed by prophet Sulaiman (King Solomon) in a conversation with the hoopoe (Venzlaff 1994: 66). In an Afghan folk tale the hoopoe answers: "It is very clear. There are more dead and buried, for those who do not pray and do not fast are, of course, in reality dead" (Dupree 1974: 187). The hoopoe plays an important role in Muslim folk religion from Morocco to South Asia not only because of his role as a messenger between Sulaiman and Bilqis (queen of Saba) mentioned in the Qur'an (27:17–45), but also because of his confession to Islam which is outstanding in the world of animals (Q 27:26). A year later after this wondrous remark about the strange holy man, in November 1997, I spend more than a week in Chilas in order to meet Majzub Baba myself and to talk to people who had encountered him.

The bearded Baba, who was allegedly around 90 years old, used to sit day in, day out in the main bazaar in front of the meteorological office where an empty room had been allocated to him. Shopkeepers confirmed that in winter he would mostly sit outside just wearing old tattered clothes and a simple skull-cap, whereas in the heat of summer he would retreat into his stuffy room without a ventilator. In addition, he would never wash himself—an observation pointing to the inversion of daily Islamic routine ritual, namely turning outward impurity into a marker of internal purity. Such body behaviour in contradiction to conventional mores is often found among eccentrics—from the ancient cynics to contemporary religious mendicants and 'madmen'. Bazaar gossip in Chilas also has it that Majzub Baba would never say his prayers. This is another element of inverse behaviour particularly in a local society where Islamic norms are strictly upheld. Those who respected the Baba emphasized that he had been exempted from praying by God himself (cf. Frembgen 2008: 161). Liminality and otherness also characterised the Baba's dietary habits.

[1] In Muslim South Asia *mawlvī* is a common title for Mullahs who obtained a higher degree of leaning in a *madrasa.*

Fig. 7.2. Mazjub Baba conversing (photo by the author).

Food was regularly provided by shopkeepers, but those four of five whom I interviewed added that they had never seen him looking for a place to defecate. In hagiographic tales it is a recurring motif that the food eaten by *majzūb*s evaporates without defecation. This contributes to their quality of saintliness, because the ascetic body of a saint is considered intrinsically pure and free of decay, not perceived as equal to the bodies of other humans (Frembgen 1998: 146, 155). To enjoy eating food without having to defecate is also a blessing commonly promised to all Muslims who enter paradise. Sometimes Majzub Baba would refuse to eat anything for days, at other times he would eat a lot. When I met him, a younger man from Astor valley was just feeding him and cleaning his nose. The Baba spoke rather clearly in Urdu to me, telling me about the time of the British colonial empire before Partition (1947) when he finally took my hands and emphasized that each part of my body—each of my fingers, for instance—had been created by God and therefore would be beautiful and a source of happiness. "Don't worry, be happy and content", he said, "life is beautiful". Bystanders remarked that the Baba would tell that to most of his visitors. It appeared to me that they smiled about these reiterated utterances, not conceiving them as the inspired words of a 'true' charismatic, although devotees from Astor or other people from Chilas who consulted the Baba

on occasion probably might have a different view on that. Unfortunately my stay in Chilas was too short to get in touch with such visitors and supplicants. Nevertheless, all the people I talked to emphasized that Majzub Baba would never take any money from those who would seek his advice. This is again a characteristic feature of a miraculous and personalised form of sainthood in which it is considered morally dubious and even polluting for a saint to accept any money whereas hereditary custodians of saints' shrines who carry 'charisma of office' in Weberian terms customarily receive donations in cash and kind.

Biographical Notes

Whereas the average person in Chilas knows at most only bits of information about the Baba's earlier life, I was able to learn more about his biography by meeting his relative Dr Inamullah who is a son of the *majzūb*'s younger brother Usman Ghani (d. 1995), called Lugu Mawlvi, a former religious scholar in Niyat (a valley to the south of Chilas). Dr Inamullah told me that Majzub Baba's personal name was Abdul Ghani. He was born into a Kohistani family in Bankhad, a village situated between Besham and Duber in Indus Kohistan; in addition to Lugu Mawlvi he had an elder brother named Abdul Qari. When their father Malik Aman was killed in a blood feud, his family escaped and travelled along the Indus to the north-eastern region of Shinkari. They settled in Sumarich, a village in the Niyat valley. At the time of their migration in the early 20th century Abdul Ghani was three or four years old.

In his youth, from the age of 10 to 15, Abdul Ghani studied in the *madrasa* of Gine not far from Niyat. Then he married a girl from Harcho, a village in Astor Valley, where he worked as a farmer, but already after a few months he got divorced. This happened, explained Dr Inamullah, when Abdul Ghani was 15 or 16 years old and went at night to another village passing a graveyard when suddenly the earth opened and flames erupted from a grave. A place where fire or a light has appeared is in Pakistan and Afghanistan frequently interpreted as a manifestation of the Divine, in particular of the tomb of a saint (cf. Müller-Stellrecht 1979: 247–248; Rzehak 2004: 215, 218, 227). This initial disturbing experience had a serious effect on Abdul Ghani who was seized by the Divine and subsequently became a *majzūb*. My partners in conversation emphasized that through this experience the young man had received divine *ilhām* (blessing) and had been empowered to communicate with superhuman beings.

He forgot his name and started to live like a dervish, sometimes speaking lucidly with a clear mind, at other times remaining completely absorbed by God. Dr Inamullah added that Majzub Baba left Astor at the age of 25 and moved back to the Niyat Valley. In summer he would stay with his brother's family in Sumarich and spend the winter in Gine and Chilas. As a young man he would wander all day long in the mountains and desert around Chilas. In his later days he would pass his time by filling exercise books with his writings.

The following anecdotes from the life of Majzub Baba were narrated by different partners in conversation in Gilgit and Chilas. Although they are very short, they throw some light on the *majzūb*'s errant ways which attracted the curiosity of people and made them think about the enraptured Baba living in their midst. At least for the narrators (and presumably for a number of listeners with whom they shared these anecdotes) these scraps of hagiography are seen as evidence for the Baba's extraordinariness reflecting personalised charisma and a miraculous form of sainthood. Miracles and magical deeds so-to-speak testify the spiritual powers of a holy man bestowed to him by God. In the full-blown shrine cults existing in the lowlands of Pakistan such powers enable the living saint or the saint buried in the mausoleum to act as an intercessor between man and the Almighty. In Chilas, however, the *mawlvī*s of the reformist Deobandi school who dominate the local religious discourse would never acknowledge the coming into being of such an emotional cult.

As often in the case of *majzūb*s and *mast-bābā*s, oral tradition plays a prominent role in spreading the fame of a saint-to-be. Thus sharing anecdotal stories about the miracles and idiosyncrasies of an eccentric is crucial in constructing charisma and hence sainthood. In the intimate company of devotees eyewitness accounts, gossip and hearsay as well as personal reminiscences are passed on in a chain of transmission and are finally taken as actual evidence for spiritual authority and power.

Anecdote 1

Abdul Qayyum from Gilgit told me that Majzub Baba was once sitting as usual in front of his room in the bazaar, laughing a lot and scribbling on his writing pads, when some preachers from the Tablighi mosque became offended that he never attended prayers. So they dragged him along to the main mosque and pushed him in the line of those offering their prayers. However, after a short while he ran away and when he was caught, he

shouted that the Imam was not fully concentrating on his prayer and instead always looking after his own sheep grazing on the mountain side.

Such narratives of resistance to the institutionalized, rigorously legalistic framework of established religion are characteristic for *majzūb*s and divine madmen. Nevertheless, like in other areas of Northern Pakistan, an eccentric such as Majzub Baba is not considered a real 'agent provocateur' who could seriously challenge the authority of the religious elite (cf. Frembgen 2006: 244). Although this anecdote only became part of local gossip initiating laughter, its popularity shows a veiled critique of established religious structures. Thus, the *majzūb* revealed the bigotry of the Mullahs and questioned the mosque as a house of sincere worship.

Anecdote 2

Dr Inamullah from Niyat told me that about 20 years ago a jeep driver returning from Gilgit to Chilas saw Majzub Baba sitting at the roadside at Juglot, a place near the confluence of the Indus and the Gilgit rivers. He offered him a lift, but the Baba refused. When the jeep some time later reached Gunar Farm, the Baba was already there chatting with some people at a shop. In utter surprise, the jeep driver again offered him a seat, but the Baba refused a second time. And when the jeep finally reached Chilas, the Baba was already sitting at his place in the bazaar and writing. Similarly, several Hajjis claimed to have seen Majzub Baba in Mecca, although in fact he was still in Chilas.

The simultaneous presence at various places (*multilocatio*) known in Sufi terminology as 'folding space' or 'time' is again typical of the miracles of Muslim saints (Frembgen 2008: 28). Of course, the Mullahs in Chilas would never endorse this *multilocatio* or other such miracles on the part of Majzub Baba.

Anecdote 3

Taj Mohammad from Chilas told me that Majzub Baba used to ask his visitors first: "You are just a piece of clay, but do you know from which clay God created you?" By this he referred to the well-known Qur'anic narrative that God moulded Adam of hardened clay mixed with water before enlivening his body with the breath of divine spirit and emphasized as well the humble origins of man; but in particular the Baba meant either local *chikni*—brown clay which is good for building local houses

and hence strong, or *rettela*—whitish clay found at the river Indus which is not useful for building purposes and hence weak. Before anybody could try to answer this riddle, Majzub Baba would do it himself, namely foretell if his visitor belonged to the caste of the Shin (i.e. made of strong *chikni* clay), Yeshkun, Kamin or Soniwal (i.e. made of weak *rettela* clay found near the river). After this initial social diagnosis he would proceed to foretell where the respective visitor came from before giving good advice, for instance in matters of fertility and illness. He would even know when people had to die.

Considering the statements of my partners in conversation, the Baba's gift of clairvoyance seems to be widely acknowledged. Even the *mawlvī* of a neighbourhood mosque in Chilas who otherwise simply smiled about the Baba's antics, confirmed that people 'drawn to Allah' have the God given ability to foretell the future.

Writing Qur'anic Verses

As mentioned above, apart from the 'moderate antics' displayed by Majzub Baba, his main characteristic was filling exercise books with Arabic looking letters and words. This was commonly interpreted as writing verses from the Qur'an. What else would a holy man write? It also supported the rumour that the Baba had been a *mawlvī* himself. Thus an air of respectability surrounded the *majzūb* in local gossip.

Those who had actually seen his writings point out that he wrote in Arabic, Persian, Shina and Pashto, but often in total confusion; in addition he is supposed to have mastered languages which he never learned such as Urdu, Hindko and even English—another well-known hagiographical trope of the Sufi tradition (for a comparable case in Northern Afghanistan, see Rzehak 2004: 201, note 15). When my friend Abdul Qayyum visited him to invite him over to Gilgit, the Baba apologized saying that he was busy with *tafsīr-e qur'ān* and therefore engaged.

The fact that Majzub Baba was continuously writing what is perceived as Qur'anic verses gave him a certain aura of sainthood at least among the common people. Like reciting the Holy Writ, writing verses from the Qur'an is also considered not only a pious, but even a sacred act conveying *barakat* (Nasr 1993: 62). A *majzūb* daily immersed in his religious exercise of writing Arabic letters (even if these were hardly legible) confirms local scriptural Islam. Therefore the Mullahs tolerated this behaviour which did not represent otherness, but conformity to their own orthodox religious code.

For those who visited Majzub Baba his practice of writing in combination with providing spiritual advice in everyday matters represented a factor of religious attraction; for them he became a tangible source of blessing. My partners in conversation emphasized that most of his devotees came from Astor and neighbouring valleys of Chilas. The fact that a Mullah from Haripur in the southern Hazara district travelled every year for a couple days to Chilas to stay with Majzub Baba and to donate food and clothing has contributed to the latter's reputation as a learned holy man. This also shows how eccentric otherness can be accommodated into the dominant orthodox religious setting.

