

## Rethinking the Anthropology of Islam: Dynamics of Change in Muslim Societies; In Honour of Roman Loimeier

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## **Rethinking the Anthropology of Islam**

# ZMO-Studien



Studien des Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient

Herausgegeben von  
Ulrike Freitag

**Band 47**

# Rethinking the Anthropology of Islam

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Dynamics of Change in Muslim Societies

In Honour of Roman Loimeier

Edited by

Katja Föllmer, Lisa Maria Franke, and Ramzi Ben Amara

With the assistance of Laura Stauth

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Katja Föllmer, Lisa Maria Franke, Ramzi Ben Amara

# Why Rethinking the Anthropology of Islam?

## Dynamics of Change in Muslim Societies: An Introduction

This volume is dedicated to our mentor and academic teacher Roman Loimeier, social and cultural anthropologist and scholar of Islamic studies, on his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2022. Roman Loimeier's academic career started with his study of Social and Cultural Anthropology and African Studies at the University of Freiburg and at the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). His academic journey continued at the University of Bayreuth where he became a research and teaching assistant at the Department of Islamic Studies. Important milestones in his academic journey were the École des Haute Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and the University of Göttingen where he worked as visiting professor. Further milestones were at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO) in Berlin and the University of Florida (Gainesville) where he was assistant professor before he became professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Göttingen in 2009.

Now, Roman Loimeier can look back on nearly forty years of experience in field research in Senegal, Northern Nigeria, Tanzania, and Tunisia. He also undertook several shorter research trips to Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Morocco, Ethiopia and more recently to Soqatra/Yemen. His studies are enriched by his interdisciplinary background. When Roman Loimeier started his research, the major emphasis was on religious developments. His interests have spanned in focus from the dialectics of internal reform within a Sufi brotherhood in Northern Nigeria, in the context of the development of religious reform movements in Northern Nigeria and Senegal, to the development of Islamic education in 20<sup>th</sup> century Zanzibar. Roman Loimeier's expertise on the presence of Islam in those countries allowed him to pinpoint the extremely heterogeneous nature of Muslim societies. Furthermore, during his research in Tunisia he realized that religion has lost its mobilizing power. The people were much more concerned with surviving the economic crisis and defending civil liberties than with maintaining Islamic traditions. On the basis of this research experience, he came to the conclusion that a prevailing focus on Islam neglects other important factors such as economic development, cultural diversity, or social conflicts, and the increasing significance of women in these societies.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Loimeier 2022a.

Among the themes and subjects that Roman Loimeier has repeatedly addressed is his development of the disciplinary subfield of the Anthropology of Muslim societies. Even though Talal Asad's 'textualization of social life' has become important in many academic disciplines,<sup>2</sup> it has been criticized for limiting the focus on Islamic literary sources while taking the dichotomy of a 'little' and a 'great' tradition for granted. The over-emphasis on Islam as a 'supreme guideline of social life' and the perception of Muslims as the 'other' obstructs the view on everyday existential and practical issues of life and global change.<sup>3</sup> We, the editors of this volume, thus decided to revive the discussion on the Anthropology of Islam in honour of Roman Loimeier. This volume intends to celebrate Roman Loimeier's numerous and remarkable contributions to the abovementioned field throughout his long academic career that culminated in a professorship in the Anthropology of Islam at the University of Göttingen (since 2009), and in an European Research Council (ERC) Advanced Grant as principal investigator (2016–22). Even though his geographic focus of research encompasses primarily African countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Egypt, and Tunisia, his scope goes beyond the African continent. It also includes Muslim-majority countries in the Near and the Middle East such as Lebanon, Iran, and Pakistan.

Roman Loimeier's research questions have mainly focused on issues of change in the context of reform and modernization and their impact on the religious field in Muslim-majority contexts. Throughout his academic journey the focus on change became increasingly significant and culminated in a large interdisciplinary project. As principal investigator of the ERC project "Private pieties. Mundane Islam and new forms of Muslim religiosity: Impact on social and political dynamics" Roman Loimeier, together with his team of researchers, subsumed different Muslim-majority countries under the research question of the mutual impact of Muslim religiosities and the social and political situations in a variety of contexts, focusing on everyday life and the individual. The project's findings led to several relevant publications on religious and social change, processes of individualization, and gender dynamics.

Roman Loimeier's interest has centred on common traits and differences in processes of change in Muslim societies while taking into consideration that there is no monolithic form of Islam, and not only one history of Islam. Rather, the plurality of Islamic traditions, practices, and beliefs, all of which are worth studying, need a corpus of different research methods that go beyond any one academic discipline. This is why Roman Loimeier calls for a combination of anthropologi-

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<sup>2</sup> Asad 2009 [1986].

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Østebø 2022, 10; Schielke 2010.

cal, historical, and philological methods. Such a methodological approach may help to accentuate the epistemic value of terms and concepts such as public/private, religious/secular, state/civil society, political Islam/individual piety.<sup>4</sup> Text and context analyses may also help to evaluate a broad range of modes of behaviour, opinions, and attitudes.<sup>5</sup>

Another reason for the choice of the title for this volume is related to Roman Loimeier's manifold efforts in giving new impetus to Social and Cultural Anthropology, and generally bringing the field forward. According to Roman Loimeier, the evaluation of the particular dynamics and structures impacting global change is central in the study and research of Social and Cultural Anthropology today. The biggest challenge for anthropologists is to distance themselves from researching the exotic and exceptional 'other', and to focus on the cultural, religious, ecological, and social modes of action in order to explain social and cultural questions and to comprehend diversity.<sup>6</sup> This may also mean that scholars of Social and Cultural Anthropology must not only undertake research in the field, but also read texts, watch films, and listen to music as expressions of conflict among different generations, and as challenges to authority which question established norms and values. In this way anthropologists may be able to observe changes that have already happened and follow processes that continue to induce change in one way or another. In addition, Roman Loimeier advocates dialogues in the form of interviews with local people, and maintains that cooperation with academic colleagues in those societies is necessary for acceptance, reliability, and mutual exchange.

Besides the combination of different research methods he adopts, Roman Loimeier calls for an open, flexible approach to the field and the subjects of study. Central to this is the critical (self-)reflection of the role of the researcher in and outside the field in combination with the cooperation with the people being studied.<sup>7</sup> This, Roman Loimeier contends, is what will give new impetus to the study of processes of change in Muslim societies. Such a dialogical character of research will also help to establish Social and Cultural Anthropology as a central academic discipline within the social sciences which deals with more than just general issues and conflicts of living together. Roman Loimeier similarly asserts that change is also required in the anthropological perspective. Researchers should consider what makes people different from one another, while looking

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<sup>4</sup> Loimeier 2022b, 22–30, 65.

<sup>5</sup> Loimeier 2022b, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Loimeier 2021, 255–61.

<sup>7</sup> Loimeier 2021, 247–54.

at the respective historical, cultural, religious, economic, ecological, and social reasons for agency.<sup>8</sup> An appropriate consideration of the determining factors of agency in addition to the particular historical, cultural, social, political, religious and economic context, is reflected in Roman Loimeier's research in African Muslim-majority contexts. The mutual impact of the anthropology of Islam and Islamic studies cannot be denied. It makes the variability and plurality in Muslim countries visible, and the many voices in Muslim societies heard.

In addition to this focus, we would like to emphasize the broad interests of Roman Loimeier in other topics, such as his research in the realm of political ecology on the notion of catastrophe and the handling of disasters and epidemics, as well as his work exploring concepts of space and time in anthropology. His other areas of research that are also present in his teaching include historical anthropology, the anthropology of religion, and maritime anthropology. All of these topics are combined in his recent publication *Einführung in die Ethnologie* (Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology) in which Roman Loimeier describes the emergence and development of anthropology within its specific political and historical contexts.<sup>9</sup>

The present volume is thus a collection of contributions from the numerous fields and subjects that can all be subsumed under the category of the anthropological study of Muslim societies. Some contributions focus on methodological perspectives, while others focus on religious and social perspectives. They all take into account Roman Loimeier's interdisciplinary projects. To emphasize the main idea of this volume, attention must be drawn to the central issue of why rethinking the Anthropology of Islam is useful with regard to discourses on Islam in Africa, and for understanding processes of change in Muslim societies in Africa and beyond.

## On Islam in the Anthropology of Islam

The Anthropology of Islam is a subfield within the discipline of Social and Cultural Anthropology that seeks to understand the lived experiences of Muslims and non-Muslims and their multifaceted relationships with Islam. This subfield is also located at the intersection of Islamic Studies and Anthropology. As an academic field, the Anthropology of Islam emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, as

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<sup>8</sup> Loimeier 2021, 255–61.

<sup>9</sup> Loimeier 2021.

scholars recognized the need to move beyond Orientalist approaches that viewed Islam as a monolithic, static religion.<sup>10</sup> Instead, anthropologists sought to explore the diversity of Muslim cultures, practices, and beliefs across different regions and throughout historical periods.

One of the key contributions of the Anthropology of Islam has been to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. Anthropologists have shown that Islam is not a homogeneous tradition, but rather a complex and dynamic religion, culture, and history that is constantly evolving and adapting to changing circumstances. Anthropologists of Islam have also highlighted the diversity of Muslim practices and beliefs, and the ways in which Islam is intertwined with other social, economic, and political processes. Many invaluable publications came out of diverse regional and thematic research which shed light on the multitude of life-worlds and individual trajectories in Muslim contexts. Among these works are numerous noteworthy publications, of which the following serve as examples: Elisha Renne examines the practice of veiling among Muslim women in Kenya, Tanzania, and Somalia. She argues that veiling is not a uniform practice, but rather takes on different meanings and functions depending on local cultural and historical contexts. Renne also shows how veiling is often linked to broader social and political processes, such as struggles for national independence and gender equality.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Henri Lauzière traces the development of Salafi movements in different countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Salafism according to Lauzière is not a monolithic and unchanging doctrine, but rather a diverse and contested tradition that has evolved over time in response to changing social and political conditions.<sup>12</sup>

However, the notion (but sometimes also the discipline as a subfield) of an Anthropology of Islam has recently faced criticism and controversy. Some critics have argued that the field reinforces Orientalist stereotypes of the ‘other’ and perpetuates the idea of a homogeneous ‘Islamic civilization.’ Others have accused anthropologists of overlooking or downplaying issues of power, politics, and inequality within Muslim societies, and of treating Islam as a static and ahistorical entity. Saba Mahmood for example, critiques the tendency among some anthropologists to view Islam as a cultural or religious tradition that is separate from broader social and political processes. She maintains that this view obscures the ways in which power relations and social inequalities are embedded within religious practices and beliefs, which can lead to a romanticized and essential-

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<sup>10</sup> Said 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Renne 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Lauzière 2015.

ized view of Muslim women's experiences.<sup>13</sup> Correspondingly, Brian Silverstein criticizes the idea that there is a single 'Islamic civilization' that can be studied as a coherent entity. He contends that this notion is based on the flawed assumption that Islam is a unified and homogeneous tradition, when in fact it is diverse and contested.<sup>14</sup>

The important articles by Fadil and Fernando, Deeb, and Schielke provide further insights into, and discussions on the notion of the Anthropology of Islam. They focus on the everyday, shifting the terminology away from a focus on religion to a focus on more mundane topics. The Anthropology of Islam could thus be called the Anthropology of the Everyday. Fadil and Fernando, for example, disapprove of the dichotomy that often exists in the Anthropology of Islam between the study of 'official Islam' (the Islam of scholars, clerics, and texts) and the 'everyday Islam' of ordinary people. They argue that this division is limiting and obscures the diverse ways in which Muslims navigate and negotiate their religious beliefs and practices in everyday life.<sup>15</sup> Fadil and Fernando's article sparked a response from Lara Deeb. Deeb agrees with Fadil and Fernando that the study of Islam should not be restricted to official sources, and argues that scholars must also recognize the importance of piety and the ways in which it shapes the everyday lives of Muslims.<sup>16</sup> Schielke, in his response to Fadil and Fernando, engages with the issue of how anthropologists navigate the tension between 'official Islam' and 'everyday Islam' in their research. He argues that while it is important to avoid essentializing either category, scholars must also recognize that these categories are not static but are constantly evolving and contested.<sup>17</sup> Schielke similarly discusses the challenges of studying Islam as a cultural phenomenon by coining the notion that "there is too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam."<sup>18</sup> He argues that scholars must avoid overly simplistic, grand narratives and instead focus on the everyday practices and experiences of Muslims in specific contexts.<sup>19</sup> Together, these articles provide a rich and multifaceted discussion of the challenges and opportunities of studying Islam from the perspective of anthropology, highlighting the need for a nuanced and context-specific approach that recognizes the diversity and complexity of Muslim-majority societies and cultures.

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<sup>13</sup> Mahmood 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Silverstein 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Fadil and Fernando 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Deeb 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Schielke 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Schielke 2010, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Schielke 2010.

Despite these criticisms, the Anthropology of Islam, or rather the Anthropology of the Everyday, remains an important and dynamic field of inquiry. By examining the diverse ways in which Muslims engage with their faith, and by recognizing the agency and diversity of Muslim communities, anthropologists have the potential to reflect on and to elucidate some of the most pressing issues facing the world today, from global politics and migration to social justice and human rights. By focusing on being Muslim and *performing* Muslimness in different social contexts, emic perspectives and intimate positions can be accounted for.

## Discourses and Foci on Islam in Africa

The study of Islam in Africa is fraught with many difficulties: There are so many Islamic communities who all have their particularities as a result of Africa's diverse cultures and local traditions. This, and the sheer variety of Islamization processes make it difficult to create a complete overview covering all subjects on Islam in Africa.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the following we want to point out a few shortfalls. A more encompassing contribution is offered by Terje Østebø in his recent edited volume *Routledge Handbook of Islam in Africa* (2022).

First, the process of Islamization in many regions in Africa was initiated through trade contacts either through Caravan routes (from the north of the continent to the south) or via the sea (East Africa). Each geographical region has a different story of Islam. Second, determining a precise number of Muslims in these regions is impossible. Third, relations between Muslims in different parts of Saharan Africa with broader Islamic traditions are complex and diverse. Muslims across the Continent live in different societal environments: Sometimes they are the majority, and sometimes in a minority position. In contrast to the widespread opinion that Islam in Africa is of minor importance for the study of Islam, Østebø emphasizes that African Muslims have always interacted with the people in the so-called 'heartland' of Islam, the Middle East, and thus the study of Islam in Africa should be integrated in the academic field of Islamic Studies.<sup>21</sup>

The study of Islam in Africa has several foci. Thematic, geographical, historical, and anthropological are only a few orientations. Central questions about Islam and Muslim communities in Africa that often arise include, for instance: What makes Islam in Africa different from Islam in other regions of the world? Is

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<sup>20</sup> Østebø 2022, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Østebø 2022, 2.



there an ‘African Islam’ or do we speak of ‘Islam in Africa’? Are there patterns of African Islam? Can we speak of a ‘Black Islam/Islam noir’? If the latter question can be answered in the affirmative, then: Can we speak of any racially based type of Islam? Is there a ‘Hausa Islamic tradition’ or a ‘Swahili Islam’? Does Islam of so-called ‘*Marabouts*’ exist? Is there an ‘orthodox Islam’? A ‘Sufi Islam’? A ‘Salafi Islam’? A ‘Sunni Islam’ or a ‘Shiite’ one? How can we study Islamic traditions in Africa? Should we deal with learning (Islamic schools, mosques, *zāwiya*, sheikhs)? Do we study objects or subjects; men or women; periods or places; events or religious movements?

Scholars who study Islam in Africa come from varying disciplinary backgrounds and orientations. Their perspectives vary from general to specific topics and sometimes from the local to the global. One example of a classical book on this subject is the volume edited by Levtzion and Pouwels.<sup>22</sup> It gives an overview of different aspects of Islam in Africa and patterns of Islamization based on cultural, political, and geographical divisions. The book is divided into two parts: the first part deals with the spread of Islam in Africa, focusing on its three geographical entrances onto the continent. Namely, Egypt and the Indian Ocean, West Africa, and the Sudan region as well as East and Southern Africa. The editors of the volume chose a geographical division of the African continent and invited scholars from different disciplines to reflect on each setting and to trace the history of Muslim communities in each region. In the second part, the editors chose a thematic order dealing with Islamic law, women, Sufism, and Islamic education. Levtzion and Pouwels’ book is considered a classical reference in the study of Islam in Africa because it includes a fundamental overview on the history and development of Islam and Muslim communities across the continent.

Westerlund and Evers-Rosander discuss some of the different settings of Islamic tradition in Africa.<sup>23</sup> They differentiate between Sufism, Islamism, and reformism. Their conceptual debates go side by side with R. Mbaye’s earlier discussion and his question of whether there is an ‘Islam Noir’ in Africa. In his discussion, Mbaye suggests leaving aside conceptual debates. He rather divides the Islamic traditions of the African continent into three main ‘tendencies’: sectarian, traditionalist, and modernist.<sup>24</sup> This is yet another orientation in dealing with Islam in Africa. A major criticism of Mbaye’s work is the focus on reformism as something “foreign and nonindigenous.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Levtzion and Pouwels 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Westerlund and Evers-Rosander 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Mbaye 1982.

<sup>25</sup> Østebø 2022, 6.

David Robinson examines the contribution of Muslim societies to African history.<sup>26</sup> His book is divided into three parts starting with a general history of Islam in Africa which is followed by a debate related to ‘Africanization’ and ‘Islamization.’ Finally, the author discusses a set of case studies from different parts of the African continent such as Senegal, Nigeria, Morocco, and Ethiopia. Robinson tackles the position of Islam and Muslims in African history, but has been criticized for his views on Africa, on Africanization as a local process, and for his portrayal of Islam as a monolithic and foreign religion.<sup>27</sup>

In other publications, Islam is studied in a particular region. In sum, a noticeable attribute of many publications on Islam and African Muslims is that they have focused on West Africa and to some extent on the Eastern part of the continent. The more we venture southward, the less we know about Muslim communities. Muslims in the Central African Republic, are for example, not yet studied. The same is true for Muslims in countries like Malawi and Zambia, while Muslims in Zanzibar or Northern Nigeria have been the subjects of more investigations.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, from an anthropological perspective, Benjamin Soares criticizes that most writings on the history of Islam have been directed either at Sufism, reform movements, or Jihadism.<sup>29</sup> Studies on everyday Islam and Muslims seem to be missing. Samuli Schielke makes a similar assertion when he emphasizes that a focus on Islam is too dominant in the study of Muslim communities.<sup>30</sup> Again, the anthropological perspective, which is ultimately more fruitful, considering Muslims as part of society and dealing with everyday life in Muslim communities is reiterated.

Among other ‘classical’ studies on Islam in Africa, John Hunwick for instance published on Arabic Literature in Africa, a topic so far neglected in research on Muslims in Africa.<sup>31</sup> Murray Last’s standard work on the Sokoto Caliphate remains indispensable when speaking of one of the longest-lasting Islamic states in Africa. Jean Louis Triaud and Louis Brenner have published widely on Islam in Africa, particularly on Francophone countries. Again, language plays a fundamental role there. There are more publications on Islam in Africa in French and English than in any other languages. Jamil Abun-Nasr’s work on the Tijaniyya published in 1965 (and again in 2007) is indispensable for any scholar working

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**26** Robinson 2004.

**27** Hanretta 2005; cf. Østebø 2022, 6.

**28** For the case of Malawi see Bone 2000. Apart of Bone’s publications, we don’t know much about Muslims in this country.

**29** Soares 2014.

**30** Schielke 2010.

**31** Hunwick 2003.

on Sufism in Africa, in addition to Rüdiger Seesemann's important work on Ibrahim Niassa and the Faydha Tijaniyya. A further example is Ousmane Kane's book on the intellectual history of Muslim communities in West Africa and how scholarship and knowledge are generated and negotiated. These publications confirm the fact that one cannot possibly cover all aspects (e.g. regionally, thematically, conceptually, historically) of studying Islam and Muslims in Africa (and elsewhere). Most scholars end up becoming specialists of one region, one country, or one movement. It is rare to find a scholar with specialization in Islam in Africa who has completed field research in more than two or three regions or countries as Roman Loimeier has. Furthermore, Roman Loimeier represents those scholars who are aware that interdisciplinary perspectives are necessary to produce results that are attentive to the complexities, nuances, and varieties of interactions characterizing processes of change in Muslim societies in Africa and beyond, and those scholars who demonstrate the connections between Muslims across the African continent and the larger Muslim world.<sup>32</sup>

## Processes of Change in Muslim Societies

Roman Loimeier's focus on change and processes of transformation has gradually become more and more important in his research. This section highlights its relevance. Whereas Africa is a well-studied region in Social and Cultural Anthropology, as mentioned above, this region was and still is of comparatively minor importance in the academic field of Islamic Studies, with the exception of North Africa, where the majority of the people are Muslims. The region of the Near and Middle East and North Africa have long been at the centre of research in Islamic history, culture, and traditions, but only a few anthropologists have carried out their research there, resulting in huge knowledge gaps in both disciplines about processes of change and mutual influences between the mentioned regions. Roman Loimeier filled the gap with his research on reform and modernization processes in African Muslim societies while integrating local and Islamic histories which connect Africa with the Near and Middle East. He thus deepened understandings of contemporary Muslim societies by making a comparative study on wider perspectives of change possible, as his last EU-funded project on mundane Islam and new forms of Muslim religiosity demonstrates.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Loimeier 2009; cf. Østebø 2022, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Sieveking 2020; Loimeier 2021; Loimeier 2022a; Loimeier 2022b; Föllmer et al. 2022.

The following will shed some light on the purpose and perspectives in the study of contemporary Muslim societies and modernization processes in rethinking the Anthropology of Islam.

Muslim-majority societies have in common that, over the course of centuries, they have been shaped by Islamic traditions and their various social, cultural, and political implications. Contact with other societies and cultures has always existed, e.g., through trade and migration, and has not been limited to colonial projects of expansion. However, the most important impact on change in Muslim societies came from modern Europe. This not only includes social, cultural, and political changes, but also changes in the self-understandings of Muslims in modern society and in Islamic traditions themselves.

Central factors for processes of change in Muslim-majority societies were the result of the introduction of new technology and knowledge from Europe at the beginning of the modern era, in the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even though Muslim societies adopted new technology from Europe and received ideas from the European Enlightenment, they nevertheless tried to resist European influence and colonial domination. They have found their own ways of reforming Islam and developing an Islamic modernity that is not simply a copy of European models. After a period of more or less successful reforms introduced by the ruling intellectual elite in the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European economic and cultural influences remained strong. Because of the desperate economic situation in many countries, there was a huge number of working migrants across India, the Mediterranean Sea, all the way to South Africa.

Over the course of time, the societies of the Near and Middle East and North Africa have adapted European knowledge and achievements to improve their economic situations. On the other hand, Muslim intellectuals and religious authorities have tried to diminish the influence of foreign colonial powers to finally become independent from them while at the same time maintaining their own religious and cultural values in order to develop a modern society. In many contexts, this went along with crucial social, cultural, political, and religious changes in those societies that made ongoing consideration of these identifying factors necessary. A new political awareness has found its form, for instance, in the development of national identities and the foundation of nation states. Such political changes and ideas of progress also went along with growing urbanization, a new fragmentation of Muslim societies, and the production of new cultural meanings by new intellectual elites who used new ways of communication and distribution of knowledge and information. References to cultural heritage were a good means of pointing out the uniqueness of certain nation states, to underline the progressive character of a society, and to create a new collective identity and national unit independent from the beliefs of its members.

After a period of secularization and modernization in many countries in the Muslim world, religion was revived as an opposing force against the established elites, norms, and values. The role of religion and law, the main structural elements of most Muslim-majority societies, was thus repeatedly negotiated in many contexts and continues to be a huge point of conflict in these societies. Processes of secularization and the revival of Islam, Islamism, and mundane Islam take turns. Whereas elites, intellectuals, and reform-oriented clergy were the driving forces of modernization in the past, nowadays, the dynamics of change come from within society and the everyday routines of ordinary people.<sup>34</sup> Traditional religious authorities have to compete with new institutionalized and individual actors empowered by social media networks, who wield political influence and exert a noticeable economic impact and strength. Religious history and values are reinterpreted, religious spaces are created by these new actors, and the transmission of religious knowledge is not limited to the traditional religious elite anymore. Religion has lost its importance for collective purposes while becoming an element of individual identification.

Change has also occurred as a result of the development of new educational systems and the education of women, thereby remarkably shifting women's participative role in society. Educated women have left the domestic sphere and become active members of society with creative potential. For instance, an increasing number of women have begun writing literary texts which are published in a growing number of newspapers across the region of the Near and Middle East and North Africa. Women have become editors of journals and newspapers, teachers, and healthcare professionals. Now, women are increasingly working in previously male-dominated professions, and even as religious scholars. They have begun to occupy the religious and political fields and continue to challenge patriarchal structures despite ongoing repressions and violence against them in many contexts. Even though women's social, economic, and political impact has been ignored by academic scholars for a long time, women have now become a subject and focus of study in many disciplines.

Similarly, in more recent times, the study of Muslim youth is regarded as crucial to understanding protest movements and processes of change in the region.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the wish for individual freedom in everyday life and a promising future, the dissident character of youth movements which challenge established authorities, traditional structures and values constitutes a further element of change in Muslim societies.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Bayat 2013.

<sup>35</sup> E.g. Khosravi 2008.

Islam and Muslim societies are no longer treated as the exotic ‘other’; they are rather seen as part of global society. In the instance of Muslim societies, the interdependences among religion, culture, politics, and society become obvious. Their study can contribute to an improved understanding of the dynamics of change at the local, regional, and global levels. Thus, anthropologists working in the Muslim world must often reconsider the religious implications of processes of change and, sometimes, methodologically transgress the established disciplinary field of Social and Cultural Anthropology to make these changes visible and comprehensible.

## The Volume’s Contributions

This volume contributes to the abovementioned aspects of rethinking the Anthropology of Islam and dynamics of change in Muslim societies in different ways. In the first part, the focus centres on general methodological approaches and perspectives in field research. Nikolaus Schareika’s contribution demonstrates how storytelling and conversation in everyday life within a group of nomadic people in Niger have an impact on the understanding of familial lineage as a mode of being. The role of quotidian communication in changes in religion and morality in Mombasa, Kenya, is demonstrated by Kai Kresse. Samuli Schielke reflects on his own experience as a researcher, and emphasizes the importance of the anthropologist as a private person and the jovial relationships he himself has with his local partners in Alexandria, Egypt. Finally, Astrid Bochow discusses the changes in social relationships as a consequence of the German state’s regulation policies during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second part is dedicated to changes in the field of religion that are perceived as permanent processes of maintaining tradition and negotiating new values and spaces. In the first section of this part, the changing role of spaces is a central feature of the contributions. In the first article, Hansjörg Dilger discusses the interreligious relationships and their interdependency with social status and morality at schools in the biased educational system in Tanzania. The creation of a ‘Muslim city’ through heritagization and the conflicting interests of the state and the local inhabitants is the subject of Patrick Desplat’s contribution on the city of Harar in Ethiopia. Georg Klute and Ghoumane Mohamed thematize the sacralization of space in the instance of the Isherifen in northern Niger and highlight the importance of mythical narratives for the preservation of the ecosystem. The demonstration of changing meaning of gardens and garden walls is the subject of Fritz Heinrich’s study.

In the second section of the second part, the contributions shift their focus to agency in the religious negotiation process. Robert Launay explains the shifts in norms of Islamic religiosity in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by concentrating on Islamic piety among women and youth in Korhogo, Côte d'Ivoire. The varied claims of Islamic knowledge and authority by Islamic scholars in Ghana's Asante region and their contributions to contestations in the *zongos* about what is or is not Islamic, as a central aspect of the social dynamics in these wards, are the subject of Benedikt Pontzen's article. Andrea Brigaglia explores the internal rift in the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya Sufi order in Nigeria, which originated in a personal, political, and religious conflict between two sons of the leading sheikh that ultimately became a trial for blasphemy. Focusing on the religious influencer Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī in Egypt, Lisa Maria Franke demonstrates the importance of alternative spiritual guidance in the digital age for attracting disciples. Seeking balance in one's life and one's belief are mutually dependant and can be an important source of inspiration for many believers.

The contributions in the third part of the volume are subsumed under the topic of social change. The first section of this part concentrates on the social and political aspects of change, and the search for identity through the framework of historical and cultural perspectives. In his contribution, Stefan Reichmuth shows that Weber's comparative urban studies and his reflections on the religious conduct of life fit with the sociocultural structure and development of social groups in Ilorin, Nigeria, particularly with regard to their ethical and economic outlooks. Ulrike Freitag gives a vivid glimpse into the everyday concerns of two entrepreneurs in Cairo, Egypt, in the 1920s which offers a unique perspective on trade vital for those concerned with the intellectual history and processes of reform in the Arab world. In his analysis of a Sudanese novel of the 1960s, Martin Riexinger demonstrates the interrelationship between Sudanese history and identity construction in relation to British colonial power, as well as Sudan's position vis-à-vis the more 'developed' Arab countries and the former's relationship with Sub-Saharan Africa. In her contribution about the 'Zanzibari' people in South Africa, Julia Koch Tshirangwana illustrates the centrality of religious identifications to efforts of claiming a position in the South African social structure. In her essay, Katja Föllmer analyses two popular social movement texts, highlighting the particularities and ambivalences of the recent protest movement in Iran in terms of individuality and collective identity in comparison to earlier movements.

The second section of the third part places its focus on gendered agency and discourses. The first contribution by Irene Schneider demonstrates in a detailed case study that the Palestinian judiciary system apparently denies the existence of 'honour' crimes and femicide, preferring a '*jinn* narrative' or a 'mental illness narrative' as explanations for the killing of women and the release of the accused

persons on bail. Katja Werthmann compares women's views of religious norms and their implications for their lives based on examples from two West African cities in Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Also in a comparative study, Muriel Gomez-Perez examines the lives of women in Senegal and Burkina Faso who have played a significant role in Hajj travel management and employed strategies in dealing with the state and various religious stakeholders. The analysis of discourses on women in Tunisia by Ina Khiary-Loch reveals the tension between Tunisia's desire to develop as a modern and progressive state based on a Western model, and its claim to be part of the Arab-Muslim world with regard to religiosity and the application of the *shari'a*. Laura Stauth concludes the section with a study on the intertwining of the public debate about the moral representation of women in social media and the everyday lives of working women as individual actors who transgress the state's efforts for a clear separation between the public and the private, the formal and the informal, and gender divisions in Egypt.

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of Social and Cultural Anthropology  
Göttingen who are not expressly named  
individually

All colleagues and friends of Roman Loimeier  
whom we were unable to reach for  
various reasons

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**Part I: Methodological Reflections on Social  
Practices and Cultural Productions of Meaning**





Nikolaus Schareika

# In the Event of the Lineage

## Research as a Mode of Being

One of the highly admirable character traits of Roman Loimeier is that he is absolutely unpretentious. His outstanding academic knowledge and intellectual authority across a wide spectrum of disciplines, countries, times, and topics would have entitled him to put on some of the airs and graces that flourish with relish in communities of experts. But he simply refuses to do so.

Far from accidental, I think, there is a link between style and knowledge. The oeuvre Roman has been building up over his career has been founded, it seems, on the unobtrusiveness by which he positions himself in time, space, movement, and sociality. His interpretation of being a researcher is not to impose himself upon an object of inquiry so that he can dissect it for scientific elucidation in a way he thinks best.

To Roman, research rather seems to be a complete mode of being. It is not divided and set aside from other existential necessities like walking, traveling, reading, observing, listening, conversing, or taking a rest. These activities are amalgamated into one form of being in the world and they are predicated on a triplet of continual curiosity, search for findings, and a lust for intellectual engagement with such findings. This kind of research does not try to gain mastery over its alleged *objects* of inquiry but aligns itself with all the things, environments, people, deeds, misdeeds, events, structures, words, symbols, writings, and ideas that make history keep going. These are treated by Roman as precious findings. Such findings must be given the room to express themselves, but they also must be arranged into an order that makes them speak to each other in a meaningful way. When they do so, it is called knowledge.

The most precious findings are those that elude the researcher. When it happens that they come out of the shadows, Roman is ready to give them a most prominent place, even if it requires changing the whole order that he has laboriously constructed for the findings that are already captured in his notebook; the researcher always remains subservient to the findings, not the other way around.

In this kind of research then, history is the star; not its scholar whose role it is to stay behind, remain modest, and do anything to make this star look fascinating and multifaceted, but by no means beautiful. The most fitting dress for history's appearance is the text, preferably a long or book-length one that starts as a successively growing, changing manuscript, allows for multiple revisions and referencing alterations, is multi-threaded to interweave findings of different nature

(from ecological facts to expressions of meaning), and finally covers all areas of interest. Most importantly, it is linear, and thus replicates the form of chronology and historicity that are the key categories through which Roman engages with an immense quantity and multiplicity of findings, ultimately arranging them into books of knowledge. One of his latest exemplars is a ‘biography’ of the discipline of social anthropology, where he explicitly states: “Theory is the result and not the starting point of the account.”<sup>1</sup>

The implicit epistemological proposition in this approach is that sequences of events entail methodological resources for their very explication. These resources can be directly tapped by the researcher; sequentiality itself allows the researcher to explain, for instance event two as coming out of event one and becoming one of the conditions in event three without determining the latter completely.

## Cultural Meaning and the Social Practice of Talking

The discovery of cultural variety and its systematic integration into scientific thinking through the discipline of social anthropology, though, have complicated the study of social events to a great extent. What people *do* with and towards each other and what *kinds* of things or arrangements they create are far from being easily translated from these people’s acts and utterances into the ‘findings’ of a researcher and from there to other scholars. How this can happen is a question in itself, and as such a major working area of social anthropology. Bronislaw Malinowski has described social anthropology’s goal in his well-known words as “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world.”<sup>2</sup> Remarkable as it is for the time,<sup>3</sup> this line of methodological guidance has the potential to heavily misguide the researcher. In my view, anthropology’s goal should not simply be to give an account of culturally different points of view, but to demonstrate how meaning-making, combined and amalgamated with other activities, enters into the continual production of social reality, i.e., into social practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Loimeier 2021, 11. My translation from German original: “Theorie ist das Ergebnis und nicht Ausgangspunkt der Darstellung.”

<sup>2</sup> Malinowski 1922, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Roman rightfully cautions his readers not to ignore the historic context of scientific ideas when engaging them critically; Loimeier 2021, 8.

Rather than an attribute of a ‘native’ – or let us say, a social person –, a point of view should be seen as the attribute of some particular social project this person is pursuing; there is no need for a point of view to be fixed, singular, or stable within a person or even a group of people. Its mode of existence is the continuous flow of social interaction or history that is marked by sequentiality. Trying to ‘grasp’ a person’s point of view, therefore is like trying to catch and stuff songbirds in order to study their courtship dance. The alternative is to study ‘the course events take’ or even the acts that, in a sequence of acts, compose an event.<sup>4</sup>

While in this paper I am moving towards a microscopic episode of social life, the basic methodological tenet here is shared with the approach Roman applies to units of analysis on a larger scale. Rather than seeking some essential meaning of a phenomenon by successfully ‘grasping’ it, the idea is to secure a sequentially-organized empirical reality in maximal autonomy from the researcher’s impulse to represent it according to his or her goals. The method towards this goal is to show how acts or events within sequences of acts or events relate to each other. Their meaning, then, is discovered as and through each next act or event (the reaction) that responds to what it was that has addressed it. Such an approach highlights the more passive role of observing without intervening over the more active role of asking questions that, by necessity, make a researcher’s ideas – expressed through the questions – the impulses to an allegedly other’s thought.<sup>5</sup>

The attempt to reduce the researcher’s impact on what is gathered as data, resonates with anthropology’s epistemological as well as ethical concerns with ethnocentrism in general. Even if the stance of the observer may in itself be a particular cultural form and technique that raises concerns of imbalanced power, privilege, and colonial attitude, it helps to minimize the researcher’s chance to inadvertently impose culturally preconceived frames of interpretation upon a sequence of social interactions. This will only work, however, when the researcher is willing to let the observations speak to each other, and, most importantly, allow inconsistencies to come through clearly even at the cost of reopening conclusions whose closure has already consumed a lot of time and effort.