Interacting with Fairies and Demons

The people from Chilas and Astor I talked to emphasized that Majzub Baba already went frequently into the high mountain area known as *niril* at a very young age. This information is very crucial as it refers to the traditional world-view of the Shina-speaking Dards with its inherent belief in fairies and demons which, in the words of Karl Jettmar (the doyen of anthropological research in Northern Pakistan for decades), "is fit into the free space which Islam is ready to allow as it usually has to live with the internal superstition even of its most ardent followers" (Jettmar 1975: 215). This indigenous demonology still exists side by side with normative, scriptural Islam. The religious world-view of the Dards is vertically layered: *niril* is the uppermost space associated with purity and holiness (on this world-view in Astor and neighbouring areas, see Nayyar 1986: 19–32). This space of the mountain peaks and high pasture lands is thought to be inhabited by pure superhuman beings, such as fairies and their male counterparts and protective deities, as well as by animals, such as ibex and *markhor*, a large species of wild goat. Shamans, hunters and shepherds also stay there temporarily. To descend from *niril* to the space known as *kul*, that is to say the bottom of the valley with the river which is the abode of dangerous demons, witches and *jinn*, means to become gradually contaminated with impurity. Man lives so-to-speak in an ambiguous border zone between *niril* and *kul*. Villages form the space created and ordered by man where purity is, for instance, 'incarnated' in the domestic goat which is considered the 'relative' of the *markhor*, and impurity in cows, sheep, chicken, the excrements of human beings, etc. (Jettmar 1975: 215–239; cf. Nayyar 1986: 25). The further away from the river and the further up from the

bottom of the valley, the more one leaves the zone of *kul*. This also holds true for the town of Chilas where the low-cast Soniwal (gold washers) live closest to the river Indus whereas the other social groups, especially the Shin, live higher up on the mountain slope.

Now it is said that Majzub Baba had encounters both with fairies from *niril* as well as demons from *kul*. Several people claimed that he interacted with them and even learned to control them through his God-given powers. Hajji Ahman, for instance, pointed out that there would have been no veil between the Baba and these superhuman beings. Taj Mohammad added that due to their help the Baba could look into the past and foretell the future (see anecdote 3). Both statements indicate that Majzub Baba in fact served to some extent as a mediator between this world and the transcendent world of superhuman powers.

Thus, if we take this particular world-view of the traditional folk religion of the Dards into account, it seems that Majzub Baba had a certain disposition either to become an inspired full shaman (*dayāl*) or at least a 'half-shaman' (*chamma-dayāl*), although he did not fulfil the major prerequisite for initiation, namely belonging to the prestigious Shin caste (cf. Nayyar 1986: 41, 46, 48–49). As mentioned above, the Shina-speaking Dards are divided into four endogamous castes whereby the social group of the Shin occupy the highest rank in this indigenous hierarchical framework. Only members of the Shin caste do have to keep special taboos, such as avoiding ritually polluting contact to the cow and all its products as well as to chicken (Jettmar 1960: 121–127; 1975: 236–237). Keeping to these taboos is obligatory for shamans. As the Baba belonged to an immigrant family of Kohistanis who had to do manual labour for high caste landowners, the only option to escape poverty was to pursue a religious career through studying in a *madrasa* and later becoming a Mullah. Hence Majzub Baba and his family were firmly rooted in austere Sunni Islam; after all, his brother had been a *mawlvī*. Taking this specific social order of Dardic society around Chilas and its neighbouring valleys into account, the Baba's chances to become a respected shaman or seer seem very unlikely. His talent as a local religious virtuoso remained fragile at best. In addition, the indigenous pre-Islamic religion had already rapidly declined at least since the middle of the 20th century and is now usually simply vituperated as 'superstition'—also due to the increasing influence of radical Wahhabi-inspired Sunni preachers.

Conclusion

In the segmentary societies of Chilas and surrounding valleys with their tribal code of behaviour, people practice a rigid and austere form of Sunni Islam which has almost totally eradicated any traits of the former indigenous religion, such as shamanism. Normative, *sharʿīa*-based and Mecca-oriented Islam is followed meticulously not providing any fertile ground for expressions of ecstatic religiosity or for saints-to-be. In the regional tradition of Islam prevalent in Northern Pakistan sainthood remains in a state of fragility—it is not nurtured, but appears in veiled forms, in traces, and is at best tolerated, sometimes even exposed to ridicule or suppressed, but most often met with sheer indifference.

In this socio-religious context, Majzub Baba's aberrance, 'madness' and transgressive behaviour was remarkably conceived by common people in Chilas as well as by members of the religious elite as divinely inspired, as a sign of the God-given state of *jazb*. Although he was visited and consulted mostly by people from Astor Valley (which is partly Shia), a region still adhering to some of the ancient non-Islamic beliefs in superhuman beings, thus acquiring a certain reputation for saintliness there, the local Sunnis from Chilas tolerated the Baba's eccentrics and legitimized it through the concept of *jazb*, but did not take him as seriously as people from Astor who are considered as 'primitive' and 'backward' in Chilas. Majzub Baba was not a heretical innovator or a religious figure with a political agenda who could have challenged the authority of the *mawlvī*s, the local religious elite. In the words of Nile Green, "... the category of the *majzūb* was in this sense a means of incorporating insanity into public life" (Green 2009: 173).

The fact that an enraptured *majzūb* belonging to a *mawlvī*-family was living like an ascetic continuously writing Qur'anic verses, was acknowledged by the people of Chilas and seen as a proof that he had been blessed by God, although not in the sense of a full-blown charisma. Indeed, as a saintly figure Majzub Baba remained rather inconspicuous, thus conforming to the strict and disenchanted Sunni reformist milieu of Chilas, whereas in the lowland provinces of Pakistan he would probably have been venerated within an emotional and vivid shrine-cult and become a veritable local saint. Thus in Punjab and Sindh people with personal afflictions are often thought to be particularly close to God and are viewed as having surrendered their soul to His will. They are frequently sought for blessings and treated with the reverence bestowed upon saints. In such a religious milieu of intense devotion many spiritually intoxicated *majzūb*s

become saints in their own right. However, in Chilas and other parts of Northern Pakistan, sainthood does not flourish, but remains fragile and so-to-speak 'underdeveloped'. On the other hand, within the context of the traditional pre-Islamic religion of the Dards which is rooted in a deeply magical world, there is a certain probability that in an earlier period and in case of a Shin pedigree Majzub Baba might well have become a shaman or a seer. Thus he is ambiguously positioned on the borderline between two religious traditions—namely the vanishing local religious beliefs and practices and the scriptural 'official' Sunni Islam.

When Majzub Baba passed away in 1999, he was buried by his family in an inconspicuous tomb at a local cemetery. What I recently came to know is that his antics and deviant behaviour slowly seem to fade away from local memory. Thus he remained an extraordinary religious figure only in his lifetime.

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PART FOUR

SECULAR SAINTHOOD

IMBUED WITH AGENCY: CONTESTING NOTIONS OF THE EXTRAORDINARINESS OF TÜRKAN SAYLAN

Daniella Kuzmanovic

Introduction

On 14 January, 2011 in prime time a state-run Turkish TV channel, *TRT Haber*, broadcasted an edition of *Büyük Takip* (The great pursuit).[1] That evening the program focused on prominent Turkish public figure, doctor and civic activist, Türkan Saylan (13.12.1935–18.5.2009), and on the civil society organization which she had founded and headed until her death, *Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği* (Association for the Support of Modern Life, ÇYDD).[2] To be more precise the program consisted of forty minutes of accusations against Saylan and ÇYDD. Some of the allegations had already previously been circulated in public, but new 'evidence' and 'disclosures' were also aired during the program. The most spectacular of these new 'disclosures' came from someone who claimed that he had been working closely together with Saylan. His allegations concerned accusations against Saylan for having performed hypnosis on female students to make them take off their headscarves, which they had then allegedly done. The aim of using such methods had presumably been to instil the students with Western-inspired, secular ideals of modernity, as defined by the founders of the Turkish Republic and as hailed by ÇYDD, in order to combat pro-Islamism in Turkey. Saylan saw herself and is also publically known as a leading figure among a segment of Turkish society, who perceives themselves as the genuine upholders and defenders of the social vision and doctrine conceived by the founding figure of the republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Saylan 2009: 696–698). Since the mid-1990s, a number of these people have rallied against what they see as an emerging threat from pro-Islamic forces against the secular Turkish Republic and its modernization project (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Özyürek 2007).

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[1] *Büyük Takip* is a weekly program dealing with current political and social affairs in Turkey.

[2] *Çağdaş Eğitim Vakfı* (ÇEV), whose profile is similar to ÇYDD, likewise faced accusations in the program.

Saylan was already a prominent public figure by the mid-1990s. But in context of the emerging political-ideological polarizations of the past decades between pro-Islamists and Kemalist-nationalists in Turkey new constructions of her as icon were produced. These constructions were embedded in a political-ideological polarization that is at one and the same time a religious-secular divide as well as a nationalist struggle concerning what Turkishness is and who the true defenders of the Turkish republic are. Saylan is thus at the heart of the dominant political contestations that has been played out in Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s. Contestations over Saylan therefore give insight into a prominent mode through which politics is perceived and performed in a Turkish context, namely by making icons. In her monograph on Faces of the State that deals with the political in Turkey, Yael Navaro-Yashin points out how persons and personal biographies 'grab public imagination,' and serve as a prime means through which events are assessed (2002: 172–172). However, what we need to understand to better grasp how politcs is produced by way of persons, I argue, is that they do not capture public imagination as persons but as icons. The icon can here best be comprehended "... as image and representative or indicative of a configuration of meanings associated with a particular personage" (Hopgood 2005: xvii). This configuration of meanings also pertains to notions of the social and of politics. Being index is only one aspect of the role of the icon, though. What is equally significant is that the production of such indexical meanings is simultaneously a production of collectives in the form of the communities formed around the iconic figure (Ghosh 2011: 6). The icon thus comes to speak of collectives and collective aspirations and is embedded in a social and 'charismatic landscape' (Coleman 2009). One aspect that is interesting to pursue with regard to Saylan and the production of politics, then, is the differing configurations of meaning through which she becomes constructed as a public figure and icon among various political-ideological contenders. There is not one but several iconographies produced around Saylan. But, as the chapter shows, it is equally important to identify the convergences between the various iconographies, in order to analytically grasp the significance of persons and personal biographies for the production of politics. The hypnosis story and other accusations made against Saylan all relay a perception of Saylan as extraordinary. Her doings are portrayed as having a profound transformative and mobilizing effect on individual lives as well as on society. In other words she is imbued with an excess of agency and recognized as charismatic. As can be discerned from the accusations against her for performing hypnosis, the notion of

Saylan as imbued with agency is prominent among those who are critical of her and her doings, and want to challenge the dominant public image of Saylan as humanist and patriot. Yet, also those who look favourably upon Saylan and hail her personal and professional achievements, revere her for her ability to induce personal and social change. The perceived excess of agency and charisma are the basis for mobilizing around her as a public figure on either side of the political-ideological divide. Although the contenders evaluate the effects of this agency and charisma differently, as either detrimental or beneficial, the positioning of Saylan as an individual whose alleged actions "transcend the ordinary" (Bandak and Bille this volume) is in effect reinforced through political-ideological contestations over who Saylan is, and what she does.

The notion of Saylan as someone whose alleged actions transcend the ordinary because of her excess of agency and her charisma, indicates that exploring contesting constructions of Saylan as a public figure and their significance can be analytically informed by insights from sociological and anthropological works on sainthood. Agency and charisma are indeed two crucial aspects of the social production of sainthood (Wilson 1983; Hopgood 2005). Albeit a saint is traditionally associated with the religious, various scholars have long-since used notions and insights from studies of saints to comprehend cults around particular persons, such as rock stars or political icons, in so-called secularized contexts (Soboul 1983; Hermes with Noordhuizen 1999; Bosca 2005; Passariello 2005; Jasud 2009). In a Turkish context parallels between sainthood and the adoration of the founding father of the Turkish republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, have not gone unnoticed (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 188–203). Such comparative studies, which focus on structural similarities between the construction of sainthood in a religous context and the making of icons in a variety of social contexts, are denoted as studies of 'secular saints' (Wilson 1983: 1; Hopgood 2005: xi). What is striking about the existing studies of secular saints, though, is that they primarily concentrate on the adoration of a particular person by the followers. They seldom explore the contestations involved. However, as Meltzer and Elsner have pointed out, the excess of agency and charisma that are hall-marks of the saint can be viewed as good or bad, beneficent or maleficent according to application (2009: 375). Various applications then entail differing strategies for containment, be they ignoring, persecuting and killing, or alternatively adoring and worshipping (2009: 377). Hence, there is a potential for multiple interpretations of what an excess of agency and charisma entail according to those who produce an icon; something that speaks of the presence of multiple

collectives and charismatic landscapes. The potential furthermore implies that the two prominent features of sanctification—i.e. the notions of a particular person as possessing excess of agency and charisma—can in fact be reinforced through contestations, because the qualities are recognized by all those who evoke a particular person as icon.