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<sup>4</sup> Dresch 1986; see also Evens and Handelman 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Holstein and Gubrium 2004, 141. This methodological idea is most forcefully stated and pursued in conversation analysis following the work of Harvey Sacks. See e.g., Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974; ten Have 2007.

## The Wodaabe Loquacious Lineage System (that is also segmentary)

Without claiming to completely master this approach but nevertheless subscribing to its goals of reducing ethnocentrism, I would like to focus on one of Abu-Lughod's "three central zones of theorizing within Middle East anthropology: segmentation, the harem, and Islam."<sup>6</sup> I will look at it using the scale of a single morning's everyday conversation within a group of nomadic people in Niger. The goal is to study segmentation, lineage, and family not as a social framework within which life is organized, but as a mode of being that is realized in and through social acts that sequentially and meaningfully build upon each other in people's everyday pursuit of life. A characteristic feature of everyday conversation in the group studied is non-fictional storytelling, a speech event that provides for two layers of analysis within the recorded ethnographic material.<sup>7</sup> At the first level there is the observed sequence of verbal interactions consisting of 'speech situations,' 'speech events,' 'speech acts,' and 'turns'.<sup>8</sup> 'Telling a story' is only one form of a verbal contribution within a conversation and should be seen as part of the whole situation and in relation to other contributions. At the second level there is the content of the story that itself reports an event or a series of events and is, in the case of non-fictional narration, generally claimed to be true by the narrator. Even if this claim of truth cannot be checked or would possibly be considered doubtful, the story may open up important insights into the social practices of the group, as it contains the meanings the storyteller wishes to make relevant to his audience in the overall conversation at hand.

The Wodaabe are highly mobile pastoral nomads living in the arid savannah lands of Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad. They are part of the Fulani societies that extend over most of West and parts of Central Africa. In the anthropological literature they are known by the work of Marguerite Dupire, Derrick Stenning and Angelo Maliki Bonfiglioli.<sup>9</sup> The Wodaabe specialize in the keeping of Zebu cattle herds. They form highly flexible, independently-deciding family house-

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<sup>6</sup> Abu-Lughod 1989, 280.

<sup>7</sup> Storytelling, including that about the self, has received a great deal of attention in social anthropology. Particularly important, here, is the dissolution of a distinction between a non-discursive reality (events or a life that are later told) and its narration within a story. Narrative practice is rather shown to be constitutive of social practice. See e.g. Bruner 1991; Jackson 2013; Ochs and Capps 1996; Schiffrin 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Duranti 1997; Hymes 1962.

<sup>9</sup> Dupire 1996; Stenning 1959; Bonfiglioli 1988.

holds (*wuro*) that stay in the bush (*ladde*) in order to avoid farmer settlements and fields. In south-eastern Niger, these households do not have huts or tents and own minimal equipment. During the rainy season from June to September, families and herds may move every day, and sometimes even at night when considered necessary for the herd's wellbeing. During the dry season, they gather around pastoral wells and shift camp about every ten days using the surrounding pastures.<sup>10</sup>

While the family household is a basic social institution, many factors make higher levels of social integration important. Protection of animal property and the family members' well-being, social control of group members, and the sharing of information on herding conditions, among others, are requirements making cooperation within more inclusive groups a crucial concern to the Wodaaɓe. Just as with many pastoral nomads, patrilineages and clans are highly relevant forms for social organization.<sup>11</sup>

Fulani, and specifically Wodaaɓe people are often treated by scholars as belonging to the world of African pastoralism. However, their combined institutions of hierarchically-nested (segmentary) patrilineages and patrilineal parallel cousin marriages (arranged during early childhood between the eventual marriage partners) suggest that they may well contribute to the prominent theme of segmentation in the study of Middle Eastern rural, tribal, and pastoral societies.<sup>12</sup> To this end, I would avoid debating at a high level of abstraction – i.e., from outside a detailed documentation of actual social practice – whether the segmentary lineage is the dominant social structure in Wodaaɓe society, or an ideology that does not match the social reality it tries to implement. My approach is rather bottom-up: it starts with a recording of naturally-occurring discourse as it is part of the everyday routines of Wodaaɓe social life, and then goes through many hours of transcription and efforts in understanding what is said, referred to, implicated, what is possibly meant, and, finally, what is socially done and achieved in and through such conversation. There is one unfortunate constraint built into this procedure. Limitations of space and most readers' time do not allow for printing the Fulfulde transcript and the annotations necessary for making it usable for a wider audience here. Therefore, I summarize the record, knowing that a full transcript would offer more opportunities for scientific critique and alternative readings.

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<sup>10</sup> Schareika 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Dupire 1996; Schareika 2010a; Schareika 2010b.

<sup>12</sup> Abu-Lughod 1989; Behnke 1980; Caton 1987; Dresch 1986; Dresch 1988; Lindholm 1986; Peters 1967.

## The Conversation

On the morning of 9 March 2004, an elder named Mobappa is sitting together with a couple of youngsters in the family camp (*wuro*) of Haamida: Degi and Muusa are sons of Haamida, and Eeli who is also present, is one of their cousins.<sup>13</sup> Later on, Haamida joins the group. The camp is situated in the plains of south-eastern Niger between the shores of Lake Chad and the town of Kabélawa. The Wodaabe call their environment of grass and brush savannah *ladde*, as opposed to populated agglomerations such as villages, or *si'ire*.<sup>14</sup> The young men are preparing tea in their small pots and passing around small glasses so that everybody gets a share of the sweet, aromatic drink. There is an almost symbiotic relation between the teapot (*baraaru*) on the stove (*banngal*) and the conversation of men sitting in a circle around it. One of these activities initiates and sustains the other. The verb *weeta* describes the spending of the morning hours engaged in some kind of activity. Men, particularly elders, routinely spend their mornings sitting together and talking; the same goes for the noon and afternoon hours and also for the evening hours (these activities are called *nyalla*, *yinta* and *hiira* respectively). Describing Wodaabe men as talkative amounts to an understatement; the study of conversation as a constitutive of social reality seems to fall perfectly into place in this environment of nomadic lineage life.<sup>15</sup>

The absence of women from this scene is a normality among the Wodaabe. It marks a clear separation of men and women in day-to-day routines. Women might appear in front of the sitting men in order to bring water and food or greet visitors and engage in a short conversation. Otherwise, women spend the day in another part of the camp (the area called *suudu*). To maintain this order and reserve, women often rather send a child to notify their husbands of this or that matter. Now, let's listen in on one of innumerable morning conversations from the position of such a child or, even better, of the tea pot, and thereby observe, with minimal interference by the researcher, in the event. Here is the summary:

(1) Mobappa openly talks about things that went wrong in his life and presents these as negative, but also entertaining examples to give some lessons to his nephews. His direct and somewhat vulgar narration gives important insights into family dynamics and morale among the Wodaabe.

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<sup>13</sup> All names have been replaced by pseudonyms based on first names commonly used by the Wodaabe.

<sup>14</sup> Schareika 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Schareika 2007.

(2) The first thing that went wrong for Mobappa was a cow. He recounts that his paternal uncle had once reciprocated a cow (c1) given to him as a loan animal with a heifer (c2) by giving it (c2) to Mobappa's mother. She promised the heifer (c2) to him, Mobappa, her first son, but then took the heifer back from him to give it her second son, Riskuwa, who then sold the animal. Later, in a transaction that at first sight had nothing to do with this incident, Mobappa gave a cow (c3) as a loan animal to a certain Bello and subsequently bestowed that cow's male calf (b1) upon Bello. Bello sold the male calf (b1) born by the cow (c3), and then bought another cow (c4) named Deelee using the money gained by the sale of the bull (b1). Bello eventually gave this cow Deelee (c4) as a loan animal to Riskuwa. Mobappa reasons that Deelee (c4) and her progeny (c5-n) originated from the bull (b1) that he had bestowed upon Bello, who then sold the bull, and more significantly, from this bull's mother (c3), that Mobappa had given to Bello as a loan animal from the herd of cattle allocated to his (Mobappa's) wife. Since Mobappa's mother took back the cow (c2) she had promised him to give it to her second son Riskuwa, Mobappa is particularly disgruntled that a further animal from his herd (c3), through Bello found its way into Riskuwa's herd. This is, Mobappa explains, why he prevented Riskuwa from removing the pack oxen from their mother's legacy when she died. Mobappa remarks that he told his brother, directly to his face, that it was with his (Mobappa's) property that he (Riskuwa) had built his family.

(3) Mobappa then dwells on the relationship between his mother and his wife, and more generally between mothers and their daughters-in-law. He tells the listening youngsters that a man must protect his wife against the resentments of his mother. He states that a mother has no love for her son's wife. A mother would even lie and conspire against her daughter-in-law as a way of trying to turn her son against his wife. Mobappa indirectly explains why it must be this way. In the past, when a mother was herself of marriage age, it was through the allocation of dairy and pack animals that she was brought into her husband's camp. Being allocated these animals meant that the wealth and importance of her mother-in-law, who had formerly held these animals under her exclusive control, was reduced. Now, having advanced herself in the position of mother-in-law, when facing the same situation, she tries to avoid it. However, Mobappa resonates, as any incoming wife and daughter-in-law secures her position in the family camp by lowering that of her mother-in-law, the latter has no right to sabotage this eternal course of the family cycle when her own daughter-in-law arrives to eventually take her place.

(4) The story implicitly explains why Mobappa's mother took the previously-mentioned cow away from Mobappa and gave it to her second son Riskuwa. In



doing so she allocated the animal to a son who did not yet have a wife, and whose animals therefore were still under her control.

(5) While the youngsters interject with short remarks or questions to clarify their understanding, Mobappa tells them how his misery evolved. To escape his mother's domineering, he left the family leaving most of his cattle behind, taking only ten animals that were not part of the family herd but were loan animals with him. He joined his father-in-law for a while, but then returned (his father-in-law is also Mobappa's paternal uncle, the father of his wife). During the following rainy season, Mobappa's mother incited him against his wife by claiming that young men would spend the night next to his home when he was away (this particular detail elicits a mixture of amused, stunned commenting from the listening youngsters). Upon this grave accusation, Mobappa beat his wife, who in response fled into secondary marriage (*te'egal*) with a man from the opposing Jijjiiru clan.

(6) Using particularly frivolous wording, Mobappa hints at his sexually unpleasant situation after his wife's departure. He complains that his mother only brought promiscuous, ill, or crippled marriage candidates for him. He concludes that a man should never believe in his mother's talk about his wife. Without a wife, he explains, he will end up as a good-for-nothing and that every man should guard his wife well. A man should never allow himself to drive away a wife that is as strong as a young gazelle.

(7) Concluding that it is the mothers who own the homestead (*wuro*), Mobappa brings up as confirmation of his analysis the recent case of the young men's patrilateral cousin Juuri and his wife Kaye, the latter a patrilateral parallel cousin of Juuri as well as of Degi and Muusa. Mobappa rhetorically asks where one could see the love that Juuri's mother Inna had for her son. There was none, he asserts, as she did not allocate a single cow to Kaye. Thus, Mobappa says, Inna is about to break up the marriage and the homestead of Juuri and Kaye. The statement brings up the information provided by the young men that Kaye leaving her husband, at least temporarily, has stored her packed homestead in the village of Kinshayinndi where she has become pregnant. This raises the question of how Juuri would accept her to come back. Degi reports that Juuri had asked his cousin to take Kaye as a wife, thus showing his contempt for her. This incites the boys to disdain Kaye, saying that whoever married her would incur the loss of a sheep (the one given for the marriage of a repudiated wife); they say they would rather offer a gift to not be offered to marry her. At this point Mobappa reiterates his earlier injunction that a man must not let his wife go. He maintains that Juuri's mother Inna and his second wife, with whom Kaye was quarrelling, were lying to him. Even when Kaye left him, she still was his wife from the marriage arranged by his paternal family. Acknowledging the young men's view on Kaye's character

as combative, Mobappa excuses her by referring to her father, Ardo Bammo, who had passed this unpleasant trait on to her.

(8) Mobappa ends this last argument by giving an example of Ardo Bammo's short-tempered appearance. In some dispute, Bammo, who is a local chief (*ardo*), had said he would take off his turban (which is worn by every adult male, but is also a sign of chiefly position) to fight. This remark about Ardo Bammo's character initiates a complete shift in topic of the conversation. Laughing, the young men comment on their paternal uncle Ardo Bammo's unrestrained attitude and declare that, by fighting, Bammo would turn into a follower (instead of being a leader). From there, Degi mentions an incident that shows his uncle's unorthodox spirit in another light. Bammo had spent the day doing writing exercises using paper and a model of his name that he had requested from me (N. Sch.). The group comments, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, about whether Bammo, is becoming an intellectual (*muuseejo* derived from French *Monsieur*) and if so, what then remains of the world as they, the Wodaaɓe, know it.

## Interpretation of the Conversation

(1) The scenery of the casual morning talk recounted above sits on a structure of three intersecting axes that are instrumental to its course. Mobappa is visiting the camp of Haamida. As a guest, he is seated on a mat and served water, tea, and food. He is not supposed to do anything else besides sit and talk. He brings news and topics to discuss, but he will also listen to what the members and other guests of the household have to say. Haamida is required, according to Wodaaɓe etiquette, to entertain his guest, but he must also see to it that the guest is well accommodated. At the same time, Haamida must also manage daily routines such as moving his herd to morning pasture. Luckily Mobappa is not left alone as Haamida's sons and nephew are there. Mobappa is a patrilateral second cousin of Haamida. The two are thus *bibbe baaba'en*, the 'sons of the fathers' and the political core of the lineage. Accordingly, Mobappa is a paternal uncle (*bappa*) of Haamida's sons and he is a maternal uncle of Eeli (*kaawu*). Mobappa is also an elder (*makeljo*) whereas his nephews are young men (*kaye'en*, sg. *kayeejo*). The latter thus owe their uncle respect, which *inter alia* shows in their reserved and silent demeanor. Mobappa, by contrast, is free to express himself vis-à-vis his nephews; his flashes of obscene wording demonstrate how irresistibly he penetrates the dangerous territory of the unspeakable.

As an uncle, however he uses his life experience and his courage to lay it bare in blunt, partly shocking style, in the service of his lineage. The teaching and

advising of the young men reflected in his contributions to the talk is part of the Wodaabe lineage order where elders show concern and sympathy for the younger generation. Uncles (and also aunts) may more easily approach youth than their fathers and mothers, particularly with regard to the challenges of married life, as the relationship between parent and child in Wodaabe culture is largely patterned by a mutual sense of shame (*semtudum*). Why Mobappa puts his lesson to his nephews into a story about himself, rather than giving them direct council, will be explained a bit later, it has to do with how the lineage works.

(2) The first thing we can observe from Mobappa's account is that in Wodaabe society – as in many pastoral societies – managing social relations among humans coincides with managing herd animals. These cattle-based relations are forged within and through the same system of meaning upon which the lineage structure rests. The meaning of what Mobappa's mother does with the cow she receives from *her brother* does not lie in the act *per se*, but in the fact that the cow is taken away from *her first son* in order to be given to *her second son*. This happens within the social space of the *wuro* where the two brothers, Mobappa and Riskuwa, live next to their father. Mobappa's wife has arrived in her husband's paternal family household and established her conjugal unit (*suudu*) there. Part of her marriage arrangement is that there are cows in the family herd allocated to her for milking (*damaaji*). Moreover, the offspring of these cattle will become the property of her children. The lineage structure and values thus form a blueprint for transactions in rights of animal ownership. At the same time, however, it is by engaging in such transactions that people create and sustain kinship ties with each other. The lineage, therefore, is not an ideology, but a practical reference and a system of meaning – a “structuring structure” in Giddens' terms<sup>16</sup> – by which actors conceive of and evaluate what they and others do. The innumerable transactions in partial or full rights to ownership of animals, and the expectations of such transactions to happen in the future, thus result in a web of social relations, orientations, and meanings that become an effective social force.

Mobappa's story makes it clear that in following the logic of the lineage, people are by no means producing linear outcomes. Their situation is rather ambiguous, indeterminate, and full of choices. Mobappa's mother allocates a cow as a way of establishing a link between born and not yet born males within the order of the lineage. In doing so, she affects opposition between the closest possible agnates, the brothers that are her own sons. The stake in this conflict between brothers is not simply the abstract value of a cow but the fact – meaning-

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<sup>16</sup> Giddens 1979.

ful to Mobappa in terms of the logic of the lineage – that a cow leaves his family herd (*dudal*) in order to be used not to foster the sons not yet born there, but to foster them in the family of his brother Riskuwa.

With regard to the second cow coming into Riskuwa's *dudal*, one can see the significance of the lineage in the social practice of meaning-making. The cow in question, Deele, is purchased from the market. Coming from no Wodaabe *dudal*, Deele has no lineage identity whatsoever. But Mobappa creates a concept akin to what Hutchinson has termed 'money cattle' in Nuer exchange practice, i.e., cash that replaces living animals in order to represent the social value of lineage cattle.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Mobappa can argue that the bull born to a heifer from his *dudal*, even after being sold in the market, confers, through the money received for it, its lineage identity on some other cow bought in the market: the one named Deele.

There is notable female agency in Mobappa's story. After all it is a woman who allocates a cow to a man. While this sentence seems to be unproblematically true, it is not fully accurate. The person allocating the cow is not acting in her capacity as a woman, but as a mother of sons in one lineage and a sister of brothers in another. Her agency stems from the fact that she is not an isolated wife to a husband, but a vital node to her brothers and her sons within the entire lineage structure; cattle can come through this node as we have seen in the fortunate case of Riskuwa. While female agency arises from this source of lineage relations, it is also contained by it. It is in Mobappa's mother's interest to build a good relationship with her son who can advocate her position within the family. Allocating a cow to a son's family herd rather than to someone else – e.g., a daughter – is a particularly good way for a woman to strengthen her position in the family household.

**(3, 4)** While there is a notably dualist order of gender generically separating dominating males from subservient females who “stay in the behind” (the noun *debbo/rewbe* for woman is derived from the verb *rewa* to follow/ to be behind), it becomes clear that this generic distinction is not specific enough for much of Wodaabe social practice. Thus, people rather talk of “wives,” “daughters,” “daughters-in-law,” “mothers,” “mothers-in-law” when engaging in social affairs hinting at the fact that a person is not identified by individual properties or attributes, but as a member of a lineage and a family. In the particular case above, a man – Mobappa – sees his situation as a household head (*jawmu wuro*) defined by the interests and agency that come with the structural positions of mother, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, and wife. He makes it clear that he is not able

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<sup>17</sup> Hutchinson 1996, 87–88.

to command the two people holding these statuses. To him, they are his mother and his wife. However, his fortune is bound to how well the two comply with the position they are given in society. His mother and mother-in-law of his wife is expected to subordinate herself and her individual ambitions to the life force and order of lineage and family development which demands that she accept the fact that her son's wife will take over command of the dairy and pack animals in order to care for the next generation (her grandchildren), and hence the lineage's future.

A mother letting her daughter-in-law take control of the dairy cattle is a single thread in the network of the day-to-day social practice, but it demonstrates the inextricable unity of managing cattle and organizing society through a status system and a conception of the future called lineage. Human agency, therefore, is bound to cattle as social acts that are meaningful, shape the composition of groups and entail the allocation of rights to animals. The story shows that the system is inherently contradictory in the sense that, according to Mobappa, mothers regularly oppose their daughters-in-law when the life cycle has advanced to the point where the former are expected to lessen their control over the family herd.

(5, 7) The conflict can even get to the point where it damages viable elements of the lineage and family structure; namely, the relationship between paternal family and son which is the nucleus of the lineage, but also between husband and wife which is the nucleus of the family and prerequisite to the lineage. Mobappa faces the challenge of conciliating the two basic social requirements of becoming an adult male, a household head and a lineage mate; and he fails. He neglects the first requirement by leaving his paternal family and joining his father-in-law in order to save his marriage, the second requirement. Doing this, however, means that he can bring along only cattle that he controls by individual initiative, not those forming the core of the *dudal* (the cattle herd associated with family and lineage) that have been bestowed upon him since his birth through the channels of the lineage. He needs the cattle of the *dudal* in order to meaningfully act as the person he wants and needs to be in Wodaaße lineage society. These cattle embody, through their history of intergenerational transmission, the family and lineage identity that Mobappa will confer upon his own children by transferring rights in these same animals. While remedying the issue of his non-compliant mother, Mobappa's position in his father-in-law's camp is thus also inherently contradictory. Consequently, he returns to his paternal family, where he finds his mother.

Whatever esteem anthropologists may attach to their lineage theories, it seems safe to say that mothers of lineage men will still know better. Mobappa's mother, in any case, knocks him out with a combination of judo tactics and her

knowledge of how lineage men tick. She knows that spreading rumours that his wife is receiving male visitors when Mobappa is out and about, will make his lineage thinking directly trigger two concerns: first, the newborns of his wife that he acknowledges and makes *his* children through the ritual use and transmission of lineage cattle<sup>18</sup> are additionally bestowed with the rumour and stigma of having potentially been fathered by another man. The use of lineage cattle would make them his children, and therefore his descendants. However, there would forever be a “but” uttered in conversations like the one he is entertaining himself and his nephews with, even decades later. Second, Mobappa also has to fear that his reputation within his community of lineage and his peers will be damaged, and his case will become an object of embarrassing and shameful talk. He would be seen as a “weak” man who has lost control over his wife, and therefore over his life. Interestingly, one can witness the moral judgement the young Mobappa faces in the story in the reaction of his nephews, and to the similar case of Kaye that the old storytelling Mobappa brings up in support of his assertion that mothers inflict harm on their sons by ousting their daughters-in-law (in 7). The young men overlook Mobappa’s criticism of Kaye’s mother-in-law Inna, but one-sidedly dwell on devaluating Kaye as a wife because she has left her husband, Juuri, for another man in town whose child she now carries.

As a consequence of his mother’s rumours, Mobappa tries to discipline his allegedly misbehaving wife by beating her. However, the beaten and mistrusted wife also invokes the significance of lineage, and leaves Mobappa who then, as the head of the household, not only loses control of the homestead, but his wife altogether. She flees into a second marriage with a man from the opposing clan, the Jijjiiru. It is a regular occurrence in Wodaabe society that an unhappy wife who has been endogamously married within her lineage may try to flee into the alternative social universe of an opposing clan. It is here that she would gain effective protection from a husband and his lineage peers who would not recognize her right to separate and who would vigorously try to bring her back. This husband and his lineage would insist on a claim to that marriage that once had been created through ritual use and transferal of their cattle.<sup>19</sup> Among the things a wife can do in such a situation where her husband does not want let her go is to make use of the segmentary lineage structure and find a new life where the strengths and interests of an opposing clan and a new (counter) husband render those of the former non-enforceable.

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18 Cf. Schareika 2010b.

19 Schareika 2007; Schareika 2010b.

(6) Having described his behaviour towards his wife and, I assume, foreseeing its approval by his nephews to whom he is delivering the story, Mobappa concludes by denouncing his very behaviour as a foolish way into misery. His sexual life ends, alternative marriage candidates are poor comparisons to the wife he had before, and without a wife he is not able to run the sort of household (*wuro*) that is key to Wodaaɓe social life. Hence, he finds himself set at the fringe of the community of agnates. On the one hand, it may seem that disciplining his wife has demonstrated his morally strong character, but in reality, this is silly self-deception. Mothers lie, according to Mobappa, and cast a damning light on their daughters-in-law in order to advance their interests. A prudent man protects his wife from such allegations and understands that the marriage arranged for him by his paternal family is too valuable to be easily dismissed.

The importance of the lineage not only resonates within Mobappa's story, but also in the speech situation<sup>20</sup> as whole. Mobappa uses the story of his failure in order to instruct his nephews who are on the verge of living together with their wives (who have been betrothed since shortly after birth) within the homesteads of their fathers and mothers. Two points are notable here. First, the elder Mobappa is addressing his nephews as both a paternal (*bappa*) and maternal (*kaawu*) uncle. In doing this, he assumes the role within the order of the lineage, where a group of agnates takes on the task of contributing as *bappa'en* to the formation of the next male generation in their lineage. As noted, because the relationship between a father and his own offspring is marked by the institution and feelings of shame (*semtudum*), it is left to others to breach topics that are not easily discussed between father and children. Group conversations, moreover, enable speakers to address a general audience rather than one specific individual and thus avoid directness and evocation of annoyance or embarrassment. In the case at hand, the Wodaaɓe lineage presents itself in the elder and uncle Mobappa, who dominates the discussion and uses obscene language, whereas the young men listen, and would not dare using obscene language in the presence of lineage elders.

Second, right to talk is differentially divided along generational lines; the elder Mobappa is mainly speaker, his nephews are mainly listeners. At the same time, it is notable that Mobappa neither addresses nor educates his nephews directly. I have observed this feature of talk on many other occasions and see it as a feature of the segmentary lineage order.<sup>21</sup> Every man is simultaneously considered to be part of a seamless unity of agnates and a node of separation,

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<sup>20</sup> Hymes 1962.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., Schareika 2014.

autonomy, and responsibility. An individual, therefore, does not obey another individual within a hierarchy of personal superiority and subordination. Rather, the individual bows to the collectivity of the lineage which is expressed in sessions of talk among its members. These sessions of talk often include stories about factual events that lead to generalizing statements about what is right and wrong. Authority is thus located in the collective of the lineage and not in an individual person, such as an uncle. This indirect approach<sup>22</sup> grants each male individual the cognitive capacity to understand such lessons and the freedom to implement their message in his own life. It also assigns to him, of course, the responsibility and accountability for his own actions which are subjected to constant evaluation by his lineage's elders in their rounds of discussions that crave for stories just as their teapots crave for sugar.

The social category of 'young wife' (not women generally and not every wife) seems to be rated within a different image of human being by the conversing men than that of 'male lineage member.' Mobappa admits that beating his wife has not worked out well for him. He also places the blame for this action on his mother who viciously manipulates him. However, nobody questions in principle the proposition of a husband disciplining, and to this end, possibly beating his wife. The latter may be seen as contradicting ideals of reserve and self-control, the loss of which indicate the husband's failure to run his homestead and marriage wisely; it may also be seen as not particularly clever as it induces wives to flee into secondary marriages in opposing clans. But what shines through is that in this case, men apply a different concept of the person than that of the responsible male individual. It seems that with regard to wives, direct command and disciplinary action correspond to men's refusal to treat them as free and fully autonomous subjects.

Thus, men tend to interpret their wives' behaviour as resulting from the action of two groups of men competing for wives in segmentary opposition rather than from these women's own expressions of will. The husband and his agnates try to guard and keep them in their place as mothers of the lineage's future generation. The young men from opposing clans try to seduce and wrest young women away (*te'eta*) from their present husbands (the ones betrothed to them at birth, who are in many cases their patrilineal parallel cousins). When the latter succeed, the former call the wives they have failed to guard sufficiently, "flown-away guinea fowls" (*be mbadi jaawle*). Successful seducers by contrast, praise and are praised by their lineage mates for the power of their charms and medicines (*maagani*) that incapacitate the of power of resistance in the other clans' wives.

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22 Cf. Myers and Brenneis 1984, 11–12.



The behaviour of young wives is thus rather seen by the men as an expression of the strength of the lineage males to control them, and not of the wives' agency. Mobappa, admits his tragic failure with regard to treating his wife badly, but in doing so he also reduces her subjectivity to a minimum. She runs away because she is beaten. Mobappa does not consider the possibility that his wife has left him out of her own volition and desire for something else. While Mobappa sees his wife as a "strong gazelle" (*meena*) that he must guard well, his mother enjoys the admittedly dubious privilege of having personality and agency. She is presented as self-serving, insidious, unfair and maliciously executing a plan that is beyond young Mobappa's cognitive capacity.

When the talk turns to the case of Kaye, who has left her patrilateral parallel cousin and husband Juuri, she, too, is discussed from the perspective of property and control that minimizes the idea of her being a subject of agency. She is offered by her husband to be taken as a wife by one of his cousins, considered a property of low value (not even worth a sheep), and she is attributed a sort of character (combative) that puts her outside sense-driven social intercourse. The remark that she has become pregnant in the Kinshayindi village implies that she is in a relationship with a man from outside the Wodaaße ethnic group. The young men find this so scandalous and revolting that they consider Kaye, their own cousin, unmarriageable and thus effectively excluded from the Wodaaße community. Their judgement is an expression of the segmentary lineage order at its utmost border. It is common practice among the Wodaaße to accept marriage with a woman who is pregnant or already has a baby from where she comes within the Wodaaße ethnic group, particularly from an opposing clan, but not from outside it.

Mobappa, however, relating to his own failed marriage life, draws an entirely different conclusion for his nephews. This does not mean, however, that he deviates from treating Kaye having, as a young wife, minimal agency. His emphasis is on Inna, Kaye's mother-in-law, who just as his own mother, works against her son's marriage by deploying the same strategies. He stresses the fact that Kaye has been given to Juuri by the latter's paternal family. From this perspective, Kaye is but a node in the larger scheme of things, the lineage, and Juuri shall act accordingly by guarding her well. Ironically, Mobappa defends Kaye against the young men's criticisms of her combative character by not even conceding such a personal character trait in a realm that is under her control and responsibility. It is something she inherited from her father.

**(8)** When Mobappa arrives at this point in the conversation, we see an easygoing change of topic. What comes in handy as an argument – Ardo Bammo being responsible for his daughter's character – all of a sudden turns into a conversational force of its own and seizes the imagination of the speakers through a chain

of association. However, they remain focused on the theme of an individual's lack of self-control (starting to fight instead of prevailing through verbal dispute) and non-compliance with orthodox standards of behaviour (as in the case of Ardo Bammo trying to write on paper) that are seen as a necessity for upholding the sensible and dignified social intercourse among males within the lineage. The value of this type of social conduct, and the flagrancy of not adhering to it, are reinforced by the implied message that noncompliance results from a basic deficiency in personal character, namely being irascible by nature (as Ardo Bammo). It is notable that this kind of evaluative talk about a non-present lineage member is a major form of social control for a lineage of equals. In conformity with Bloch's ideas, it is the general form of the talk more than its particular substance that executes its political working here.<sup>23</sup> Its socially disciplining message does not simply reside in the content of a moral speech, directed towards somebody, but in the structure of the whole performance. If you do not want to be the subject of gossip and ridiculed even as you are gossiping and ridiculing someone who is not present, do not transgress the lines of morally acceptable conduct! In acting as speakers, Wodaaɓe men thus constantly produce the limits for the ways they dare to act.

Let us leave without comment at this point that our speakers are incensed by Ardo Bammo's admiration of my efforts at taking ethnographic notes, viewing it as a prelude to the end of Wodaaɓe pastoralism and lineage life.

## Conclusion

If somebody asked me, "Where have all the lineages gone?,"<sup>24</sup> I would point to the social practice of talking. In the event of a morning conversation, of storytelling, gossiping, chatting, advising, and instructing (as within the content of telling stories) we see that the lineage is a practical institution, a source of meaning, a structure of relations, and a force of control relevant to Wodaaɓe social practice. A lineage is simultaneously a workshop, a workpiece, a working tool, and a product of its application. In using lineage as a means of agency, people turn themselves into its object and consequently feel pressures that come from no easily discernible source of power but from a constantly moving, and re-sorting collectivity that manifests itself in a myriad of ephemeral events like the morning

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<sup>23</sup> Bloch 1975.

<sup>24</sup> Verdon 1982.

round of discussion presented here. The effective social force that members of lineage society simultaneously create and undergo, does not spring simply from a formulaic principle of opposition of descent groups. It results from a multiplicity of processes of attraction and repulse among people that, using the repertoire of meanings of the lineage, go about producing life materially and socially.

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Kai Kresse

# Notes Toward a *Baraza* Sociology ...

## Introduction

Roman Loimeier's article "Sit local, think global..." on the Swahili *baraza* in Zanzibar was, and still is, a refreshing read that made a range of important programmatic points about how thinking with the *baraza* in mind can enrich and stimulate our thinking about society and human sociality more generally.<sup>1</sup> As a reference point and, as Loimeier said, as a kind of ideal type while reflecting upon practices of sociality, and active and dynamic performances of social relations by (mostly Muslim and largely male) residents of the East African coastal port-towns, the *baraza* reflects some core aspects of Swahili society and life in the Muslim community more generally. Highlighting important observations about 'baraza life' and its organization in space and time, Loimeier pushed for the establishment of "something like a *baraza* 'sociology,'" <sup>2</sup> "eine Soziologie der Baraza" <sup>3</sup> and flagged some pathways and criteria to take this further. Yet until now, such a project with its possibilities of internal and external comparison has not been pursued, though increasingly, *baraza*-like settings feature in the research literature.

This essay seeks to point to and sketch out some of the promising aspects of such an envisioned project, based on my own long-term fieldwork experience and selected readings. Following Loimeier's lead from 2007, I now ask, what does it mean for the study of society to take the *baraza* as a focal venue of interest? What options or perspectives for research and insights into society can a 'baraza sociology' provide – both for the Swahili context, and beyond? I am interested in reflecting upon *ways of living together* that are cultivated in *baraza* interaction, with a view to also determine how aspects of quotidian communication, religion, and morality overlap and intersect in *baraza* life.

In his rich and perceptive essay, Loimeier laid out the core features (and functions) of *baraza* groups in the Stone Town area of Zanzibar city, as he encountered them during his fieldwork there, then abstracting from these to provide elements of a systematic grid for understanding *barazas*. The term *baraza* basically refers to a bench (usually a built-in stone bench integrated into the front of houses)

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1 Loimeier 2007; see also Loimeier 2011.

2 Loimeier 2007, 16.

3 Loimeier 2011, 155.

or a group of people meeting regularly, in publicly visible or accessible spaces (created by such benches). *Baraza* groups or meeting points have long been part of everyday life in Swahili towns. As regular conversational groups and meeting points for men, they are found in accessible (semi)public spaces at specific times of the day; usually on stone benches outside houses or mosques after prayer times in the late afternoons or evenings. Being at a particular place and time for each group determines their *baraza* as an actual meeting point and regular social platform for conversation and discussion, often in the immediate neighbourhood. In his article, Loimeier emphasizes the interlinked space/place and time dimensions that always accompany (and thus are constitutive of) *baraza* settings, which consist of specific people meeting at particular places at regular intervals, in a here-and-now. The peer groups that meet might consist of two or three, and up to ten members, usually neighbours and friends who may be peers by age, status, or related aspects (e.g., ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds). In Zanzibar Town, Loimeier observed distinct *barazas* of fishermen, porters, taxi drivers, and others that were visible in public life, but also *barazas* of selected local intellectuals, who extended their circles by invitation only. My own observations and experiences of *baraza* life in Mombasa,<sup>4</sup> where I spent much time in such group settings during a long-term (thirteen months between 1998 and 1999) and many subsequent shorter visits, resonate with and complement those of Loimeier. People who have travelled the Swahili coast or read the literature attentively will have come across these distinct small groups of men in conversation in semi-public places in the afternoons or evenings. While each group has their own dynamic, there are usually hierarchies among members but at the same time a sense of equality, and a kind of license to talk openly within the group.

Historically, the stone benches in front of the (often multi-story) stone houses in Swahili towns were reported early on in Portuguese sources about these port towns in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup> *Barazas* have long been spaces of appreciation and cultivation of orality, with people enjoying the different local art forms and subgenres of vivid communication, similar to the ways in which Bengali *adda* members have long taken “pleasure in the pure art of conversation.”<sup>6</sup> Topics of discussion include almost anything, from the latest gossip, exchange of news, to serious discussions of all kinds of matters. Commonly, a good natured tone of jest and friendly socializing would be kept up, but conversations and discussion could also go very different ways.

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<sup>4</sup> Esp. Kresse 2005; Kresse 2007, 72–80, 132–36; Kresse 2009a; Kresse 2009b.

<sup>5</sup> Strandes 1961.

<sup>6</sup> Chakrabarty 2007, 205.

Attempts at recreating or preserving the *baraza*-like character of familiarity among peers in conversation has been sought even in virtual venues, like internet websites, radio stations, or social media, where the terms ‘virtual *baraza*’ and ‘*cyberbaraza*’ have been used;<sup>7</sup> and some radio shows have been studied with these similarities in mind.<sup>8</sup> Loimeier used the expression “sitting local, thinking global” in the title of his article as a means to flag the trans-local and cosmopolitan dimensions of *baraza* interactions. Indeed, a dual connectivity with both locally specific forms (genres, patterns, idioms) of expression and also a sensitive consciousness to global themes, contexts, and concerns can be regarded as common to the character and scope of *baraza* conversations.