By tracing various productions of Turkan Saylan as icon, this chapter shows how the extraordinariness of Saylan is reified rather than challenged through contestations over who she is, and what she does. The analysis focusses upon two crucial aspects pertaining to the construction of sainthood, namely excess of agency and charisma. As will become clear, it is not whether Saylan possesses an excess of agency or is charismatic that becomes contested. On the contrary, opponents and supporters both construct Saylan as a person, who transcends the ordinary and is able to transform peoples' lives and society. The pivotal point of these contestations, is rather how to assess the effects of this agency and charisma. The chapter thus argues that the reinforcement of extraordinariness through contestations is central to the maintenance of the significance of persons and personal biographies as something that can grab public imagination (Navaro-Yashin, op. cit.), and hereby also central to the reproduction of a particular notion of politics in a Turkish context in which the production of persons as icons plays a central role.

"She performed hypnosis and it worked"

Büyük Takip on 14 January, 2011 contained a range of accusations against Saylan and ÇYDD. Towards the end of the program a former student, Adem Zincir, who claimed to have been close to Saylan in the organization but had supposedly been forced to leave when it became known that he had been trained at a religious vocational high school (*İmam Hatip*),[3] described how female students had been hypnotized in order to make them remove their headscarves:

> When we were studying at the Faculty of Literature [Istanbul University] there was a branch there [of ÇYDD]. What did she do, *Hanım Efendi* [Saylan]? At the time there was the headscarf issue. A recent debate, I think. It was taken up again and had become significant. When the ladies came from

[3] Debates on *İmam Hatip* schools are central in the political struggle between pro-Islamists and the Kemalist state elite. Graduates from religious schools have traditionally had restricted access to universities in Turkey.

> Anatolia, unspoiled, clean and pure, they immediately took the girls to the *konak* [mansion, i.e. ÇYDD meeting halls] and made hypnosis. She made hypnosis. They worked to get the girls to distance themselves from Anatolian values, Turkish values, Turkish customs and belief. And they succeeded. [Clip is inserted from press conference with Saylan talking about the need to fight pro-Islamists] One week later those kids were all seen with their heads uncovered. They were seen with uncovered heads. And for sure Saylan did this, she and her ideological soul-mate Kemal Alemdaroğlu.[4] (*Büyük Takip*, 14.1.2011, part 3, 5:40–6:55, my translation)

Zincir also put forward other accusations against ÇYDD and Saylan. One allegation pertained to a channelling of donations from abroad and from the 1999 earthquake funds into other purposes than those they had been intended for. More specific, money had supposedly been channelled to Kurdish separatists, who are seen as enemies of the Turkish state, in the form of scholarships given to children of PKK sympathisers. Zincir, secondly, talked about the existence of a secret program with the exotic name of 'Starfish' (*Denizyıldızı*). The program allegedly aimed at bashing traditional Turkish culture and Islam, and instilling students with ÇYDD's particular notion of modern ideals and values (*Büyük Takip*, 14.1.2011, part 2, 6:00–10:04). The host on *Büyük Takip* now alerted the viewers' attention to a number of already publically known documents, consisting of copies of internal communication among senior ÇYDD members. The documents had been procured in the course of various investigations against Saylan and ÇYDD by the public prosecutor. They supposedly reflect a deep concern within ÇYDD that the public should get to know about scholarship selection procedures. Moreover, the 'Starfish' program is explicitly mentioned. Just as Saylan, while alive, had rejected all accusations against her and ÇYDD (Saylan and Karataş 2011: 24), the allegations made in *Büyük Takip* were repudiated by ÇYDD as pure fabrication (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 4.2.2011).

Büyük Takip was completely one-sided and gave no airtime to defenders of Saylan and ÇYDD. The program was therefore immediately written off by Saylan supporters as the latest in a number of attempts to publically discredit Saylan by accusing her of anti-Turkish, anti-state and anti-Muslim activities. Such accusations had been put forward in various media since the late 1990s by people who oppose Saylan and ÇYDD's work

[4] Kemal Alemdaroğlu was rector of Istanbul University from 1997 to 2004. He is part of Kemalist-nationalist circles in Turkey, and known for his enforcement of the regulative banning headscarves. Today he stands accused of being a key person in the alleged Ergenekon network.

(see Saylan and Karataş 2011 for an overview of all allegations). The most active media in this regard were newspapers and magazines owned by the religious movement Fethullah Gülen, who is perceived to be close to the current ruling party in Turkey, The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP). But also right-wing nationalist magazines carried allegations against Saylan. *Büyük Takip*, however, ran on state TV, which has traditionally been associated with circles close to a Kemalist, state elite, who align with Saylan and Kemalist-nationalists. These circles perceived the program as proof that 'the religious reactionaries' (*irtica*) were now also in control of state media. Another surprise was the new hypnosis accusation. Although Zincir was vague as to when exactly he had been at Istanbul University and witnessed the workings of hypnosis, the program benefitted from the implicit association that could be made to a public issue concerning the existence of so-called *İkna odaları* (Persuasion rooms) at some Turkish universities in the late 1990s.

The Persuasion rooms were supposedly established at some institutions for higher education following the 28 February, 1997 military coup that aimed to protect the secular Turkish Republic. The coup entailed a general clamp down on pro-Islamic forces and a tightening of the control over religious expressions in public contexts. Although the headscarf regulative already existed at that time, it was thus enforced more rigorously after 28 February.[5] Exactly what the Persuasion rooms were, if they existed, and what had went on there is a highly contested issue. The claim made by pro-Islamic circles is that the Persuasion rooms functioned as a venue, where Kemalist, secular academics attempted to pressure female students to uncover their heads rather than give up studying (*Radikal*, 4.2.2011). As chairwoman of ÇYDD Saylan had allegedly been a leading force behind the Persuasion rooms. There had thus already been some talk that Saylan had used 'unusual methods' in order to make girls, who had received scholarships, uncover their heads (ibid.). But Zincir was the first to go public and name the 'unusual method' as 'hypnosis.' Saylan's stance on the headscarf issue, which is one of the prime symbolic battlegrounds between pro-Islamists and Kemalist-nationalists, is well-known. She was a defender of maintaining the ban. The following quote illustrates, how Saylan perceived the headscarf to be irreconcilable with a modern/

[5] On 28 February, 1997 the military exercised its political influence through The National Security Council. They dictated a number of initiatives aimed at protecting the secular order, and urged the initiation of a closure case against the then ruling-party, the pro-Islamic *Refah* party.

contemporary (*çağdaş*) culture that, among other, Kemalist-nationalists see as the hall-mark of Turkish, republican identity. In this case modern pertains to the removal of religious symbols from public space. In that sense the quote also illustrates the strong intertwinement between a religious-secular struggle and a nationalist struggle in defence of the republic and of Turkish national identity:

> Our republic has to be represented by a presidential family that embodies modern (*çağdaş*) characteristics regarding interior and exterior, family- as well as individually related aspects. We are against a representative of our country in the Presidential Office wearing headscarf [the wife of president Gül is covered], who politicizes while sheltering behind the concept of personal freedom, and brings a religious symbol into politics. We will never embrace nor accept this. (*Milliyet*, 16.8.2007, my translation)

Saylan's willingness to promote her point of view in practice is reflected in ÇYDD policies regarding their schools and scholarships, as well as in her acts during the period in which she was on the central state board that regulates university life in Turkey and upholds the headscarf ban, the *Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu* (YÖK).[6] Such acts, in combination with her outspoken and publically visible defence of a secular, modern republic that she perceived to be under threat, facilitated the production of her as an icon and thus as image and representative of a configuration of meanings pertaining to a particular notion of the secular—strong, state-controlled Kemalist secularism—and to a notion of Turkish national identity in which religious identity plays little part. In other words Saylan became a 'secular saint' not just in the analytical sense of the phrase (Wilson 1983; Hopgood 2005, op. cit.) but in the actual sense. The configuration, moreover, proved relevant for supporters and adversaries of Saylan alike. In Kemalist-nationalist circles Saylan came to embody their struggle against Islamism, which they see as the gradual political advancement of a reactionary (*irtica*) force threatening a modern lifestyle and rationality in Turkey. For pro-Islamists Saylan came to embody the Kemalist state and elitist mindset they are challenging, namely the all-encompassing, Jacobin state that have left little room for religious identity as part of what it means to be a Turk. These two main contenders for political power, hence,

[6] YÖK has been a central battle ground in the political power struggle between pro-Islamists and the Kemalist state elite. Like several other state organs, YÖK was designed by the military in the aftermath of the 1980 coup in order to control university life. It has until recently been a traditional stronghold of the Kemalist state elite but is now AKP dominated.

converged on the significance of Saylan as a symbolic figure, hereby further enabling her status as icon.

In the Realm of Secular Divinity

The establishment of sainthood is best seen as a set of relations involving interpersonal relations as well as relations between persons and the perceived social order (Bandak and Bille this volume). Establishing a privileged relationship between a particular person and a perceived social order is crucial with regard to constructing a person as extraordinary. This is so both in the sense that a saint can be seen as the personification of a religious doctrine, and in the sense that a saint can be viewed as a threshold person that mediates between symbolic orders including self and divinity (Coleman 2009: 417). These two aspects can shed light on the constructions of Saylan as icon and the extraordinariness she becomes imbued with. Of course, Saylan does not mediate the divine in the religious sense. Nevertheless, she does mediate something that has for decades been enacted as if it were divine in a Turkish context, namely the doctrine of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the mythological history of the Turkish Republic. The enactment involves an adoration of Atatürk himself as if he were a saint (Tapper and Tapper 1991; Navaro-Yashin 2002: 188–203). It must be added, though, that the sanctity of Atatürk has increasingly become publically contested since the 1990s. The contestations have intensified the adoration of him in some segments of society. Yet, even among those who contest his saint-like status, the significance of him is actually more often than not reproduced by reversing what has henceforth been granted status as benevolent acts of nationalism and patriotism into destructive endeavours. The significance of personal acts with regard to social change, as well as Atatürk's perceived excess of agency is thus reproduced.

There are clear parallels between the ways in which Atatürk as icon is produced in context of political contestations, and the production of Saylan as icon. This is not surprising, given that Saylan personifies the Kemalist doctrine and ideals of a social order, and embodies the history of the Republic as narrated in official history writing. All this is encompassed by the notion of 'daughter of the republic' (*Cumhuriyet'in kızı*). The notion is used to denote a generation of women, primarily born in the 1920s and 1930s, who have embodied and promoted the ideal of modernity as envisioned by Atatürk through doing what he asked of Turkish women; namely that they become publically visible and enact their citizenship

not only through motherhood but also through becoming professionals and partaking in public life as citizens alongside men. The Kemalists saw such participation as a hall-mark of a modern, Western civilization (Göle 1996). Women were, hence, to become 'individuals of the republic' (*Cumhuriyet'in bireyi*).[7] In this context, Saylan appears and is reproduced as a "paradigmatic figure" (Coleman 2009). When Saylan can be constructed as someone who embodies Kemalist ideals, it is not least due to the way in which she has lived her life. This issue touches upon a central aspect of sainthood, namely the significance of the idea of such persons as embodying an exemplary life-style, or what Wilson calls "sanctity in life" (1983: 9). Saylan was born in December 1935 in Istanbul in what is known as the heyday of Kemalism, the single-party period from 1925–1945 (Zürcher 2004: 4). As mentioned, a crucial aspect of the social vision of the Kemalists is an altered role for women. Saylan were one of few women, who initially had the opportunity to follow the Kemalist call. In 1963 she graduated from the Faculty of Medicine at Istanbul University, whereupon she continued her education in Turkey and abroad. Saylan became pre-occupied with the study of Leprosy, and first became publically known in Turkey for her fight against Leprosy and for the rights of those struck by the disease. In this regard she also became internationally acclaimed. Her merits in this fight play central part in relation to establishing the extraordinariness of Saylan. Her public image as a grand humanist and Turkish equivalent of Mother Theresa enabled the construction of sanctity as was performed by political contenders for power from the mid 1990s onwards. Her later merits in context of her civil society work only served to reaffirm an already established life-pattern as a modern (*çağdaş*), professional woman, with particular laudable personal qualities such as devotion, willingness to sacrifice, and concern for human beings in distress.