It strikes me that a focus on the Swahili *baraza*, and on similar concepts elsewhere around the world, can help us, as anthropologists – whose task it is to observe and make good sense of the ordinary, and to reflect upon aspects of ‘being human’ based on specific observations – to engage with specific forms of cultivation of the social in society’s midst, as much as these are accessible. As Loimeier’s essay lays out, and as all those familiar with everyday life in Swahili contexts are aware, *barazas* as regular meeting points and platforms for conversation and discussion, connect not only people but also different spheres of everyday life. As people convene, converse, and exchange news and arguments in lighthearted or dedicated conversation, or even serious conflict, aspects of ‘everyday religion,’<sup>9</sup> ‘living Islam,’<sup>10</sup> and ‘ordinary ethics’<sup>11</sup> come into play and can be studied further. Related discussions and negotiations are performed as part of social interactions taking place. As noted, the scope of *baraza* conversations ranges from the exchange of news to banter, mutual teasing, and even philosophizing, and includes political and religious debate. Much can be learned about society by observing these dynamic exchanges in presence, and watching and listening in. Beyond that, an ethnographic focus on *baraza* interactions in everyday life connects us and can contribute to significant conceptual subfields of anthropology, such as those just mentioned.

A *baraza* sociology – the project suggested by Loimeier – could consist of a comparative endeavor of an *external* and *internal* kind. The latter would be a regional one focusing on the internal diversity within the Swahili context, and the former would look at similar platforms for social interactions across cultures

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7 Topan 2006; Brunotti 2019.

8 See Alidou 2013; Kresse 2013; Kresse 2018.

9 Schielke and Debevec 2012.

10 Marsden 2005.

11 Lambek 2010; Lambek 2015; Das 2015.



and societies. Both seem valuable to pursue, as they would lay out in a larger scope and more specific detail what is being commonly discussed and discursively engaged with, among peers, in this region and around the world. By engaging with the *baraza* phenomenon specifically, we focus in on something that is typical and representative of Swahili society, and its forms of sociality and sociability. This represents one type of a common regional platform for everyday meetings and social exchange, of which we find many varieties within the internally diverse Swahili region; other regions (may) have comparable ones. Building on reflections about the specifics of interaction in these settings, we may, following fieldwork, formulate some bottom lines of how, in different regional and cultural settings, particular kinds of being social, being human (and being a good Muslim, being political), are being cultivated, which on the whole we may call ‘ways of living together.’ These may be subject to change and rupture, within the Swahili context as much as elsewhere. Nevertheless, in each case these attitudes and outlooks and what they entail may have something insightful and stimulating to offer to outsiders and specifically for anthropologists, to think with about being human and social more generally. Anthropology itself is “a conversation rather than a science,”<sup>12</sup> and thus anthropologists are well attuned, and well advised to attune themselves further, to listening and learning from conversations of many different kinds, including those at the *baraza*.

Common rules and requirements about how to interact with each other, as peers, whether as Muslims (largely but not exclusively), as neighbours, or as people with the same linguistic or ethnic background, about how to greet one another, speak to, and in general relate to each other, are in place and observable. *Barazas* are shaped through the performative interactions of group members along as well as across those lines, in comparable social settings. Within these dynamics of *baraza* discussions, aspects related to the understanding and practice of religion in everyday life come up frequently as well. They often overlap and intersect with people’s concerns about proper and adequate knowledge and education, and the social value and moral obligations connected to these. In my own work, I have been trying to tease out how discursive and performative aspects of expressing, affirming (and sometimes questioning), and negotiating social positions and relations in debate and direct and indirect interaction, in public speech and writings – which can to some extent be seen as *baraza*-like – and in semi-public direct interactions, are reflected in the *baraza* group performances. A focus on *baraza* (and *baraza*-like) interactions in ethnographic work can help foster an understanding of how certain religiously guided rules of good behav-

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<sup>12</sup> Lambek 2015, 7.

ior (*adabu*) and character (*tabia*) are integral parts of social interaction among Muslims (and others) locally. In most *barazas*, a range of obligatory and optional forms of interactions with one's peers exist, and one has to honor the practice of certain verbal forms and discursive formulas, and follow rules of gesture, bodily composure, etc.

In the following, I pick up on some of Loimeier's key observations and programmatic points and bring them into conversation with some of my own. Due to constraints of time and space, I shall not be able to cover or review the literature on Swahili *barazas* and related comparative settings here. With a view to the *baraza* sociology in which Loimeier encouraged us all to engage, and within the limitations of this chapter, I would like to draw attention to the practice of sociality, communicative interaction, and mutually attentive being-with-each-other in *baraza* settings as corresponding to specific features, or key conceptions of being social and human. In this particular Muslim context, these features are characterized by long-term trans-local links and interactions. I write this from a position that seeks to be ethnographically well-grounded in the socially internal projections of meanings that matter in conversation and interaction, and intellectually curious and open-minded (also and especially for comparative reflection). Thus, I position myself close to a critical hermeneutical stance in anthropology<sup>13</sup> and in affinity to an existential(ist) approach.<sup>14</sup>

## **Social Being, Relationality, Mutuality – *Mtu Wa Watu***

In specific terms, the common conception of being human (and humane), as reflected in the Swahili term *utu*, can be seen as foundational in Swahili society. *Utu*, the quality of being human and good in a moral sense, is fundamentally characterized by what one could call an inter-relational positionality to other humans, like its better-known South African cousin, the Nguni term *ubuntu*. One is (or seen and recognized as) a true or complete human being by one's relations to others. The Swahili saying '*mtu ni watu*' (a human being is human beings), which is endorsed by coastal Muslims but is not per se Islamic in character, expresses that sociality as the fundamental human quality of being with others (being in interaction) – *kuwasiliana* in Swahili – in mutually attentive and in meaningful

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<sup>13</sup> As characterized by Lambek 1993, 3–68.

<sup>14</sup> Characterized by Jackson 2013.

exchange with each other, is socially seen to be what ultimately qualifies humans as humans.

If this is so, then perhaps *barazas* can be conceived of as the kinds of accessible and yet protected (open enough and yet restricted) social venues, places, spaces, that humans create and that need to exist for humans to realize themselves as interactive, communicative agents, in shared space and time and in interaction, i.e. mutual exchange, with their peers. Human people (*watu*) are seen to be truly human (humane, in an ethical sense, of good character, in Swahili *wa utu*) through being with others; as emphatically social beings and moral agents defined by their relations to others, they can be qualified as *watu wa watu* (lit. humans of/through humans) as well as *watu wa utu* (humans of humane features, i.e. those who have/show goodness). Indeed, these expressions are commonly understood in the singular, as independent terms, *mtu wa watu* and *mtu wa utu*. Nevertheless, the most commonly used one is the simple singular term *mtu*, when praising specific individuals for their actions. In such cases, the phrase “*huyu ni mtu* (she/he is a true human being/person)” is used and meant in terms of moral recognition.

For a brief illustration of the term *mtu wa watu*, I refer to my own observations that the ability to speak, relate, and interact well with all kinds of people in the community often seems a crucial feature for religious leaders. For example, to be successful as actual leading figures, a person must be able to reach out to, address, and make a real impression upon people – and also enact a kind of performative role-model figure of good sociable behavior. For these reasons, I have recently portrayed Ustadh Mahmoud Mau, a poet and imam from Lamu, who I have been working with, as a characteristic *mtu wa watu*.<sup>15</sup> The features that matter here are also visible in the accounts of several leading Swahili sheikhs of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in the present. Being a ‘man of the people,’ active and engaged as a human being among one’s peers, well attuned to the needs of ordinary people, giving advice and providing orientation in accessible words that are comprehensible, are common and crucial features of those who have made it and achieve local recognition and followership.

From a regional Swahili conceptual perspective building on local terms, experiences, and practices, and integral to a long-term history of Islam on the East African coast, human beings as moral agents seeking to build meaningful lives for themselves are understood as embedded in social relations. Thus, striving for, and seeking to cultivate what we could call a set of healthy and balanced social relationships becomes a crucial task for people as individual social actors.

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<sup>15</sup> Kresse and Swaleh 2023.

The communicative performances and interactive efforts that can be observed in (different kinds of) *baraza* group settings seem to illustrate this well. Verbal interaction is mutually respectful, according to the conventions of the respective group sitting together; this may well include banter and mutual teasing, as in the case of young men, sailors, or simply good friends.

Overall, we could call the *baraza* time-space, in which an emphatically social (and relational) conception of human beings is performed, a setting of a kind of ‘sociable sociability’ (*gesellige Geselligkeit*), twisting Kant’s much cited (Eurocentric) characterization of humans as ambivalent creatures characterized by ‘unsociable sociability’ (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*). On the Swahili coast, the qualification of human beings as emphatically sociable beings who actively relate with their peers (or for whom this obligation is at least clear and indubitable), is, as noted, expressed in common sayings, like *mtu ni watu* (lit. a human being is human beings) and others. This underpins an understanding of the sphere of human interaction more generally as a sociable, inter-relational one, and humans as relational creatures. According to existing models and conceptual guidelines, the practice and performance of social relations by human agents are geared toward others (their human peers), and by doing so they are at ease (not in tension) with themselves. Along these lines, the model roughly sketched out here (and perhaps generalized somewhat insufficiently) from the Swahili context, drives the point that self-realization lies in the cultivation of relations with others: as a human being, one becomes more human(e) the more one engages with others. *Mtu ni watu*, and it could be said, *mtu ni kuwasiliana* (a human being is to relate with others). *Kuwasiliana*, being in relation/communication with each other, is what the *baraza* is all about; whether in simple, easy terms, or difficult and complex ones, in mutually challenging and questioning ways, as well as in assertive and educational ones. Mutual attention and concern in interaction (following obligations) can be related to the most diverse themes and fields of engagement and kinds of knowledge. Social relationality is shown and pursued in different kinds of discursive performances here, among specific, regularly-meeting groups of male peers. This includes the possibility that conversations and discussion can become contested and confrontational.

Is it possible to claim then that, in the Swahili context particularly (like perhaps in others, elsewhere in the world), people are thinking, acting, and living with an acute sense of sociality and human relationality in mind (including a more acute sense of their own positionality in society), more so than people in the West are familiar with in everyday life? Such a sense, at least, is being cultivated, nurtured, and perpetuated, within *baraza* settings and interactions. Drawing our attention to *barazas* as specific venues and platforms of social interaction – as Loimeier qualifies them and asks us to do – is a fruitful and promising endeavor

for anthropology, to be explored much further. Not only insofar as we are seeking, more generally, to understand basic conceptions of being human, and being social, but also in specific terms, as much as we are engaging ethnographically with specific questions about details of forms, themes, and contents of discussions and dynamic interactions in everyday life. Both of these aspects speak to us as researchers (anthropologists and others), interested readers, curious human beings, and members of a wider general public.

## Intellectual Practice, Knowledge and Wisdom, Ordinary Ethics

In addition to being general venues for socializing amongst different peer groups, *barazas* are also, in a pronounced and locally known (if hardly formalized or visible) way the meeting points for local intellectuals, historians, and ‘true sociologists,’ as Loimeier calls them.<sup>16</sup> Sheikh Yahya Ali Omar (who died in 2008), a renowned Swahili intellectual with origins in Mombasa, who had collaborated with many academic scholars and was based in London during the last four decades of his life, characterized this type of intellectual *baraza* to me as a ‘Swahili university’ (in July 2001). He highlighted that even specialized knowledge (in different fields) and higher education were mediated and passed on in ways that seemed to have somewhat systematic character. However, he did not describe the system and the intellectual *baraza*’s place within it more widely to me. What is certain is that *barazas* are venues of “spreading knowledge and education” (*kuenza elimu*), and of cultivating their acquisition and dissemination. Thus, *barazas* as pronounced meeting points for those who are knowledgeable, who are seeking and exchanging knowledge, who are keepers and custodians of knowledge (in specific fields), can also be explored much more extensively, ethnographically, and in comparative ways. If the meaning of the term ‘sociologists’ (that Loimeier used) is taken seriously and understood as those with an expertise for theorizing and thinking about society or the social from the conceptual perspective or framework of Swahili language, culture, and history, it is possible to document some important ways of regional sociological thinking, including how society, or the social, is conceived, when listening in to such kinds of *baraza* exchanges.

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<sup>16</sup> Loimeier 2007, 37.

Along similar lines a focus on *baraza* interactions was important to me in my own research from early on, when I focused on knowledge, intellectual practice, and philosophical thinking in Mombasa. I spent many hours of my fieldwork listening in at different *barazas* in order to gain a good sense and understanding of how knowledge was pursued, passed on, questioned, contested, and negotiated in *baraza*-based discussions. This has proven to be a rich and fertile field, and there is a lot more (and so many more *barazas*) to be explored in the Swahili and wider East African context along similar lines comparatively, with a view to themes, language use, argumentative and rhetorical strategies, the use of key terms, phrases, and idioms and patterns in discussion. This could be one way, and just one take, of pursuing a ‘*baraza* sociology’ further.

More recently, I have continued to build on earlier experiences and observations of *baraza* interactions, paying increasing attention to language and the ways in which reasoning is expressed, arguments built, and what kinds of phrases and terms are used recurrently in discursive exchanges, in order to try to convince one’s counterparts and appeal to one’s audience. My observations are based on work with written texts, speeches and lectures, as well as radio talk show settings that resembled *barazas* and indeed modeled themselves accordingly.<sup>17</sup> These observations show a meaningfully loaded interactive field in which people dedicate mutual attention to each other, and in which discursive and other agentive aspects intertwine. In such discussions, which commonly have moral undertones, following the respective obligations that humans (as Muslims, neighbours, or as members of the community) have toward each other, are invoked, and formulated in recurring phrases and patterns of speech. – In Swahili, these express and emphasize such obligations and are also commonly used in religious speeches or moralistic debates. Formulated in the subjunctive tense (i.e. “let us...” do this/that), they mirror or point to mutual moral obligations within the social community, and they have an implicit (and sometimes) explicit religious underpinning. Understanding, educating, and reminding each other about what is good and bad to do, according to Muslims’ obligations of commanding good and forbidding evil, are the cornerstones of adequate interaction, reflected in the terms *tufahamiane* (let us understand each other), *tuelimishane* (let us educate each other), and *tukumbushane* (let us remind each other); and a set of related terms in the same subjunctive expression complements this field.

What seems particularly noteworthy to me here, and worthwhile to explore further, is the way in which such language use reflects different intertwining aspects of social obligations (about knowledge, morality, and the religious) that

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<sup>17</sup> Kresse 2018.

members of the Swahili Muslim community have vis-à-vis each other. A common unity is invoked from the outset, and reference to a shared knowledge of common rules and obligations (as Muslims, neighbours, and human beings) is made, so that the counterpart may conform to these obligations. This constitutes not only a common discursive pattern of discussion or debate in *baraza* settings (of different kinds) and elsewhere. These invocations also represent common ways of seeking or finding a consensus by mediating between positions while seeking to convince or persuade the counterpart of the truth of one's own position because of its status as being sanctioned by religious prescriptions or following commonly known obligations, and appealing to the others to follow them as well. A basic ethical requirement for human beings is to put knowledge to good use, in caring for others (one's peers) who may be perceived as pursuing a wrong pathway or performing bad deeds, and to appeal to them to cease with what they (should) know they should not do. This is an underlying general feature and common moral assumption underpinning all kinds of communicative and actual social interaction. *Baraza* participants, as well as Muslim Swahili speakers engaged in discussion (oral or written) more generally, usually subscribe to these rules and perform their interactions accordingly.

*Tuwasiliane* – let us interact! (be in contact/exchange with each other), then, is the most basic formula in play here, and a phrase also often used or invoked when saying goodbye to each other. The expression affirms the status of *kuwasiliana* (being in communicative relation to each other) as a foundational, basic term. As terms of mutuality and reciprocity, these expressions together mark a discursive-cum-practical field of social interaction (within which a sense of moral obligations are common to participants) of which the *baraza* is the representational social place. It is the social meeting point, or 'inscribed place' that can come into being, as Loimeier rightfully says, in principle, anywhere, through the enactment of conventions of time and space by participants who agree to meet because of certain shared interests.<sup>18</sup>

### **Beyond Place: Virtual *Baraza* and *Cyberbaraza***

If the *baraza* can be qualified to be an ongoing regional tradition of cultivating conversation, discussion and debate, this cultivation is also extended to other linked forms and rules of verbal exchange and interaction. With the quick and

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<sup>18</sup> Loimeier 2007, 22, 20–24.

vast changes in communication technology over the last decades, the *baraza* has been taken ‘beyond place’ and its normal semi-public settings in the streets, into the virtual space of radio broadcasts, internet group websites, and social media. In a commentary piece on Swahili modernities at the beginning of the new millennium, Farouk Topan coined the term ‘cyberbaraza’ with a view to understand the recent phenomenon of community-based websites that facilitate intra-communal interaction in a public and generally accessible way, thus replicating a kind of semi-public character of *baraza*-like interaction, even if it is not localized in place.<sup>19</sup> Irene Brunotti recently took up the term and developed extended reflections on the *cyberbaraza*, as she explored how specific, group-based use of social media impacted (while being part of) the vivid and dynamic back-and-forth of debates around political election campaigns in Zanzibar in 2015, which she covered in detail through fieldwork. According to her, similar to a *baraza*, in a *cyberbaraza* “participants create communities that are tied to a sense of belonging, enacted through personal stories and experiences, which are narrated, shared and read.”<sup>20</sup> *Cyberbarazas* may be constituted by a wide variety of communicative and technological forms, as they continue to be “reflecting the norms of informal public discussion.”<sup>21</sup> Brunotti explores a number of relevant actual dimensions of the political tensions and dynamics that at play and traceable in virtual publics and counter-publics constituted and perpetuated by different stake-holders. She points to new or emerging perspectives for political critique and influence, vis-à-vis the state, by ordinary people through the forms of their discursive engagement, somewhat along the lines of Achille Mbembe’s earlier arguments about the power of practices and performances of critique of rulers by ordinary people from below, in postcolonial Africa.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, due to being dislocated, and having lost their actual grounding in a three-dimensional spatial setting, *cyberbaraza* spaces offer certain kinds of liberating opportunities in social interactions, such as overcoming obstacles and thresholds of social hierarchies (e.g. of gender; age; descent) for direct mutual address. In virtual spaces, these can be performed in ways that would be rare or even unimaginable in in-person social settings. On websites, social media groups, and on live radio, for instance, women, youths, or people of low social status can address male, elder, and more established counterparts directly and unceremoniously on equal terms, as I have witnessed many times. Similarly, the

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<sup>19</sup> Topan 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Brunotti 2019, 22.

<sup>21</sup> Brunotti 2019, 21.

<sup>22</sup> Mbembe 1992; Mbembe 2001.



voicing of critique (particularly political, but also religious and moral) by individual ordinary members of society, has been brought forward, heard, and seen in ways not typically possible in physical *baraza* settings, and thus has been made easier in these virtual settings.

Looking at radio interactions, and closely following a particular live broadcast that described itself as a *baraza*, I have observed and discussed similar critical and liberating aspects as well, while also noticing that the insistence on ongoing mutual respect for participants, and on fundamental rules of mutual social engagement (politeness shown through acceptable ways of speaking, etc.) remain important, also for maintaining the radio show's relevance and reputation (and its hosts' credibility).<sup>23</sup> As long as the hosts could adhere to such rules, it seems to me, serious discussions with participation from oppositional sides could be held. Otherwise discussions might easily be in danger to evolve into simple exchanges of mutual insults, or one-sided partial pleas or rants.

## 'Ordinary Ethics' in Everyday Life: Obligations and Responsibilities

Following the field of *baraza* settings and exchanges, one can observe that normative reference points, invoking what is right or wrong, good and bad, or promises, aspirations or wishes, are commonly involved in social interactions which either explicitly or implicitly underpin *baraza* exchanges. In *baraza* settings as much as in other, similar discursive settings in everyday life, people refer to each other with reference to such expectations and obligations that they have and acknowledge of each other. In this way, the *baraza* is also a particular social venue – in its physical as well as its virtual forms – of what Michael Lambek has called 'ordinary ethics',<sup>24</sup> building on Austin's ordinary language theory.<sup>25</sup> Everyday interactions, inasmuch as normative expectations vis-à-vis each other are addressed and negotiated, are intrinsically also ethical in character (in addition to other aspects). During social interactions at *barazas* and comparable settings across the world, language and performative communicative practices overlap, intersect, and combine in conversations and interactions. These communicative dynamics are commonly full of references to mutual normative expectations and

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<sup>23</sup> Kresse 2018, 147–89; Kresse 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Lambek 2010, 39–63.

<sup>25</sup> Austin 2018 [1962].

assumptions, and thus *barazas* can also be viewed as further potential field sites for the exploration of interactions that are focused on or driven by ethical commitments and considerations.

How the ethical forms an intrinsic part of everyday interactions and is particularly linked to a wide range of common, frequently-used utterances that imply and refer to normative criteria, has been worked out by Michael Lambek and Veena Das (among others). This has opened up a valuable and intriguing field for investigation in all kinds of different societies around the world.<sup>26</sup> They argue that this field of human concerns deserves attention in its own right and should not be subsumed analytically under aspects of politics or religion. This resonates with the way in which as discussed above, aspects of moral, religious, and other obligations overlap and intersect in everyday interactions in the Swahili context. Concerns about living properly, doing the right thing, coping with challenges, enduring shortages, and so on, shape much of people's everyday lives anywhere. These concerns feed into many people's everyday communications and interactions that anthropologists try to make sense of and comment upon. As Veena Das put it, to ask and pursue how humans can cope with the challenges of life, "living with fragility, vulnerability, joys and sorrows that everyday life entails" gives us insights into the features of the ethical lives that people live or seek to build for themselves.<sup>27</sup> Due to the features highlighted above, the *baraza* – like related sites of everyday interactions elsewhere – presents itself as a particularly suitable venue for investigating the dynamics in which ethics can be seen to be performed, asserted, challenged, and negotiated as part of everyday social life.

## Conclusions, Outlook

What sort of conclusion can be drawn in this text that promises no more than provisional notes on the *baraza*, and on the *baraza* sociology that Loimeier put in view to us? Perhaps it is sufficient to reiterate and point, briefly, to the multiple dimensions and overlapping levels according to which the *baraza* can be approached, studied, and explored further. To the ways in which the ethical, religious, and political may intersect there, as mutual obligations and expectations are conveyed, assessed, and negotiated, as fun is made of each other and puns are traded, and as news are passed on, and greetings exchanged.

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<sup>26</sup> Lambek 2010; Lambek 2015; Das 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Das 2015, 114.

Both within the Swahili context and far beyond, there is lots to compare and contrast with a view to understanding (gendered) social interaction in everyday settings. For instance, looking at cafes in France, barber-shops in Middle Eastern contexts, *addas* in Calcutta and the South Asian Bengali region, and *Stammtische* in Germany and Austria with which readers might be more familiar from their own experiences, and which constitute similar kinds of platforms of sociality, and venues of distinct kinds of sociability.<sup>28</sup> The appeal that Loimeier saw in a greater *baraza* project,<sup>29</sup> comparing the manifold variety of Swahili *barazas* along the coast – and possibly far inland too – as well as the diverse range of known *baraza*-like settings across regions, is still strong. It also resonates strongly for those of us who have experienced them as habitual parts of daily interactions, those who have engaged closely with them (and still seek to know more), or those newcomers who are curious and intrigued to explore *baraza*-like settings and the lived dynamics of actual sociality in greater depth.

I would like to conclude by saying that the ethnographic and conceptual work engaged in here, in relation to each other, by anthropologists and others, might provide a contribution to the current and pressing tasks of addressing challenges and demands surrounding the decolonization and re-orientation, or re-thinking of scholarship in a constructive and collaborative manner. Engaging in such a focused joint comparative endeavor of what Loimeier calls a *baraza* sociology, concerned with how community and society are practiced as well as conceived elsewhere (how we can think about the social outside of Euro-phone and Eurocentric frames), and how social relations are performed and practiced in many different contexts beyond the Swahili one, have, potentially, something constructive to offer.

One helpful piece of advice, for practising sociality as much as for maintaining sociability (or simply for persevering in difficult times), as many of the authors and readers of this book who know Roman will know, is the encouragement to “keep smiling!”, in the face of pressures or amidst confusion. For this, and many other tips and shared insights over the years, I thank you, Roman.

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<sup>28</sup> Amit 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Loimeier 2007, 16.

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Samuli Schielke

## ***This Is Tanta***

### Or What I Learned from Acting in an Unprofessional Manner during Fieldwork

As an anthropologist, I have made my career out of insisting that humans often don't live by what they teach, and that this is a normal condition of morality and ethics. Since the people I write about are mostly Muslims, and their morals and ethics for the most part are informed by Islamic principles, this has paradoxically turned me into an anthropologist of Islam, although I do not personally identify with this description.

One of the principles that I try to live by and that I do identify with, however, is that one should preferably work together with people whom one would also like to have or consider to be friends. This is true of Roman Loimeier, who has been a mentor for me throughout my academic career. We share an appreciation for good beer and good conversation in friendly company. When I was asked to write a contribution to this volume, it became evident that I should write something that does justice to my knowledge of Roman as a friend; of cheerful, humorous anecdotes about jovial, friendly gatherings, but also the scholarly inspiration he has given me to pay attention to conflict, contradiction, and incompleteness as features of human lives.

In this essay, I engage with my fieldnotes from a literary gathering in Alexandria in 2015 that was disturbed by a guest who used the gathering for electoral campaigning. I discuss a private gathering afterwards where two friends and I poked fun at that guest's literary work. I reflect on how such an instance of professional misconduct by an anthropologist is related to the ethnographic learning process. Literary scenes – and like them, many other social spaces – tend to be normative, competitive, and judgmental, often involving much backstabbing and ridicule behind the scenes. Anthropologists are expected to maintain a more relativist position, withholding their judgement and certainly abstaining from ridicule. Paradoxically, learning to be a competent participant in a literary scene can be at once a key moment of anthropological knowledge and go against the grain of professional codes of ethical conduct.

## The Ethnographic Record

The events that I describe in the following pages are part of my fieldwork with literary writers in Alexandria that stretched over a period of nine years from 2010 to 2019. Mukhtar Saad Shehata, a novelist based in Alexandria at the time, and I were trying to understand what draws some people to write literary texts in a society where doing so is economically uninteresting and often considered a waste of time by one's family. Our research soon shifted from a focus on determining motivation to exploring literary networks, sociality, and the links between aesthetic, class, religion, politics, and other factors. We soon found that literary gatherings were the most interesting context for our fieldwork. These are performative spaces where participants can live out the role of a person of letters, real and effective for the moment and yet marginal and exceptional vis-à-vis everyday life. Importantly, the border between the researcher and the researched was very porous in our fieldwork. Mukhtar is a novelist who also writes critical essays, and during the time of our fieldwork, he was working to establish himself as an author. I personally have no record of literary writing worth mentioning, but I have actively participated in the cultural life in Alexandria and published several essays and two books in Arabic, and at least one of them has become part of the conversations and debates among the Alexandrian intelligentsia it addresses.<sup>1</sup> The people Mukhtar and I worked with have not been simply providers of information and insights. Instead, they frequently entered into theoretical debates with us about how to interpret and develop our fieldwork. In short, we were very much part of the field, and the field was part of us.

The following events, which I documented in a handwritten notebook and an electronic research diary, transpired during our fieldwork in the Alexandria branch of the Writers' Union of Egypt (*Ittiḥād Kuttāb Miṣr*). This Union is one of the gathering places of a literary scene organized according to the framework of the Egyptian public sector and aligned with a conservative reading of twentieth century modernism. We were on friendly terms with some of the people present and respected by others because we occupied the highly esteemed social roles of literary critic and potential translator. Concerning the latter, in Egyptian literary scenes, translation into foreign languages carries great prestige, and although we always made clear that we were not involved in translation, the assumption that we might be assigned me an undeserved air of authority. The Writers' Union is a semi-official, self-governing syndicate that represents the interests of Egyptian writers. It is part of an architecture of corporate rule where professional syndi-

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<sup>1</sup> Schielke 2016.

cates and trade unions serve the conflicting tasks of self-representation and government control. However, the Writers' Union does not have the same degree of power to censor and police the literary field that, for example, the Syndicate of Musicians commands over music venues and concerts in Egypt. Perhaps because it wields less power, the Writers' Union is allowed to have a greater degree of internal pluralism, and the elections of the national and local boards of the Union that take place every two years attract considerable interest among its members.

In spring 2015, we attended a symposium (*nadwa*) that was dedicated to the critical debate (*munāqasha*, one of the established formats of a literary gathering) of a collection of short stories by S.K.,<sup>2</sup> a middle-aged writer from Alexandria. Following the extension of formal, polite greetings by the chair towards all those present, two critics provided friendly critical analyses of her work, followed by the author reading a passage from her work. One by one, other authors came to the podium to add their comments, and S.K. occasionally replied. The evening proceeded with a mixture of polite, lofty formality and friendly wittiness we knew from previous meetings, mixed with a tension in the air over the upcoming elections for the Writers' Union board. There were more people in attendance than usual, many whom we did not know. Among them was a woman who had been greeted by name in the beginning, and who was accompanied by a small group of young women. Then, while the critic M.A. was offering his analysis of the work, he was suddenly interrupted, which was also when the event changed in character.

The following is an excerpt from my handwritten notebook, most of which I wrote during the event. Only the last lines were written the next morning, and a few minor edits for clarity have been added:

M.A. is interrupted so that the *Ustāza* [Professor, title carried by teachers and civil servants among others] L.H. can speak next. He [M.A.] gets really angry, stands up, shouts '*Mish hanāqish tāni!*' [I will not discuss again!]. Then [the chair] M.W. tries to calm the waves and greets *Ustāza* L.H. who starts with the *basmala* [In the name of the All-Merciful God] and [extends] greetings to all poets and writers of Alexandria, says she came just to meet the people here, didn't expect a *munāqasha*, [offers her] excuses if she caused disturbance. She reminds [the audience] about the coming elections of the Union on 27/3: 87 candidates. 15 will be elected; and that it [the elected position] is volunteer work, *khidma wa- 'aṭā'* [selfless service]; and we need to elect people who can provide that [volunteer service] and who are people known for work and engagement, so she encourages people to choose wisely, not to choose weak candidates, → so [she urges]: 'My number in the list of candidates is [...], from [...] originally, and I hope for the support of the writers of Alexandria which I love along with their people... etc. etc.' (so it's all an elections campaign speech).

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2 The names of writers and literary works mentioned in this article have been anonymized.



K. comments to Mukhtar: ‘Shame on her, you can’t do that,’ accusing her [L.H.] of abusing the occasion of speaking in a *nadwa* [symposium]. (He breaths deep[ly]). Meanwhile she praises her great engagement and *khidma* and ‘*aṭā*’ (lots of *hagṣ* [bragging; boastfulness]) in her work in the branch in [...] and in the literary club of which she is the president. She speaks long in clear violation of the code of the *nadwa*, but gets friendly reactions from stage, hands out her book to S.K., while Mukhtar demonstratively goes out for a smoke and K. is really pissed off. Then a younger lady comes to make an announcement about a Facebook page (not clear if L.H.’s) and distributes copies of her book to everybody.

Lots of side discussions evolve, finally an older man with glasses & a moustache comes to the front and speaks, explains that it would have been impolite not to devote a part of the *nadwa* to *Ustāza* L.H.’s visit since it happened on the day of the *nadwa* even if [some people] sensed [it] to be *iqtiḥām* [a violent act of storming].

→ Lots of agitated side discussions, some bad mood, L.H. returns to her seat, S. [a senior female writer] says: ‘L.H. is known, needs no *da’āya* [advertisement].’

Then the next speaker, an older man with big glasses, first speaks in *tabrīr* [justification] of L.H.’s election speech, then goes on to discuss the text [by S.K. to which the event was originally dedicated], calls for *murāgi* ‘*luḡhawī* [proofreader or copyeditor] to work on the texts, that copyediting should be part of every literary club’s activities; then invites [everyone] to a *nadwa* tomorrow on [the early 20<sup>th</sup> century singer] Sayyid Darwish at the Fath Club, and that the 5 candidates of Alexandria are there, and then adds that we know for whom to vote *ḍidd al-haymana* [against the hegemony].

M.W. goes on with more praise for S.’s work to conclude the evening and greets & thanks people by name.

Afterwards, M[ukhtar] & K. furious, we go home, drink whisky and smoke hashish and I make paper airplanes of L.H.’s book. Pleasant evening of great *mazāg* [pleasant mood, typically including alcohol or hashish].

My electronic diary from the following day adds this additional note:

[I took the] tram to Sidi Bishr and then a long walk in Sidi Bishr, finally to Writers’ Union: detailed notes of Writer’s union in notebook. Afterwards with Mukhtar and K. at home drinking whisky, smoking very good hashish and making paper gliders from pages of the book *This Is Atlantis* (ultra conventional moralistic novel that really is closer to a lecture than to a novel, but with very few grammar errors) that was distributed at the *nadwa* of the Writer’s Union to everybody present by the daughter of L.H. who stormed S.K.’s *nadwa* with a 15-minute campaign speech for her electoral campaign for the Writer’s Union. K. and Mukhtar were furious, and in general she [L.H.] didn’t really make new friends with that move. She also recently won a prize from the Writers’ Union for her poetry. F.A. had just recently written an angry comment about that on Facebook because her poetry is lousy. It’s ‘*amūdī* [classical double verse] by the way. She is a classical representative of people who dominate the Union: aesthetically, morally, and politically conservative, uptight and anti-experimental, identify literature with a morally uplifting message far from dirty words, and very savvy in association politics.

## Learning by Misbehaving

When we went to Mukhtar's home, we enjoyed a drink and a hashish cigarette. Our friend K. left early. Then we started reciting passages from our copy of L.H.'s novel, *This Is Atlantis*. Written in a very didactic fashion, and in flawless classical Arabic, it tells of a learned scholar obsessed with the search for the mythical lost city of Atlantis, which he eventually finds in a sort of dream journey or vision. He gets to know the amazing social and technological progress of Atlantis and wins the heart of the queen who rules Atlantis wisely. To his dismay, he discovers that the people of Atlantis, despite their advanced civilization, still worship idols. With the help of the queen, he successfully converts them to a monotheistic faith. When he awakens from the dream, he wonders whether what happened was true or not. The novel is written with a lofty earnestness that reads like a caricature of the most didactic-conservative current in the Writers' Union. L.H.'s behaviour at the symposium, effectively supplanting from the podium the author and original guest of the evening, S.K. and the discussants who had each prepared a study of her work, had made us angry. While becoming increasingly intoxicated, we recited passages from the book in an exaggeratedly formal pronunciation, occasionally mispronouncing words intentionally in silly and sometimes obscene ways. The title of the book *Hunā Aṭlantā* (*This Is Atlantis*) turned into *Hunā Ṭantā* (*This Is Tanta*).<sup>3</sup> We also intentionally misread the author's CV mentioning her membership in various literary associations, highlighting other connotations of the word 'member.' Page by page, we literally ripped the book into pieces: after reading a page, we ripped it off, and I folded paper gliders from the pages. We sent them flying across the room and had a lot of fun doing so.

At the symposium, L.H. had broken the etiquette of literary gatherings by not respecting the other speakers, interrupting the discussion of somebody else's book with her own electoral agenda, and abusing her status of a guest. Some of the members of the Union present were responsible for allowing her to storm the symposium, attempting to justify it afterwards. Others were angry about it, but the protocol urging polite conduct at symposia discouraged them from directly challenging the visitor. Already before she stormed the stage, association politics and literature had coexisted that evening in a strained balance; the former was downplayed, and the latter highlighted. The visitor's unsanctioned campaigning upset this delicate balance, and the moderators managed, only with some difficulty, to prevent the event from falling apart completely. They could not reprimand or interrupt the visitor from Cairo – doing so would have resulted

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<sup>3</sup> Tanta is a city in the Nile Delta that few would think of as a civilizational utopia.

in escalation of the ensuing chaos and would have also broken the code of polite conduct towards honoured guests. Instead, the moderators did their utmost to bring the event to an orderly ending, and left participants to express their opinions in smaller groups after the event.