In 1989 Saylan, together with a group of persons devoted to Kemalist ideals, created ÇYDD. During the following decade the organization grew to become one of the largest civil society organizations in Turkey (Erdoğan 2000). Saylan was chairwoman and ÇYDD's public face until her death. ÇYDD is primarily known for its work on providing education to poor children, especially girls, from rural areas through establishing schools in

[7] 'To be an Individual of the Republic' (*Cumhuriyet'in Bireyi Olmak*) is actually the title of a two-volume collection of selected articles on society written by Saylan. For an autobiography see Kulin (2009). Kulin's book formed the basis for a TV series on Saylan's life (Türkan, *Kanal D*, 2010).

underdeveloped regions of Turkey and handing out scholarships. Education is perceived by people in and around ÇYDD as directly related to the creation of a modern (*çağdaş*) society, because it creates enlightenment (*aydınlık*).[8] The use of the notion of *çağdaş* signals that a civil society organization or activist is part of a Kemalist-nationalist segment (Kuzmanovic, 2012b: 83). Articles, speeches and statements by Saylan confirms a self-perceived close association between the aims of ÇYDD and Kemalist reformism (Saylan 2009). Any quick Internet search for pictures of Saylan moreover reveals dozens of pictures of her surrounded by children, portrayed with the Turkish flag, or in front of banners with depictions of Atatürk and various Kemalist slogans.

In addition to mediating the perceived divine, tragic circumstances around the death of a person, in the form of martyrdom, constitutes a key symbolic resource through which he or she becomes constructed as a saint (Bosca 2005: 69). Saylan's death facilitated the reproduction of a relationship between her and the social order pertaining to Kemalism—i.e. the divine—and contained martyr-like elements. Saylan passed away from cancer on 18 May, 2009. Her death on this particular date meant that her funeral procession could be held on 19 May, which is one of the most significant dates in official Turkish Republican national history and a national holiday. Although Atatürk's exact birthday is unknown, he said that he thought of 19 May as his birthday. *Ondokuz Mayıs* (19 May) commemorates the day Mustafa Kemal landed in Samsun in 1919 and started unifying local resistance groups into a national resistance movement against the Entente powers. The event marks the beginning of the War of Independence (1919–1922) that is narrated in official, national history-writing as a mythological period culminating with the establishment of the Turkish Republic (Poulton 1997: 87–88). 19 May forms the starting point in Atatürk's famous speech (*Nutuk*) from 1927, which is a primary source in relation to official, national history writing on the period. Apart from Saylan's burial on this highly symbolic date, her death also echoed martyrdom in another sense. A month prior to her death, while mortally ill and visibly weakened from cancer, she had come under investigation in a high-profiled police investigation and had had her home searched by the police. Her supporters saw this as a politically motivated witch-hunt carried out by her adversaries in pro-Islamic circles, who had apparently infiltrated the police and judiciary. Bearing these things in mind, it was as

[8] See ÇYDD webpage, http://www.cydd.org.tr/sayfa.asp?id=22 (25.8.2011).

if Saylan had been able to plan her own death date. Indeed her supporters do not see her death date as a mere coincidence. Rather, it reflects her devotion to the Turkish Republic and to the Kemalist ideals and social visions, and points to the sacrifices such devotion implied. Her funeral became a symbolic event that reproduced and promoted a particular ideal of society, while simultaneously reifying Saylan as the ultimate embodiment and personification of this ideal. Her funeral, which I attended alongside thousands, was turned into a public demonstration in defence of Kemalism and the Turkish nation. Images of Saylan, images and slogans of Atatürk, and the Turkish flag blended into one another, thus reifying Saylan's status as a defender of the Kemalist ideals and as a patriot.

Contours of a 'Charismatic Landscape'

New features were added to the construction of Saylan as a public figure from the mid-1990s onwards. As a religious-secular divide gained increased political-ideological significance, both those who rallied behind her and her adversaries elevated Saylan into a key symbolic figure in this struggle. The reconfiguration of Saylan as icon was enabled by her outspoken critique of a pro-Islamic advance as well as by her biography as an individual of the republic. Here it must be recalled that the religious-secular divide entails a nationalist mobilization through a revival of the cult surrounding Atatürk and Kemalism, or a challenge to it since pro-Islamists have challenged dominant notions of how Kemalism should be interpreted and appropriated in contemporary Turkey. The particular nexus of relations pertaining to a political struggle and in which Saylan is embedded, is crucial with regard to understanding how Saylan becomes imbued with an excess of agency and charisma, thereby transcending the ordinary. In an article on sainthood and charisma, Coleman introduces the notion of the 'charismatic saint.' He uses it in order to designate the sanctification of living persons, and grasp how such living persons are at one and the same time part of the ordinary—i.e. the community to which (s)he belongs—because they embody "a shared, widely assimilable religious culture" and common strive, yet extraordinary by example (2009: 438). The sanctification of the living, in other words, depends upon a shared notion within a given community that "all must strive towards a form of exemplary piety," and where each person is perceived as part of the ordinary. On the other hand, some figures are recognized as more exemplary than others within the community (2009: 421). Charisma is thus not something that emerges

from a person. It is rather a condensation of the relations between believers and particular social forms of religious capital, and becomes present only through the community of believers. The "... believers become visible, embodied indices of a wider charismatic presence" and hereby form a "charismatic landscape" that constitutes the charisma of the exemplar (2009: 420). Following Coleman, it can be argued how Saylan's charisma emerges in such a condensation between the social form of capital pertaining to Kemalism and the mobilization of people around her, who all come to embody a charismatic presence. Saylan's co-organization of the Republican rallies in 2007, including the mobilization of participants, is a prime example. The Republican rallies were a series of demonstrations in larger cities in Turkey organized by Kemalist-nationalist circles and aimed directly against the AKP. The rallies were held around the time when former foreign minister and co-founder of AKP, Abdullah Gül, were to be elected President thus consolidating AKP's power. The demonstrations were a key moment in the Kemalist-nationalists' struggle against pro-Islamic forces. The participants in these rallies became, in the words of Coleman, "embodied indices of a wider charismatic power" that was mediated through Türkan Saylan and other prominent representatives. They became the embodied presence of the spirit and genius of the founding figures of the Republic.

Saylan was, however, also a controversial figure who on occasions even went against her own. By publically stating that she and her organization wanted neither Islamic law nor coup ("*ne şeriat ne darbe*"), she denounced any calls for military intervention against the AKP government, and thus partly dissociated herself and ÇYDD from other Kemalist-nationalists. On the account of the "*ne şeriat ne darbe*" statement she was refrained from speaking at a republican rally in Izmir, Turkey's prime Kemalist bastion (*Milliyet*, 14.4.2009). Another point of deviation was her preoccupation with Kurdish children with regard to the educational activities of ÇYDD. On the one hand this emphasis can be perceived as an attempt to sustain what most pro-Kurdish or Kurdish people see as a continued assimilation policy on behalf of the Turkish state. Thus the publically well-known Turkish sociologist and critic of state policies against the Kurds, İsmail Beşikçi, in an article in the *Kurdistan Post* (21.3.2008) accused ÇYDD of intense activities that maintained the racial and assimilatory policies of the Turkish state through advancing the status of Turkish language as mother-tongue. Education in other than Turkish is forbidden. But on the other hand, the attention Saylan and ÇYDD give to Kurds make them possible, even likely, targets of a nationalistic critique for anti-Turkish and

anti-state activities, because it can be interpreted as if they give preferential treatment to a particular ethnic group. This critique is articulated in the accusations against Saylan for supporting separatism, which will be elaborated upon in the following section.

The allegations against Saylan must be seen in context of how Saylan became a target and hereby redefined as public figure by her adversaries, who wanted to contest the kind of sanctification of Saylan performed by her supporters. While Coleman maintains focus on the believers or followers in relation to exploring the charismatic, the case of Saylan shows that it is equally significant to understand how the charismatic landscape through which a person emerges as extraordinary can actually be made up of adversaries as well as believers. However, as the next section shows, those who contest the sanctification of Saylan in effect reinforce her charisma as well as a notion that she possesses an excess of agency. Hence, this chapter suggests that while sanctification and charisma are interrelated, the latter can actually be reproduced through contestations of the former. In order to understand how come it has to be to recalled that the excess of agency and charisma, which are hall-marks of the saint, can be assessed as beneficent or maleficent and can subsequently entail differing strategies for containment (Meltzer and Elsner 2009: 375, 377).

Contesting the Holy Motives of a Daughter of the Republic

The accusation against Saylan for performing hypnosis on female students was yet another culmination in a series of attacks on her. The conceptual pivotal point in the attacks was a notion of Saylan and ÇYDD as having a hidden agenda. Saylan is not who she appears to be. Two main accusations were floated about Saylan. One is that she and ÇYDD are in reality performing Christian missionary activities aimed at conversion. The other is that she and ÇYDD support separatism (*bölücülük*). Both are grave offenses and legally forbidden in Turkey, and are seen as activities aimed at insulting Turkishness, and undermining the Turkish state and national integrity. If guilty, it would classify Saylan as an enemy of the state and nation, and undermine her patriotic claim to be defending Kemalist ideals and visions. The agency of Saylan thus becomes redefined as destructive rather than productive. Such a redefinition simultaneously recasts her extraordinariness from being something desirable and beneficent, to something dangerous and maleficent. However, the excess of agency she is perceived to possess is not challenged. Rather it remains integral part

of the accusations in the sense that also such allegations rest on a notion of Saylan as able to intervene in and transform the lives of people and society.

The accusations of missionary activity were established by reference to several kinds of 'evidence.' One referred to her mother, who was of Christian, Swiss-origin but converted upon marriage, hereby portraying Saylan as a crypto-Christian. Another kind of 'evidence' came in the form of testimonies from a few former students and persons working at ÇYDD schools, who claimed that missionary activities were a regular occurrence. A pupil referred to by the initials C.K. thus told a newspaper that "... teachers we do not know came to our dorm gave us books and CDs about Christianity and gave speeches. They promised to give financial support to us until we completed our education and to send us to America for our doctor's degree" (*Bugün*, 13.4.2009, my translation). In addition, documents were circulated in public, including official documents from a prosecutor's investigation into the claims of missionary activities. The documents allege that Saylan and ÇYDD are supported by the World Council of Churches, and that they have a common agenda of conversion aimed at establishing Protestant world dominance (*Zaman*, 14.4.2009; Odabaş 2005).[9] A steady recycling of statements from Saylan, such as a famous quote where she says that pupils should do ballet instead of praying and that this is the way in which a 'modern' (*çağdaş*) Turkey is made (*Zaman*, 12.4.2007), were used to support claims of Saylan as not just anti-Islamic, but anti-Muslim and thus anti-Turkish.

The other main allegation regarded separatism and was first taken up by the Gülen-owned magazine *Aksiyon* in 2001 (*Aksiyon*, 28.4.2001). Here Saylan and ÇYDD were accused of support to separatist groups by giving scholarships to children of persons close to the Kurdish separatist movement (PKK). ÇYDD even faced charges in the early 2000s concerning support for separatism, which is a serious offense in the Turkish anti-terror laws. The case was dismissed. The claim was, however, reintroduced and supposedly further substantiated by a former activist, who had left ÇYDD accusing the organization of separatism. Speaking to Gülen-owned daily *Zaman* in 2006, the former activist pointed out that pupils from South and East Anatolia—i.e. Kurdish dominated areas—were selected for

[9] The first to make such allegations was Adnan Odabaş, who wrote several articles in right-wing nationalist newspapers *Hergün* and *Üsküdar* and also covered the topic in a book entitled 'Dikkat Misyoner Geliyor,' Beware the missionaries are coming (2005).

scholarships and sent to Istanbul, whereas girls from other areas of Turkey were not despite the fact that the latter face similar obstacles. She went on to claim that "[t]here was talk that some of the pupils who were brought to Istanbul were close to people who are terrorists in the mountains [PKK]" (*Zaman*, 3.8.2006, my translation).What is at stake here is a portrayal of Saylan as anti-Turkish, anti-state, and a threat to the integrity of the Turkish nation. Her patriotism is thus questioned.

Allegations against ÇYDD and Saylan first appeared in public in 1999 (Saylan and Karataş 2011: 34–35). Those making the allegations were supposedly persons in or close to the Fethullah Gülen movement. The Gülen movement is a faith-based civic movement, founded and headed by Fethullah Gülen, who after having left Turkey in 1998 due to fear of a trial against him now lives in self-imposed exile in the US. It is considered one of the most influential groups in Turkey. Although the movement is now global in outlook and outreach, Gülen is still pre-occupied with Turkish affairs. Estimates as to the number of followers in Turkey are between half a million to several millions (Yavuz 2003: 180–181). The Gülen movement runs a number of schools in Turkey and around the world, which offers education to poor, promising students. It also has a range of economic interests and investments, including a substantial role in the media sector in Turkey through their media company the *Feza* group, which is one of only a handful of holding companies that control almost all Turkish media (2003: 190–191). Among the portfolio of the *Feza* group are Turkey's biggest daily, *Zaman*, and the English daily *Today's Zaman*, TV stations like *Samanyolu*, and weekly magazines like *Aksiyon*. Gülen is known to support the current government party, the AKP, with whom he shares the aim of creating a larger role for religious values and outlooks as the basis for the social contract and defining Turkishness, as well as the aim of dismantling an all-encompassing Jacobin, Kemalist father-state. But the Gülen movement does not identify itself as a political movement, nor does it engage in party politics (2003: 204). Relations are thus more often than not rumored or discerned.

Saylan was an outspoken critic of the Gülen movement, and continuously warned the Turkish public not to be misled by them. In her eyes they were part of an alliance aimed at undermining the secular order of Turkey. In 2002 she wrote an open letter to then prime-minister Bülent Ecevit, in which she urged him to be aware of the danger that the *Fethullahçılar* (the Fethullah followers) posed to Turkey as a modern society (Saylan 2009: 684–685). ÇYDD and the Gülen movement can in addition be perceived as competitors in the sense that their respective

movements both focus on education for poor students, and attempt to use schooling as a prime means to disseminate their ideas and visions. This is by supporters of Saylan believed to be a prime motive behind the attacks on Saylan and ÇYDD from Gülen-owned media. But also other pro-Islamic media, such as the newspapers *Yeni Şafak* and *Vakit*, circulated the allegations, and voiced critique of Saylan in her capacity as public, symbolic figure. However, another direction from where Saylan was attacked was from right-wing nationalist circles, more specifically from Adnan Odabaş, who is the editor of *Hergün* and *Üsküdar* newspaper, and part of the circles around the right-wing nationalist party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP). Although fiercely nationalistic, pro-military, against any recognition of rights to Kurdish and other minorities, and thus opposed to many of AKP's policies, pro-Islamists and right-wing nationalists nevertheless share a strong emphasis on Muslim identity as the backbone of Turkish identity. In this sense Saylan's overt attacks on religion, alleged missionary activities, and possible preferential treatment of pupils with Kurdish background do not play well among right-wing nationalists. In addition, a member of an organization which is traditionally aligned with ÇYDD, the *Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği* (The Atatürk Thought Association, ADD), Yılmaz Dikbaş, also played a prominent role in relation to the allegations raised against Saylan. He accused her of being unpatriotic, and of not being an Ataturkist but simply using this as a 'mask' to advance her own notion of social order (*Büyük Takip*, part 2, 0:29). Odabaş and *Dikbaş* both appeared on *Büyük Takip* and repeated their respective allegations.

The different claims against Saylan have been brought to the attention of the Turkish public on various occasions during the past one and a half decade. 2004–2007 and April 2009 were two intense and significant periods in this respect. In mid-2000 it became known that Saylan and ÇYDD were being investigated by the public prosecutor. It was also around the same time as *Zaman*, referring to among other *Dikbaş*, first claimed that some of the evidence came from intelligence reports (*Zaman*, 9.9.2007). In 2009 Saylan became a suspect in the so-called Ergenekon case in Turkey and had her home as well as the offices of ÇYDD ransacked by the police (see Kuzmanovic 2012a). The Ergenekon investigation was launched in 2007. It concerns the alleged existence of a network of persons with Kemalist-nationalist convictions working or allied with persons in the Turkish military. Together, the two are accused of having conspired in order to overthrow AKP by unleashing social unrest and staging false flag operations (Ünver 2009). As part of uncovering the extent of the

network, the police investigated various segments among Kemalist-nationalists ranging from journalists, over university rectors, to civil society activists. The case is highly politicized and contested in Turkey. Where pro-government, liberal and leftist circles see it as a highly overdue reckoning with the deep state tradition in Turkey and the state elite, those accused and their supporters see it as a political witch-hunt led on by AKP (Kuzmanovic, 2012a).

The police dropped their investigation of Saylan due to lack of evidence. Her implication nevertheless provided opportunity to recycle all the accusations previously made against her, including rerunning the intelligence reports that supposedly substantiate the accusations of proselytism and support to separatism (*Zaman*, 14.4.2009). But her implication also provided opportunity for her supporters to elevate Saylan to the status of innocent victim of a political witch-hunt performed by persons with no regard for others, nor any decency. Saylan was fatally ill with cancer at the time of her implication, something that did not go unnoticed in the media. Pictures and clips of a visibly weak Saylan, waving from her window during the house search, being interviewed while in bed, or being wheeled around in a wheelchair, were run time and again in newspapers and on TV. An internationally published commentary by outspoken critic of the Gülen movement, Soner Çağaptay, is just one of many commentaries that illustrate how Saylan becomes defined as victim, hero and embodiment of disorder and dysfunction in Turkey, by way of being made into a key symbolic figure in a larger narrative dealing with political persecution:

> Although some of the people interrogated and arrested might have been involved in criminal wrongdoing, most appear to be innocent. Take, for instance, Türkan Saylan, a 73-year-old grandmother who was undergoing chemotherapy. Saylan ran an NGO providing liberal arts education scholarships to poor girls in Eastern Turkey, an area where Gülen's network runs many competing organizations. She was interrogated by the Turkish police for allegedly plotting a coup from her death bed, and passed away only four weeks later. (Çağaptay, *Foreign Policy*, 25.1.2010)

The narration is one of martyrdom, marked by persecution of the innocent who performs good deeds that benefit society. In this account Saylan is made into an icon by becoming defined as the object of a destructive and maleficent agency rather than being imbued by such agency as her adversaries claim.

Contesting Sainthood—Reinforcing Extraordinariness

A saint is not out of this world but of this world. Sainthood is a set of relations, a condensation consisting in an interlocking between historical formations establishing the autonomous, agentic individual as the desirable kind of subjectivity in modernity, social contexts, communities and personal features. Through this interlocking a person is produced as extraordinary and collectives of followers or, as this article has shown, adversaries emerge. As seen in the case of Saylan, two prominent features of this extraordinariness are the notions of Saylan as imbued with an excess of agency and as charismatic. She is believed to be able to transform individuals and society. The contestations over Saylan do not concern the question of whether she possesses such capacities. Rather, the contestations pertain to an assessment of the effects of them, and thus revolve round an evaluation of whether her perceived capacities have beneficent or maleficent effects. In this sense her extraordinariness is acknowledged and reaffirmed through contestations over her.

By using analytical insights from studies on sainthood on a wider societal field, this chapter illustrates how such insights can be applied in order to understand aspects of contemporary fragile states (Bandak and Bille this volume). In this case I have used insights from the study of sainthood and secular sainthood in order to explore a central mode through which politics is produced in a Turkish context, namely by way of making icons. Indeed, analytically employing the notion of a cult around particular persons, such as is the case with saints, it by no means unfamiliar in a Turkish context. On the contrary the similarity has already been noticed and analytically probed with regard to the adoration of Atatürk (Navaro-Yashin 2002: 188–203). Yet it often stops there. The adoration of Atatürk becomes a unique example rather than a refraction of how politics is produced in Turkey through the creation of public figures as mediators that embody a charismatic presence shared among those who relate to the figure, while also being persons "whose actions—or the narratives thereof—transcend the ordinary" (Bandak and Bille this volume). As the contestations over Saylan however show, public figures as icons are central to the production of the politics. Person and personal biographies are integral part of the production of politics, because they constitute a means to produce public imaginaries of the social and of politics as well as being a prime means through which collectives emerge.

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THE SECULAR SAINT: ICONOGRAPHY AND IDEOLOGY IN THE CULT OF BASHIR JUMAYIL

Sune Haugbolle

On 23 August 1981, leader of the Lebanese Forces Bashir Jumayil (BJ) related the following in an interview with the Lebanese French-language daily *L'Orient le-Jour* (LOLJ):

> LOLJ: Do you think about death?
> BJ: No.
> LOLJ: Fear of death?
> BJ: Perhaps the war has allowed us to overcome this idea.
> LOLJ: So, you are not afraid of dying?
> BJ: Well yes, I am not a superhuman.

Whether or not Bashir Jumayil had read Nietzsche and knew of his concept of the *Übermensch*—as well as its troubling adaptation by the Nazis—we do not know. In any case, his use of superhuman (*surhumain*) is a striking invocation of some of the qualities bestowed on him by his supporters even while he was still alive. Often portrayed in army fatigue with a steely gaze poised over crossed arms, 'Bashir', as he is simply known in Lebanon, presents a picture of determination on the posters, banners, key-rings, t-shirts and stickers that can be observed in East Beirut and other parts of Lebanon. Other representations conflate his face with symbols of Maronite Catholicism in order to depict his crucial role for the Lebanese Maronite community. Moreover, videos of his speeches can be downloaded from the Internet, and DVD and CD-ROM compilations of images and videos circulate among his supporters. Like many other dead leaders in the Middle East—from religious leaders such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Musa al-Sadr to heads of state like Gamal Abdel Nasser—he has been turned into an icon, a stylized emblem with considerable aura and power appropriated for a number of purposes and invested with various meanings that touch on cultural registers ranging from political history to religious and communitarian signification. These meanings are reified and redefined through social practices of emulation, iconization and commemoration, which draw heavily on religious symbolism. Hiding behind such 'secular icons'[1]—

[1] In the 20th century, the original meaning of icon as an image preserving the divine has been gradually secularized to mean any "representations that inspire some degree of

a term I use to describe non-religious images, tropes and themes that feature prominently in particular cultural, political and national public spheres—are particular ideologies and themes in identity politics. In the case of Bashir, his iconic significance extends beyond the historical figure to the situation of the Christians in Lebanon in the postcolonial period. Killed by a massive bomb in Beirut on September 14, 1982, shortly after being elected president of Lebanon, Bashir Jumayil was followed by a number of less unifying Christian leaders. As a result of what has been termed the Christian disenchantment (*ihbat*) with their situation in post-civil war Lebanon, many Lebanese Christians today view his persona as the ultimate symbol of a strong and cohesive Christian community in Lebanon, which they nostalgically recall and wish to recreate (Dagher 2000: 15–32). This narrative of Bashir's historical role and nostalgic potential for a political project of resurrecting Christian power is propagated by particular forces. The Lebanese Forces and al-Kata'ib parties, as well as other social actors that today maintain the legacy of Bashir, draw on (and exacerbate) these sentiments and promote him as part role model who fought bravely for their cause, part ideologue who formulated the creed of their movements. In their narrative, Bashir is presented as somewhere between mortal and immortal, a transformation of his status which, as the *L'Orient Le-Jour* interview indicates, already happened in the last years of his life, and a transformation which he himself was well aware of.