A.D., an experienced moderator of literary events and at the time a member of the board of the Alexandria branch, told me in 2019 that the moderator's key task at any symposium was to prevent unproductive debates and escalation of conflicts. The Writers' Union brings together a complex spectrum of different literary, political, religious, and other views. It is often a contentious space that successfully functions by exercising polite mutual respect during the on-stage events of the symposium where productive literary debates take place. Divisive issues and internal conflicts are typically delegated to off-stage conversations, such as during semi-private gatherings in cafés and private homes after the symposia.

The latter is what K., Mukhtar, and I did at the end of the evening. Insofar as limiting our divisive criticism to a private setting, we followed the Union's literary code of conduct. However, we behaved in a way that contradicts the professional ethics of anthropologists.

Anthropologists should not poke fun at people they write about. Respect is among the essential attributes of the discipline. As researchers working on literature, we had from early on endeavoured to recognize all literary production on its own terms, regardless of whether it fit into our own personal aesthetics and preferences. In the described gathering, we clearly acted against our own values, and enjoyed doing so to the extent that even years later, 'This is Tanta' remains an inside joke that still makes the two of us laugh. For that, we owe an apology and an explanation.

As researchers Mukhtar and I have always had differing approaches. I am more committed to the anthropological stance of methodological relativism. That is, trying to understand and recognize people on their own terms without passing judgement, while acknowledging that we are never truly relativists. My wanting command of Arabic literature made it easier for me to act out this relativist stance, having less knowledge and skill to discern good from bad writing. Mukhtar, as a writer and literary critic, in contrast, was and is often judgmental and critical. For him, embodying what he calls 'the researcher's neutrality' continues to be a more difficult task, and he has never felt quite comfortable in it although he asserts that he has profited from it. For Mukhtar, it was therefore a moment of relief and amusement to see me slip out of my relativist, purportedly neutral stance and engage in what he and other writers so often do as a form of entertainment: harshly poke fun at what I too considered awful literature.

Anthropologists often find it somewhat difficult to address such slips and breaches of their professional role in academic writing. At the same time, anthro-

polologists have become increasingly aware and concerned with ethics, positionality, and power. In the 1970s, Paul Rabinow shared in his book the joy of a grand day out in Morocco that ended with him spending the night with a sex worker, doing so with a tone of innocence and without having to question his positionality, privilege, or how the events might have appeared from the woman's perspective.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, four decades later, the *HAU* affair shook the anthropological community when something that had been an open secret for a while became the topic of a public scandal. The editor of the discipline's most fashionable journal at the time was bullying the part-time employees of the journal, who were mostly junior academics in no position to publicly defend themselves. Generations of professors and editors before him had gotten away with similar, and much worse conduct; however, anthropologists have become less accepting of such behaviour, at least once it became public.

The refusal to accept workplace abuse is an obvious improvement to the state of our discipline. However, the *HAU* affair also draws attention to another, more ambiguous shift: while anthropologists are trained to understand different ways of thinking and acting without hasty judgement, no such relativism was present in the debates on *HAU* and its editor. The majority of opinions were strong and judgmental. I have read only one account of the affair that tries to understand and explain the events rather than to pass judgment. Perhaps significantly, its author is a journalist, not an anthropologist.<sup>5</sup> The affair soon expanded from being an issue of misconduct and a structural problem of academic power into a symbolic conflict in which anthropologists with no first-hand experience of the person and the journal's editorial process could participate. Scholars addressing entirely unrelated issues have dedicated space in their work to express their moral stance about the *HAU* affair, occupying what might be called a shared judgmental space of righteousness.<sup>6</sup>

I do not propose a return to the air of innocence that marks Rabinow's reflections on his fieldwork. I also do not suggest that the mood of righteousness that the *HAU* affair has inspired in some is the most productive way for anthropologists to address their own and their colleagues' breaches of professional codes of conduct. Professors and editors who subject their junior co-workers to undue, extreme stress and pressure for the sake of their academic egos should not be allowed to occupy such positions. At the same time, however, the satisfying righteousness that comes from somebody else's misconduct and the broader

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4 Rabinow 1977, 64–69.

5 Singal 2020.

6 For example see Kanna, Le Renard, and Vora 2020, 130–31.

global wrongs we may see embodied in these can make it difficult to cultivate an attentiveness for the vast, ambiguous, and less blatant multitude of ways in which anthropologists, just like most humans, often don't live what we teach. An important part of this is that we may follow varying modalities of moral reasoning and action at different times, and, depending on the situation, following one modality may constitute a breach of another. This is why I view my own breach of the anthropological code of conduct after that evening at the Writers' Union as instructive and deserving of attention that neither legitimation nor condemnation could provide. Breaches in one's professional role can also provide moments of learning where the 'participant' becomes the more important aspect in the concept of 'participant observation.'

By ridiculing the author and her work during our private gathering, we were doing something that writers and readers do regularly: we were positioning ourselves in the literary field, establishing our solidarity with the writers we knew in the Writers' Union in Alexandria, while at the same time distancing ourselves from the didactic style promoted by the conservative end of the milieu that came together at the Union. On both levels, we were acting more as members of the literary field and less as researchers.

We had come to enjoy the meetings at the Writers' Union, and we had learned the etiquette of the symposia. We appreciate and enjoy the work of some of the writers there, such as K. who is an old friend of Mukhtar and belongs to what could be called an avant-garde minority in the Union. L.H. represents the most conservative end of the spectrum of writers who participate in the Writers' Union, and she was unpopular among writers with more experimental, less didactic approaches to literature. This also forms the context for the note in my electronic diary, about how the poet F.A., from the southern city of Qena, had days earlier sharply criticized L.H. on social media for receiving a prize that she, in F.A.'s view, did not deserve. We were genuinely angry at L.H. because we saw in her an aesthetic and didactic counterforce to writers like K. and F.A., whom we consider genuinely good poets. We also sympathized with the Alexandrian author S.K. whose book was the original subject of the symposium and whose work and person we had grown to appreciate, as well as the five Alexandrian candidates running for the Union board against whom L.H. was campaigning on their home turf. By performatively protesting against an intruder who had hijacked the symposium, we were acting in solidarity with the people we most appreciated there.

At the same time, we also always possessed a certain ironic distance from much of the work presented at the Union, and from the general sense of formal loftiness that often prevails at symposia. The literary field is constantly abuzz with the search for distinction from others, which works through sarcasm and ridicule. Viewed in this way, we were also embodying the habitus of a supposedly

more sophisticated and critical avant-garde audience by laughing out loud about the lofty sincerity of *This Is Atlantis*.

This event became an important (though not explicitly mentioned as such in our book) moment of insight for our thinking about how friendship, formality, and mutual recognition at symposia coexist in often aggressive competition for power among literati.<sup>7</sup> It also helped us understand sympathy, courtesy, sarcasm, and ridicule as key affective-performative means for establishing a literary life. Later, we also learned that such conflicts are in fact more common than we understood at the time. The same people can be in one situation socialising amicably, while in others publicly pitted against each other in conflicts that violate the boundary between off-stage and on-stage conduct. Yet, such conflicts have not dissolved the Writers' Union: rather, they seem to be a part of its normal operation. The success of the Union lies in its ability to contain such conflicts, and to continue acting as a forum and platform for differing approaches to literature and life.

## A Less-than-Sober Afterthought

Reasonable though it seems, this conclusion remains unsatisfactory, because it feels too reasonable, too sober. It overlooks the fact that in addition to participating in literary life in on-stage and off-stage contexts, we were also becoming increasingly intoxicated over the course of the evening. We were being unreasonable and quite enjoying it.

There is a long-standing connection between cultural production and scientific research on the one hand, and intoxicating substances, on the other. Many years ago, at a time when Mukhtar did not drink alcohol, he once joined me at a gathering in a bar in Cairo, and wondered: "What's the relationship between culture and beer?" At the time, I had no answer. When we presented this paper as a lecture in Münster in spring 2022, during discussions with the audience and afterwards over beers in a traditional German brewery, an answer began to take shape.

Mukhtar suggested that intoxicating substances help writers and artists to create distance between their audiences and their private identities. He referred to a famous reciter of the Quran from the 20<sup>th</sup> century who was rumoured to smoke opium before his recitals to improve his focus. Alcohol, Mukhtar argued, has a similar effect of marking the shift from the habitus of on-stage performa-

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7 Schielke and Shehata 2021, 63–70, 73–75.

tive interactions to off-stage relaxation, exactly as we did after the symposium at the Writers' Union. I added that intoxication may, under certain conditions also generate a different sort of public sphere; one that is less about deliberation and proper forms of recognition, and more exploratory, playful, and uninhibited in character.<sup>8</sup> Lively parties and social gatherings over drinks or other substances are cases in point. The lack of inhibition during these events gives intoxication an inherent ambivalence: a joyful gathering can deteriorate into a fight, and the spirit of laughter and joking can become malicious. It was in that ambivalent space of an off-stage gathering, uninhibited and playful to a degree that transgressed professional ethics, that we learned something about literature and ourselves that we might not have learned in a sober state.

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<sup>8</sup> Desplat 2016; Tamimi Arab 2022.

Astrid Bochow

# Measuring Risk in Pandemic Times

## Social Relationships and Testing Technologies

The social anthropologist Marilyn Strathern asks: “[H]ow [does] a relation become[s] to be [sic] reinvented, or discovered, at moments of knowledge-making”?<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 has placed in-person contact on the political agenda of many governments across the globe. During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments were called upon to control the movements of people and their daily face-to-face interactions everywhere, from shopping malls to business meetings, lessons in schools and informal gatherings at home. In this vein, politics and lawmakers introduced new classifications of ‘relationships’ based on scientific insights into the dynamic of transmissions of the COVID-19 virus. When the first cases of COVID-19 infection appeared in January 2020 not much was known about the virus apart from the observation that it may be deadly for those who have been referred to as vulnerable populations, namely elderly people and those suffering from certain chronic diseases. Epidemiologists discovered that the virus is airborne and may be transmitted by inhalation. In their responses to COVID-19, many governments, including the German government, developed rules of social distancing based on biomedical evaluations of the infection. Under the rules of social distancing, lawmakers and their executives developed directives according to which physical contacts were reduced by forbidding a variety of social interactions. Although the practices of quarantine and limiting of social contact are not new methods for stemming the spread of illnesses, during the COVID-19 pandemic, ‘social relationships,’ through which physical contact between people are channeled, became a matter of politics related to the concept of ‘social distancing.’ Definitions of ‘relationships’ were re-invented according to the potential risk they carried for infection, as Strathern has observed in her observations about ‘knowledge making.’

The polymerase chain reaction test, known as a PCR test, became a decisive tool for the management of risk and was used to interrupt chains of infection at the beginning of the pandemic. However, being a scarce resource during those periods when infection peaked, PCR tests were not granted to everybody who demanded one. Rather, policy makers and health authorities developed strategies for how to effectively use limited testing capacities. I argue here that these

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1 Strathern 2020, 168.



strategies of how to best use precious risk-measuring technologies drew on ideas and concepts about what constitutes a ‘relationship.’ I will show that the legal definition of a ‘relationship’ became a hindrance when evaluating the risks of the virus, and in some cases the use of this definition to issue protocols for ‘social distancing’ systematically excluded people from adequate access to PCR testing.

To whom were PCR-tests made available, and who was excluded from these risk-measuring technologies? What were the consequences? Did they have long lasting effects? These are the questions I will deal with in this essay. The focus of my reflections is the legal (re-)definition of ‘relationships’ under the rules of social distancing. I will reflect on some of the practical implications the new legal models of risk had for how people could access PCR-tests and how they perceived their relations in view of this risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Roman Loimeier and other researchers have examined the conditions under which epidemics forge social transformations in African societies. They have shown that potential long-lasting effects of pandemics depend on how governance structures intersect with social and economic life.<sup>2</sup> The questions posed in this paper on the classification of social contact under COVID-19 regulations and their impact on relationships contribute to the broader debate on how politics impact human relations in times of pandemic.

In my considerations, I draw on insights from my own personal interactions. In this auto-ethnography, I refer to the situation in Germany from March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020, until June 2021, specifically in the state of Lower Saxony where I live with my partner and my daughter, who at the time was of preschool age. This auto-ethnography is far from being explorative and does not replace a fully-fledged research article. Having been limited by the rules of social distancing, which made systematic observation and interaction impossible, I hope this study offers valuable insights into some of the consequences that resulted from COVID-19 politics.

In her latest book *Relations*, Marilyn Strathern states that anthropologists have successfully observed, discussed, and analyzed the social relationships which people maintain in their everyday lives. Despite anthropologists’ focus on relationships, she argues, the question of *what* a relation *is*, often escapes scholars’ attention. Social relations, Strathern claims, are ‘prime subjects for study’ in social anthropology:

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<sup>2</sup> Loimeier 2011, 113; Dilger 2011, 44.

Yet, it [a social relation] is honored with no special, or specialist, definition. [...] [I]ts distinctive problematic consists less in determining which social relations constitute its object than in asking what its object constitutes as a social relation.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, social anthropology has convincingly analyzed how social relationships have shaped people's perceptions of objects. This perspective has become prominent in relation to people's health, their understanding of diseases, as well as the use and implementation of medical technologies. Strathern prompts us to turn the question around and ask how objects create relations. Following her argument, I consider PCR tests as the object through which relationships come into being.

Diagnostic technologies such as tests have been widely researched by social anthropologists dealing with questions of health and wellbeing.<sup>4</sup> Scientific diagnostic technologies are instrumental to biomedical conceptions of health and illness. Lock and Nguyen, for instance, discuss the standardization of the body through trials based on quantification.<sup>5</sup> Standardization of the body, they suggest, maximizes the chance of restoring the body's full function and minimizes health risks associated with certain treatments. They state: "Once technological innovation became the keys to diagnosis [...] and care, then inevitable changes result as to what counts as valid knowledge about the body."<sup>6</sup> Applying their insights to testing technologies, one can argue that new diagnostic tools enable doctors and patients to gain greater certainty about the health of an individual patient. Tests may confirm a doctor's assumption about the health condition of a patient, which can be turned into a diagnosis. In the case of life threatening or chronic illnesses, tests can turn people into long-term or lifelong patients, and change uncertainty into certainty; the certainty whether someone suffers from a certain disease.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, PCR tests were the only diagnostic instruments which provided certainty of infection. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, many both ordinary citizens and doctors alike experienced great insecurity regarding diagnoses of COVID-19. With symptoms such as fever, headaches, and coughing, the virus' symptoms are difficult to differentiate from influenza or bronchitis. As noted, due to the limited capacities of laboratories, PCR tests were restricted. In addition, there were frequent media reports of people who were unaware that they had been infected. Others felt only mild symptoms, such as a

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<sup>3</sup> Strathern 2020, 3.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, Biehl et al. 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Lock and Nguyen 2010, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Lock and Nguyen 2010, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Benton et al. 2017; Frumer et al. 2021; Mackworth-Young et al. 2020.

headache lasting a few days or less, so many did not even consider consulting a doctor. In these cases, only a PCR test accurately determines whether a person is COVID positive. Only when a person tested positive were measures of quarantine for the patient, as well as for those in their close social environment enforced. Therefore, a positive PCR test was in most cases the precondition prohibiting social contact. To measure the potential infectious spread among these contacts, a tracking system was developed through which social contacts were traced.

From a legal perspective, definitions of risk were essential for the classification of relationships. Risk in turn was measured by a (relative) physical distance or closeness: physical distance closer than 1,5 meters was (and still is) considered to be a primary risk factor for infection. This physical distance, which became understood as a requirement for safety, became a new measurement for people's interactions taking place in their homes, the workplace, and in public spaces such as streets or shops. A second component added to this idea of risk was duration of contact: physical interactions of more than 15 minutes, even with physical distancing measures, were classified as potentially infectious.

This legal concept of how relationships became meaningful in terms of their potential health risks illustrate an important point about the entanglement of social, material, and logical dimensions of relationships that Strathern addresses: not only are these various dimensions often entangled, but what is more, the classification systems of social relationships entailed set concepts of how these entangled dimensions relate to one another. In the case of COVID-19 social distancing protocols, physical and social aspects of relationships became co-determinates in the classification of permitted forms of contact.

Starting in November 2020, people who had close physical contact with infected people for more than 15 minutes were categorized by German health authorities as *Kontakt 1* (K1), which translates as [*person*] *contact-one*. At the time, to be categorized as K1 had legal consequences in Germany; K1 persons were required by law to quarantine at home. They were not allowed to leave the house, even for essential activities such as food shopping. Those in quarantine were also required to suspend all aspects of life outside the house: going to work, meeting friends, and so on.<sup>8</sup> During the first weeks of the pandemic, a person was required to quarantine for a period of fourteen days, regardless of whether they tested negative for the virus. Looking back, we can observe that the invention of

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<sup>8</sup> In winter 2022, under the impression of the new variant called Omicron, this situation changed again. Only K1 persons not fully vaccinated were required to quarantine. Those K1 who received their third vaccination booster were only required to quarantine if they showed symptoms.

K1 led to a new type of social relation, which in turn created new perceptions of risk and new social realities.

Quarantine policies changed over time and varied by state in Germany. During the first period of lockdown in the country (March–May 2020) regulations were generally uniform across the country. Interestingly, during this first lockdown period, public discourses on solidarity featured prominently in Germany’s public and social media, and many people shared this spirit of solidarity. Relaxation of lockdown restrictions started in May 2020. This was also the moment when legal quantifications of risk became heterogeneous. For instance, in some countries quarantine could be ended with a negative COVID test after five days, which was not the case in others.

The situation became even more diverse during the second lockdown period which started in November 2020. This period was colloquially referred to as ‘lockdown light’ because schools and shops were kept open under specific conditions of social distancing. After November 2020 all K1-persons would be required to quarantine, but without being tested. In contrast to the situation before, all other people in the household were not also required to quarantine.

This modified regulation raised many questions, especially to those who had adhered to the measures of social distancing during the first lockdown. For instance, if a child visited a daycare and infected others, they would all be required to quarantine as K1-contacts. All other people in a K1’s household were labeled as K2. In contrast to the situation during the first lockdown period, when *all* members of one household were required to quarantine, during the second lockdown K2-persons were asked to refrain from interaction with people outside their households but were not required to quarantine. K1-persons were to remain separated from the rest of the household by staying in one room and not using communal areas, such as the kitchen, at the same time as other members of the household. Even young children with K1 status were expected to maintain physical distance from members of their household. Especially for preschool-aged children, these arrangements were simply not practical.<sup>9</sup> The concept also did not provide a solution for those families who live in households in which many people share only two or three rooms.

Using the same example of an infected child, the K1 policy had implications for parents of the child in quarantine, who were expected to continue working, which might include interactions with colleagues at work, such as eating lunch or attending meetings. Any siblings of an infected child would continue going to

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<sup>9</sup> This praxis changed in November 2021. Since then, one parent was to isolate themselves, with the infected child, from all other members of the household.

school. According to the policy, those colleagues, classmates, and schoolteachers that had interacted with the infected child's family would all become K3, thereby creating K4s within their families and friends. K3, K4, and K5 would often be unaware of their status as being part of an infection chain; in many cases, K2 people would avoid or fail to disclose their passive participation in an infection chain to those they might interact with at daycares, schools and workplaces.

According to Strathern ideas about what counts as 'relations' include considerations about who might *not* be taking part in a web of social interactions.<sup>10</sup> She reflects on these exclusions by asking what 'non-relations' are, or who could be classified as a 'non-relation.' In the case of COVID-19, some people were *not* deemed to require testing to check for infection, and therefore remained excluded from the epidemiological-legal definition of infectious relations or networks. Among the first set of people excluded was anyone who was in fear of having caught an infection. Given the limited capacities of laboratories, PCR tests were only granted if a person was symptomatic for COVID. This was practiced from spring of 2020 until winter of 2021. Confirmed symptoms included fever, coughing, and impairment of taste and smell. To qualify for a PCR test, it was also required that any possible symptoms coincided with contact with a person who had been tested positive for COVID. Otherwise, medical doctors were not allowed to refer patients for testing. Reactions towards such exclusions differed and would be worth researching in detail.

Based on my own contact with colleagues, friends, and parents of my daughter's playmates, I observed that this systematic exclusion from COVID screening on the one hand resulted in great insecurities, which manifested in peoples' everyday lives in the form of a fear of infecting others. On the other hand, some people developed a sense that infections were unlikely to happen in their everyday lives. On top of this, in the Region of Hannover, where infections were high throughout autumn 2020 and spring 2021, people received notifications from the government to enter quarantine only after they knew that they should quarantine. Sometimes, letters arrived by post only after the period of actual quarantine, when people were already back to work. All of these factors, including the restrictive testing policy, and the slow pace of issuing information by the health administrations, distorted many people's sense of belonging and obligation to their community, which held everyone responsible for not carrying the virus further.

Other people who were systematically excluded from testing were children and young people. Based on first-hand experiences with the pandemic in countries like Denmark, children and young people were considered mostly carriers,

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<sup>10</sup> Strathern 2020, 110–12.

and far less likely to experience severe symptoms. As a mother of a child who at the time of writing this paper attended a daycare, I learned that several of my friends were refused PCR tests by health authorities for their children with COVID symptoms, such as coughing and high fever. Early in the pandemic, doctors believed that children were less prone to infection. Therefore, children and young people were only tested in rare cases, such as when someone in their close social environment tested positive for the virus. Then, if children showed symptoms they were also tested. As a result, children's infections were systematically excluded from statistics. Less information was collected about possible and likely courses of the disease in children. This lack of medical knowledge about possible courses of the disease of children became especially pertinent in the year following the first peaks of the pandemic. In spring of 2021, when many people were infected by the Omicron variant, news about multi-inflammatory syndrome (PIMS), worried many parents in my social media networks and newsgroups. Allegedly, these were syndromes associated with intense pain and high fever caused by secondary infections of the nervous and digestive systems.

What effects did the categorization scheme of K1, K2, K3, have on social relationships? This model of social relations implied that the virus would become less contagious the further it went along the infection chain. It also claimed that people were less prone to become infected if they were only in contact with one K1 person.

In autumn 2020 'cases of suspicion,' or cases of people who showed symptoms and were sent to test, appeared on a regular basis within my close network of relations. These incidences were usually announced by emails sent from my friends' and colleagues' workplaces, or from schools or daycare centers without mentioning names. Notifications of such cases also circulated in WhatsApp groups. These messages were frequent reminders of the existence of the virus, and its related risks. Similarly, test results distorted fears, and as noted, letters with notifications of exposure arrived late or never. In addition, the helplines of health authorities were often busy, which I experienced myself when I had a question about the correct protocols for certain specific situations with unclear circumstances. Consequently, the very idea that some contacts were potentially more infectious than others made the virus appear tenuous and difficult to track down. As a result, the reactions of my friends and colleagues towards the ongoing threat of infection, whether being infected themselves or infecting others, resulted in either anxious concern over who to meet and who to avoid in everyday life, or complete indifference.

What are some of the long-lasting effects that this legal conceptualization of social contacts has had on people's lives? Taken together, the politics of selected testing ultimately obscured the virus rather than detecting it systematically. This

prompted some people to anxiously monitor their close social environments for signs of infection, or to consider possible chains of infection closely. The anxious deliberations of who might be K1, or K2, or of whether there are hidden K3s and K4s in one's close social environment only lasted for a few weeks. When vaccinations became readily available to everybody, the anxiety slowly disappeared.

However, the systematic exclusion of the true number of infections resulted in an increase of infections in December of 2020. As the virus once again spread, which was followed by another spike in hospitalizations, the death toll also climbed. As a result, the country went into a third lockdown on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Schools, daycares, shops, restaurants, theatres, and cinemas were closed. In many cities in Germany, this lockdown continued until almost mid-March. This third lockdown was the longest, and marked by frustration, fatigue, and existential *angst*.<sup>11</sup>

Starting from Strathern's call to reflect on how we conceptualize relationships and their material, social, and logical aspects, I have argued that the translation of risk into models of relationships rather obscured the virus rather than making it more visible. This invisibility of the virus led to the failure of the political fight against the virus. Strathern's approach, which features relationality, allows for the systematization of insights into the fallacies of COVID politics in Germany in the years 2020 to 2021.

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Part II. Religion I: **Negotiating New Religious Values and Spaces**



Hansjörg Dilger

# Faith-Oriented Schooling as Socio-Moral Intervention

## Values and Class Belonging in a Contested Religious Landscape

In the postcolonial African context, religious actors from the Christian and Islamic spectrums have become prominent players in the provision of education. In 2013, faith-oriented schools represented a market share of 10 to 15% in the educational sector and were thus on par with the equally growing number of secular private schools across Africa.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, a report by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities stated in 2009 that there is “clearly an important parallel faith-based universe of development, one which provides anywhere between 30 to 60% of healthcare and educational services in many developing countries”<sup>2</sup> – including the African continent.

The booming presence of faith-oriented schools in the African context has been linked to an encompassing reconfiguration of the relationship between religion, education, and the postcolonial state. This boom has also been associated with the liberalization of the educational sector from the mid- to late 1990s onward, which led to a growing desire for private schooling and the disillusionment with state education among the expanding rural and urban middle classes.<sup>3</sup> It has also been linked to the simultaneous growth of global – including faith-based<sup>4</sup> – development initiatives, which define the obtaining of quality education as “the foundation to creating sustainable development” and as a solution “to the world’s greatest problems.”<sup>5</sup>

What does the contemporary booming of Christian and Muslim schools in the African context mean for a country like Tanzania, where all religious schools, among them a large number of mission-based institutions, were nationalized during the country’s socialist *Ujamaa* period in 1969?<sup>6</sup> How have schooling initiatives become not only an opportunity for the socio-political and economic

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1 Wodon 2013, viii.

2 UNFPA 2009, 1.

3 Boyle 1999, 124; Stambach 2010a, 371.

4 Bompani and Frahm-Arp 2010.

5 UN “Sustainable Development Goals: 4 – Quality Education,” accessed January 26, 2022.

6 Ludwig 1999, 134; Tanzania’s socialist *Ujamaa* (Sw: extended family, kinship) period lasted from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s.

engagements of Christian and Muslim organizations and activists, but also an avenue for their becoming involved in the academic *and* moral formations of young people?<sup>7</sup> How do these socio-moral-cum-educational interventions shape students' and teachers' own positions in the entanglement of social status and religious affiliation that has defined Christian and Muslim actors' unequal locations in society since the colonial era?<sup>8</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that Christian and Muslim schools have become key sites for the negotiation of socio-moral and -religious belonging in postcolonial Tanzania, where religious differences have become a growing source of “disputes over development, national political leadership, [and] access to resources.”<sup>9</sup> As Roman Loimeier has described regarding colonial Zanzibar, Islamic schools aim to “educate Muslims” as persons who are aware of “good manners” and “good moral conduct.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Christian and Muslim schools in contemporary Dar es Salaam are regarded by their (potential) clients as “moral enclaves,”<sup>11</sup> which are “propagating ideas on how people should achieve or lead a good, prosperous, healthy and just life.”<sup>12</sup> These institutions are valued for enabling their students to learn about all aspects of life involving questions “about value, worth, virtue, what is good or bad, right or wrong,”<sup>13</sup> thus promoting their “moral becoming within the domains of everyday life,”<sup>14</sup> including with regard to body, dress, and gender; social status and difference; the presence of, and ways of engaging with, religious difference; and relationships of affect and belonging at large.

While the moral becoming of students and teachers is firmly embedded in specific educational settings with their respective mission statements, teaching practices, and material environments; I argue that students' and teachers' quests for a good life in these schools are both an individual *and* political affair. As Fassin has reasoned, morality and ethics “are often intimately linked with economic and political dimensions” and, “[t]he ethical grounds on which agents justify their conduct are influenced by the moral climate of the time.”<sup>15</sup> Consequently, I show that notions of, and aspirations for, a good life in Tanzania's faith-oriented

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7 Loimeier 2007, 143.

8 Ndaluka 2012, 22; Said “Intricacies and Intrigues in Tanzania: The Question of Muslim Stagnation in Education,” accessed January 29, 2022.

9 Loimeier 2007, 137; see also Wijsen and Mumbufusa 2004.

10 Loimeier 2009, 248.

11 Dilger and Janson 2023.

12 Bochow, Kirsch, and van Dijk 2017, 451.

13 Fischer 2014, 4f.

14 Mattingly 2014, 27.

15 Fassin 2015, 2, 21.

schools are ‘imagined’<sup>16</sup> and embodied by students and teachers in relation to large-scale historical and political-economic forces. These forces include colonial and postcolonial histories of education and Christian-Muslim relations, as well as more recent histories of privatization and faith-based development,<sup>17</sup> all of which have shaped the structural positions of Tanzania’s faith-oriented schools in Dar es Salaam’s highly diverse religious landscape.<sup>18</sup> I offer the conclusion that everyday practices of moral becoming in Tanzania’s faith-oriented schools provide a rich empirical and analytical lens for exploring how Muslim and Christian actors negotiate socio-moral belonging and interreligious co-existence in the context of class formation and the politics of religious difference in the country over time.

In the following sections, I will first show how diverse Christian and Islamic actors have established their educational projects in Tanzania’s urban centres in the wake of neoliberal market reforms. By focusing on Dar es Salaam – the place where I conducted ethnographic research on this topic between 2008 and 2010<sup>19</sup> – I argue that these faith-oriented schools have become places for the embodiment of socio-moral and -religious belonging in a highly diverse urban environment, which has been perceived by its inhabitants as a place of moral contestation for many decades.<sup>20</sup> Second, I will show that individual and collective dynamics of moral becoming are shaped not only by students’ and teachers’ searches for “moral meanings”<sup>21</sup> in regard to a strong academic performance and material success, but also by the specific socio-economic profiles of these schools as well as their embeddedness in transnational networks of funding and ideological and/or denominational orientation. I also demonstrate that these schools, most of which admit students from diverging religious backgrounds,<sup>22</sup> promote

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**16** Weiss 2004.

**17** Stambach 2010b.

**18** See Dilger 2022. Since 1967, ‘religion’ has been excluded as a category from the national census in Tanzania on the grounds that “[statistics on religious affiliation] were politically sensitive and could undermine national unity and security” (Ndaluka 2014, 2). In congruence with the Tanzanian government, the US Department of State claimed in 2007 that Muslims and Christians in Tanzania were each 30–40% of the population, with the “remainder consisting of practitioners of other faiths and indigenous religions, and atheists.”

**19** Dilger 2022.

**20** Cf. Ivaska 2011, 62.

**21** Fischer 2014, 5.

**22** The category of Christian and Muslim ‘seminaries’ admits only students of their own faith, while other faith-oriented schools are open to students with other religious or denominational backgrounds. In most cases, the values that are taught and embodied in these schools are derived from a specific denomination or faith. However, especially those institutions which admit

the value of living together in a pluralistic society and cultivate the respectful embodiment of a different religion's or denomination's practice or teaching while maintaining a critical distance from it.

## Religious Inequalities and Educational Interventions in Post/Colonial Tanzania

In Tanzania, a wide range of Christian and Islamic organizations and individuals have established primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions in the last decades. Especially in Dar es Salaam, the country's economic and cultural hub, Christian and Muslim actors became involved, or *re-involved*, in schooling initiatives after the partial privatization of the education sector in 1995. Their schools reflect the city's enormous religious and socio-economic diversity and include not only the newly established educational institutions of the former Catholic and Protestant mission churches, but also former mission schools which were returned to the churches in the wake of liberalization.<sup>23</sup>

These schools also reflect the educational projects of mosques and individuals from revivalist, often transnationally promoted strands of Sunni Islam,<sup>24</sup> as well as the schools of individuals from the Evangelical spectrum which are mostly linked to neo-Pentecostalism.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to their colonial predecessors, which comprised mainly the schools of the former mission churches and those of the Aga Khan-funded East African Muslim Welfare Society,<sup>26</sup> this new generation of schools has become firmly embedded in the neoliberal market and is run mostly on the basis of school fees. Furthermore, especially the Christian, but increasingly also some of the Muslim schools, have become attractive due to their promise of combining high quality secular and moral education, thus claiming

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students from diverse religious backgrounds aim to accommodate the different spiritual and moral needs of their students and staff in their approach to teaching morals.

<sup>23</sup> Dilger 2022, 177–217.

<sup>24</sup> Loimeier 2007, 143–45; Ahmed 2009, 429. The Muslim schools with a Sunni orientation which are described in this chapter are different from the Shia or the – highly successful – Gülen-oriented schools in the city (see Dohrn 2017) which are open to students from diverse religious backgrounds.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Stambach 2010b; Dilger 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Chande 1998, 184–89.

to provide ‘a new type of community’ and a ‘new form of moral framework’<sup>27</sup> for their mostly middle-class clients.

In order to understand the coming into being of religiously diverse ideas, practices and infrastructures of education in contemporary Dar es Salaam, the discourses, experiences, and practices of students and teachers in Tanzania’s Christian and Muslim schools must be studied as part of an overarching empirical configuration and “within an encompassing conceptual framework.”<sup>28</sup> As Larkin and Meyer have noted, especially Christian and Muslim revivalist organizations – and I would add, other religious actors who are currently becoming involved in educational or other social service activities – “share a great deal of common ground” in contemporary Africa: while they often position themselves as competitors or opponents, they “overlap strikingly in the procedures in which they have come to prominence, the practices on which they depend, and the social processes they set in motion.”<sup>29</sup>

In the urban setting of Dar es Salaam, the ‘common ground’ of Christian and Muslim interventions in the field of schooling refers not so much to the *direct* encounters between students and teachers of these faiths, although these also occur, especially in the Christian schools where both Muslim students and teachers are also admitted and employed. Rather, the common ground of these schools is constituted in their mutually entangled positions in the histories of education and religious difference in Tanganyika/Tanzania, and how these histories have shaped their shared projects of learning and teaching values under the often highly unequal conditions of state regulation and the contemporary free market economy.

The strong position of mission schools in colonial Tanganyika was established especially under the British colonial government which was heavily biased in favor of the Christian churches and population.<sup>30</sup> In 1924, the Phelps-Stokes Commission from the United States visited Tanganyika to “investigate the educational needs of the [East African] people in the light of the religious, social, hygienic and economic conditions.”<sup>31</sup> Their visit provided a significant boost to

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**27** Freeman 2015, 123.

**28** Janson and Meyer 2016; see also Soares 2016, 673.

**29** Larkin and Meyer 2006, 286.

**30** During German colonial rule, there was initially an overall reluctance of the colonial government over the involvement of the Christian missions in educational work, which coincided with the good working relations between the German colonial administrators and the local Islamic elite (Pesek 2000, 98) as well as colonial perceptions of missions as a potential threat to their authority (Nimtz 1980, 12).

**31** Jones 1924, xiii.



the missionaries' educational work. Thus, one of the recommendations of the commission was the systematic involvement of Christian schools in the provision of education as they were said to be "famous for their really great achievements in education."<sup>32</sup>

In subsequent years, a 'golden chain' of mutual dependency was forged between the British colonial state and the missions,<sup>33</sup> and both government and mission schools increased significantly in number. In contrast, the schools of the East African Muslim Welfare Society, which was established by the Aga Khan in 1945 and catered mostly to the educational needs of the Ismaili and so-called 'Asian' community,<sup>34</sup> operated on a much smaller scale and were also marginalized in the allocation of colonial government funds for "voluntary agencies engaged in educational work."<sup>35</sup> Mushi concludes that "at the time of independence, most of the educated people in the country were Christians who later became dominant in politics and government."<sup>36</sup>

After independence in 1961, the socialist government of Tanzania's first President, Julius Nyerere, addressed educational inequalities through numerous programs, which in the context of the politics of self-reliance focused primarily on adult education, and training and educating the peasantry.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the post-colonial government introduced a quota system for all regions of the country, nationalized mission schools, and made Kiswahili the national language of instruction in primary schools.<sup>38</sup> Despite these various efforts, the goal of reaching socio-religious, ethnic, and economic equality through educational equity continued to face massive challenges. Many of the social and religious cleavages that had their origin in colonialism continued to shape the educational sector long after the formal ending of the socialist period.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of the growing economic crisis during the 1970s and the mounting international pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary

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<sup>32</sup> Jones 1924, 189.

<sup>33</sup> Pels 2013 [1999], 202.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Kaiser 1996, 62f.