It is the embodied formulation of ideology through Bashir that I hone in on in this chapter. I am interesting in how a particular reading of the past is lodged in a single person's life story, held up as a mirror for a social group to reflect on their own trials and tribulations. His iconic qualities make Bashir an interesting case for investigating the way singular persons incorporate a wider set of cultural norms and ideological aspirations in Lebanese and Arab political culture. How are ideal human beings established in contemporary public culture? How do secular political movements use religious discourse and iconography? And how is the legacy of a dead person reproduced mnemonically? By examining social practices of contemporary veneration surrounding Bashir Jumayil and particularly the yearly commemoration of his death taking place every September 14 since 1983, I investigate the iconic qualities necessary to frame sectarian ideology, as well as elucidating why there appears to be such a necessity. At the

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awe—perhaps mixed with dread, compassion, or aspiration—and that stand for an epoch or a system of beliefs." (Vicky Goldberg, quoted in Brink 2000: 136).

same time, the chapter examines negative representations of Bashir, and how these portrayals inside and outside of Lebanon of Bashir as a fascist leader influence the production of his iconic status by his supporters. Moreover, I am interested in the striking slippages and overlaps between a tradition of condensed biographies in the form of stylized images in Eastern Christianity, and the semiotic practices—the language, symbols and iconography—used by Bashir's followers to commemorate him, and what these spill-overs between religious and secular realms can tell us about ideology and iconicity in Lebanon and in the wider Middle East.

Theorizing Secular Sainthood

Bashir Jumayil's invocation of the superhuman invites further thoughts about religion, heroism and idolization in modern political culture. Nietzsche devised the figure of the *Übermensch* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1995) in contrast to the other-worldliness of Christianity. The prophet Zarathustra proclaims the *Übermensch* to be an example to follow in the rupture with an old morality. Written on the cusp of the 20th century, Nietzsche's famous text introduces the idea of a non-religious figure (drawing heavily, of course, on religious terms and images) leading the masses to salvation—that is, to a worldly mode of living—in secular time and space. Nietzsche's vision was partly a reflection of the many Zarathustra-like ideologues of his own time proclaiming a path towards a better world and bestowing that path with charismatic leadership. Since the mid-19th century, several writers had noted the parallel between modern ideologists and ancient prophets and demagogues. For Ernest Renan (cited in Feuer 2010: 198), the prophet was a recurrent type in social intellectual history, akin to the charlatans of false hopes and aspirations that he observed in the Paris Commune. Seen from this perspective, modern-day ideologues like Bashir Jumayil follow a tradition that began with the Hebrew prophets but can be observed through history, from Jeremiah, Tamerlane and Genghis Khan to the demagogues of the late 19th century. According to Renan, these religious and political leaders are similar in that their charismatic politics dazzles individuals (Feuier 2010: 197–207). Following on Renan, and in response to technological advances and the growth of mass-mediated public culture and the complex changes in society and politics that ensued, many 20th century theorists of ideology from Weber, Mannheim and Hannah Arendt to Michael Herzfeld have stressed the role of charisma and emotional and bodily stimuli over and beyond

ideas.[2] In a Middle Eastern context, Lisa Wedeen and Yael Navaro-Yashin have written influential monographs about hagiography and canonization of political leaders in Syria and Turkey (Wedeen 1999; Navaro-Yashin 2002). While both are interested in how Middle Eastern regimes use imagery to create omnipresent personifications of statehood, they also underscore the performative aspects of identity formation, and hence the crucial role of ceremonies in gathering people *in carno* to enact their adherence to the personified creed (Lisa Wedeen elaborates on the functions of performativity in Wedeen 2008). As Navaro-Yashin shows, despite its secularist claims, the iconography of Ataturk is not just a product of the modern nation state, but draws on embodied experience with religious modes of behaving, thinking, feeling and sensing the world. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of performativity, Lisa Wedeen stresses the importance of semi-conscious participation of mass audiences in secular cults of veneration for the very existence of autocratic regimes such as that of Hafiz al-Asad in Syria. Both writers show how embodied charisma and bodily participation underwrite ideologies and political communities just as they do religious creeds and religious communities. They are ways in which states create what Aleida Assmann—with another religious metaphor—calls *canons*, actively circulated memory that keeps the past present and politically relevant (1999; for a shorter rendition of Assmann's theory, see Assmann 2011).

The opposite of canons, for Assmann, is *archives*, the many representations and narratives of the past that are rarely or never invoked, and only exist on the margins of canons. Archives primarily become incorporated into canons through the use of emotional signifiers, what one may also call icons. In the Middle East, the form and content of icons in public performative politics draws on religious iconography, but also differs from it in crucial ways. Whereas religious icons either represent the divine or the religious saints who have sacrificed their lives for the divine, and hence offer a chance to commune with the divine, secular iconography celebrates a person standing in for a group of people and should therefore be analyzed as part of the conceptual production of notions about the popular, and of popular memory. Modern Middle Eastern societies

[2] In the tradition of what Herzfeld calls "cultural ideology" (2005: 95), ideologies do not primarily reside in books, tracts or party programs. Rather, they become meaningful objects of social analysis in their adaptation and mediation. This tradition builds on Mannheim's emphasis on the psychological underpinnings of ideology, including shared rituals, stories and histories, as well as Hannah Arendt's examination of totalitarian manipulation.

habitually produce followings of grand men whose popularity is sanctified by popular culture. They so to speak head the canons by providing them with a recognizable face and personal life story. In our media-saturated reality today, the very notion of something or someone being popular cannot be understood outside the realm of mass media flows of images and iconographies which present raw semiotic material rife with possibilities for forging and staging the popular (Ghosh 2010: 336). The popular, in this sense, has augmented functions of religion, producing a wide range of secular rituals, images, and language that are either tied to nation states, national leaders and nationalism, or to non-state actors and sub-state identities. In either case, the cults of modern politics are accompanied by a form of mystical, ritualistic and religious 'excessive expression' (for secular rituals in Turkey, see Navaro-Yashin 2002). It is in this sense that we can view political cults like that of Bashir Jumayil as secular sainthood—the secularized inscription in public culture of near-infallible human beings whose example can lead fallible and vulnerable individuals towards the path of the divine (in secular ideology replaced by Utopia). As such, secular sainthood exemplifies the intersection of religion and politics, which has become visible in most parts of the world in recent decades. The blurring line between secular and religious modes is calling into question the 'bright line of separation' theory of modernity that sees (saw) modern life in terms of an obvious and resilient demarcation between the private domain of religion as faith and the public domain of politics as ideology and interests. In some ways, this is merely stating the obvious at the beginning of the 21st century (for a discussion of slippages and overlaps between religious and secular categories and of post-secularism, see Dressler & Mandair 2011). The more pressing challenge for scholars of political culture is to understand what this blurring means for ideological projects. More specifically, how do religious discourses about identity facilitate political mobilization through an invocation of cultural canons that not only reach far back in (early) historical time, but also intersect in crucial ways with narratives about modern secular history? The case of Bashir Jumayil allows us to raise these questions in the historical context of the last three decades, and in the context of current-day application of populist iconicity through mnemonic practices.

The Ceremony

Bashir Jumayil is commemorated each September 14. I have participated in the ceremony in 2002, 2003, 2007 and 2010 and thus observed its

development over eight years. I have been coming to Lebanon regularly since 1997, and in 2002–2003 I resided in East Beirut. I have many Maronite friends, and although none of them are Bashir supporters, they have allowed me to gain contacts close to the milieu and to listen in on many conversations about 'Shaykh Bashir' and about the Christian right.

The ceremony itself dates back to the first anniversary of Bashir Jumayil's death in 1983, and arguably even further back, as the celebration that today takes place on September 14 superseded an older religious festival called *Aid al-Salib* (the The Feast of the Holy Cross). Informants in Ashraffiyya, the area of East Beirut where the ceremony takes place, remember how September 13 used to be "like a Christmas Eve," with fireworks, presents and family gatherings in the 1970s. After Bashir's death the religious celebration was toned down in place of a more austere—secular—day of mourning institutionalized by the Lebanese Forces and the Kata'ib Party, the organisations officially in charge of the territory until the end of the war in 1990. The Kata'ib Party was founded in 1936 by Bashir's father Pierre Jumayil, and the Lebanese Forces was founded and led by Bashir. After the war, the Jumayil family started the Bashir Jumayil Foundation with the main purpose of maintaining the yearly memorial ceremony and protecting Bashir's legacy. Hence, the ceremony is a product of the Jumayil family's standing in Maronite society—a standing that has been waning since the death of Bashir, as neither his brother Amin, who was president from 1982 to 1988, nor his sons and nephews have been able to fill his shoes.

The dwindling fortunes of the Jumayils and the Maronites in general are crucial for understanding the ceremony and its particular combination of self-assertion and nostalgia. In the post-war period, late September was made a month of commemoration of the whole Christian struggle during the war, and September 21 became a yearly day for celebrating Christian fighters who died in the war. Under the auspices of the three organizers—the LF, the Kata'ib and the BJ Foundation—the September commemorations have become a ritual part of the Christian Lebanese calendar. Even residents of East Beirut who do not support the parties in question cannot help being inundated with the sights, sounds and seasonal commemoration of the 'cult of Bashir' (for a thorough analysis of what I term the cult of Bashir, see Haugbolle 2010: 179–184.) In day-to-day politics the Jumayil family is a marginal force in a marginal party (Kata'ib Party) and no particular force in the Lebanese Forces which is today led by Samir Ja'ja', its war-time leader and the only living Christian leader who can compete with Bashir in terms of popular appeal. But on September 14, the Jumayils

Fig. 9.1. "Bashir al-Jumayil is gone but the struggle continues". Banner, Place Sassine, Beirut, 14 September 2010 (photo by the author).

again, momentarily and nostalgically, rule the roost. The Jumayils rely on the symbolic capital generated by the commemoration.

The content of the ceremony for Bashir has remained the same with very few changes since 1983. The day starts with a mass gathering in Place Sassine in Ashraffiyeh, followed by a mass at the Church of the Miraculous Icon only a few hundred meters away, and ends with supporters laying wreaths of flowers near the building where he was killed. A large number of Christian dignitaries participate in the mass, and in this way show their respect for the memory of Bashir and for the Jumayil family. Outside the church, anywhere between five hundred and several thousand people gather to catch a glimpse of their leaders as they arrive in the usual high security cortege of black Mercedes and Hummers. Due to ever-changing alliances in Christian politics, some movements and families are not represented one year only to show their face the following year. Most notably, deputies and supporters of Michel Aoun—the former General and controversial leader of the Free Patriotic Movement who in 2006 formed an alliance with Hizbollah—have been absent from ceremony since 2005. Samir Ja'ja' (or his wife Satrida) usually arrives in style as the purported

successor of Bashir Jumayil. As a whole, the participants can be summarized as the face of the Christian right in Lebanon: the core parties of the Lebanese Forces and the Katai'b party, as well as a number of smaller groups and individuals who count as centrist.

Inside the church, the Jumayil family and leading Christian figures participate in a religious mass, which is mediated to the crowds outside the church through loudspeakers. Meanwhile, the crowds celebrate Bashir and their common cause much in the way of supporters at a sports event: with banners and slogans which they rhythmically chant, as they wait for the leaders to come out, by circulating, meeting old friends and making new ones, seeing and being seen. There are war veteran groups, youth associations, local party branches from around Lebanon, and mingling teenagers drawn by the carnevalesque atmosphere. After the mass, a member of the Jumayil family gives a speech, which is usually political in nature. In 2010, Bashir's youngest son Nadim spoke of the regional situation, the pressure from Iran and Hizbollah on Lebanon's 'true nationalists', and how relevant and living Bashir's creed is today.[3] Several times interrupted by the cheering crowd, he outlined the political stance of the Kata'ib party, and presented its quest today as a direct continuation of the struggle of Bashir during the war. However, according to the group of 20-something *shabab* (guys) I was standing with, the speech could have been sharper, and would have been if it had been held by Sami, the firebrand nephew of Bashir, who just a week earlier had attracted national attention by stating that it was time for the Christians to stop apologizing for what they did during the Lebanese Civil War and instead be proud of their "national defence."[4] Nothing could have been more fitting for the Bashir ceremony, the guys thought. The strong unapologetic Christian community, acting, leading, combating their enemies instead of being split between weak leaders: this is the nostalgic dream, or the cultural canon to use Assmann's terminology, being celebrated on September 14.