<sup>35</sup> Jones 1924, 179; Tanganyika Report for the Year 1960, 105.

<sup>36</sup> Mushi 2009, 84. During British colonial rule, Muslim families were generally reluctant to send their children to the mission schools due to concerns about proselytization (Pels 2013 [1999], 226). This was partly different in Zanzibar where Islamic education was integrated into the curriculum of government schools, thereby establishing a (strategic) entry point for Muslim families to send their children to British colonial schools (Loimeier 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Stambach 2000, 41ff.

<sup>38</sup> Stites and Semali 1991, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Cooksey, Court, and Makau 1994, 229.

Fund, Tanzania embarked on an economic recovery program in 1986. From 1992 onwards, the education system was gradually released from being solely the government's responsibility. Furthermore, the quota system of education was abolished and replaced with a free-market approach, which was assumed to create equal chances for all with regard to the access to education. However, while the growing privatization of the education sector was also tied to the reestablishing of a wide range of Christian and Islamic schools from the mid-1990s onwards, especially Muslim activists, who were strongly influenced by students returning from Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries during the 1980s, claimed that adherents of their religion continued to be marginalized in regard to their access to education.<sup>40</sup>

While there is no comprehensive data to sustain the Muslim activists' claims *statistically*,<sup>41</sup> there are three aspects that highlight how Christian schools have secured an overall privileged position within Tanzania's contemporary educational market today. The first aspect is that in 1992, the dominant role of the churches in the provision of social services was cemented in a memorandum of understanding between the former mission churches and the United Republic of Tanzania. This memorandum established a close cooperation among international donors, the Tanzanian government, and the Catholic and Protestant churches in the areas of health and education and became manifest in the foundation of the Christian Social Services Commission.<sup>42</sup>

However, while (or exactly because) this MoU – and the CSSC itself – became the umbrella for the establishment of a significant number of highly successful 'church schools' in the subsequent years; in the eyes of the Muslim revivalists this close alliance of the Tanzanian government, (Western) donors, and the former mission churches was an internationally sanctioned way of turning the East African country into a 'Christian state.'<sup>43</sup> Corresponding critiques are expressed both in the vibrant landscape of Muslim media and at public rallies in Dar es

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**40** Chande 1998, 196ff.

**41** In 2001, Lassibile and Tan (2001, 148) claimed that "Christian schools run by the Catholic Church and the Evangelical [probably Evangelical Lutheran, HD] Church of Tanzania ... make up about 16% of the country's secondary schools." In contrast, Leurs et al. (2011, 3) refer to figures of the Tanzanian government that "show that in 2003, of the 42 per cent of secondary schools that were privately run, 45 per cent were run by Christian and 12 per cent by Muslim organizations." My own study found that, depending on the mode of counting, the number of Tanzania's faith-oriented schools amounts to 9–20% of all secondary schools, with significantly fewer Muslim than Christian schools.

**42** Sivalon 1995, 189.

**43** Jumbe 1994, 114ff.

Salaam, where activists tend to focus on, and condemn, the marginalized state of Islam in the country.

Second, in the mid-2000s, private, especially Christian schools in Tanzania received a significant boost when the national government and the World Bank started a joint program to increase enrollment rates at the secondary level by strengthening government-funded ‘community schools.’ In the early 2000s, the idea to rely on this type of school in order to increase access to education was in line with the World Bank’s preference for participatory development and community ownership at the time. Between 2001 and 2008, the number of government secondary schools in Tanzania saw an almost sixfold increase, rising from 527 to 2,893. This massive shift in the education sector over a short period of time especially affected the public schools, which were unable to provide the human and material resources necessary for such an ambitious undertaking. At the same time, the attractiveness of the *church-run* schools grew exponentially during these years as they successfully competed for highly qualified teachers and wealthier clients who were able to afford their generally high school fees.<sup>44</sup> Concurrently, the Islamic schools, which were significantly fewer in number than their Christian counterparts, suffered from an increasingly negative public perception, which was reinforced by the systematic vetting of Islamic organizations through government authorities after the terrorist attacks in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi in 1998, and the Global War on Terror in the wake of 9/11.<sup>45</sup>

Thirdly, in the late 2000s, Christian schools had become the preferred option for a good education for most middle-class families in Tanzania. Their successful position as the country’s ‘top schools’ was underlined by the annually published school rankings which were widely followed by prospective students and their families in their search for a good education. In 2009, a high-ranking CSSC official provided me with a recent list of Tanzania’s 200 best-performing secondary schools, which contained only the name of the schools and their rank.<sup>46</sup> I asked her to identify on this basis to which background (i.e., ‘government,’ ‘church,’ ‘Islamic,’ etc.) each of them belonged. The CSSC official’s categorization confirmed what has been claimed by public discourse for several years: the ‘church’ schools figured disproportionately high in the rankings, with 41.5% of the 200 top-performing secondary schools. They were followed by the ‘government’ schools, which comprised 20%, and other ‘private for-profit’ schools with 13.5%. ‘Islamic’ or ‘Muslim’ schools ranked at the bottom of the list with only 3.5%.

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<sup>44</sup> Dilger 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Dilger 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Ms. Anastasia Martin, August 10, 2008.

## Socio-Moral Belonging in Dar es Salaam's 'New' Christian and Islamic Schools

In the following two sections, I draw on my ethnographic research in two Catholic schools – one at the primary and one at the advanced secondary level – which were both former missionary schools that were nationalized during the socialist *Ujamaa* period and were transferred back to the Church in the early 2000s. Furthermore, I build on my fieldwork in two secondary schools of the Africa Muslims Agency and a reformist mosque respectively. Both schools were established in the context of the Ansaar Sunna movement which was initiated by Tanzanian students returning from Saudi Arabia and other Islamic countries in the 1980s. The movement is critical both of the country's national government and the national umbrella organization of Muslims in the country, BAKWATA.<sup>47</sup> While the two Catholic schools admit students of *diverse* religious and denominational backgrounds, the two *Islamic* schools function as 'seminaries' and exclusively admit students of their own faith.

All four schools included in my study depended on often substantial school fees, even if they relied simultaneously on the funding of an international development organization (as the Africa Muslims Agency's schools did, which depended on the Agency's headquarters Direct Aid in Kuwait<sup>48</sup>). Furthermore, the four schools operated under the government's (secular) curriculum, but in addition they were dedicated to teaching moral values and religious content. At the Muslim schools, religious knowledge was taught during Islamic Knowledge and Arabic classes, and there was an obligatory midday prayer in the on-site mosque. In the Catholic schools, religious knowledge was taught in Bible Knowledge or Divinity Studies classes and church attendance was mandatory. With this focus, the schools of my study distinguished themselves from the government (i.e., public) schools which they associated with 'poor performance' and their alleged inability to cope with the moral challenges of urban life.<sup>49</sup>

In the following, I will show how this broader structural and ideological context led to the articulation and embodiment of very different subject positions in the four schools. I explore these dynamics with regard to, first, my interlocutors' somewhat ambiguous self-positioning in relation to notions of privilege and marginality; and, second, the teaching and learning of faith-oriented values in

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<sup>47</sup> Becker 2006, 591; Loimeier 2007, 143.

<sup>48</sup> See Ahmed 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Dilger 2022, 103.

Dar es Salaam's highly diverse and, especially at the political and institutional level, contested religious cityscape.<sup>50</sup>

## **Ambiguous Perceptions of Privilege and Marginality**

The two Catholic schools included in my study especially adopted a prominent position in Dar es Salaam's educational landscape at the time of my research, both with regard to their perceived academic performance and their reputation of providing rigid moral training to their students. At the same time, these schools were also strongly involved in the dynamics of class formation – a process that involves a complex assemblage of affective, material, and symbolic aspirations towards 'the good life'<sup>51</sup> which may be achieved not exclusively, but importantly also through education.<sup>52</sup> The boundary work that was performed by the students and staff of Catholic schools in establishing themselves as members of a highly successful group in the city involved the cultivation of socio-religious prestige<sup>53</sup> and distinction both beyond<sup>54</sup> and within<sup>55</sup> the institutional setting of the schools.

Both schools, which were situated on the same campus next to the renowned St. Joseph Cathedral in the inner-city area of Dar es Salaam, attracted families of the wealthy middle and partly upper classes as their clients. These institutions were ranked among Tanzania's 'top schools' due to their academic success and because they consistently employed English in their everyday teaching. In the latter regard, their successful operation is closely associated with the 'language gap' that has shaped Tanzania's educational system since independence, and even before. Thus, Tanzania's education system is closely aligned with the British model and is characterized in particular by its bilingualism that was established during colonial rule. While Kiswahili is the language of instruction until the completion of primary school, the use of English is compulsory from secondary school onward. In most public schools, but also in the weaker performing Islamic

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50 While the inhabitants of Dar es Salaam pursue an overall pragmatic approach toward the articulation of religious diversity in everyday life (Njozi 2002, 47f.), Christian and Muslim encounters in the city are defined by their potential for conflict, especially at the institutional and political levels, where the relationships between religions are a delicate matter.

51 Spronk 2020, 471.

52 Lentz 2020, 451f.

53 Cf. van Dijk 2020, 188.

54 Cf. Pauli 2018.

55 Cf. Lentz 2015, 26.

seminaries, neither the teachers nor the students usually have a sufficiently good knowledge of English, and Kiswahili is often spoken *de facto*. This poses a major problem for the final examinations, which are conducted in English throughout the country. This, in turn, attracts large numbers of students to the often better-equipped private schools, especially the Christian institutions.<sup>56</sup>

Against this background, some students claimed that Christian schools had good teachers and learning materials, were well managed, and made them ‘spiritually strong,’ 17-year-old Florence said:

[M]y parents wanted me to go to [a different Catholic school]. But ... I told them that I would like to come here. I believed that Saint Joseph as a new school run by the Catholic Church – that maybe the teachers, we being the first, they will do their best to make us pass. Also, it’s under the cardinal’s organization, it is the [only] school [in Tanzania like that].

Furthermore, the students of St. Joseph distinguished themselves from the students of public schools and emphasized the importance of moral discipline for a strong academic performance. As 17-year-old Iqbal put it:

[This school] is good because ... we have good teachers and the school is religious. So, first of all [we learn] to be good people, [more] than in government schools [where] you can do many things that are immoral, like smoking... If you see the results of Form IV from last year, the top ten schools in Tanzania were, first, private schools and, second, they were Christian schools.

However, there was also a sense of ambiguity concerning the privileged position of the Catholic schools, especially among the management and teachers. Thus, the process of establishing oneself as members of a highly successful middle class applied not only to aspects of economic improvement and/or social status, but also to the embodied, and contradictory,<sup>57</sup> “feeling of [the] structure” in which the schools’ employees were aiming to live.<sup>58</sup> For instance, one of the leading staff at St. Joseph was critical of the fact that her church claimed to be involved in the struggle against poverty and illiteracy in the country – a claim also emphasized by the CSSC itself –, but instead fostered a growing social gap in Tanzania by catering to the wealthy middle classes. She said: “I am a Christian, but sometimes I think that the church can also divide society.” Furthermore, some of the teachers, who often came from less privileged rural families, reported a loss of respect

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<sup>56</sup> On the language gap in Tanzania, see Brock-Utne 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Coe and Pauli 2020, 10.

<sup>58</sup> Spronk 2020, 471 with reference to Ahmed 2010.

among their students and claimed that some pupils from wealthy families were looking down on them. One Kiswahili teacher said: “If they [students] made a mistake [and you] punish [them, they] become harsh. Some students say: ‘My mother is paying you, so...’”



**Image 1:** View of the playground of St. Joseph Primary School with St. Joseph Cathedral in the background (Photo: H. Dilger)

At the two Islamic seminaries, the situation was quite different, though the two schools differed from each other with regard to their respective social profiles. While the Kipata Islamic Seminary for girls attracted students and families from the rapidly growing Muslim urban middle class who were seeking to reconcile their “generalized ideas about ‘progress’ and ... middle-class aspirations” with notions of “religious virtuosity” and faith,<sup>59</sup> the Al-Farouq Islamic Seminary for Boys was attended mostly by students from low-income Muslim families, with some of them being co-sponsored by the Africa Muslims Agency.

Furthermore, the Al-Farouq seminary’s academic performance declined rapidly in the late 2000s, due to its low competitiveness in comparison with other private, but also some high-performing public schools. This was due to its weak material infrastructure, the high turnover of teachers, and the general stigmatization of Islamic seminaries in the city. Moreover, the feeling of being socially and

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<sup>59</sup> Osella and Osella 2010, 207.

religiously marginal<sup>60</sup> was shared by both teachers and students. Several teachers complained about being poorly paid by their school, referring to their profession as “work for God” or as “work for society,” though in most instances these comments were both a statement about faith and the reality of a low-paid job. As Mr. Ibadi put it: “You work for the benefit of society – not for your own benefit.” For him, teaching in an Islamic seminary was a temporary solution, as he saw his employment at Al-Farouq in opposition to his own material and professional aspirations.



**Image 2:** Advertisement for two Islamic seminaries (Kipata Girls Islamic High School and Ilala Islamic High School) in Dar es Salaam in 2010 (Photo: H. Dilger)

The male students of Al-Farouq saw themselves in an overall marginal position, too, and painted bleak visions of their future, with some of them being concerned about being exposed to the “moral temptations” and risks of urban life, including the use of drugs and the risk of becoming infected with life-threatening diseases. Many of them argued that if they performed poorly in school, they would “die an early death” in their urban neighborhoods. According to these young men, their own marginal status corresponded closely with the perceived lack of resources of their seminary, which they compared to the Christian schools in the city with their well-equipped libraries and laboratories, their highly qual-

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Loimeier 2007.



ified teachers, and their school-owned transport systems which picked up the students at their homes and brought them to school every day. In contrast, the students at Al-Farouq reported that they depended on public transport in the chronically congested city. One of them told me:

In [Christian] schools the students are brought home after school, but I often have to wait half an hour for transportation. In some daladalas you have to stand up the whole way home. By the time you get home your whole body aches.

Another student added: “We are the people from below. Ordinary people are just moving [with public transport].”

## Learning the Value of Multireligious Co-Existence

The schools in my study also differed from each other with regard to the way their teaching of values was shaped by their specific religious or denominational frameworks, and how this was perceived and embodied by students and teachers. As Mahmood has argued with regard to the context of Islamic revivalism in Egypt, religious settings can be spaces of moral agency in which the specific virtues of a particular faith are embodied in often highly active ways.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the students included in my research were also more than “passive and submissive beings”<sup>62</sup> when it came to the embodiment of religious values in their lives, both in the context of the Islamic seminaries and the more religiously mixed Catholic schools. Furthermore, both Christian and Muslim schools played an important role for situating their students and staff in the multireligious landscape of Dar es Salaam, even if they gave priority to one specific faith in their teachings.

The two Catholic schools admitted students from different religious backgrounds. Their primary school emphasized that “the school has made arrangements for every pupil to practice his/her religion.” At the same time, however, the primary school urged parents to follow up with their children’s “religious instructions.” The advanced secondary school stated that “students that find it difficult to cope with the regulations of the ... School, [and] must weigh carefully their decision to join or not to join” the school. Furthermore, the schools played not only a central role for (re)producing “a materially ‘successful’ elite” but also “an

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<sup>61</sup> Mahmood 2006, 205.

<sup>62</sup> Mahmood 2006, 205.

expanded Catholic middle class.”<sup>63</sup> Thus, while the St. Joseph schools were open for students from *all* religious and denominational backgrounds; the majority of their students (around 70%) were Roman Catholic, while the remainder belonged to the Protestant churches (25–30%) or had, in very few instances, a Muslim background.

Attending the religious rituals and services of the Catholic schools was not necessarily a morally or emotionally awkward experience for my interlocutors, even if they had a different religious or denominational orientation. During my fieldwork in 2010, on each of the four Fridays preceding Easter Sunday, the students and teachers recited the “Way of the Cross” prayer, which reflects on the fourteen stations of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, in the neighboring cathedral. The mass, which was organized exclusively for the students and teachers of St. Joseph, began with the entrance of the priest who was accompanied by three altar boys and eight students from the schools. This group passed each of the fourteen icons with a cross and two candles, while one student read from the Bible about the events depicted at each station. These activities were accompanied by collective singing, kneeling, and reciting of prayers at each of the fourteen stations. Many students and teachers next to me held a small prayer book in their hands, like the *Little School of Prayer*, as well as the booklet *Praying the Rosary with the Pope* (both in Kiswahili).

While the non-Catholic students and teachers articulated their reservations about participating in these religious rituals, most of them claimed that they complied with them either due to “their contract” (especially teachers) or because it was “normal” for them (both teachers and students). Ten-year-old Veronica, who came from a Muslim family, said that her father was initially opposed to his daughter attending a Christian school. However, she had been at St. Joseph’s primary school since Grade two and had gotten used to “playing along” in the church services while learning about her own faith at home. She said:

It’s not a challenge for me. I am used to pray[ing like this]. But my father, when I was small, he didn’t want me to go to Christian schools; he was concerned that I was forced by the nuns [who are running the school]. He said that they are not the same religion.

Similarly, the Muslim teachers at St. Joseph’s adopted a largely pragmatic stance toward participating in Catholic rituals, while making sure to attend the nearby mosque for prayer during lunch breaks and on Fridays. Mr. Usman said that he had several Christian family members and was used to attending Christian

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<sup>63</sup> Grace 2003, 48.

events, and that this was not uncommon in the socially and religiously diverse environments of Dar es Salaam. He explained:

I've told you that even though this is a Christian school [there are] people with different religious backgrounds and we live as a community. So, the race and any kind of 'you are Muslim, I am Christian,' we don't have that. It's not something we talk about, because we live here as one.

At the Islamic seminaries, the aspect of teaching faith-oriented values was emphasized even more. The girls' seminary especially pursued a rigid approach to training its students in becoming "good Muslims" by observing the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed. One teacher illustrated this aspect with regard to the proper wearing of the hijab when she said:

On the Day of Judgement, I will be asked: 'If you wear the hijab, why haven't you taught them?' I have the responsibility, and these girls were going half-naked. Did not Jesus have his disciples? [These students] are following my manners.

At Al-Farouq, on the other hand, the teaching of religious values was less strict, which had to do both with the somewhat older age of the seminary's students but also with a generally more relaxed attitude toward the moral behaviors of young Muslim men and boys compared to women and girls. At the same time, the students at Al-Farouq also articulated a strong sense of belonging to the global *Umma*, but associated this – more than the girls at Kipata – with their socially marginal status. Thus, the learning and embodiment of values in the schools of my study entailed practices that were characterized by the ethical desire to establish continuity in one's life<sup>64</sup> (especially with regard to adhering to the teachings of the Quran) as well as by moral ambivalence<sup>65</sup> and the "preparedness to reflect on the ambiguity of selfhood"<sup>66</sup> (for instance, with regard to their perceived marginal position in the socially and religiously diverse context of Dar es Salaam). In particular, the young Muslim men expressed the feeling of being "different," which was described in drastic terms by one of the students who said that the public perceived of Al-Farouq as a place for the education of "future terrorists." Similarly, one teacher reported how he was treated differently in his everyday interactions with non-Muslims in the city. He said: "Sometimes you sense that

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<sup>64</sup> Mahmood 2001, 212.

<sup>65</sup> Engelke 2004; Schielke 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Janson 2015, 38.

[they] greet you differently because you are a Muslim – for instance, when they shake your hands.”

At the same time, however, neither the striving to become a good Muslim, nor the perception of being socially marginal at Al-Farouq, implied the retreat into a socio-religious enclave of fellow believers at the Islamic seminaries.<sup>67</sup> Thus, even the male students of Al-Farouq emphasized the sameness of all religions and the value of multi-cultural co-habitation in Tanzania today. As 17-year-old Faraz put it:

[Being with other Muslims] helps me to recognize that we Muslims are supposed to be as one, how we are supposed to be and live. [...] And this is not only for the Muslims – all human beings are one, only their beliefs [*imani*] are different.

Among the students of Kipata, on the other hand, the active embodiment of their own faith values instigated a moral orientation toward the world that was not only an individually liberating<sup>68</sup> but also a socializing force in their everyday lives in a religiously diverse city. Salma, for instance, said that her faith and the practice of prayer helped her to focus on “her own things,” and that she was not shutting off herself from her (non-Muslim) friends, but that her interactions with people of different religious backgrounds were a core element of her everyday life. In this regard, she asserted that the liberating experience, that she had with her own faith at the seminary, had been seminal for her everyday moral comportment in her wider social and urban environment. She told me:

You know, in Dar es Salaam, it is just normal: the Christians have their things, the Muslims have their things, but we are united in society. For instance, I study in an Islamic school, but when I return home, I have my Christian friends there. I go and ask them for materials, maybe for a certain book. We teach each other, maybe my friend knows things [I can learn from her] although she is a Christian.

## Conclusion

In Dar es Salaam in the early twenty-first century, Christian and Muslim schools have become central to families’ and students’ quests for a good life, which are shaped by material, ethical, and moral aspirations.<sup>69</sup> Especially the church-run

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Shavit and Wiesenbach 2012.

<sup>68</sup> Mahmood 2006.

<sup>69</sup> See Fischer 2014, 5.

institutions, but also some of the more successful Muslim seminaries, are widely appreciated for their practices of teaching morals in order to instill their locally, nationally, and transnationally embedded value frameworks in the lives of students as well as their staff.<sup>70</sup> However, the educational interventions of Christian and Muslim actors do not only have individual effects for the moral development of their students and teachers. The new generation of faith-oriented schools has established itself in a context of interreligious tensions, where Christian and Muslim organizations and their related actors compete over political participation and moral and spiritual territory in the city.<sup>71</sup> As Loimeier has argued Tanzania “risks becoming one of the countries ... where religion may either contribute to national stability or become a destabilizing force,” and where religion, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, is “often instrumentalized as a marker of identity in interreligious conflicts.”<sup>72</sup>

In the conclusion to this chapter, I want to highlight two aspects that are relevant for understanding how faith-oriented schools in contemporary Tanzania have come to play a major role in these contestations as they are both a reflection and an outcome of large-scale colonial and postcolonial forces. I argue that it is important to explore the emerging dynamics of socio-moral and religious belonging among students and teachers of Christian and Muslims schools *comparatively* as this helps to understand how their co-existence may have a disruptive or stabilizing impact on the transforming relationships among religion, society, and the state in postcolonial Tanzania.

First, the case studies in this chapter have highlighted that both Christian and Islamic schools were established by their parent organizations as development initiatives from the early-1990s onward, especially in the area of social services provision. In their official self-representations, they usually aim to increase access to education among disadvantaged groups, thus contributing to the building of a more equitable and just society. At the same time, however, their activities have become firmly embedded in the dynamics of market liberalization and social segregation in Dar es Salaam’s wider cityscape. This has a strong influence on the formation of individual practices and subjectivities within these schools, both with regard to students and teachers’ self-perceptions of marginality and privilege. As I have shown, the close entwinement between students and teachers’ self-perceptions of social and religious difference in Christian and Islamic schools have been shaped by colonial and postcolonial histories of

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<sup>70</sup> Stambach 2010a; Dilger 2017.

<sup>71</sup> Dilger 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Loimeier 2007, 137, 138.

socio-religious inequality that continue to affect Tanzania's educational market. Since the early 1990s, the topic of Christian-Muslim relations in Dar es Salaam has become an increasingly sensitive issue, and the unequal access to education among members of the two religions plays a significant role in these conflicts.<sup>73</sup> The comparative angle presented here can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the historical dimensions of the debate, and it may help expose the ways in which especially the former mission churches' privileged position in the field of education has become entwined with the perpetuation of socio-religious inequalities in contemporary urban Tanzania, and potentially other parts of Africa.

Second, faith-oriented ideas and practices are relevant for the formation of different types of moral and religious belonging in Dar es Salaam's new Christian and Islamic schools, and therefore the dynamics of interreligious co-habitation in the wider urban environment. The Islamic seminaries in the city especially engage with religious subject formation as they only admit Muslim students and train them to become 'good Muslims.' They also do not share the Christian schools' strong commitment to nation-building and the formation of 'good citizens,' and concomitant references to the nation-state. For instance, the singing of the anthem or the prominent hanging of the national flag are strikingly absent at both Islamic seminaries that I studied. However, despite such moments of escaping state control, the hegemonic power of the Tanzanian state in "all aspects of everyday life, including religion"<sup>74</sup> is omnipresent in the schools. This applies not only to the vetting of Islamic seminaries in the wake of terrorist attacks,<sup>75</sup> but also to the rigid enforcement of the same secular state curriculum in all public and private (including religious) schools.

Furthermore, the formation of belonging in all Christian and Muslims schools included in my study was shaped by the value of a multireligious society, very much along the lines of the *Ujamaa* legacy. The learning of one's own religious values and practices is seen as necessary for a self-confident life with socio-religious difference and marginality in Dar es Salaam's highly diversified cityscape. Thus, Muslim students became knowledgeable and confident about their faith in these seminaries with regard to living in a pluralist Tanzanian culture, in which they engaged with people from different religious and ethnic backgrounds on an everyday basis and simultaneously longed to lead a morally 'clean' life in spiritually and socioeconomically challenging environments.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Ndaluka and Wijzen 2014; Wijzen and Mfumbusa 2004.

<sup>74</sup> Loimeier 2009, 134.

<sup>75</sup> Loimeier 2009, 134; Dilger 2022, 75.

I end this chapter with the call to pay more systematic attention to the dynamics of power, politics, class formation, and processes of institutionalization in anthropological and interdisciplinary studies of the co-existence of Christians and Muslims in urban Africa, and in research on religiously diverse settings in general. The comparative study of Christian and Muslim schools in a joint analytical framework requires not only paying thorough attention to the political economies and power relations that structure the formation of diverse religious urban environments under the influence of globalization and capitalist market expansion. It also provides an opportunity, as Altglas and Wood argue, to bring ‘the social’ back into the socio-anthropological study of religion and religious diversity in order to understand how religious experiences, practices, and materialities are shaped and transformed in intersection with large-scale forces like class formation, development interventions, and the politics of religious difference over time.<sup>76</sup>

The comparative study of moral becoming, and the educational and professional trajectories of students and teachers in Christian and Muslim schools in Dar es Salaam offers an example par excellence for “unmasking the relations of power”<sup>77</sup> in the social constitution of religiously diverse fields, both with regard to the becoming of individual bodies and particular institutions, and the position of specific religious groups and actors in a globalizing world. Situating the emergence – or re-emergence – of these schools since the 1990s in the histories of interreligious relations and education from colonial times onward highlights their highly diverging social positions in Tanzania’s educational market today. A focus on individual experiences and practices of learning values, as well on the micro-institutional histories and materialities of the schools in which these values are embodied, allows for an understanding of the entanglement of all these phenomena with dynamics of socio-religious difference, market mobilities, and urban transformation.

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<sup>76</sup> Altglas and Wood 2018.

<sup>77</sup> Monnot 2018.

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Patrick Desplat

# Tropes of Longing and Loss

Religion, Politics, and the Heritagization of a ‘Muslim City’ in Ethiopia\*

## Introduction

In 2006, the city of Harar in Ethiopia was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The enlistment recognizes Harar as the ‘fourth holy city of Islam,’ a ‘fortified historic town,’ and the ‘sacred Muslim city of Ethiopia.’<sup>1</sup> The walls surrounding the old town, constructed between the 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as local townhouses, their interior designs, and 82 mosques and 102 shrines dedicated to Muslim saints, were considered as tangible heritage of African-Islamic origin. UNESCO made the enlistment decision based on the exceptional universal religious and cultural significance of Harar’s old town. Its centuries-old architecture has been neglected and is on the brink of loss. Therefore, the argument is that preservation and conservation are necessary.

In addition to Timbuktu in Mali, Harar is one of the few World Heritage Sites in sub-Saharan Africa that is explicitly framed by its religious reputation as an Islamic city. Labels like the ‘fourth holy city of Islam’ are obviously not grounded in a profound Islamic theological argument – Kairouan, Damascus, Hebron, Najaf, Istanbul and Timbuktu sometimes claim the title, too – but are used by various actors involved in the process of heritagization as a successful marketing and advertising scheme. In the wake of such a scheme, Harar became prominent in social media as ‘Africa’s Mecca.’<sup>2</sup> As such, various cultural and religious idioms

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\* This chapter is a revision of my research conducted in Harar between 2003 and 2007 (altogether a total of 14 months). In my fieldwork, I scrutinized the culturalization of religious practices, thus focusing on how people in Harar discuss the changing role of established religious practices in regard to rising Muslim activism that condemns saint veneration as un-Islamic innovation (*bid’a*). The heritagization of Harar was in full swing during my research, however, I did not investigate the complexities of the process at that time. Therefore, this chapter is an opportunity to revise my older material with the help of a more recent body of literature on heritage and heritagization, an interdisciplinary scholarly interest that evolved after my fieldwork during the 2000s. All of my interlocuters have been anonymized.

1 Revault and Santelli 2004; <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1189/>, accessed January 4, 2023.

2 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-4065694>; <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/-2017/6/25/the-walled-city-of-harar-in-eastern-ethiopia-14>, accessed March 22, 2022.

merged into an aestheticized and sacralized representation of Islamic authenticity.

In this chapter, I engage with current debates on heritage, religion, and culture. I explore how the religious reconfiguration of urban spaces and places is not only part of the current global resurgence of religion, but also the emergence of religious subjectivities and discourses in the public domain of Ethiopia. More specifically, I examine how the urban fabric of Harar is shaped by the religious imaginaries, practices, and power relations of supranational institutions, the Ethiopian state, and local actors that draw upon various historical sources to advance their own interests.

In recent decades, the process of heritage designation has evolved into its own industry. Many cities have sought to address economic decline and generate new revenue streams through tourism and cultural consumption. Heritage serves not only to preserve what is at risk of being lost, but also to compete with other places and cities which are popular tourist destinations. The pursuit of authenticity and the global heritage movement were initiated as a result of the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage. Since then, local communities, national states, and supranational institutions transformed the search for 'pure' and 'original' cultural markers into an authenticity craze and downright obsession with the past. Authenticity became something sought after, celebrated, and at times disputed, but always believed to possess elements of originality and purity which are at risk, and thus require protection. World Cultural Heritage sites aim to preserve these fleeting moments into stasis. Labelling something as heritage locates and specifies historical legacies in place and time, elevating culture to the status of an asset.

Tropes of longing and loss involved in heritagization indicate various emotional investments and political tones that themselves mirror as many nostalgias as there are actors involved. These multiple nostalgias draw on perceived notions of loss: loss of knowledge, roots, identity, culture and even religious virtue.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as various studies argue, nostalgia is not a retrogressive perspective of local people, but a specific practice to control the present and sketch the future.<sup>4</sup> Like heritage, nostalgia defines and extracts a specific historical period or events as representative in the present.

The process of heritage designation is an act of sacralization that easily transcends the divide between the religious and secular spheres. Heritagization goes beyond imbuing materiality with special meaning. Instead, it creates a distinc-

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3 Berliner 2020.

4 Battaglia 1995; Berdahl 1999; Bissell 2005; van Dijk 1998.

tion between places, people, and practices, elevating and setting them apart from other intertwined places, people, and practices.<sup>5</sup> In this process, various actors – including state representatives, organizations, local communities, and supranational advisors – can easily create heritage by investing in sites or practices that blur the boundaries between the religious and secular. As a result, heritage designation intersects in complex ways with cultural and religious values and often blends them into a single entity.

Currently, about 20% of the locations included on the World Heritage List have religious or spiritual connections.<sup>6</sup> Yet, heritagization is not without its challenges. Most studies on heritage and Islam “have consistently been dominated by the theme of dissonance, irreconcilable values, and subsequent destruction.”<sup>7</sup> For instance, in 2013, the almost ritualistic demolition of architectural heritage sites in and around Timbuktu by Muslim groups in northern Mali made global headlines.<sup>8</sup> Other mediatized events included the bombing of the Buddhist temple in Borobudur, Indonesia,<sup>9</sup> the shelling of stone Buddhas in Bamiyan, Afghanistan,<sup>10</sup> the destruction of statues in Hatra, Iraq<sup>11</sup> and the riots in Djenne, Mali, during the restoration of a mosque.<sup>12</sup>

These incidents expose how the claims of universal values and authenticity by UNESCO and intergovernmental constellations do not necessarily meet with demands and views of local communities. UNESCO and various Muslim groups often rely on different sorts of authenticities. UNESCO in collaboration with councilors, state representatives, and local communities together construct the authenticity of tangible and intangible heritage using different criteria that are based on the necessities of conversation and preservation. Muslims often debate authenticity along with other questions, for instance; proper piety, religious practices, and theological arguments, while facing the challenges of their ethical project in the face of secularism.<sup>13</sup> For example, the role of shrines and related religious practices could be simultaneously debated among Muslims, and foci UNESCO preservation, the latter regarding these sites as having universal human value. Here, two kinds of authenticity are at work.

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5 Meyer and De Witte 2013.

6 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/religious-sacred-heritage/>, accessed January 10, 2023.

7 Rico 2017, 213.

8 Apotsos 2017; Joy 2016.

9 Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2015.

10 Centlivres 2008.

11 González Zarandona, Albarrán-Torres, and Isakhan 2018.

12 Arnoldi 2014.

13 Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005.

States play a crucial role in heritagization processes. States propose national heritage sites, and when UNESCO conventions are ratified, they may often struggle to implement them. Here, conflict between state demands and the requirements of UNESCO create various challenges. These interfaces between state and international governance create new administrative procedures, offices, and bureaucracies to negotiate and implement decisions of authenticity and heritage. These ‘heritage regimes’<sup>14</sup> attempt to manage and control processes of heritagization.

Against this conceptual background of heritage and religion, the Ethiopian city of Harar is a complex empirical case. Unlike many sub-Saharan African countries, Orthodox Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia share a long, intertwined history, marked by periods of conflict and peaceful coexistence.<sup>15</sup> Yet, various governments and academia alike have often portrayed Ethiopia as Christian, effectively marginalizing Muslims and other religious groups. When the new Ethiopian government promoted religious freedom in 1991, formerly curbed Muslim reformers and Protestant religious groups initiated new intra- and interreligious debates about religion, authenticity, and correct religious practices. In some cases, violent clashes erupted between various religious groups.<sup>16</sup> These conflicts have challenged the dominant state discourse of religious tolerance, coexistence, and communal harmony that undermine the often conflictual history among religious and ethnic communities.<sup>17</sup>

In the wake of these conflicts, the Ethiopian government joined the global ‘war on terror,’ distinguishing between an indigenous ‘Ethiopian Islam’ that is tolerant and peaceful towards Muslim reformers, and activists that are seen as ‘exterior’ and a threat to religious relationships. Against this backdrop, I argue, first, that the global representation of Harar as the ‘fourth holy city of Islam’ is not only an act of state recognition of the city’s Muslim citizens, but also a political move to forge the historic materiality of a former Islamic centre on the Horn of Africa as an example of a tolerant ‘Ethiopian Islam.’ Indeed, the presence and density of shrines dedicated to Muslim saints points to an inclusive, Sufi-inspired religious practice; a mystical expression of Islamic faith that has been fiercely criticized by Muslim reformers in Ethiopia and beyond.

I argue, secondly, that the Islamization of Harar serves the main interests of Harari Muslims, a small minority group and among the first settlers in the

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<sup>14</sup> Bendix, Eggert, and Peselmann 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Ahmed 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Abbink 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Feyissa 2012.

multireligious, multicultural urban environment of the city. Spatial practices of Harari people produce a sense of place that is often nostalgic. I will draw on ethnographic material to underline sentiments of belonging to material religious places as sites of memory. These places are either religious sites or embedded in religious narratives and have protective functions that are both transcendent as well as immanent. Muslim figures venerated at local shrines in Harar often defended the city and its inhabitants against infidels and other enemies, and therefore evoke a double meaning of safeguarding. However, these narratives and their respective sites underline how Harari people in the past and today perceive threats by outside forces that might endanger their religious and ethnic identity.

A third section of this chapter brings these two perspectives together and engages with the historical process of heritagization of Harar starting from the early 1960s. This section is based on historical reports from UNESCO and will shed light on the various politics and foci of preservation involved. In the past, Ethiopian state policy predominantly fostered heritage sites that are designated as Orthodox Christian, and therefore reproduced a certain narrative of Ethiopian history and of a particular region. Namely, the country's northern highlands as the cradle of Abyssinia. The nomination of Harar as a Cultural World Heritage site has fostered the recognition of Islam as being part of the Ethiopian state.

In this chapter, I will also underline how contemporary decisions of finally designating Harar as a heritage site is concurrent with a new policy that distinguished 'Ethiopian Islam' as tolerant and inclusive, in contrast to the threat of Muslim reformers that are regarded as exterior forces which disrupt religious co-existence in Ethiopia. This section of the chapter will highlight the gradual shift from a predominantly cultural to a religious value of heritage.

## **The Heritagization of Harar: The Culture-Religion Nexus, Brandings and Contestations as the 'Forgotten City'**

In 2003, Harar's early efforts to be designated as a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage site were accompanied by two concurrent initiatives. Firstly, UNESCO awarded Harar the 'City of Peace' prize, recognizing it as an urban model of peace, tolerance, social cohesion, and intercommunal understanding. Secondly, a team of French scholars and students from various disciplines including anthropology, sociology, history, and architecture conducted extensive research over several years on the city, producing the academic foundation for its designation as a her-



itage site. The research focused on tangible elements such as the sewer system, shrines, mosques, and local houses, and was published in the edited volume *Harar: A Muslim City of Ethiopia* (Revault and Santelli 2004). This publication served as a prelude to Harar's eventual recognition as a Cultural World Heritage site and provided a visual representation of various aspects of the city's material culture. For the first time, Harar was referred to as the 'fourth holy city of Islam.' The publication portrayed the city as a timeless, preserved monument similar to what Arthur Rimbaud encountered when he settled in Harar in 1880.

European researchers collaborated extensively with stakeholders in Harar, and the resulting publication was a testament to the influence of local narratives on the process of heritagization. The volume clearly differentiated between mosques as historical landmarks and Muslim shrines, which were placed under the subheading of culture. This distinction reflected the views of many Harari and the local administrative structure at that time, with shrines being under the jurisdiction of the local *Culture & Sports Bureau* and mosques being managed by the local branch of the *Ethiopian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs* (ESCIA).

In 2006, Harar was successfully enlisted as a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site and again was considered the 'fourth holy city of Islam.' The initiative outlined the city's sacred significance, along with the material heritage of 82 mosques and 103 shrines dedicated to Muslim saints within the urban landscape of the walled old town.<sup>18</sup> The heritage zone includes the old town, encircled by a wall containing a large number of mosques, shrines, and traditional houses, as well as a largely uninhabited buffer zone extending to the east.

The designation by UNESCO contained four main criteria. First, the old town of Harar displays "values of original Islamic culture [...] within the otherwise Christian region" that shaped the city's unique forms of architecture, reflected in the old town's alleys, traditional houses, mosques, and shrines. Second, Harar exhibits "cultural traditions related to Islamic and African roots," a "melting pot," that has grown in "relative isolation" and developed a culturally specific community structure. Third, Harar's architecture illustrates the "impact of African and Islamic tradition" that made the city unique. Fourth, the city is an "example of a traditional human settlement" that developed in close interaction with its environment, giving rise to social organization and the Harari language.

The criteria overlap considerably but aim at underlining the genuine and unique traditions and culture of a 'Harari Muslim heritage,' as explained under the heading of 'authenticity.' Furthermore, UNESCO suggests focusing on the preservation of historic heritage, improving living conditions for its inhabitants,

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<sup>18</sup> Revault and Santelli 2004; Santelli 2008.

and promotion of tourism, as a way of ongoing management of the site which also combines conversation efforts with development policies. The designation by UNESCO set apart several features of Harar that were marked as authentic and singular and therefore worthwhile for preservation.

UNESCO's initiative draws on a comprehensive range of scientific and local data, but also simplifies contemporary complexities into a historical essence. The initiative represents Harar as inhabited by Harari Muslims who are differentiated from other groups through their language, social structure, and traditional crafts such as bookbinding, basket making, and textile weaving. This perspective aligns with the dominant discourse among the Harari, who view themselves as a small, threatened group and as Ethiopian Muslims who are marginalized by the modern state. This viewpoint motivates their pursuit of recognition and preservation. Both UNESCO and the Harari rely on historical records and aim to distinguish Harar through heritagization, albeit with distinct justifications.

Many perspectives that exist regarding Harar fail to accurately reflect the intricate religious and ethnic makeup of the city. Since its incorporation into the modern Ethiopian state in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Harar has transformed into a diverse urban hub with a multiethnic, multi-religious population.<sup>19</sup> As noted, the Harari are a small demographic minority compared to the majority of ethnic Oromo and Amhara. Furthermore, the city is home to a substantial number of both Christians and Muslims. Hence, the portrayal of Harar as a 'Harari Muslim city' is more of a historical depiction than a current reflection.

Despite the diversity of the urban populace, the process of heritagization of Harar has been relatively smooth and free of major controversies. However, there have been instances of dissatisfaction expressed by certain groups, such as from members of the Orthodox Christian Amhara community, who expressed their discomfort with being excluded during the presentation of the UNESCO-related book, *Harar: A Muslim city in Ethiopia* in Harar.<sup>20</sup> Another dispute arose between the Harari and UNESCO over the buffer zone outside of the old wall, where UNESCO required this area to remain unoccupied, while some Harari initiatives aimed to build homes in the zone.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> According to the latest figures available (2007), Harar's urban population is approximately 100,000 of various ethnic (40.5%, Amhara, 28.1% Oromo, 11.8% Harari, 7.9% Gurage, 6.8% Somali) and religious backgrounds (48.5% Orthodox Christian, 44.5% Muslim, 6.1% Protestant) (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Population Census Commission 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Revault and Santelli 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Bosredon 2009.

Another contentious issue, mainly among Muslims, has been the role of the Ethiopian state in the branding of Harar as the ‘fourth holy city of Islam.’ This debate was highlighted in a 2017 report by the *Middle East Times* entitled “The Forgotten City of Islam.” Some Harari accused the Ethiopian state of both suppressing the religious history of both Harar and of Ethiopian Muslims, while simultaneously promoting sites of Orthodox Christianity. The report also revealed the existence of disagreements among Ethiopian Muslims. On the one hand, the Vice-President of the *Ethiopian Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs* (ESCIA) expressed his pride in the UNESCO nomination, but categorically denied that Harar could be considered the ‘fourth holy city of Islam.’ The ESCIA is often perceived by Ethiopian Muslims as an institution that is close to and voices the interests of the state. On the other hand, Ahmed Zekaria, a Harari Muslim historian and former Chief Curator of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum, argued that Harar should be ranked even higher than the ‘fourth holiest place’:

As far as I am concerned, Ethiopia is the second home of Islam ... Before it reached the second city [of Medina], Islam was here. So it ... may be the first-and-a-half [most holy place], but not the second.<sup>22</sup>

In advocating for Harar to be ranked even higher, Zekaria drew a connection between the events of the so-called first *hijra* in 615 CE and the religious significance of Harar. Eight years prior to the establishment of the Islamic calendar, a small group of Muslims were sent by the Prophet Muḥammad to Ethiopia to avoid persecution by the infidel Quraish clan. During the first *hijra*, the group of Muslims arrived in the capital of the Aksumite Empire, in present-day northern Ethiopia. The Christian ruler, Ashama, provided political refuge to the Muslim group and subsequent refugees, despite the demands of the Quraish to hand them over. Among these early Muslims was the later Caliph, Uthman ibn Affan. By linking Harar to the first *hijra*, Ahmed Zekaria hinted that the companions of the Prophet may have visited or even resided in Harar. However, Zekaria also acknowledged that he did not wish to incite religious controversies, but rather aimed to highlight the city of Harar as a significant location of religious and cultural heritage.<sup>23</sup>

Zekaria’s report emphasizes the differing interests of the various actors involved. The heritage designation of Harar has been shaped by the actions of

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<sup>22</sup> <http://hararconnection.blogspot.com/2007/01/>, accessed March 25, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> During fieldwork, however, most Harari denied that there is any ‘4<sup>th</sup> holy city of Islam,’ even Ahmed Zekaria. However, some argued along Zekaria’s claim that it would have been possible that the companions of the Prophet have been in Harar at least for a short time.

supranational, state, and local stakeholders who have utilized various historical sources to advance their diverse political aims. UNESCO seeks to preserve unique cultural achievements, while the Ethiopian state seeks to reshape the historical narrative and to navigate contemporary religious politics.

## Religion and Politics in Ethiopia and Harar

Although Ethiopia is often perceived as Christian, the city of Harar has been deeply shaped by its historical role as an Islamic centre in the Horn of Africa. The city was the capital of the Adal Sultanate (1415–1577), and therefore the political centre of the 16<sup>th</sup> century *jihād* led by Imam Ahmad b. Ibrahim (r. 1527–43) on the Christian Empire of the central highlands. Later, Harar became famous as an independent Emirate ruled as a politically and militarily limited city state. Under the control of the Da’ud dynasty (1647–1875), Harar increased in economic strength, based in part on strategic alliances with the Oromo. The pastoralist Oromo migrated from the south and began to occupy large territories of depopulated areas while continuously attacking the city of Harar. Gradually, Oromo and Harari came to an agreement that finally led to the settlement of the Oromo and their Islamization. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city was conquered by the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889–1913) and incorporated into Ethiopia in 1887. Although the city was modernized by its Ethiopian rulers, the city lost its power as an economic centre when the French built a railway line between Addis Ababa and Djibouti, bypassing Dire Dawa in the nearby lowlands. Harar gradually lost its reputation as Islamic centre, although it remains attractive to regional Muslims students searching for religious knowledge or to pilgrims seeking to visit the many existing shrines.

Historical narratives of Ethiopia have frequently downplayed and often marginalized the significance of Muslims as an aspect of regional history.<sup>24</sup> Instead, academic attention has been directed towards Christian sources, often written as a state project of the (Christian) empire, ignoring the historical impact of Muslim sultanates and other non-Christian political entities.<sup>25</sup> This disregard of Islam as a subject of study is closely tied to its representation as an antagonistic ‘other’ by the Christian empire. The popular analogy of Ethiopia as a “Christian Island in a sea of Muslims and pagans”<sup>26</sup> reflected the perception of Islam as an external

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<sup>24</sup> Cerulli 1971; Cuoq 1981; Trimingham 1965 [1952].

<sup>25</sup> Toggia 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Østebø 2020.

force. This had real consequences; Muslims in Ethiopia have been largely marginalized by various Ethiopian governments in the past.

Following the downfall of Mengistu's socialist regime in 1991, the newly established government in Ethiopia underwent significant restructuring of its political and religious landscape. The government codified religious freedom in its constitution and granted Ethiopian Muslims increased rights, including political participation and religious expression. Additionally, the government implemented a policy of decentralization, which allowed for the establishment of a federal structure comprised of nine regional states, organized along ethno-linguistic lines. This provided greater autonomy for various ethnic groups to govern themselves at the regional level.

However, the implementation of federalism and religious freedom incurred numerous challenges. The emergence of ethnic conflicts in regards to language policies, regional power dynamics, and boundaries of territorialized ethnic group boundaries became prevalent issues.<sup>27</sup> The newfound religious freedom empowered various Muslim groups that have often been referred to as reformist or activist, resulting in inter- and intrareligious conflicts and sometimes violent incidents. The Ethiopian state blamed Muslim reform groups for instigating conflicts and producing tensions among Muslims and various other religious groups.

In response, the government expanded its discourse on Ethiopian Muslim-Christian relations, particularly in the context of the post-9/11 climate and the 'war on terror' in the Horn of Africa.<sup>28</sup> The state promoted a discourse of tolerance that was rooted in the historical image of peaceful cooperation between Muslims and Christians. As a result, state representatives introduced the concepts of 'home-grown Islam' (amhar. *hager beqel islimina*) or 'indigenous Islam' (amhar. *nebaru islimina*) to characterize a specific, peaceful, and moderate expression of Islam that is unique to Ethiopia. These terms were used to distinguish from recent Muslim reformers as external, conflict-causing forces influenced by the Middle Eastern region, sometimes referred to as 'Islamic extremism in Ethiopia' (amhar. *akrari islemena beethiopia*).<sup>29</sup>

The restructuring of the religious and ethnic landscape by the Ethiopian government had a significant impact on the city of Harar. The city underwent a transformation, becoming a multi-ethnic, multi-religious community since its incorporation into the Ethiopian state in late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Today, the majority of

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<sup>27</sup> Aalen 2002; Abbink 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Duncker 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Feyissa 2011.

its urban inhabitants are comprised of Oromo Muslims and Amhara Christians.<sup>30</sup> Both of these groups reside in the modern part of the city and its rural outskirts. The Harari, on the other hand, are a demographic minority, mostly residing in the old town. During the socialist regime from 1974 to 1987 and the subsequent civil war in Ethiopia, a significant number of Harari left the city and relocated elsewhere within Ethiopia or abroad, with the largest communities being found in Canada.<sup>31</sup> Currently, the majority of Harari reside outside of their hometown.

Despite being a demographic minority within the city, the Harari community was granted the right to self-governance through the establishment of the *Harari People's National Regional State* (HPNRS) in 1995. The decision sparked controversy as the Harari were the only ethnic minority group in Ethiopia to be granted the right to self-governance, in contrast to the majority of other, larger ethnic groups. During early negotiations, the regions of Oromia and Somali both had claimed administrative jurisdiction over Harar, but in 1995, the city and its surrounding region became its own state, the HPNRS, which is the smallest regional state in Ethiopia. Its boundaries correspond to the historical borders of the once independent Emirate of Harar (1647–1887), surrounded by the larger Oromia Regional State. The allocation of seats in various political institutions within the regional state is divided among ethnic groups, with the Harari securing a fixed number of seats in decision-making bodies. This political arrangement has resulted in tensions and major political impasses, particularly between the Harari and Oromo communities, with each accusing the other of marginalization during political decision-making. Despite these tensions, both major parties were allied with the governing Ethiopian state party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPDRF), which was the ruling party from 1991 to 2019.

The political argument of the Harari for their claim of their own regional state is driven by a perceived sense of threat. On the one hand, some Oromo political elites claim sovereignty over Harar and aspire to politically incorporate it into the Oromia Regional State. On the other hand, Salafi-inspired Oromo reform movements that emerged in the 1990s gained traction in the region and challenged local traditional Islamic practices, including the veneration of Muslim saints, which Salafi movements consider to be an illegitimate innovation (Arab.: *bid'ā*).

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**30** According to the latest figures available (2007), Harar's urban population is approximately 100,000 of various ethnic (40.5%, Amhara, 28.1% Oromo, 11.8% Harari, 7.9% Gurage, 6.8% Somali) and religious backgrounds (48.5% Orthodox Christian, 44.5% Muslim, 6.1% Protestant) (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Population Census Commission 2008).

**31** Gibb and Rothenberg 2000.

These developments added to the tensions between Harari and Oromo, further exacerbating the political deadlocks in the region.

The challenges faced by the Harari population regarding religious differences with Oromo Muslim reformers have been seized upon by the Ethiopian government to further its discourse on religious tolerance. Harar is presented as a prime example of religious harmony and inclusivity, where Muslim shrines in the city are visited by individuals of various religious backgrounds seeking blessings, including Christians. The coexistence of Catholic and Orthodox churches within the old town further serves to reinforce the government's message of religious tolerance. The heritagization of Harar as a model of peaceful coexistence between religions serves to highlight the country as a leader in promoting religious tolerance in the Horn of Africa.

## A Sense of Place, Spatial Practices, and Muslim Nostalgia in Harar

During my fieldwork in Harar in 2007, I had the opportunity to meet with Ibrahim, a young taxi driver and musician of Harari-Somali ancestry. Our scheduled meeting took place near the Argob Bāri gate, one of the five gates that divide the historic walled old town from the modern urban areas. Starting from late morning into at midday, Oromo women from the surrounding rural areas converge on the area to sell fresh *čāt* leaves under sun-protective tarps to the urban populace. After a customary negotiation over prices, value, and quality, we purchased some *čāt* leaves for the common *bārča*, an afternoon session that attracts men of all ages and backgrounds to private houses for consuming *čāt*, socializing, and exchanging news. On our way back to the old town, while passing through the gate, Ibrahim shared the following information with me:

Keep in mind that it was through this gate where Islam entered the town more than a thousand years ago. It was here that goods flourishing from the Red Sea into Ethiopia [sic] and it was here that Āw Abādir entered the city with four hundred five *awliyā'* and set the foundation for our civilisation.<sup>32</sup>

I became familiar with the practice of many of my Harari friends to help explain their daily life experiences through the spatial navigation of places and their

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<sup>32</sup> Informal talk, March 5, 2007.

meanings during leisurely walks in the walled old town and beyond. The Harari take a great deal of pride in their city, referring to it simply as *ge* (Har.: place) or *jugäl* (Har.: wall) in reference to the wall encircling the old town. Others view Harar as *Bāndar Abādīr*, or the city of Sheikh Abādīr, the city's patron saint and founder. The existence of hundreds of shrines dedicated to various Muslim figures both within and beyond the city has earned it the moniker 'city of saints' (Arab. *madīnat al-awliyā'*, Har. *gē awliya'āč bāndār*).<sup>33</sup>

Ibrahim's references to specific places in connection with Muslim figures reflect a well-known narrative of the foundation of the city as described in a local Arabic-language document, *Fatḥ Madīnat al-Harar* (Conquest of the city of Harar).<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Sheikh Abadir Umar al-Rida, Harar's patron saint, arrived with 405 *shuyūkh* from the Arab peninsula to reorganize the town and to fight against infidels between 1215 and 1301. The events are regarded by Harari as central to the formation of an explicitly urban society that was prone to both mysticism and strong leadership. Ibrahim also pointed to the role of Harar as a trade hub between the Red Sea and the Ethiopian hinterland, guaranteeing the economic growth and therefore political survival of the city. The trade routes to and from Harar were also known to be the routes of dissemination of Islam into the inland of the Horn of Africa, thereby strengthening the Islamic role of Harar in the region.

The fortification of the old town of Harar with a wall was a later development that took place during the rule of Amir Nur (1552–67) who assumed leadership of the city following the death of Imam Ahmed after a 14-year long *jihād* against the Christian Empire in the highlands. The wall was erected for defensive purposes, to protect the city against invasions from attacking Christians and Oromo from the south. According to local legends, Amir Nur often sat on a rock in the middle of the city atop a small hill called *gay humburti*, Harar's navel. Here, the leader regularly conversed spiritually with Al-Khidhr, the 'Green One,' a widely known Islamic figure that represents eternal liveliness and is a belief common in several Sufi branches of Islam. Amir Nur demanded Al-Khidhr to help him build a wall. The legend states that Al-Khidhr sent two architects from Mecca to support Harar in their endeavour to protect themselves against the attacking enemies.<sup>35</sup>

The construction of the wall was accompanied by the recitation of the Quran. Amir Nur is said to have circled the wall forty times, a number that represents both the necessary attendants of a Friday prayer (according to Shafiite *madhhab*,

<sup>33</sup> Desplat 2010; Gibb 1999; Leslau 1965; Wagner 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Wagner 1978.

<sup>35</sup> Burton 1987 [1894], 186.



or protocol) and the alphabetic character ‘M’ for Muḥammad. Additionally, the length of the wall was believed to be 6.666 *curro*, a local unit of measurement, equal to the mythical number of verses in the Quran.<sup>36</sup> Another popular narrative explains that Amir Nur circled the wall with a bull from the outside and with an ox from the inside. Symbolically, the circuit demonstrates aggressive potency to exterior potential enemies and a peaceful strength to its community inside of the wall.<sup>37</sup>

These narratives and Ibrahim’s descriptions are spatial practices that relate the physical and moral geography of an environment to wider Islamic traditions and transregional connections. These legends, like the story of the first *hijra* to Ethiopia, impart religious significance to specific locations, setting them apart from others. Such spatial practices contribute to shaping a collective image of a place, its location, and its importance for local residents. Shrines, the old city walls, gates, and other elevated places are tangible and visible landmarks that are interconnected and nested within a hierarchical network of meanings. These meanings often encompass not only religious aspects but also the socio-cultural, political, and economic significance of historical events and the material legacies that continue to be felt in the present day.

Furthermore, the accounts surrounding the two local saints hold great significance in shaping the collective identity of Harari. In their collective memory, physical sites serve as places of remembrance that constantly evoke the city’s ‘golden age.’ However, the time of most popular Islamic ‘saints’ between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century was not a time of wealth and glory, but rather a critical period in the history of the struggles and resilience that Harari people endured under the leadership and guidance of their religious figures. The narrative of Abadir emphasizes the city’s foundation, restructuring, and defence, while Amir Nur is associated with fortifying and protecting the city. These are central themes in Harari perceptions of their history. Shrines dedicated to Muslim figures are particularly revered as they are closely linked to protection and blessings in the face of external challenges. Harari regard these shrines not only as places of veneration for ‘the friends of God’ (Arab. *awliyā’*) but also as sites of healing and observation posts as they are erected on higher ground.<sup>38</sup> The abundance of shrines in the city points to the prevalence of Sufi practices that have shaped the city’s religious landscape. However, for many Harari, this ‘golden age’ of Harar is in stark

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36 Abdullahi Mohamed 1990, 331.

37 Gibb 1996, 93.

38 Desplat 2010.

contrast to the current political and religious climate, which is often perceived as threatening.

The pride that many Harari people take in their city, and the sense of place many feel while walking through it is reflected in their tone and discourse, which often become more nuanced and complex during the traditional afternoon discussions over *čāt*. While these discussions may start with boastful reminiscing about the past, they can quickly transition into heated debates about the perceived lack of respect for local saints and the decline of Islamic virtue. Regret about a perceived departure from Allah and a longing for a lost, humbler, mystical way of life is a common sentiment expressed among many Harari. For example, one participant in a discussion session recounted the view that all Harari were once believed to be Sufis, leading humble lives oriented towards the mystical aspects of the world:

[I]t was Islamic mysticism which shaped the life of the Harari and that everything fit together like a spider-web. Harar has been beyond an average Islam, but today they [the Harari] are just average.<sup>39</sup>

These sentiments of loss and powerlessness are frequently expressed in nostalgic narratives during *čāt*-chewing sessions in Harar. The discussions, which are part of the daily routines of many, reveal deeper meanings about the perceived decline of religion and the constant reminder of a bygone era. The belief that religion has been diluted and lost as an all-encompassing way of life that influences every aspect of daily existence is a prevalent theme among many Muslims in Harar.

In Harar, opinions about mysticism, specifically Sufism, as an expression of Islam are varied and nuanced. There are no organized Sufi orders or open practices related to Sufism in Harar. While some Harari individuals embrace Sufism as a form of experiential knowledge, others view it as a historical tradition that has limited relevance in contemporary times. Some claim that Sufism and other mystical expressions of Islam are not suitable for modern times as they require times of contemplation and retreat from worldly activities. The latter group often acknowledges the value of Sufism, but they generally do not actively participate in certain practices like saint veneration. It is important to note that these views are not universally shared by all members of the Harari community, and some may hold more complex claims that blend elements of both perspectives. Nevertheless, the mere existence of these divergent views serves to highlight the diversity of religious expression within Harar.

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<sup>39</sup> Abdulsamad, a local historian, during a discussion on October 24, 2003.

In Harar, discussions about Islam as a comprehensive ethical project, secular ideas, or the implementation of religion in the public sphere are rare.<sup>40</sup> However, the sense of being threatened, which has been a part of the Harari minority's political-cultural history for centuries, plays a role in shaping the discourse on an implicit level. The combination of nostalgic sentiments, reflections on present transitions, and the anticipation of potential threats to Islam, frames politics and memory (as well as amnesia) and highlights the affective dimensions that often pertain to questions of religious values. The expressions of nostalgia and feelings of loss greatly influence the discourse of threat, which has a significant impact on the heritage of Harar.

## Heritagization and the Shifting Religion-Culture Nexus since the 1960s

The designation of Harar as a Cultural World Heritage site in Ethiopia represents a significant recognition of the important role played by Muslims in the country's history and culture. As noted, in the past, the Ethiopian state has tended to emphasize Christian heritage sites, which has resulted in a narrow focus on a specific aspect of Ethiopia's history and origins. Like the first *hijra*, Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia connect their origins to historical events and narratives that were recorded in the Ethiopian national epic *Kebra Negest* (The Glory of Kings). Accordingly, the first Ethiopian ruler Menelik was the offspring of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. Menelik is said to have founded the Solomonic dynasty in Ethiopia, and believed to have taken the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia where it is supposedly still hidden in the church of Axum.<sup>41</sup>

*Kebra Negest* provided the religious narrative for the foundation of Ethiopia and was instrumental in the creation of early heritage sites. The initial focus of heritage politics was on the ancient and medieval Ethiopian empire and the Orthodox Christian tradition, with these sites being chosen as the primary visual representation of Ethiopian national identity. As a result, other important historic sites, including those associated with the Muslim tradition, were excluded from this national narrative.

The initiative to preserve cultural heritage sites in Ethiopia has its roots in the influence of international tourism and UNESCO. Recognizing the potential

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<sup>40</sup> Desplat 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Budge 1932.

benefits of tourism for social, cultural, and economic development, the Ethiopian government established a program in the 1960s aimed at identifying and preserving sites of cultural significance. As part of this program, the government created the ‘Historical Route,’ a circular itinerary in the northern highlands that connects several important sites, including the rock churches of Lalibela, which were designated as a Cultural World Heritage site in 1978, and Axum, which was designated in 1980. These sites serve not only as tourist destinations, but also hold significant religious importance for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. For instance, Bahir Dar and its monasteries were a spiritual center for the Ethiopian Empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are considered one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

The process of selecting cultural heritage sites in Ethiopia began in the late 1960s when consultants from UNESCO conducted a survey and estimated the cost of restoring monuments and sites along the ‘Historical Route.’<sup>42</sup> The report was framed within the context of cultural tourism, and did not consider the religious significance of these places. The initiative was the result of close collaboration between international research teams of architects, urban planners, and historians as well as Ethiopian political elites, reflecting the state’s definition of national heritage. However, local communities were excluded from the decision-making process and were not represented in the report.

Surprisingly, the city of Harar was included in the report, albeit designated as having secondary importance. The report cites the nearby airport of Dire Dawa as a transportation hub and highlights the main Friday Mosque, the so-called ‘Muslim market,’ and a nearby ‘shrine of a local Muslim saint.’ However, the authors of the report also noted that it was not so much the “monuments of questionable historical or artistic value,” but rather “the very particular atmosphere of an Arab town, of which few [features] remain today,” that warranted preservation.<sup>43</sup> Although Harar was not included in the preservation plan for monuments and sites in 1971, it was identified as a reference for future archaeological projects.<sup>44</sup>

The reasons for the Ethiopian state’s inclusion of Harar on the heritage list are open to interpretation. During the 1960s and the rule of Haile Selassie, Harar was still seen by the government as a place of resistance and a symbol of Islam in the Horn of Africa. However, two interconnected policies may have led to the decision to consider Harar as part of Ethiopian heritage. Firstly, in the 1960s the administration of Haile Selassie systematically excluded Muslims from high-

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<sup>42</sup> Angelini and Mougin 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Angelini and Mougin 1968, 19.

<sup>44</sup> Nair 2016.

level political and military positions but attempted to portray Muslim-Christian relationships to global audiences as tolerant. For example, state publications in English depicted Muslim-Christian religions as tolerant and peaceful, while Muslim representatives likewise emphasized that they had not been subjected to any repression and highlighted the role of religious freedom in Ethiopia.<sup>45</sup> The recognition of Harar as a potential heritage site may have been part of the state's effort to convince other nations of the Ethiopian state's tolerance towards non-Christians. Secondly, Emperor Haile Selassie may have had a personal nostalgic interest in making Harar a heritage site. Despite the political turmoil with Harar and its inhabitants before and during his reign, Haile Selassie was born near Harar and spent his youth in the city, and educated at a Catholic school within its old walls.<sup>46</sup>

Following Selassie's reign, during the socialist era in Ethiopia under the Derg military junta, which spanned from 1974 to 1987, the continuation of heritage preservation took place, but the discussions surrounding power and religion became less prominent. This period was characterized by economic decline, famines, dependency on foreign aid, the Ogaden War (1977–78), and the increasing conflict with ethnic militias, which eventually led to the Ethiopian Civil War and a war with Eritrea. As a result, religion was not a central issue during this time.

The Derg socialist regime imposed restrictions on certain religious practices such as travel abroad (such as pilgrimage to Mecca), and the import of religious literature, but these restrictions applied to all religions and were not specifically targeted at Muslims. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which was previously the state religion and the largest landowner, lost its land and political influence due to Derg's policies of nationalization. Although religion was pushed out of the public sphere, it continued to play a significant role in shaping social identity.

During the era of the Derg regime, however, Christian sites, such as the rock-churches of Lalibela and Axum, were granted UNESCO World Heritage status. Harar was also included in the heritage list of eleven possible sites in the UNESCO project ETH 74/014 in 1978, however, the city was not further considered for selection. Scholars have argued that the city's urban Muslim heritage was not fully integrated into the official narrative of Ethiopian history.<sup>47</sup> Probably more important has been the local resistance against the heritage-making process by urban citizens in Harar. In 1979, when representatives of the government and UNESCO project advisors visited the city to introduce Harari people to heritage conserva-

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<sup>45</sup> Ministry of Information 1965.

<sup>46</sup> Asserate 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Huber 2017, 142.

tion, they encountered resistance from a group who were already engaged in their own initiatives. The state was unable to negotiate an agreement with the authorities in Harar to incorporate local engagement into the existing programs of the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture.<sup>48</sup>

Representatives of the Ethiopian government and UNESCO observed the dynamic local practices of heritage preservation by the local community through the museumification of traditional objects. These local initiatives date back to the early 1970s, when cultural tours showcasing Harari objects, music, and dances were introduced in the region. This led to the creation of the *Ada Gar*, or ‘cultural house,’ a community-run project that collected and displayed cultural items from Harari *afocha*, women’s voluntary organizations, such as jewelry and baskets in a permanent exhibition.<sup>49</sup> With its focus on Harari cultural items, the museum served as a rival to the state-run *Harar Regional Museum*, which displayed items from various ethnic groups in the region, highlighting the city’s multicultural aspects. The establishment of this museum by Harari people could be viewed as a response to perceived threats brought about by the civil war and the emigration of many Harari.<sup>50</sup> The initiative was basically an attempt to counter the sense of identity loss and perceived threat by other groups.

In 1985, a proposal published by UNESCO boosted Harar’s recognition as a cultural heritage site in need of preservation. Part of the initiative was driven by the religious significance of the town, as the “majority of citizens [...] regard the town as sacred, as evidenced by the existence of about 90 mosques, holy shrines, and tombs of saints within the walls.”<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the focus of conservation was on the damaged Harari houses. These houses, constructed using a unique local method that combined lime and wood, were impacted by heavy rains. Along with the encircling wall of the old town, these houses were deemed in need of financial support for repairs and maintenance.

However, rain damage was not the primary concern. In 1975, urban properties were nationalized, and urban dwellers in Harar were only allowed to own one house. This led to around 30% of houses being privately owned, while the remaining 70% were maintained by the public sector and rented for a small fee. The revenue generated from these rentals was insufficient to cover repairs and maintenance costs, and tenants had little motivation to invest in a property that they did not own.

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<sup>48</sup> Huber 2017, 142–43.

<sup>49</sup> Tarsitani 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Gibb and Rothenberg 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Flemming 1985, 89.

In 1994, Harar was finally included in the list of nominations for Cultural World Heritage sites. This was due to the newfound openness of the Ethiopian government to engage with local communities in heritage preservation initiatives. The shift in governmental policies in 1991, which included the declaration of religious freedom, decentralization, a discourse on tolerance between Muslims and Christians, and an engagement in the ‘war on terror,’ created a favorable atmosphere for the recognition of Harar as an Ethiopian Islamic city that embodies interreligious tolerance and peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups. Despite its declining role as a center for Islamic education, which has been overshadowed by the capital city of Addis Ababa, the northern region of Wollo, and the southeastern region of Bale, Harar continues to hold a special place in the region’s heritage. This is evident in its designation by UNESCO that branded the city as the ‘fourth holy city of Islam.’

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Harar serves as a site for various forms of politics of authentication, which are perceived and expressed differently by various groups. Despite these variations, these groups collectively construct a heritage landscape that portrays Harar as a religious-cultural space of Islam in Ethiopia. The process of heritagization reveals the diverse interests of these groups, who glorify the past in their own unique ways.

UNESCO and the Harari people have used or supported the claim of Harar being Islam’s ‘fourth holy city’ for the purpose of raising awareness about the city’s vulnerability to material decay and the risk of being neglected. Both entities base their claims on historical evidence and emphasize the importance of preservation and global recognition. However, their perspectives on authenticity differ. UNESCO primarily focuses on material culture, which is expressed mainly through religious and cultural symbols, while Harari people focus on acknowledging the Muslim community in a nation where its history has been dominated by Orthodoxy Christianity. The preservation of culture is a secondary objective for them.

The Ethiopian state has historically utilized heritagization to generate revenue through tourism and to represent the nation in accordance with its political agenda. Despite this, the concept of religious tolerance has consistently been a significant factor in the state’s depiction of Ethiopian history. In the early years of politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Orthodox Christianity was favored over Islam, which was reflected in the selection of heritage sites primarily located in the Christian

north of the country. During the socialist era, religion was downplayed, and the focus shifted to culture as a preservable entity. However, with the establishment of the new government in 1991, religion once again became a prominent issue and religious tolerance was adopted as a political strategy to encompass Ethiopian Muslims and exclude reformist Muslims as external influences. In this context, Harar has become a symbol of Ethiopia and its history.

However, the latter perspective is limited to a specific time period as recent conflicts in Ethiopia have negatively impacted the inclusive preservation narrative. In November 2020, the Ethiopian Prime Minister initiated a military campaign against the northern *Tigray People's Liberation Front* amid growing tensions and violent incidents between the Tigray region and the central state. During the ongoing conflict, forced migrations and murders have resulted in the destruction or damage of several cultural and religious sites.<sup>52</sup> All parties have aimed to disrupt the organizational structure of opposing civil societies. The demolition of religious sites, such as the al-Najashi mosque or the church of Aksum, has targeted traditional power structures and symbolic places, resulting in vandalism and bombings. Additionally, artifacts and manuscripts have been destroyed or looted.

Harar, located a significant distance away from military operations, has not been impacted by the destruction of local sites or objects. Although the national State of Emergency issued as part of the Prime Minister's military campaign was lifted on February 15, 2022, the security situation at the time this chapter was written remains uncertain, with the potential to escalate into civil unrest. Such escalation in the country can result in road closures, communication disruptions, business closures, and, in some cases, violence. While it is unlikely that the conflict would reach Harar, the city faces ongoing potential threats. Once again, during such times religion and religious differences becomes rather secondary.

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<sup>52</sup> <https://theconversation.com/ethiopias-war-in-tigray-risks-wiping-out-centuries-of-the-worlds-history-179829>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopias-war-also-takes-toll-its-cultural-heritage-2021-11-02/>; <https://eritreahub.org/the-destruction-of-tigrays-world-important-cultural-heritage>, accessed April 1, 2022.



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# Espaces sacrés et personnification écologique

## Introduction

Pour comprendre leur place dans l'univers, de nombreuses personnes recourent aujourd'hui à des récits mystiques, ou nouent des liens avec leur environnement, soit par des réflexions personnelles, soit par des expériences plus organisées, que ce soit dans le cadre de normes religieuses, ou de rituels et tabous traditionnels. Certains identifient des espaces pour se consacrer à leur dévotion respective. Le groupe touareg *Ishérifén* au nord du Niger, habitants d'une oasis saharienne et nomades pastoraux, lie étroitement son mode d'exploitation des ressources naturelles à la protection, la conservation et la valorisation de ces ressources. Les *Ishérifén* affirment l'hégémonie spirituelle de leur espace autour de la Khalwatiyya, une confrérie soufie introduite par le saint Sidi Mahmud al Baghdadi au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle. La zone des *Ishérifén* se situe à l'intérieur de l'aire protégée de l'Air-Ténééré (R.N.N.A.T.), mise en place par le Fonds mondial pour la nature au XX<sup>ème</sup> siècle, selon la division (occidentale) d'une sphère naturelle et d'une sphère culturelle, division qui se situe généralement à la base de la pensée académique occidentale. Contrairement à ce clivage, les *Ishérifén* coexistent avec leur environnement. Ils accordent une importance particulière aux espèces habitant les lieux saints, les protégeant par des formules religieuses, des pèlerinages, des récits mystiques et des rituels. Notre objectif est de montrer d'abord l'ancrage des récits mystiques dans la valorisation et la préservation des espèces naturelles, puis de souligner l'importance des récits mythiques qui ont des motivations écosystémiques. Enfin, nous explorerons les interconnexions entre les *Ishérifén* et leur environnement, en les opposant à la division épistémique (occidentale) entre le naturel et le culturel.