Assmann writes that the central concern of cultural institutions promoting particular canons is to ensure that memory is constructed as "past present", that is, as a past that will not go away but is maintained emotionally and sensorially (2011: 335). This historical narrative of continuation—of living in historical time so to speak—is the thematic pivot not just of the politics surrounding the ceremony, but also of what we could call

[3] Report in al-Nahar, 15 September 2010.
[4] *Al-Nahar* 12 September 2010.

Fig. 9.2. Commemorative ceremony for Bashir Jumayil, Beirut, 14 September 2010 (photo by the author).

the emotional content of the infatuation with Bashir's persona. As several *shabab* at the ceremony told me, Bashir to them is like a protector saint watching over the Christians of Lebanon, and his example provides guidance for their conduct. In my conversations with young and old men at the ceremony, I was told over and over again that the times we live today are similar to those of the war, and that Bashir's words and deeds were like those of a "prophetic person" (*mitl shakhs nabawi*) in the way he analysed the forces threatening the Christians. An older veteran of the Lebanese Forces, who fought with Bashir, explained to me that although Bashir spoke like a plain person, he was able to see behind events—he was "*shatir* (perceptive) enough to know our real enemies and see their next move. You can hear it in his speeches. Today we face the lies about Bashir, this is how they (the real enemies) work against us today, by telling the world that he was a murderer and soiling his reputation. But really, they should listen to his speeches. He was for all of Lebanon, its president." Here, the language of political history and political positioning ("for all of Lebanon, its president") blends with quasi-religious interpretations of Bashir' status ("he was *shatir*"—"like a prophetic person"). There

was no clear separation of these registers in the participants' discourse. Rather, the totality of Bashir's person becomes a signifier for secular and religious longing and sense of belonging.

A Fragile Icon

As we have seen, the idea of Bashir as a saint-protector for the Maronites is produced not just by interpretations of his role as military protector and prophet, but also by the implicit knowledge that there are differing interpretations within the political community of Lebanon which question his positive role in Lebanon's history and hence his moral authority. Outside of the supportive Christian community, and even outside of Lebanon, Bashir signifies fascism and violence more than protection and righteousness. The best-selling novel *De Niro's Game* from 2008 by the Lebanese-Canadian writer Rawi Hage (2008) is an example of artistic representations of the war where Bashir appears as the arch-leader of a blood-thirsty, deranged Christian right. In 2004, the French journalist Alain Ménargues (2004) published a historical account of 'secrets' about the Christian right during the war, which painted a bleak picture of its leadership accusing it of systematic atrocities committed against civilians. The book was a best-seller in Lebanon. The award-winning Israeli film *Waltz with Bashir*, in which Israeli veterans from the invasion of Beirut in 1982 attempt to come to terms with the violence they committed and witnessed, has augmented the negative image of Bashir. In a crucial scene in the film, we see the IDF soldiers advance in Beirut close to the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila where they are met with scores of Palestinian women and children running from the infamous massacre taking place there. Over them hover images of Bashir Jumayil on Lebanese Forces posters lining the street, blueprinting the massacre, which was indeed carried out in revenge of the killing of Bashir (Signoles 2010). Bashir's soldiers are the demonic others, with whom the young Israeli soldiers 'waltz' in the Lebanon war, and unknowingly, unwillingly as the film seems to suggest, become complicit in bestial war crimes that dovetail with their own passed-on memories of the Holocaust. In another scene in the film, a former soldier now living in Holland ponders the Christians' strange relationship with Bashir:

> They always carried pictures of Bashir on them. Bashir pendants, Bashir watches . . . To them the man was what David Bowie was to me. A star, an idol, a mega hunk, striking. I think they even felt an erotic love towards him. Totally erotic. Now, their idol is about to be king, we're crowning him

> for them, and the next day he is murdered. It was obvious that they would avenge his death in a perverted way. It was as if their wife had been murdered. They had to avenge the family's honour. It's deep.

Here, Bashir becomes an icon not just for violence but also for primordial, irrational sentiments that the ostensibly more modern Israeli soldiers do not understand but nevertheless underwrite through their actions in the Lebanon war. *Waltz with Bashir* was an international hit, and will have done nothing to improve Bashir Jumayil's international reputation, nor that of his supporters. Although the film has not been shown in Lebanon, his supporters know about it and know about the negative connotations it has helped to exacerbate. What is of more immanent relevance to them, they know that inside Lebanon, Palestinians, leftists and a large proportion of Lebanon's Muslim population agree with the verdict. The stain of Sabra and Shatila will not be washed away or transcended by the Bashir ceremony's claims about national leadership and broad support for Bashir. It is a fantasy that willfully suppresses the conflicting national and international canon about Bashir. Sabra and Shatila has become a particular blind spot in the historical memory that is constructed, a silent area in a discourse that otherwise centers on reviving the past. In the ceremony, and among the Christian right generally, Sabra and Shatila is never mentioned. It nevertheless influences the production of Bashir's iconic status in crucial ways by providing a hushed zone of ambiguity for his supporters that produces both defensiveness and aggressive assertions in the face of cynical outsiders, who should simply "listen to his speeches".

The slogans that constitute the semantic framework for his position as a revered, at times saintly, figure and that are repeated endlessly on September 14 come from the knowledge of there being both positive and negative representations of Bashir. Bashir is a message (*risala*), a dream (*hulm*) and a Truth (*haqiqa*), and these words are used both in political material like posters and banners, but also in popular discourse. Whereas political material emphasises the positive interpretations, popular discourse allows more room for the ambiguity or doubleness to shine through. This doubleness does not just concern portrayals of Bashir as a fascist zealot, but also involves the mix of sadness and celebration, joy and disappointment, pleasure and pain, surrounding the memorial ceremony. An entry on the discussion forum of one of the many Lebanese Forces webpages, posted by "Mano" on September 14 2010, details the bitterness with which Bashir can also be connoted. The entry is addressed (in English) directly to Bashir as a plea or a prayer for saintly intervention:

> Bachir,
> When you became the 'promise' that once was, we became orphans. We didn't know how to preserve the country, the freedom and the seeds of the 'Promise'.
>
> I wished you stayed a little bit longer with us and more important in us . . . Maybe we would have been able to catch the broken dream and our walk in the open desert wouldn't have taken so long.
>
> Bachir,
> I will not bother you much today, but I have to tell you something. I have to tell you the truth, the one that left a deep scare in us: What you wanted for Lebanon was not accomplished. The 'promise' became only a promise.
>
> Everything has changed, or almost . . .
> (. . .)
>
> Bachir,
> In these dark days would you please borrow us you name, your voice and your raised fist?
>
> Bachir,
> Do not get fooled by few slogans that will be released, as they do each September, they are empty slogans.
>
> Your rifa', your own rifa', lost the path. They forgot why our resistance existed one day.
>
> If you look from above, do not be fooled by the masses and the speeches. When the night falls, they will each grab a sword and try to stick it in the back of the other.
>
> Bachir,
> We did not deserve you, your sacrifice and our rifa' sacrifices.

The long invocation, prayer-like both in structure and in the pleas for forgiveness to a Christ-like Bashir whose sacrifices the living do not deserve, is characterized by resentment and nostalgic longing for the presence of a strong Christian leader. It condenses the sentiments summed up in the expression *al-ihbat al-masihi*: dreams and memories of hegemony, communal struggle, internal rifts, and ultimately disappointment. Today's leaders (*rifa'*) bicker and fight, and as a result the Christians have lost their way. Even some of those who claim to venerate Bashir have strayed so far from his path they are merely hypocrites. The only solution is to borrow Bashir's name, that is, use his example to embolden the struggling Christians. Bashir is addressed as a living, superhuman creature, or even a spirit that should have "stayed in us," for whom the ordinary people are not worthy as they have not been able to follow his example. But most

painful of all is the Christian leadership today, lame men who pale in comparison with Bashir. The ceremony can therefore also, implicitly, be seen as an indictment of their failures—an indictment that they underwrite by celebrating Bashir.

The Making of an Icon

Mass media have been crucial for the construction of a myth about Bashir as a nationalist leader since 1979. As a protagonist in the Lebanese Civil War, Bashir was a familiar face in Lebanese and international media. The Lebanese Forces and Kata'ib promoted him on posters and banners already before his death as an icon for their movements. Many of these images are still used, creating an unbroken visual code, which older residents of Beirut will recognize, and through which younger generations are connected semiotically with their parents' generation. These are sharply drawn profiles in the typical style of political posters of the 1970s (Maasri 2009). His iconic status is not just created by selecting artifacts from the past and bestowing them with new meaning, but by recycling memory anchors (Assmann's term) that already have a well-established function in society, such as crosses, Lebanese cedar trees, and famous images from the civil war. However, images are not the only means of creating the canon. Outside the party, Bashir had many sympathizers among Lebanese journalists, and some of them played important roles in propagandizing for the 'nationalist' role he had played in the war. Journalist Scarlett Haddad, writing in 1982, observed that first the election and then the death of Bashir brought people together and "cancelled the violence" of the civil war. People were gripped by euphoria "that bordered at times on hysteria", she writes.

> A whole people appears to be gripped by madness. And the mothers who have lost their sons, they are no less happy. For them, as for all of us, it is a victory over the enemy, and over all the demons that have been cast upon us in these last seven years. (Haddad 1982: 49)

She then quotes a Muslim woman saying that "I cried of anger when he was elected, and I cried of despair when he was killed" (Haddad 1982: 44). In other words, in the short time span of August and September 1982, Bashir Jumayil transformed Lebanon by showing the country the capacity for unification under a strong leader. The experience of spiritual transformation recurs in other press reports and accounts of September 1982 seen from the Christian side. Through the shared experience of extreme

emotions—first hope that the war will finally be terminated by a young, powerful president, then despair over his death—people were united. With his death, Bashir becomes the 'arch victim', standing in for all other sufferings. And with that, the myth of Bashir as a Lebanese Christ, a *risala* (message) for the Maronites, is born.

The fantasy of Bashir's venerators that all of Lebanon supports Bashir continues to be fed by certain Lebanese media. Despite knowing how vehemently some people detest him for his role in various massacres during the war, and for embodying what is seen as an ultra-sectarian ideology, media reports around 14 September maintain that Bashir was a president for all of Lebanon, loved by all the Lebanese. In 2009, the French-language version of the newspaper *al-Balad* (the Country) published a eulogizing article titled "Le Saveur Assasiné" (the assassinated savior), portraying Bashir as the last strong nationalist leader and a prophet of cross-sectarian tolerance.[5] "*All* sects, high and low, they revere him, and overcome the past through him," as I was told by a young Lebanese Forces stalwart at the ceremony. The Christian TV stations agree on this construction. On September 14, 2010, the Christian owned TV station MTV produced a eulogising documentary in honor of Bashir and the whole Jumayil family, titled *wal-masira mustamirra* ("and the cause continues"), one of the official slogans of the ceremony in 2010. On the news, Bashir's daughter Youmna Jumayil was interviewed about her father. Backed by emotional muzak and accompanied by a beautiful, solemnly respectful female interviewer walking along a flowered pathway, she recounted what a loving father and a gentle human being he was. In earlier years, LBC have played this role of media cheerleader, and in 2007 they replayed Bashir's last speech hourly throughout the day of September 14. More importantly, the usually quite critical talk show *Kalam al-Nas* (People's talk) paid tribute to Bashir Jumayil and invited his children into the studio. Due to changing ownership patters in LBC and MTV, MTV had in 2010 moved closer to the Kata'ib Party and the Lebanese Forces and now assumed the role of principal propagator of Bashir's memory. In general, all parties of the March 14 alliances and their associated media have since 2005 become complicit in maintaining the cult of Bashir. Bashir is now often presented as a forefather of March 14. Even the online newspaper *NowLebanon*, mainly

[5] *Al-Balad*, French edition, 14 September 2009.