## Les sources de pèlerinage dans l'Air

L'islamisation dans l'Air daterait des VIII<sup>ème</sup> aux IX<sup>ème</sup> siècles. Le courant représenté est celui des sunnites, qui se caractérise au Niger par l'importance accordée à la loi, aux traditions islamiques<sup>1</sup>. Mais l'islam ne s'est véritablement implanté

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1 Adamou et Morel 2005, 85.

et répandu dans l'Aïr qu'avec l'arrivée du Shaikh Sidi Mahmud al Baghdadi. Ce guide spirituel serait un descendant d'Abd al Qadir al-Jilani et est originaire de Bagdad en Irak. Sidi Mahmud avait institué certains rites et cultes, et avait séjourné pendant dix ans à Abatol dans la région de Tabelot, dix ans à Aghalal dans le département d'Iférouane, trois ans à Tchighozérine dans la commune rurale de Timia, et dix ans à Agalangha où il a été tué à la suite de rixes<sup>2</sup> entre les *Ibarkorayen* et les *Itesen*, premières populations touarègues ayant occupé l'Aïr<sup>3</sup>. Son corps disparut aux yeux de ses agresseurs, et seul son sang resta figé sur un rocher.

En marge de l'exercice de la foi islamique dans l'Aïr, il a été institué des sites de pèlerinages ou *ziyaras* (en langue locale: « *tahajara* »), équivalant à « *aburug* » ou « *ahaggeg* » (désignant en langue locale la direction de la Mecque), qui signifie recueillement au niveau des lieux saints. Il est remarquable qu'au niveau de certains lieux saints isolés, des passants laissent une offrande en espèce ou en nature. Demeurant et s'inscrivant dans la continuité d'une tradition culturelle et cultuelle à laquelle les Touareg sont fortement attachés, les espaces sacrés sont à la base d'une importante phase de migration des pèlerins en direction de saintes mosquées les plus réputées. La coexistence de celles-ci au lieu de rassemblement et leur ouverture au désert, offrent une accalmie hautement propice à la spiritualité et à ses rites connexes. C'est peut-être l'une des raisons pour lesquelles ont été institués depuis longtemps par les anciens Shaikhs et guides spirituels des centres et des sites d'instruction et d'éducation à la ferveur religieuse. Chaque centre dispose de sa propre histoire mystique et emblématique en lien avec ses fondateurs ou leurs successeurs. Parmi les plus fréquentés, figurent les mosquées d'Anu n'Alkher (Tabelot), de Tchighozérine en enig (Timia), d'Egandawel<sup>4</sup>, d'Aguelal, de Tefes,<sup>5</sup> Sidawat (Iférouane), de Takriza (Gougaram), de Tawat (Timia). Le pèlerinage se déroule à la date fixée selon un calendrier cyclique des *ineslemen*, des « guides » spirituels, réunissant toute la communauté religieuse au lieu prévu par le rassemblement.

L'un des lieux les plus visités par les fidèles, est la mosquée de « Tchighozérine en enig ». L'histoire de cette mosquée serait étroitement liée à celle du

2 Nicolas 1950b.

3 Norris 1990.

4 La mosquée d'Egandawel a été créée pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale par Malam Mousa ; elle est un centre de gravité de la *Tarîqa Khalwatiyya*, dirigée par Malam Moussa.

5 Tefes est la première mosquée de l'Aïr d'après la légende rapportée par Henri Lhote ; elle serait due au marabout Mohamed ag Mohamed ag Ibrahim, désigné Wan Tefis (originaire de Fès, venu pour convertir la population à l'islam, voir Adamou et Morel 2005, 85). Un éléphant portant les poutres destinées à la construction de la mosquée accompagne le marabout.

Shaikh Sidi Mahmud al Baghdadi considéré par la tradition orale comme l'une des figures emblématiques ayant propulsé l'islam au Sahara nigérien. Traditionnellement, les grands guides spirituels et certains pèlerins y passent une retraite spirituelle de 40 jours d'adoration de Dieu.

Lors de ce voyage de dévotion, les fidèles s'y succèdent par groupe à dos d'ânes, à dos de chameaux,<sup>6</sup> à moto, en véhicule 4x4; et chaque fragment qui arrive reçoit la baraka solennelle dite en langue locale « *tugdut* » ou « *amanay* », (littéralement les retrouvailles), de la part de son groupe d'affinité, de filiation familiale ou tribale qui l'accueille au rythme et au son d'*azzeker* ou *tarajij* (chant mystique ou *dhikr*<sup>7</sup> en arabe). La bienvenue au lieu saint de chaque groupe affinitaire est saluée par une action de grâce solennelle au cours de laquelle les fidèles scandent la formule « *lâ ilâha illâ Allâh* » [il n'est de dieu que Dieu].

La migration pèlerine est aussi un événement important dans la mesure où elle permet aux gens de visiter leurs parents, amis et connaissances en vue de présenter un pardon mutuel individuel et collectif dans le cadre du renforcement de l'entente et de la cohésion sociales. À une autorité, une famille que l'on a rendu visite, le dernier mot du visiteur est l'expression « *asaruf* », littéralement « pardon » ou encore: un tel parent ou ami demande pardon. En d'autres termes, au-delà de son caractère spirituel, la migration pèlerine devient et demeure alors un facteur de résolution de conflits internes renforçant ainsi l'unité pour la perpétuation du lignage d'appartenance.

Pendant la retraite spirituelle et pendant le pèlerinage, toute une gamme d'obligations religieuses y est exécutée. Au menu des activités figurent les prières « *imadden* », le jeûne « *azum* », la psalmodie du Coran « *tegaré* », la circumambulation « *aburuq* », rythmée par la formule « *lâ ilâha illâ Allâh* » [il n'est de dieu que Dieu] pratiquée autour des cimetières où certains hommes sont armés de leurs épées « *takoba* » et quelques femmes s'enduisent le pourtour des yeux et le visage d'une poudre d'ocre « *tamazgut* » pour éloigner les mauvais esprits.

Au cours de cette dévotion, mise à part la communion des cœurs et d'esprits, les différents déplacements des pèlerins en direction de saintes mosquées revêtent également la phase du règlement des conflits ou des différends sous la conduite d'un érudit qui se base sur les lois coraniques. Il y a aussi l'entretien et

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6 Les groupes de pèlerins à dos de chameaux se livrent traditionnellement à une course de 10 à 15 km du site des pèlerinages, et les premiers à y arriver exécutent deux prosternations dans la mosquée en direction de l'est et invoquent Allah. Le chameau fait partie des animaux bénis par le prophète de l'islam, et les premières générations de pèlerins de l'Aïr ont effectué leur hadj de la Mecque à dos des chameaux raconte-t-on.

7 *Dhikr* en arabe équivaut à « *ezzeke* » ou chant mystique connu sous le nom de « *tarajij* ou *arajij* » en langue de l'Aïr. C'est une méthode d'oraison employée par le courant sufi.

la réhabilitation des cimetières « *isensa* » ou de la mosquée « *tamisgida* ». Tout au long de ces retrouvailles, les croyants qui n'ont pas participé à la dévotion, confient leurs offrandes « *takuté* » en nature ou en espèce à leur alter égo, étant donné que la pratique de « *takuté* » est omniprésente dans la conscience individuelle et collective, puisque d'une part elle fait partie d'une éducation religieuse incitant les enfants au partage, et d'autre part elle exhorte les gens à la générosité, et beaucoup de personnes croient à travers l'institution de l'aumône<sup>8</sup> « *takuté* », en l'atténuation de leurs péchés « *ibakkaden* ». Certains habitants de l'Air ont coutume de laisser sur des tas de pierres sacrés une offrande. Les tas de pierres sacrés sont répandus un peu partout, et l'aumône que l'on y dépose est moralement facultative. Elle consiste en aliments ou souvent même en pièces de monnaie. Cette charité peut être récupérée par tout passant. À la faveur de cette ferveur, nombre de fidèles croient aux récompenses divines et aux sanctions liées à la pratique de l'aumône dans l'au-delà « *emerked* » au paradis « *alaxharat* » ou « *eljinnat* ».

Lors de la migration pèlerine, les pèlerins sont hébergés sous des arbres, dans des grottes « *ekazam* » ou dans des anciennes habitations en pierres<sup>9</sup> dites « *ighiwnan en kel enebda* » [les demeures des gens d'autrefois].

La journée consacrée à la dévotion marquant la cérémonie de clôture est dite journée de « *tawatré* », littéralement journée d'évocation et d'invocation d'Allah où a lieu le récapitulatif de l'essentiel des rituels auxquels prennent part de nos jours les autorités politiques, coutumières ainsi que les notabilités de la région d'Agadez. Traditionnellement, durant la séquence de clôture, un des sages professe l'adoration finale axée sur la paix et la préservation des espaces et espèces naturels (flore et faune) en rappelant à l'endroit des pèlerins l'interdiction morale et la malédiction encourues par quiconque oserait s'attaquer aux êtres vivants des lieux saints: d'où le caractère écologique de pèlerinage de l'Air. N'est-ce pas

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**8** Au sujet de l'aumône, les sources coraniques disent à la Sourate 2. « Al-Baqarah », versets 271–72: « Si vous donnez ouvertement vos aumônes, c'est bien ; c'est mieux encore, pour vous, si vous êtes discrets avec elles et vous le donniez aux indigents, Allah effacera une partie de vos méfaits. Allah est parfaitement connaisseur de ce que vous faites (...). Ce n'est pas à toi de les guider (vers la bonne voie), mais c'est Allah qui guide qui il veut. Et tout ce que vous dépensez de vos biens sera votre avantage, et vous ne dépensez que pour la recherche de la Face « *Wajh* » d'Allah. Et tout ce que vous dépensez de vos biens dans les bonnes œuvres sera récompensé pleinement et vous ne serez pas lésés, Coran, Sourate 2, Versets 271–72.

**9** Actuellement les constructions des habitants de l'Air sont en terre battue. Mais à Assodé, ville ancienne en ruines, le mode d'habitation est fait de édifices dont les murs, assez bien conservés, sont construits en pierres de dimensions égales, choisies avec soin, mais non taillées, placées en double épaisseur, et assemblées avec de la terre glaise comme ciment, voir De Zeltner 1914, 363.

là, l'une des raisons pour lesquelles, l'oasis à travers son microclimat et son milieu physique caractéristique du paysage montagneux, réunit des conditions optimales et une orientation aux yeux des pèlerins pour une retraite spirituelle dans l'espace-temps ?

## Les espaces spirituels

L'Air a été islamisé par l'ouest d'où sont originaires les fondateurs de principales et premières mosquées Tefes, Takriza, Agalal<sup>10</sup>: « The move of Qādiriya Sufis from Tadamakkat (today in northern Mali, Gh. M. & G. K.) was of major importance in islamisation of the inner massif ». <sup>11</sup> Les Shaikhs venus de l'ouest islamisent les grandes tribus nomades, et créent des centres religieux appelés à rassembler les croyants.<sup>12</sup> En fait la croyance à la foi coranique et musulmane dans cet espace, est issue d'une pratique symbolique des mystiques soufis, avec ses mosquées célèbres et les tombes de nombreux saints que l'on visite lors de pèlerinages.<sup>13</sup> En dehors des pratiques rituelles, l'on se consacre à une retraite spirituelle de quarante jours. Il s'agit là d'une pratique héritée des grands saints où la montagne joue un rôle important dans cette élévation spirituelle. Pour le devoir religieux, notamment la spiritualité, il existe une douzaine de lieux de culte ou sanctuaires religieux présidés par les *ineslimen* [les Touaregs religieux] qui affirment leur hégémonie spirituelle autour de la Khalwatiya, confrérie soufie introduite par le saint légendaire, Sidi Mahmud al Baghdadi au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle.<sup>14</sup>

Le rénovateur de la Khalwatiyya, institutionnalisée par un rituel approprié (*wird*), serait Mallam Musa qui créa à Tabelot la *ziyâra* [visite de tombes] la plus influente de l'Air. L'emplacement des mosquées, des puits et des cimetières demeure des repères « *imasaknan* », c'est-à-dire des catégories signifiantes dans le cadre de l'orientation dans l'espace. Ils montrent et président l'intentionnalité des acteurs.

Il est indicatif de rappeler que la symbolique sémantique du minaret de la grande mosquée d'Agadez, est connue sous l'appellation locale d'« *imeskini* ». L'étymologie de ce terme vernaculaire dérive de « *sekni* » qui signifie « voir, repérer » et revêt une connotation renvoyant au terme de « *imasaknan* » (les

<sup>10</sup> Nicolas 1950b, 483.

<sup>11</sup> Norris 1975, 44.

<sup>12</sup> Bernus 1981, 369.

<sup>13</sup> Norris 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Triaud 1983.



repères). De Zeltner rappelle que le minaret d'Agadez est certainement l'œuvre de maçons indigènes; les maisons de la ville d'Agadez, comme aussi celles de Tombouctou, de Gao, de Tahoua, sont de type commun à tout le Sahara, qui a d'ailleurs de grandes analogies avec les bâtiments de l'ancienne Egypte. Dans l'Aïr, les croyants s'inspirent essentiellement des recommandations de la philosophie soufie dans le cadre de l'adoration et des rituels. Pour le soufi « il n'y a de divinité si ce n'est la divinité et Mohamed est l'envoyé de Dieu ». <sup>15</sup> En cela, toute entreprise de l'homme doit se diriger vers Dieu, Dieu qui est la préoccupation et l'aboutissement de tout. En effet, la pensée soufie se particularise par certains préceptes et rituels qu'il importe de connaître notamment:

La recherche perpétuelle dans la multiplicité, l'investissement dans l'esprit quêteur, le rassemblement de toutes les multiplicités dans l'unicité avec comme toile de fond la totalité de l'être dans la contemplation directe des réalités spirituelles, la connaissance de l'unicité qualitative transcendant l'existence qu'elle unifie, et le rassemblement en un centre de tous les aspects du soi. <sup>16</sup>

Dans la pratique, les enseignements primordiaux des rituels de la confrérie soufie peuvent être régis et se résumer par cet aphorisme « tu ne sais même pas qui tu es, tu es un jeune homme de sable : à chaque coup de vent, tu t'effrites un peu et tu te découvres autre. Un jour, il ne reste rien de toi. Pour vivre, il faut un noyau, et toi tu n'en as pas ». <sup>17</sup> Cet aphorisme brosse toutes les vicissitudes ainsi que les différents moyens qui peuvent servir de support à l'individu et le conduire vers le chemin de Dieu. Parallèlement, l'aphorisme de Sassine connote une certaine relation avec le sable et l'eau, symbolisant l'impermanence et la fragilité de ce qui coule, mais aussi la dure, l'imputrescible, l'inentamable minéralité des choses qui ne changent jamais. En milieu touareg, c'est au sein des centres religieux que la confrérie soufie se consacre à la spiritualité et aux rites de la dévotion. C'est évidemment dans cette logique qu'il faudrait placer certains récits (oraux ou écrits) et le sens donné à certains cultes ainsi que les rapports pratiques et symboliques qu'entretiennent bon nombre de Touaregs avec leur univers dans le cadre de l'appropriation et de la conservation de l'environnement. Si Descola <sup>18</sup> a montré que pour les Achuar, ce que nous appelons la Nature, n'est pas distingué de la société : c'est une nature domestique, il est admis que la manière dont un groupe conçoit ses rapports à

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<sup>15</sup> Bakhtiar 1977, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Bakhtiar 1977, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Sassine 1979, 180–81.

<sup>18</sup> Descola 1986.

son milieu naturel dépend de l'idée que ce groupe se fait de son environnement matériel et de son intervention sur celui-ci.<sup>19</sup>

La région de Tchirozérine en ennig, que les *Ishérifén*, successeurs du Sidi Mahmud al Baghdadi habitent, se trouve à l'intérieur d'une aire protégée, la Réserve Naturelle Nationale de l'Air et du Ténéré (R.N.N.A.T). Ici se juxtaposent alors deux conceptions de la relation homme-environnement. La réserve R.N.N.A.T. se base sur la conception occidentale d'une dichotomie opposant une sphère 'Nature', stable et obéissant à des lois naturelles, à une sphère 'Culture', dynamique et soumise à la volonté de l'homme. Comme la sphère nature est menacée par l'action humaine, on la sépare de la sphère culture en la délimitant dans l'espace. La conception religieuse des *Ishérifén*, par contre, ne se base point sur une quelconque dichotomie, mais sur l'unité de l'univers, qui englobe tout, l'homme, la faune, la flore, ainsi que le monde inanimé dans la notion de la création divine.

Dans cet espace des *Ishérifén*, l'activité et l'autorité spirituelles jouissent d'une grande réputation liée au passé mystique et légendaire de la localité et de sa mosquée. En effet, c'est dans ce site mystique situé dans la réserve, devenu et demeuré un sanctuaire de pèlerinage annuellement organisé par les fractions maraboutiques de l'Air, que l'on (dé)voue une respectabilité particulière aux espèces fauniques et floristiques qui s'y trouvent. Il existe des récits mystiques qui attestent de la dimension culturelle du règne végétal (des plantes à génies par excellence) et de son caractère sacré. Une relation symbolique lie les Touareg religieux de l'Air et particulièrement ceux de la souche *Ishérifén* à leur milieu naturel, tendant vers une catégorie cognitive indéniable représentative d'un marqueur identitaire possible, opposé à la dichotomie Nature-Culture dominante dans l'occident. Ainsi, le désir des autochtones d'humaniser leur interaction avec leur milieu naturel et concevoir leur condition de vie et d'existence, le poussa à inventer toute une fresque orale (récits, légendes, contes, proverbes, poèmes, devinettes, mythes) pour ériger un espace des rites, de la géomancie, d'êtres surnaturels, d'animaux et plantes sacrés, des djinns bons ou mauvais, en leur faisant jouer des rôles humains tirés de la représentation qu'ils se font de leur univers. Dans ce cadre, le biotique suscite toujours des traditions culturelles et artistiques à l'exemple de la musique, de la danse, de la littérature.

Consciemment ou inconsciemment, les représentations du milieu naturel dans la création artistique façonnent notre perception sensorielle et notre appréciation de l'environnement et des espèces représentées. De ce point de vue, les expressions orales (littérature), gestuelles (danses), ou musicales tirent l'essen-

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<sup>19</sup> Descola 2005.

tiel de leurs thèmes des écosystèmes respectifs. C'est dans cette éventualité que les expressions instrumentales et musicales touarègues, ont été dédiées à certaines espèces animales élégantes comme l'autruche (*anhil*), l'addax (*tenirt*) permettant leur fixation dans la mémoire collective même après leur disparition du Sahara. La tradition érige le son du violon au rang des coutumes et codes sacrés, tel le tambour, symbole de la chefferie, du pouvoir et de l'autorité qui accompagnent *Amenokal* (le sultan) dans ses déplacements. L'espace touareg inventorie également d'autres gestes et attitudes légendairement inviolables comme le port du voile masculin, ou *tegelmust* en langue locale. Dans le même symbolisme existent des légendes qui célèbrent des personnages hors du commun : les récits endogènes leur vouent sanctification. C'est le cas par exemple d'une catégorie des gens communément appelés « *Kel alkhouma* » (surnaturels) et qui bénéficieraient d'une protection divine et dont la descendance serait attribuée aux grands saints. Cela est illustré et se reflète dans certaines formes de production littéraire locale<sup>20</sup>.

De manière générale, les fidèles musulmans peuvent être soit des individus de toute condition qui ont décidé d'apprendre à lire l'arabe et de s'astreindre à une observation rigoureuse des commandements de l'Islam, soit appartenir à une famille où l'on maintient une tradition d'érudition : c'est le cas des *Ishérifien*, réputés dans leurs rapports pratiques et symboliques avec la nature. Sachant qu'au niveau de la doctrine soufie, c'est tout être qui demeure sacré, au-delà des principes qui s'opèrent par l'intériorisation de la foi.

Les enseignements de la foi islamique relatifs à l'environnement nous offrent une grille de lecture et d'explication traduisant la sacralité autour de l'existence de l'environnement qu'on peut lire dans la sourate al-qaşaş (28) verset 77 du Coran où Dieu dit : « Et sois bienfaisant envers les autres créatures comme Dieu l'est envers toi : garde-toi de commettre des excès sur la terre ; car Dieu n'aime point ceux qui commettent les dégâts ». Conséquemment, pour les *Ishérifien* et ceux qui les visitent en pèlerinage, la préservation de l'environnement demeure une obligation religieuse imposée par Dieu. Aussi, trouve-t-on dans les enseignements du livre saint, de nombreux autres versets qui garantissent la découverte et la protection de la nature, singulièrement la flore et la faune.

Le complexe écologique composé par le « parc naturel » des *Ishérifien* de Tchirozérine en ennig, et le parc national R.N.N.A.T. couvrant une aire protégée d'environ 77.360 km<sup>2</sup> recoupe des paysages très différents: le désert du Ténéré constituant deux tiers de cet espace et le massif de l'Air le tiers restant.<sup>21</sup> Les rapports

<sup>20</sup> Casajus 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Giazzi 1996.

entre l'homme et son environnement, entre la société et le monde surnaturel, représenté par les « *Kel Esuf* » (ceux de la solitude), ou « le monde sauvage, le vide », entre les vivants et les morts, touchent l'univers faunique et floristique basée sur les taxinomies telles que: « *esuf* » (le monde sauvage, le vide), « *anu* » (le puits), « *adghagh* » (la montagne), « *isinsa* » (les cimetières), « *eljinen* » (les djinns), « *tamesgida* » (la mosquée). Ce déterminisme taxinomique accoucherait des considérations susceptibles de détenir des bribes de connaissances connotant une certaine dévotion des sites réservés à la spiritualité, voire une tendance de personnification de certains éléments de l'environnement, en l'occurrence les espèces arborescentes et faunistiques.

## Les espaces de dévotion dans l'Aïr et le Sahara

Les aspects religieux et les mœurs qui y sont liés de Kel Aïr ont fait l'objet de plusieurs études.<sup>22</sup> À ce sujet De Zeltner écrit :

Nous n'avons d'ailleurs que de vagues renseignements sur la religion qui a précédé l'islam ; elle comprenait, semble-t-il, un certain nombre de divinités locales comme le dieu Bocax ou Bocos et la déesse Tanit, et pratiquait des fêtes saisonnières et des rites orgiaques qui ont laissé quelques traces chez les Berbères du Nord. On peut sans doute y rapporter deux fêtes (fête de Bianou et celle dite Fourfourou) qui remontent certainement à une antiquité et se pratiquent actuellement dans l'Aïr.<sup>23</sup>

La dévotion tient à ce niveau à l'acte spirituel jouant un rôle important puisqu'elle devient un indicateur de la spiritualité. De nos jours, l'activité et l'autorité morales dans certains centres d'instruction et d'apprentissage de la foi musulmane y sont représentées par les aires de pèlerinage et les mosquées remarquables. En raison de la considération que l'on a pour les grands sages et érudits, exerçant des tâches religieuses, et surtout à cause de leur intervention dans le règlement des conflits dépassant leur territoire, l'on a institué des séries de pèlerinage (*ziyara* ou *tegdut*). Lors de différents rassemblements (auxquels nous avons participé pendant nos recherches de terrain) et des visites de tombes, les Shaikhs sont toujours en tête du cortège de fidèles, marchant à pied ou montés à dos des chameaux et s'orientant vers les cimetières scandant des cantiques (*dhikr* en arabe et

<sup>22</sup> Voir Norris 1990; Triaud 1983; De Zeltner 1914, qui retracent l'historique et l'installation de l'islam dans le Nord du Niger.

<sup>23</sup> De Zeltner 1914, 356.

*tarajij* ou *arajij* en langue locale). Une fois sur les tombes de saints, les fidèles se placent devant, y observent d'abord un moment d'invocation, ensuite débute les rituels de pèlerinage. Conformément aux principes soufis, c'est l'érudit le plus âgé qui dirige les exercices. Le recueillement au niveau des tombes aux motifs de recherche d'une bénédiction ou pour bénéficier des songes prophétiques aurait été une ancienne pratique en usage connue et répandue chez les Berbères.<sup>24</sup>

Dans leur croyance traditionnelle aussi, les Touaregs retiennent qu'il y a une vie après la mort. Voici ce que rapporte Hachid relativement à la vénération des tombes de saints :

Le retour à l'incubation, c'est-à-dire à la divination par les songes sur la tombe des ancêtres, se pratiquait il n'y a pas longtemps encore chez les Touaregs : les serments se faisaient aussi sur la tombe des ancêtres. L'existence de bétyles et d'images rupestres représentant de grands personnages, inhabituels dans cet art, tend à indiquer un culte des ancêtres et de leurs mânes, ancêtres qui seraient devenus des héros mythiques. On a d'ailleurs conservé chez les Touaregs le souvenir de plusieurs saints à l'islam.<sup>25</sup>

En effet, les Touaregs utilisent les termes « *tazekkawt* », littéralement la mise au tombeau, l'inhumation, et « *azekka* », la tombe. Le terme « *azekka* » est omniprésent non seulement dans la littérature pieuse, mais également dans la valeur assertive quotidienne (conversation) surtout lorsque survient la mort. Dans le parler de l'Air, le verbe « *ester* », qui a pour substantif « *assatar* », signifie « ensevelir, enterrer, mettre dans la tombe ». Il est usité lors des rites et cérémonies mortuaires. Quant aux sépultures, elles sont dénommées en langue locale *adebni*, sépulture préhistorique formée d'un tumulus en pierres sèches, dont la longueur peut aller de quelques pas à plus de trois cents mètres. La forme géométrique en est variable, et la hauteur peu importante : un peu plus ou un peu moins que la taille d'un homme. Mais il est à noter que tout *adebni* comporte des compartiments et des allées, préfigurant les chambres et les couloirs des futures pyramides égyptiennes. Les *idebnan* (pluriel *d'adebni*) se trouvent en grand nombre : à Tin-Kawya, non loin de l'oasis de Rhat, dans la région d'Ajjer, en Libye ; à Tit, dans le Hoggar, en Algérie ; au lieu-dit Tin-Gherhoh entre l'Adrar et le Hoggar.

Dans l'Air, les chercheurs localisent ces monuments préhistoriques de forme généralement circulaire, faits de blocs plus ou moins empilés à Iwelen sur la bordure du massif du Chiriet. À Iwelen, les morts sont inhumés sous d'énormes tumulus, avec une sorte de cratère sommital. On y a inventorié soixante-trois sépultures. Elles sont accompagnées de poteries, d'instruments de broyage de

<sup>24</sup> De Zeltner 1914.

<sup>25</sup> Hachid 2002.

céréales, dont la présence témoigne de préoccupations extra-matérielles.<sup>26</sup> Certaines femmes touarègues auraient fait des *idebnan* des lieux de pèlerinage. À l'occasion de leurs visites à ces sépultures, elles ne doivent porter sur elles aucun talisman à la musulmane, comme pour se retrouver au temps des cultes anciens. Au pied de *l'adebni*, la visiteuse prononce, en berbère, des imprécations d'où est systématiquement exclue toute allusion à Allah. Puis, invoquant le saint enterré en ce lieu, elle se couche au pied du monument, dort, ou fait semblant de dormir, pour que lui soit révélé, en rêve, ce qu'elle cherche à savoir, soit sur son propre avenir, soit sur un proche dont l'absence a trop duré.<sup>27</sup> On pourrait ranger cette dévotion dans la période préislamique où les pratiques rituelles traditionnelles prévalaient et régissaient l'ordre de la métaphysique et des philosophies touarègues.

Certains chercheurs pensaient à l'existence d'autres prétextes quant aux sens symboliques à attribuer aux éléments constitutifs de la sépulture touarègue « *taghart* », isolée et construite en pierre où les anciens Berbères ensevelissaient leurs morts. Par rapport aux formes de stèles retrouvées dans l'Aïr et au comportement spirituel qui leur est dévolu, De Zeltner note ceci :

L'image d'élever des tas de pierres semble être maintenue non seulement pour les sépultures, mais aussi pour perpétuer certains événements comme on l'a souvent noté chez d'autres berbères. Ainsi sur un plateau de l'Aïr, entre Aoudéras et Assada, on voit une ligne de cairns de taille diverse, dont voici l'origine : à une époque assez récente, un grand marabout, Bilal el Bardaji a été blessé à cet endroit, et à chaque endroit où son sang est tombé, on a élevé un tas de pierres. Cet alignement se termine par une enceinte de pierres, basse, rectangulaire, longue de 50 mètres, large de 5 à 10 mètres: c'est son tombeau.<sup>28</sup>

Retenons qu'à travers une telle perception, les Touaregs assumeraient les conceptions coutumières à la sépulture qui aurait trait à des croyances traditionnelles datant probablement de la période préhistorique et qu'ils continueraient à sanctifier. Comme le remarqueraient à bon escient la plupart de chercheurs qui s'intéressent aux croyances des Touaregs, les occurrences des origines préislamiques de certaines pratiques rituelles, sont aussi récurrentes que les exemples textuels et contextuels auxquels elles renvoient. Elles y sont hiérarchisées suivant les différents registres de la pensée orale comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné précédemment. De ce point de vue et dans le même ordre d'idées, le lieu Azrou est

<sup>26</sup> Adamou et Morel 2005, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Ces détails sont de De Foucauld 1951-52, I., 159: « *édebni* »; De Foucauld 1951-52, II., 793-94: « *témekelkelt* ».

<sup>28</sup> De Zeltner 1914.

un neck de Trachyte, lieu saint, objet de culte de la part de Kel Aïr. Son passé mythique en fait le théâtre des prouesses d'Elias ou Batis, neveu d'Aniguran, le héros culturel des Touareg, résistant à ses ennemis sur sa montagne. Il s'agirait pour les pèlerins d'obtenir d'Elias qu'il intercède auprès de Dieu, afin que celui-ci pardonne les fautes commises par le passé et accorde sa protection pour l'avenir.<sup>29</sup> Adamou & Morel ayant mis l'accent sur le caractère idéologique et socioculturel de certains rites et traditions sacro-saints de Touaregs, décrivent le socle du pèlerinage d'Azrou comme suit :

Ce pèlerinage rassemble chaque année en mars un grand nombre de croyants, plus de deux cents cinquante personnes venues de tout le massif de l'Aïr. Ces dernières années, il concernait plus de cent chameliers sans compter les véhicules 4x4. Il a lieu en l'honneur d'Elias, héros illustre de la tradition touarègue, près du piton rocheux d'Azrou, neck trachyte culminant à plus de 1500m, tout près du mont Gréboun. Ce lieu aurait été, dans un lointain passé, le site de prouesses de ce fameux Elias. Jean-Pierre Roset rapporte deux versions de cette légende dans l'Encyclopédie berbère. La première, indique qu'Elias, poursuivi par ses ennemis et très fatigué, monta avec son cheval sur un petit promontoire qui sortait à peine du sol. Ce rocher sortit alors de terre et s'éleva à une hauteur vertigineuse, le soustrayant du regard de ses poursuivants... Dans la seconde version, certains poursuivants auraient essayé d'escalader la paroi du rocher, mais une force mystérieuse les aurait précipités dans le vide. Les autres auraient alors allumé de grands feux au pied du rocher pour contraindre Elias à descendre, en vain. De nos jours, on peut voir à proximité du rocher le tas de cendres laissé par ces feux, ainsi qu'en hauteur, un morceau du vêtement du héros. Durant le pèlerinage, les fidèles font trois tours du piton, s'arrêtant pour prier à chaque tour. Au pied du rocher, se trouve une mosquée. Dans le mihrab, sont posées deux pierres : celle de gauche est gavée d'un texte à la gloire de Dieu, celle de droite est creusée d'un sillon. Au moment du pèlerinage, chaque fidèle vient à son tour frotter cette pierre avec un caillou, ce qui produit une poudre fine avec laquelle il se frotte les sourcils, les paupières inférieures et la poitrine, demandant à Elias d'intercéder auprès de Dieu pour conserver une bonne vue et une bonne santé.<sup>30</sup>

Aussi, remarque-t-on ici la persistance de la mythologie touarègue, dont les croyances et les rites sont antérieurs à l'islam, qui imprègne la foi musulmane et qui a su intégrer certains de ces éléments, dont la fonction symbolique particulière de la montagne : la zone de refuge d'Azrou tendrait à confirmer ces hypothèses.

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<sup>29</sup> Roset 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Adamou et Morel 2005, 162.

## L'expression de la personnification faunique

Dans son article consacré aux Kel Ahaggar, Benhazera note la vénération par certains Touaregs nobles du varan « *aghata* », gros lézard du désert qui serait même protégé, indiquant d'après ses informateurs les raisons de ce tabou: « l'*aghâta* est leur oncle maternel » ; le varan est protégé, personnifié, car il aurait sauvé un Touareg d'une mort certaine en le guidant vers le point d'eau.<sup>31</sup> Badi rapporte les mêmes occurrences en mentionnant des multiples récits et croyances du varan: *Varanus griseus* « *aghata* », est un des dépositaires de la mythologie des populations locales, sorte de vestige des pratiques totémiques de l'arrière-plan historique.<sup>32</sup> Cet animal est au centre des récits et serait protégé par les Touaregs au même titre qu'un oncle paternel car il occupe une place particulière dans leur imaginaire.

Certes, l'on rencontre une anthroponymie à connotation animale chez les Kel Air. Il est connu que certaines personnes ne consomment pas la viande des espèces comme les poissons et ses dérivés. Elles pensent que ces créatures vivant dans l'eau, sont maléfiques et perçues comme les « *Kel Esuf* » (ceux de la solitude); rien qu'à la vue ou à la senteur de l'odeur du poisson, certaines personnes commencent à vomir.<sup>33</sup>

Les Touaregs obéissent aux interdits alimentaires prescrits par l'islam, mais aussi à d'autres spécifiquement touarègues. On peut retenir que le lièvre par exemple, est une « nourriture dédaignée car son sang évoque les menstrues des femmes » et quant à la pintade, l'outarde et même l'autruche et les œufs autrefois « elles appartiennent à l'ensemble des volatiles pour lesquels les Touaregs affichent un dégoût généralisé, qu'on serait tenté d'attribuer à des vieilles croyances magico-religieuses dont on a oublié l'origine ».<sup>34</sup> Spittler rajoute que l'on explique cette aversion « par le fait que la volaille picore dans la terre et mange aussi des excréments ».<sup>35</sup> D'autres interdits frappent les poissons car ils leur rappellent les serpents et les lézards, ou les animaux carnivores comme l'hyène et le chacal. Autrefois, les Touaregs refusaient de manger de la viande de chameau, et encore aujourd'hui, la plupart s'y refuse.<sup>36</sup>

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31 Benhazera 1908, 60.