Fig. 9.3. "Dream of the Republic" Bashir Jumayil banner, Place Sassine, Beirut, 14 September 2010 (photo by the author).

funded by the Hariri family, in 2007 printed a long celebratory article on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his death.[6]

Practices of extreme eulogizing can seem like a conduit of lying and repression. More importantly, they signal the particular role with which Bashir continues to be invested by various social actors in Lebanon. Even those who detest him agree that he was far from an ordinary leader. For his supporters who gather around the memorial ceremony, he is more than a historical figure: he is a spirit (*ruh*), who lives on in them. Indeed one of the chants repeated over and over again is *Bashir hay fina*: (the spirit of) Bashir lives inside us. Not only does he live inside them, they must attempt to *be* Bashir. As a supporter and youth organizer of the ceremony told journalists in 2007, "Even 25 years later, every day he is important to us; every day we are living Bachir Gemayel." To 'live' Bashir means to be aware of the enemies around 'the real Lebanese' and to struggle for justice and independence.[7] It also means to be a strong and assertive Eastern Christian.

Religious Invocations and 'Muscular Maronitism'

These invocations of spirituality should not just be seen as metaphors for Bashir as a role model for current-day Lebanese. The cult of Bashir is packed with religious overtones first and foremost because of his status for the Christian community in Lebanon and for the Maronites in particular. Born in 1947 as the youngest son of founder of the al-Kata'ib Party, Pierre Jumayil, Bashir grew up in an intensely Christian environment in the Ashrafiyya neighborhood of Beirut, where he attended Christian schools and university. As a student in the early 1970s, he became embroiled in tensions between Christian students who confronted Islamic and leftist students supporting Palestinians refugees in Lebanon. In 1971, Bashir entered the ranks of the military branch of the Kata'ib Party, allegedly after he was briefly kidnapped by Palestinians groups and taken to the Tall al-Za'tar refugee camp. During the first two years of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1976), he rose in the ranks of the Kata'ib militia. His military units led the sieges of the Karantina and Tall al-Za'tar refugee camps in 1976, both of which were concluded by massacres of hundreds

[6] NowLebanon, 15 September 2007 "The Life and legacy of Bashir Gemayel, 25 years on". http://www.nowlebanon.com/Arabic/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=13226.

[7] Ibid.

of civilians (Haugbolle 2011). In 1980 he became the undisputed leader of the Lebanese Forces, and through a violent series of clashes with rival leaders, he made it the dominant militia in what was known as the Christian or Eastern sector of Lebanon. Already from 1979—in the immediate aftermath of his participation in mass killings and the resulting military prowess he gained—Bashir was celebrated as a new kind of leader for the Christian community: an iconic, even mythical figure (Matar 1984: 39).

Although there is no evidence to prove that he consciously cultivated his status, he did frequently draw on Christian lore—the deeper Christian archive—in his speeches. For example, he invoked one of the most important saints for Maronite mythology, Saint George, who is said to have slain the famous dragon in Lebanon. As one of the most celebrated military saints in Eastern Catholicism, Saint George has over the centuries attained the status of a defender of Christians in the near East. During the heady days of the Lebanese Civil War, the warrior saint gained new significance, drawing both on his meaning for Christians and as a nationalist symbol for Lebanon. With a nod to Saint George, Bashir stated, rather theatrically, in one of his speeches that "we are the saints of the Orient and its demons, its cross and its iron lance, its light and its fire, for we can burn it if it tries to burn our fingers, or enlighten it if it leaves us in peace" (La Resistance Libanaise 1982: 31). This discourse draws on historical memories of Christian warriors in Lebanon going back to medieval times that were in fact appropriated heavily within the Christian right in the early 1980s, but also invokes the notion that Christians represent enlightenment and modernization in an otherwise 'darkened' Islamic region.

The making of Bashir's secular sainthood must be understood in the *longue durée* context of the Maronite community in Lebanon and the Christians in the Near East who have with varying intensity seen themselves as a "rose among thorns" in an Islamic Middle East (Salibi 2005). But more importantly, it must be seen in the context of the civil war and the extreme antagonism that grew out of mounting violence between the warring militias. Lebanese society experienced extreme ruptures, and the sense of being surrounded by menacing enemies made many people look for the 'emblems and armour' of communitarian solidarity and leadership (Khalaf 2002: 232–51). Military leaders became focal points for the construction of combative sectarianism, and Bashir Jumayil was just one of several such leaders, whose presence as posters on the walls of Beirut made it clear who controlled particular neighborhoods (Maasri 2008).

Bashir was a conservative figure in the way that he supported traditionalist strains in Maronite ideology. At the same time, his supporters

today also stress that although he hailed from a family of traditional leaders (*zu'ama*), he introduced a new informal tone that appealed broadly. An attendant at the September 14 ceremony in 2007 was quoted in the Lebanese press as saying that Bashir was a "man of the people." Not only did he put himself on the frontline, he shared daily hardships in a very egalitarian way, and would sit "down on the sidewalk and eat his rotten sandwich with the same enthusiasm and gratitude as the rest of his men." Moreover, as a young military leader, in the words of an informant in Ashrafiyya, "he galvanized the Christians and allowed them to leave behind those who always turn the other cheek." Similar to what has been termed muscular Zionism in Israel (Rosenberg 2002)—the stress on youth, health, and strength in parts of the Zionist movement in Israel that was meant to dispel the image of the weak and defenseless Jew—elements in Bashir's militarized version of Lebanonism appear to confront an apathetic and meek stereotype of a Christian. Such reformulations of the faith from devotion to muscular Maronitism happened on many levels of the community, including among a group of warrior monks, some of them fighting with the Guardian of the Cedars militia. At this stage of the civil war, the Christian coalition was facing a joint Syrian, Palestinian, Muslim enemy, which exacerbated defensive strains in Lebanese nationalist ideologies that emphasized the role of Lebanon as refuge for Christians in the Middle East. Bashir put this combative ideology—a necessary defense of Christian leadership in a sovereign Lebanese nation—into emotive words and action.

As a result, Bashir is both celebrated for his leadership in battles, and for his many speeches. Some of these speeches, including his last speech, which, as mentioned, was replayed throughout the day on national television in 2007, have become iconic signifiers and objects of adoration, of pleasure even. From 1978 to 1982, Bashir gave a number of speeches addressed to his soldiers, the Maronite community and to Lebanon and the rest of the world. In schools, high-schools, and universities, members of the Lebanese Forces youth organization pass around DVDs of these speeches. Most can be downloaded from the Internet, either through official Lebanese Forces websites or from generic video sharing sites like YouTube. The speeches range from early combative speeches given at the front in first years of the civil war, to official addresses following important military and political events like the battle of Zahle in 1981 and his election as president in September 1982. Bashir's rhetoric is characterized by repetition of key phrases. Again and again, he returns to the dangers confronting Lebanon from the outside, sometimes referred to as the

'desert' (*al-sahara*'). He draws on lyrical stereotypes of Lebanese mountain villages reminiscent of the early plays of the Rahbani brothers and the songs of Fairuz from the 1950s and 1960s to explain how this idyllic country of enlightenment and coexistence was subject to a plot supported by international powers (For a discussion of nostalgic nationalism in the Rahbani brothers' work, see Stone 2008). And he maintains the necessity of defending Lebanon, all of its "10,542 square kilometers," which is perhaps his most famous catchphrase. As he attains a role of statesman in 1981 and 1982, his public speeches become less confrontational, while speeches addressed to his soldiers maintain the earlier exclusivist tone. Most speeches are held in a rather informal Lebanese dialect, apart from public speeches addressed in modern standard Arabic (Ajemian 2008).

The informal, chummy, brother-in-arms Bashir presents himself as a friend as much as a leader to his followers. Unlike most other Lebanese leaders who are distinguished by their powerful remoteness, Bashir speaks to people in their own tongue. The material reproduction of his speeches and the consumption of them are as important as the content. A few days after the 2009 ceremony, I watched a DVD with young members of the Lebanese Forces, whom I had met at the ceremony. The DVD was a medley of his speeches and interviews and documentaries from the war, as well as slideshows of Bashir and his family on a background of emotional or heroic music. The particular DVD we watched was produced by the Lebanese Forces, but the three young men in their late teens told me that plenty other home-made compilations circulate in the milieu. In small groups like this, the *shabab* of Lebanese Forces youth organization get together and watch them. The three young guys, who were all from East Beirut and had family members in the organization, admired Bashir endlessly and wished to be like him. As we watched the DVD, they stressed Bashir's exemplary attributes, his poise and posture, his manly conduct in battle and his manliness in general, and his bravery and willingness to sacrifice himself for the cause. These qualities could also be deduced from his words: his bluntness, his use of vernacular Lebanese, the proper language of the people. He was, in the words of one of the informants, a man of the people, but a special man, a particular person (*shakhs khas*).

The category of digitalized biographical material appears to make up the core of the emotional canon—the knowledge and connoted feelings about the historical figure Bashir Jumayil—that his young supporters draw on in their cult. Older supporters I have talked to referred to personal memories of meeting Bashir, following his career, or even fighting alongside him. The various emotional archives provide the raw material

for producing an updated version of the ideology that Bashir promoted—the cultural canon of muscular Maronitism for which he is the principal icon. Other categories of material that facilitate the transposition of Bashir from the world of the early 1980s civil war Lebanon into the world of contemporary Lebanese politics include biographies, pictures and war-time songs, particularly those of the female singer Pascale Sakr. Furthermore, his supporters are informed by stories and accounts from their families and friends. The totality of this information lives a pretty quiet life most of the year, but is operationalized in the yearly commemoration on September 14.

Conclusion: Sainthood and Ideology

In this chapter I have examined how the cult of Bashir Jumayil is produced by a combination of political, emotional and cultural motivation. I have focused both on the longer historical context of the Lebanese Civil War and the post-war period, as well as the contemporary period after 2005, when Lebanon's Christians continue to struggle for a common political and cultural project. Because of this sustained sense of crisis, now inbuilt (that is, socialized) in most Christians and their view of communal and national history, Bashir Jumayil provides a counterbalance of optimism, pride and self-celebration in a reality that mostly offers failure, pessimism, and self-doubt. I have pointed to the centrality of this doubleness of negative and positive self-images and the way history and memory is used to articulate a communitarian expression of its ambiguous experience of modern Lebanese history. However, the very notion of one expression for the entire community, which the September 14 ceremony is supposed to enact, is in itself a fantasy. In day-to-day life there are severe splits in the Christian community, as there have been since the death of Bashir Jumayil. It is exactly because of these failures that Bashir connotes a longing for the past, and a desire to make the past present. I have used Aleida Assman's term of cultural canon to explain the processes through which Bashir is constantly remade as the arch-leader. Following on Ghassan Hage's argument from his important article about Bashir Jumayil (Hage 1992), I have suggested that Christian symbolism plays a crucial part in the iconization of Bashir as a secular saint for Lebanon's Christians, and for the continuing centrality of what I have called an ideology of muscular Maronitism that maintains a particular role for Christians in Lebanon and the associated right to fight for that role.

The example of Bashir Jumayil shows the extent to which religious symbolism is enmeshed in the political realm in Lebanon. Importantly, political actors like youth groups and older members of political parties imagine and articulate the political realm as a space separate from religion as creed. Bashir Jumayil for them is not a saint (*mar*) similar to the Maronite saints who through prayer and invocation offer an intermediation with the divine. Rather, Bashir establishes a link between political history and Christian mythology, which accentuates Christian communitarian identity in the context of modern Lebanon's fractious national history. In that sense, he is a transcendental figure—not between this world and the other, but between the religious identity and political history. By positing Bashir as a valiant defender of the welfare and identity of the entire national community, the particular, central role of Christians in Lebanon is re-imagined and re-enacted on a yearly basis. This imagination clashes badly with reality, but it does so defiantly and perhaps surprisingly consistently. Rather than abating, in 2012, in the context of extreme regional tension and uncertainty for many Christians in the Levant, the Bashir ceremony has an amplified significance for Lebanese Christians sheltering in the memory of their secular saint.

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