32 Badi 2004.

33 Bernus 1981, 213–14; Spittler 1993, 256–58; aussi Gast 1968; Nicolaisen 2001.

34 Bernus, 1981, 258.

35 Spittler 1993, 257.

36 Spittler 1993, 256; Gast 1968, 128.



## L'expression de la personnification floristique

En raison de la fragilité qui caractérise les écosystèmes des régions arides et dans le cadre de la conservation et de la préservation de la biodiversité pour un développement durable, Zakaria révélait une approche locale des pratiques de la valorisation de l'arbre dans l'Air, particulièrement celle des espèces végétales des monts Eghalak; une approche fondée sur des techniques et des savoirs locaux de populations en lien avec leur patrimoine végétal.<sup>37</sup> Ainsi, il y mentionne l'existence des espèces végétales censées abriter des esprits maléfiques dont le prélèvement recommande l'obéissance de certaines règles et la nécessité de faire recours à des outils comme la hache, le couteau, la faucille, la gaule pour les épineux et les pierres pour écorcher les ligneux. Parlant du savoir-faire local, le prélèvement même du feuillage à titre thérapeutique, peut concerner soit la plante entière, soit sa partie aérienne, la racine, l'écorce. Par cette expérience, certaines populations de l'Air détiendraient ainsi des savoirs endogènes érigés en mode spirituel, culturel, moral et social sur les plantes. Lors des prélèvements de ces plantes médicinales, les tradipraticiens font recours aux pratiques rituelles. Convaincues que certaines espèces végétales médicinales seraient protégés par des forces surnaturelles tels les génies, les populations autochtones et particulièrement les acteurs du prélèvement développent la crainte face aux malédictions ou aux fatalités encourues. Dès lors la croyance en l'existence du caractère sacré du couvert végétal médicinal bénéficiant d'une protection naturelle, valoriserait et sauvegarderait ainsi certaines espèces floristiques « vénérables », ou même menacées de disparition à l'exemple de l'Olivier de Laperrine (*alaw* en langue locale). Selon les locaux, cette plante fait un grand bruit au contact des humains. Ceux qui partent dans le but de couper ses racines ou cueillir ses feuilles reviennent bredouilles, effrayés par son bruissement. C'est pourquoi cet arbre bénéficie toujours d'une protection originale dans le sens où il est considéré comme un refuge pour les génies qui se manifestent par le bruissement émis par le feuillage souple au contact du vent. Il est préférable de ne pas le contourner et d'offrir des présents aux enfants et aux personnes âgées si l'on doit s'en approcher.<sup>38</sup> Les Touaregs maliens saluent des « *Kel Esuf* » qui habitent l'arbre *aboraq* (*Balanites aegyptiaca*), en frappant le tronc avec un caillou et en laissant un peu de nourriture sous l'arbre.<sup>39</sup>

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37 Zakaria 2009.

38 Adamou et Morel 2005, 112.

39 Klute 1992.

Pour écarter des risques que peuvent présenter les *Kel Esuf*, il est nécessaire de faire des offrandes, d'identifier le jour, le moment, la saison du prélèvement et surtout de réciter les formules rituelles adéquates. En outre, l'opération du prélèvement dévolue aux tradipraticiens exige d'eux de faire recours à des rites incantatoires. Au nombre des formules et des mesures à prévoir figurent d'abord les offrandes à offrir à l'adresse des plantes médicinales à prélever, aux enfants ou aux personnes âgées, ensuite la récitation voire la salutation des génies dans des termes ésotériques pour demander leur assentiment. Pour communiquer avec les djinns des plantes, les tradipraticiens utilisent des expressions dont voici quelques exemples : « *Mojit-tid-lama-taquten-nak-day* » [ne me fais pas du mal, voilà ta charité], « *Fel-amagal-asqwon-n-orama-wer-moji-t-adliman* » [ne me fais pas du mal, c'est pour faire des médicaments que je te prélève], ou encore se placer du côté droit de la plante puis prononcer : « *mojit-t-idlama-amagal-at-taga* » [ne me fais pas du mal car je te prélève pour me soigner].

Ces formules constituent un savoir traditionnel que seuls les tradipraticiens possèdent et transmettent dans le cadre de l'initiation de leurs adeptes. Se transmettant de bouche à oreille, elles sont ainsi érigées en science endogène, particulièrement au niveau de leurs détenteurs ; elles obéissent à des logiques et à des pouvoirs différents. Elles servent d'approche épistémologique aux tradipraticiens en même temps qu'elles convainquent « moralement » la population de l'Air quant à l'existence des plantes disposant d'une « âme », d'où la personnification des espèces végétales médicinales. Mettant en valeur l'arrière fond symbolique qui anime l'interaction entre l'homme et son environnement, cette transposition des attributs humains au règne végétal par les pratiques rituelles ou par des incantations dont l'objectif ultime serait de parvenir à obtenir l'agrément des « génies titulaires » des lieux et qui veillent sur la plante, limiterait sans nul doute une utilisation abusive des ressources végétales en particulier et naturelles en général. Dans cette perspective, la pratique culturelle endogène viendrait en appui à la gestion efficace de l'espace et de l'équilibre des écosystèmes oasiens.

Les Kel Air connaissent bien les plantes de leur milieu naturel et y trouvent une remarquable pharmacopée. Cette absorption du règne végétal pourrait-elle justifier et expliquer la pratique locale consécutive et constitutive à la personnification des espèces végétales médicinales ?

Même lorsque la pratique s'inscrivait dans une logique liée au mode d'exploitation et de sauvegarde des ressources naturelles, elle ne serait ni plus ni moins qu'une mesure de protection efficace de valorisation des communautés floristiques dans le cadre de leur développement, de leur utilisation durable ainsi que de la préservation du patrimoine végétal. En somme, elle revêt, des stratégies locales idoines qui traduisent la pérennité des ressources naturelles et des parti-

cularités végétales admettant l'évitement d'attaques, ou des coupes abusives des arbres. Par conséquent, l'on pourrait inscrire ces croyances traditionnelles dans le cadre de la participation et de l'implication de l'individu face à ses environnements, à la gestion et à la préservation des milieux sacrés et biotiques. Cela constitue une bonne issue de développement et de protection naturelle d'espèces particulières (végétales ou animales) situées dans le complexe écologique composé par la réserve naturelle nationale de l'Air et du Ténéré.

Presque toutes les plantes prélevées au moyen des rites font l'objet de plusieurs usages servant à des fins médicinales, artisanales, alimentaires et fourragères. Parmi les espèces végétales connues dans l'Air, convoitées et faisant l'objet d'une personnification, nous avons cette autre plante « *agar* », *Maerua Crassifolia*, réputée abritée des génies. Suivant la tradition, si l'on veut se reposer sous son ombre, l'on cassera quelques épines d'une branche de l'arbre ou incisera le tronc avec son couteau pour s'en protéger. L'arbre *agar* tient une place spécifique dans la classification symbolique des éléments naturels puisqu'il est sans équivoque assimilé aux *Kel Esuf*. Bernus a relevé de nombreux autres exemples qui l'attestent: « lorsqu'un homme est mordu par un chien enragé, les Touaregs (de l'ouest du Niger) le font monter sur un agar, abattent l'arbre à coup de hache, et l'homme mordu n'est pas atteint par la rage ». <sup>40</sup> La rage est considérée comme une action malveillante d'un *Kel Esuf*, servant ou non l'intérêt d'un sorcier qui se serait allié à lui. Abattre l'arbre, c'est détruire le *Kel Esuf* ou du moins son abri favori. L'efficacité symbolique tient dans la cohérence de cette logique des rapports entre humains et non-humains. Selon d'autres sources orales, cet arbre serait habité par les esprits d'où la pratique de jet de pierre ou de coup de sabre pour faire fuir les génies (*aljinan*) avant de s'en approcher. Son bois, très dense, est peu utilisé pour le feu, en raison d'une croyance en ce qu'il provoque la perte de la vue. Plusieurs croyances entourent alors cet arbre. C'est le cas aussi des femmes désireuses de se débarrasser de leurs problèmes intimes : elles les lui confient en y attachant un bout de tissu. Certains amoureux également se confessent à lui, en lui laissant des messages en *tifinagh* gravés sur son tronc dans l'espoir d'être lus par leurs amours. <sup>41</sup>

En définitive, ces différentes considérations et pratiques limitent les déboisements, les abus sur le couvert végétal, et débouchent sur une gestion des espèces végétales et animales. Selon la tradition et l'histoire orales, ceux qui abattent des plantes sont punis par les djinns. Cet enseignement traditionnel traduit l'utilité et la place de l'arbre dans ce milieu, car en l'absence des arbres il n'y aura pas de faune encore moins de source médicamenteuse, d'où le sentiment d'une tragédie

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<sup>40</sup> Bernus 1979, 115.

<sup>41</sup> Badi 2004.

encourue par le Touareg nomade du Sahel et du Sahara dont traditionnellement le mode de vie dépend étroitement des espèces floristiques et fauniques qui assurent aussi diverses fonctions vitales. Leur disparition est synonyme de désertification, d'où l'alerte à la préservation de la biodiversité saharienne.

## Conclusion

A l'intérieur de l'aire protégée de l'Aïr-Ténéré (R.N.N.A.T.), se trouve une zone habitée par un groupe local des soufis touareg, adeptes de la Khalwatiya, qui protègent leur environnement comme la réserve naturelle R.N.N.A.T. est censée la protéger. Nous avons démontré que les épistémologies de ces deux aires de protection sont diamétralement opposées : Pendant que l'approche de la R.N.N.A.T. résulte du dualisme cartésien, caractéristique pour la pensée (scientifique) occidentale, les soufis touareg ne perçoivent point une quelconque dichotomie. Au contraire : Ils mettent en avant l'unité de la création divine qui englobe l'humain et le non-humain. L'approche de la réserve R.N.N.A.T. délimite spatialement une sphère 'Nature', conçue comme stable et obéissant à des lois naturelles, d'une sphère 'Culture', conçue comme dynamique et soumise à la volonté de l'homme. Comme la sphère nature est menacée par l'action humaine, on la sépare de la sphère culture en la délimitant dans l'espace.<sup>42</sup> L'approche des soufis touareg, par contre, se base sur l'idée de l'unité de l'univers dans son ensemble qui est créé par Dieu, d'où la nécessité d'éviter tout abus de la création divine. Cette justification religieuse correspond à des croyances préislamiques des Touareg qui persistent jusqu'à nos jours. Les motivations religieuses et culturelles des soufis touareg pour la protection de l'environnement sont renforcées par la pratique du pèlerinage qui amène annuellement des centaines de Touareg dans cette aire de protection où ils expérimentent et vivent le respect pour la création divine.

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<sup>42</sup> Hauhs and Klute 2018.

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# Fritz Heinrich

## (Garden-)Walls

*A Study of Religions's* Exploration of Constructive Makers of Space

### Introduction

“Negotiating the Religious [...] in Everyday Life” is the focus of a volume recently edited by Roman Loimeier.<sup>1</sup> The book can be connected to the work of some of the most innovative scholars in the Study of Religions from the beginnings of the discipline until the so-called cultural turn, the paradigm shift under post-modern and post-colonial perspectives.<sup>2</sup> In the following considerations I will look at garden walls as three-dimensional representations of boundaries and restrictions at the margins of everyday life. These boundaries are places where people usually pass by and hardly take notice of them, even though they may sometimes physically stumble on or bump into them. Walls figuratively and practically create spaces in which the lives of people, animals, and plants take place; walls in general and garden walls in particular direct and regulate perspectives, views, and movements.

In thinking about garden walls, I would like to take up a point that Loimeier made in the introduction to the mentioned volume. He described ‘voids’ as moments within certain communication processes during which people are acting in certain ways, but words fail to express their views or their opinions.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the architect Daniel Libeskind has used voids as structural elements for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which was opened in 2001. He designed the building as an annex of the old Collegienhaus. Voids are empty spaces within the building. The halls break through the several floors of the edifice so that the visitor is always confronted with them. The halls also give room to the emptiness created by the *Shoah* (Hebrew: Holocaust), which could otherwise be easily missed, particularly in cases when a museum tries to keep alive the memory of people, times, and lives, which passed away. This emptiness is simultaneously

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1 Loimeier 2021.

2 See e.g. Hardy 1901, 199f: “Der Mensch ist ein alter Praktikus und musste es wohl oder übel sein, um existieren zu können.” Gladigow 1988, 22: Gladigow criticizes that routine, disinterest, or apathy were rarely in the focus of traditional surveys in the history of religions, which were mainly interested in reconstructing ‘religiosities’ under the “conditions of perfection.”

3 Loimeier 2021, 10f.



difficult to put into words. The architecture of Daniel Libeskind communicates through its voids the history and geography of Berlin, and of lost Jewish life in past and present. In this way, Libeskind's design tries to build on the cultural and religious memory of humankind. The walls are the constructive devices through which the voids are realized and communicated. The walls of the complex also speak the language of walls in several ways; be it as walls of a garden, of a tower, or of Libeskind's sophisticated design. Not coincidentally, according to the homepage of the Jewish Museum Berlin, Libeskind preferred "Between the Lines" as name for the building.<sup>4</sup> Here people can see and experience on a colossal scale how walls determine perspectives, views, and movements. Following the perspectives of Loimeier, this chapter looks at smaller examples, which could be easily overlooked, to systematically trace some of the qualities of walls. Garden walls are an especially useful illustration of a paradigm shift towards the unspectacular in many ways, and serve as a sort of catalyst for everyday negotiations of the religious.

The idea of garden walls as an illustration of a paradigm shift towards the trivial shall be discussed, deepened, and developed by first tracing the semantics of the phrase 'garden walls' by exploring various terms for 'garden' taken from several cultural horizons, with a focus on Near and Middle Eastern and European languages. Secondly, the notion of garden walls as three-dimensional discursive statements will be outlined in relatively broad and open terms, in order to provide a systematic width for the third part of this chapter, which will discuss two specific examples of garden walls as catalysts of religiosities. The first example is the Japanese Hyakudanen (hundred terraced gardens), and the second is the Iranian Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh, or Prince's Garden near Mahan. In both cases not only do garden walls play a prominent role in the arrangements of space, but emptiness is also a considerable part of the religiosities negotiated through the walls; be it the Sufi way in the Iranian case, or the Buddhist path within a Shinto horizon in the Japanese. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

## Tracing the Semantics of Garden Walls

Garden walls can be constructed from several materials: stone, concrete, or mud walls; or as a fence, a hedge or a rampart. In some cases, water canals play the

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<sup>4</sup> Jüdisches Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/libeskind-building>, accessed January 2, 2023.

role of the walls. Garden walls either enclose a plot of land or are erected within designated grounds to create and limit terraces, divisions, or perspectives, or all these aspects together.

Garden as a category genealogically refers to the process of urbanization.<sup>5</sup> The development of gardens in the context of human civilizations is part of the fortification of settlements to protect what is held within designated boundaries from every sort of violation. Fences, hedges, and walls appear as integral parts of all kinds of cultivation, be it the cultivation of plants, animals, or societies.

This becomes evident through the etymology of ‘garden’ and its equivalents: particularly in Persian and some of its related languages, walls are sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly an important element of what is considered a garden. In many cases the cultivation, or housing of fruits, vegetables, trees, animals, or other goods appear to have their locus in some sort of garden. In the etymology of Wilhelm Eilers, he identifies the Old Persian word for garden, *paridayda*, and later *paridaiza*, the original meaning of which was ‘something walled.’<sup>6</sup> In Middle and New Persian, *bāḡ* became the term for garden. According to Eilers, the latter refers to a *Sogdian*, an Avestan term of Indo-Iranian origin with the meaning:

‘piece’ or ‘patch of land’ [...] with the connotation of share in landed properties. Comparable semantic development is shown by the Hebrew *ḥéleq* ‘share,’ which came to mean ‘field’ (not to be confused with the Akkadian *eqlum* and Arabic *ḥaq* ‘field’) and by the Greek *ho kléros* and *tò méros*. In the Talmud the Aramaicized word *bāḡā* has the meaning ‘common land.’<sup>7</sup>

As Eilers calls it, the ‘rival’ term of *bāḡ* in Middle and New Persian was a word, which originally meant ‘vineyard,’ i.e. *raz*.<sup>8</sup> The etymological richness of the New Persian connotations of ‘garden’ are extended by *pālīz*, coming from *paridaiza*, referring to a “‘vegetable garden’ or ‘melon bed,’ though today this most often denotes an unenclosed patch,” as Eilers points out.<sup>9</sup> These are not the only words describing a kind of garden, which can be found in Persian. There is in addition the term *būstān*, “literally ‘place of perfume,’ Arabic *bostān* [...] and *golestān* ‘rose garden’ or ‘flower garden.’”<sup>10</sup> Terminologically and etymologically the heart of

<sup>5</sup> See Wirth 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Eilers 2011 [1988]; Pezzoli-Oligati 2003, 909; Nitschke 2003, 10.

<sup>7</sup> Dalman 1901, 45; Eilers 1988.

<sup>8</sup> Eilers 2011 [1988].

<sup>9</sup> Eilers 2011 [1988].

<sup>10</sup> Eilers 2011 [1988].

the term garden, at least in the linguistically Indo-European, Middle Eastern, and Eurasian parts of the world, lies in the Persian-speaking world.

In comparison to this wide variety of terms in Persian, European languages are more limited. The etymology of the term garden in most European languages revolves around several derivations from a single Indo-European root, which became the Greek *χόρτος* (*khortos*), and the Latin *hortus*. Later, these developed into several forms of the word garden; *garten*, *garda*, etc. The translation of or equivalent to the Latin *hortus*, in English is *garden* or *yard*, the German *Garten*, the French *jardin*, which is similar to the Spanish *jardín* and the Portuguese *jardim*. According to Karl Ernst Georges, the Latin *hortus* originally meant “any fenced in or however enclosed place,” which could include a garden of any kind or a park.<sup>11</sup>

In Portuguese, there are the terms *jardim* for garden in general, *quintal* for ‘kitchen garden,’ *horta* for ‘vegetable garden,’ and *pomar* for orchard. On the other hand, the English and German way of using the term garden provides for the possibility of adding several attributes to the word, which in turn allows an almost unlimited extension of what can be called a garden; from a vineyard, in German *Wingert* or *Weingarten*,<sup>12</sup> a rose garden, in German *Rosengarten* or a *Klostergarten*.<sup>13</sup> There is also the term *Küchengarten* that appeared in the Middle Ages. During the Renaissance and into the Baroque period, the term botanical garden (*jardin botanique*) came into use in English and in French. The terms *Kindergarten*, *Schrebergarten* (allotment garden),<sup>14</sup> zoological garden and beer

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**11** Georges 1998 [1913]; Thelen 2014, 28f.

**12** Particularly when they are situated on slopes along mountains and valleys, walls have often been used to construct terraces, on which the grape vine could be placed perfectly towards the sun. Due to the land consolidation during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in many areas of Germany the structures of vineyards have been changed. The walls have been removed and the aesthetics of the areas lost a bit of the garden appearance. The steep slopes along the valleys of Mosel, Neckar, and Main preserved the original construction and still show why they are vineyards in the truest sense, that is ‘vine gardens’ and not just a ‘Weinberg,’ for which English has no specific name.

**13** Rainer Schomann gives a nice overview of monastery gardens in Lower Saxony, Schomann 2009, 95–128.

**14** For *Schrebergarten* as a specific form of allotment garden, see Thelen 2014, 199. These kinds of gardens, besides other aspects and equipment, are designed to combine relaxation and garden work. For these purposes they are very much shaped by hedges or the proverbial wire mesh fences, as Friedrun Trenkler demonstrates in his well-illustrated urban ethnographic exploration, Trenkler 2012, 97–117, see particularly 110; in 1927 Paul Richter has captured the imperial character of a *Schrebergarten*. Its original function was to feed the poor citizens of a big city. The role of the fence is depicted in a small poem: “Ein paar Meter ein jedes Reich / Zwölf Spatenstiche, ein Harkenstreich. / Zäune trennen das Nachbarland, /.../ Ein paar Meter jedes Land / Acht Gurken, zehn Rüben, ein Bohnenstand / Und dahinter fünf Köpfe Kohl. / Ein paar Meter ein

garden<sup>15</sup> have all appeared in more recent times.<sup>16</sup> In consideration of the present exploration, the English word courtyard is particularly interesting, because it terminologically denotes the architectural feature of a walled garden within a building. Walls, regardless of how they are constructed, play a characteristic role in each type of the mentioned gardens. Only the English landscape garden, which first emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and became very popular in many parts of Europe particularly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, largely omitted walls as a confining element. Instead, walls in a landscape garden can be found as parts of architecture placed within the compound, but features such as watercourses often play the role of garden walls.<sup>17</sup>

A relative, so to speak, of the English garden in the Far East is the Japanese garden, which likewise aims to transgress the walls, by integrating the horticultural arrangement as harmoniously as possible into the surrounding landscape. In the Japanese case, the aspect of occupation is similarly etymologically present when it comes to the term *niwa*.<sup>18</sup>

All terms, words, and specifications of garden, including the facilities to structure, and mark its borders, do not just relate to the physical places somewhere in the past or present, but can and do serve likewise as expressions for

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jedes Reich. / Aber die Wangen nicht mehr bleich / Und die Augen nicht mehr hohl! /.../ Jeder König auf eigener Scholle! / Froh gespielte Herrscherrolle - / Traum der Freiheit - du Menschenlos!" Richter 1927, 237. Transl.: "Each empire, a few meters / twelve cuts of a spade, one stroke with a rake / Fences separate the countryside / ... / Each empire, a few meters/Eight cucumbers, ten turnips, one stalk of beans / and behind five heads of cabbage. / Each empire, a few meters. / But cheeks no more pale / And eyes no more hollow! /.../ Each a king on the patch of his own! / Happily played the emperors role - / dream of freedom - thou human fate!"

15 Even though many places which are called *Biergarten* or 'beer garden' actually have an enclosure made of hedges, fences or even wooden walls, being fenced apparently never belonged to the indispensable characteristics of such locations. What counts, according to the latest Bavarian regulations for Beer gardens from 1999, are, apart from serving beer, the opening hours, the character of a garden, and that the visitors are allowed to bring their own food with them, see "Bayerische Biergarten Verordnung vom 20. April 1999" (GVBl, 142), § 2, and Bestimmungen 2.1. zu § 1; the curator of monuments, Karl Gättinger, is even stricter than the state and is quoted in a feature for the Bavarian TV. According to him, only a place, which is located nearby a beer cellar, can historically be named as *Biergarten*, see "Genuss mit Geschichte 2: Biergärten unter Denkmalschutz" | Unsere Themen | freizeit | BR Fernsehen | Fernsehen | BR.de, <https://www.br.de/br-fernsehen/sendungen/freizeit/themen/biergaerten-unter-denkmalschutz-unterwegs-mit-dem-schmidt-max-208.html>, accessed February 22, 2022.

16 The basic features of the outlined etymology are mentioned under the entry 'Garten', m. hortus, in *Deutsches Wörterbuch* von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm, vol. 4, 1388–1401.

17 Or as invisible walls 'Haha' forming part of a surrounding moat, see Thelen 2014, 29.

18 <https://de.pons.com/übersetzung/japanisch-deutsch/>

imagined spaces and their qualities. In this way the various kinds of gardens and their designations in the diverse languages, of which here only a few examples are given, embrace an enormous symbolic and metaphorical treasure.<sup>19</sup> The semantic and symbolic treasure of the term garden and its derivatives appears to be a sort of docking site and a type of aesthetic catalyst for religious, spiritual, mythological or ideological narratives, imaginary worlds and practices of almost any kind.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, walls are the elements of a garden where religious associations are specifically stimulated. Along them is negotiated what in concrete cultural, historic, and social horizons is conceived of and designed as ‘garden.’

In addition, gardening and cultivation can be described as creative, powerful acts through which a designated place and its setting are brought under the rule of one or many who claim and exert power and the right to cultivate and design this piece of land. The sometimes obvious, sometimes hidden marker, which communicates and represents these hegemonic aspects of a garden is its walls, and how and where they are constructed.<sup>21</sup>

## Garden Walls as Three-Dimensional Discursive Statements

Systematically speaking, the garden wall relates architecture to geography, and more specifically geography of religions to aesthetics of religions. This interdisciplinary synthesis is a case of material religion. Erecting a garden wall combines the purposeful and artful act of constructing a wall with the hegemonic act of drawing a three-dimensional line in a physical or imagined place. The wall divides a space into at least two different realms. Depending on the point of view, the areas created by the wall may appear as here or there, left and right or, if an area is enclosed with walls, as inside and outside.

As architecture the wall has constructive, aesthetic, and functional dimensions, which all together in reciprocal relation provide for its representative, or in Michel Foucault’s terms, its monumental character.<sup>22</sup> This representative, monumental character of the garden wall can be methodologically conceived as an

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<sup>19</sup> See Thelen 2014, 85–133, provides a useful survey of representations of gardens in novels, poems, and other kinds of literature.

<sup>20</sup> See Kalender 2020, 1–25; Kalender 2017, 107–30; Mohn 2016, 55–77.

<sup>21</sup> See Thelen 2014, 55–85.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Foucault 1981, 14f.

intersection where geography comes into play. In an imagined, as in a physical area or realm, a wall shapes the land as stage or scene for the environment, while the land conditions the form and the purpose of the wall. What makes a garden wall distinct depends on the perspective, on the idea of a garden, and what in a given context can be considered attributes of a garden. In certain regards, the symbolic power of the architectural boundary marker increases if it is not erected as stone wall, but instead as a rampart or a fence.

Jean Jacques Rousseau accounted for the hegemonic character of erecting a fence around a piece of land as a kind of ontological and sociological watershed in the development of humankind which laid the foundation for *société civile*, i.e. a society that is comprised of a political constitution and of participating individuals.<sup>23</sup> Rousseau idealistically described the living conditions of humankind before this paradigmatic shift had taken place in society as if they were a paradise. This shows the intrinsic dynamic, symbolic power, and potential of a purposely enclosed plot of land as an imaginary garden with religious connotations. An important factor in this regard is the wall in the widest sense, which delimits the spaces of the garden and thereby creates a here and there, a prior and a posterior, and, depending on which of the side of the wall is idealized, ascribing cultivation to one side and wilderness to the other. In other words, where a wall limits a terrain, garden as a physical or metaphorical description for the complex is suggesting itself. The semantic treasure of the garden, with its 'paradisian' heritage, creates a docking site for religious allusions of any kind. 'Paradisian' in this regard does not allude so much to the beauty and appeal of the land in reference to the Biblical use of 'paradise,' but to the circumstance that the garden is delimited and thereby marked as something special, belonging to whoever owns and rules over it.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of Rousseau, both sides of the wall, or fence, are reciprocally inverted: the idealized wilderness in the open paradisian garden, and the often criticized, raging brutality of the *société civile* in the fenced in plot of land. The former, a paradise of all, after setting a fence, according to Rousseau, became exclusively reserved for a privileged few:

The first who enclosed a terrain, acquiescing to say, *this is mine*, and finding people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of the civil society 'société civile.' From how

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<sup>23</sup> See Rousseau 1993, 172f., fn. 214.

<sup>24</sup> In this sense I would say, paradise as a relevant category in the study of religions does not necessarily relate only to the Judeo-Christian usage of the word, but goes back to how it can be found in the ancient world of the whole Near and Middle East, be it the Achaemenid, the Mesopotamian or Egyptian Antiquity, see Pezzoli-Oligati 2003, 909.

many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors had saved humankind, who had pulled out the posts or filled up the moat and shouted out to his fellow humans: 'Beware of this imposter; you are lost, lest you forget that the fruits belong to all and the earth to no one.'<sup>25</sup>

Such an outcry, if it has ever happened or will happen, remains utopian in its egalitarian outcome. Setting a fence, planting a hedge, or encircling a terrain with other materials in order to protect it and enable the relatively undisturbed development of it for purposes of any kind, have been and continue to be compelling necessities for all humans whenever and wherever they live. The next logical step is to claim ownership over this piece of land and effectively communicate such a claim. By erecting a wall, such a claim's social and cultural loci are implicitly communicated. Therefore, building a wall can be understood as a communicative act in the horizon of a discursive constellation imbued with power and interest-related positionality, perspectives, and utterances.

Günter Nitschke observed these kinds of acts related to developments in China where walls have served as boundaries for imperial hunting grounds, and in Japan, where Buddhists of several schools have contemplated their nature within walled gardens.<sup>26</sup> Serving both functional and representative purposes, garden walls develop their own communicative trajectory and dynamics related to their settings, the environment, and the way people interact with them practically and perceptively. In these regards, garden walls could be considered the sisters of city walls, and later of the walls erected at the frontiers of empires.

As a way of illustrating the religious aspects of the inevitable, hegemonic character of setting a garden wall, the present study draws on the ideas of Jonathan Z. Smith. In his famous essay "Map is not territory," Smith described the inevitable hegemonic act of mapping, or perceptively organizing the world according to one's own needs and interests. He conceived of the term 'religion' as one of the tools with which such an organization is achieved. As part of this deconstructionist, postcolonial approach, Smith explained that he wanted to understand the term 'religion' as:

the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence 'matters.' Religion is a

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<sup>25</sup> Rousseau 1993, 172f. (Transl. FH on the basis of the French and the German translation of Heinrich Meier).

<sup>26</sup> See Nitschke 2003, 10; for both Chinese and Japanese gardens see Wiede 2018, 14 (all Chinese characters depicted here show something enclosed, fenced or walled).

distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for human existence.<sup>27</sup>

This characterization of religion, coined by Smith, is a classic perspective. It draws a parallel between the discursive act of identifying something as religious and the intellectual and physical act of drawing a geographical map, while simultaneously conceiving of both as inevitable cultural and social activities. Architecture can be understood in a similar way: architectural objects, are essentially three-dimensional constructions or buildings erected by humans which they then call ‘home’ for themselves, their activities, or goods, regardless of where or how they actually live. Being at home means to control the conditions of the environment and regulate interactions with them to survive, be protected, and have orientation. Both this understanding of architecture and Smith’s characterization of religion, demonstrate the analogical functions of the religious and architectural. This functional proximity between religion and architecture has necessarily consequences for the garden as a specific kind of architecture.

The garden can be conceived not only as part of a discourse field in the sense that it is a term with three-dimensional and material meanings,<sup>28</sup> but may also be analyzed as a three-dimensional discursive act; an *énoncée*, or effective statement in the Foucauldian sense.<sup>29</sup> In the case of garden walls, these form intrinsic parts of the material cosmos as conditions for the realization of *énoncée*. The garden walls are the element of a garden where architectural and geographical aspects converge. In this regard, garden walls can be conceived of as a materialized – although sometimes only imagined – marker or representation of “the expressions, activities, and intentionalities” that Smith intended to study within the perimeter of history.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Smith 1978, 291.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Thelen 2014, 11f.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Foucault 1981, 41; regarding the relevance of this concept from a study of religions perspective on architecture, see Heinrich 2017, 95–101.

<sup>30</sup> Smith 1978, 291. This matches with Thelen 2014, 37: “Ein Garten ist ein mit menschlicher Intention bedachtes räumliches Stück Natur, das der Mensch nach seinen Vorstellungen zu formen bereit ist.”



## Explorations of Garden Walls as Catalysts of Religiosities

Using the pictures in Victoria Clarke's *The Gardener's Garden* as a guide for a metaphorical stroll through the global world of gardens, since a real journey to all of these beautiful places remains a utopian dream, in most of the images the garden walls are perceptively hidden in the perspective from which the gardens are photographed.<sup>31</sup> In the visual representation and reception of many gardens, the walls appear to be voids in the sense Loimeier described them regarding the absence of the religious in explanations of normal people in everyday life: the photographers did not find an aesthetical language, to integrate them adequately in the depictions of the gardens.<sup>32</sup> Only when walls play a constitutive role for the internal arrangement and structure of the garden and the garden therefore cannot be portrayed without them do they become an element of its visual representation in the book. This is the case for the Hyakudanen (hundred terraced gardens), which form part of the conference center Yumebutai (stage of dreams) in the city of Awaji on Awaji Island located in Osaka Bay in Japan.<sup>33</sup>

### Garden Walls as Constructive Makers of Spaces for the In-Between

Hyakudanen consists of one hundred terraces in the form of a square. Each of the terraces are enclosed by walls made of concrete. A rectangular labyrinth of stairs and paved walkways climb up the hills and cover an area of 0,7 hectares. Besides the hotel and the garden, the complex also includes a memorial. The memorial is devoted "to the 6000 victims of the great Hanshin earthquake of 1995," as Alex Rayner explains. He continues: "Although the disaster is best known for destroying the city of Kobe, its epicenter was actually at the northern end of Awaji Island, in Osaka Bay."<sup>34</sup>

The garden walls of the Hyakudanen protect the plants and the soil within. In doing so, they are reminiscent of the walls of rice terraces in many mountainous regions all over Asia. Aesthetically, the paved walkways around each of the

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<sup>31</sup> Clark 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Loimeier 2021, 10f.

<sup>33</sup> Rayner 2014, 83. Text and photo serve as a starting point for the following considerations.

<sup>34</sup> Rayner 2014, 83.

hundred squares, and the atmosphere created by the light-gray concrete, in contrast to the more colorful plants and flowers, allude in a stylized way to Japanese cities, with their high density of buildings and few garden areas. The squares are also reminiscent of Japanese cemeteries; for example, the Otani cemetery in Kyoto or one of the cemeteries in Osaka have similar visual appearances.

Hyakudanen's arrangement connects visitors to the natural disaster of the earthquake. It also connects them with the garden's location, and to the human destruction of parts of the Island, which made way for the construction of Kansai International Airport. The airport was constructed on artificial islands in Osaka Bay 20km east of Awaji close to the mainland. The Hyakudanen was built over the quarry from where the soil was taken to construct the airport island.

In this arrangement, the walls become a particularly connective element. Inside and surrounding the gardens, the walls relate cultural and social activities, such as architecture, memory, leisure, relaxation, eating and drinking, awareness of the endangered natural environment, conferences, tourism, and holidays, to nature-related activities, such as studying or enjoying of the trees, flowers, plants, and views of the landscape, sky and sea.

The architect assigned to develop the complex was Tadao Ando. He was also responsible for the reforestation of the wider area with endemic trees. The reciprocal integration of nature and artificial spaces is a benchmark for his architecture.<sup>35</sup> Abstract architectural forms created through a precise setting of concrete walls characterize the projects of Tadao Ando, whether residential houses<sup>36</sup> or the Naoshima Contemporary Art Museum (1992–95). Werner Blaser, who analyzes the architecture of Tadao Ando including the aforementioned and two other buildings, describes how the reciprocal integration of nature and architecture, of landscape and construction, of inside and outside, are created by the clarity and strictness of Ando's wall placements. Blaser suggests that this clarity and strictness are also distinctive qualities of Japanese architecture: "The garden is completely incorporated into the living space by means of the open ground plan. There is no separation between inside and outside, and yet exquisite boundaries can be found everywhere."<sup>37</sup>

In the case of Hyakudanen one could apply the same idea and say that the living space and the place for the dead are completely incorporated into the garden. This can be further applied in a similar vein to Blaser's ideas about

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<sup>35</sup> See Vester 2019, 4, as hypothesis proven valid throughout the reasoning in the PhD thesis, e.g. 22f, 26f, 38f, 52f, 92–134, and more frequently.

<sup>36</sup> See Jodido 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Blaser 2005, 34. The methodology behind it deciphers Vester 2019, 30–35.

‘edifice,’ which can be understood in the present context as a garden in the following sense:

An exciting unity between openness and closedness, between connection and separation. In addition, the transition between the interior space and the exterior space as a whole. The creation of transparency and lightness in an edifice [garden] – the sublime and the liberating in the landscape.<sup>38</sup>

Chris Vester gives the *terminus technicus* in Japanese architecture for this reciprocal integration of garden into urban spaces and vice versa, calling it the ‘artificial *niwa*.’<sup>39</sup> The constructive elements, which create this reciprocity, are the wall in the building and the garden wall in the garden. Both simultaneously limit and open the spaces, transform the natural into the cultural and social, and vice versa.<sup>40</sup>

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**38** Blaser 2005, 34. Regarding the ‘mutual permeation’ of inside and outside, architecture and surrounding nature, see Tadao Ando as he is quoted and introduced by Jodido 2021, 12–15, text on 12 and 15. Pivotal in this horizon is the antagonism between darkness and light. For the darkness within traditional Japanese houses and the role of light, see also Kerr 2015, 28–30. The relevance of it for Ando is demonstrated by Vester 2019, 9f.

**39** Vester 2019, 74.

**40** For the pivotal role of walls in the design of Ando’s architecture, see Vester 2019, 273–85. Blaser realizes the importance of the walls for Japanese architecture, but seems to miss the point when he describes the Shrine of Ise as kind of archaic heritage, which hindered the Japanese architecture from undergoing changes throughout the centuries, see Blaser 2005, 8. In his impressive phenomenological survey on sacralty in history of architecture, Ivica Brnić appears to be too closely bound to the European concepts of the holy and the sacred, and the idea that sacred buildings represented the cradle of architecture in the history of humankind to realize the communicative character of the walls in Ando’s architecture. Ando’s walls made of concrete, whether walls of buildings or garden walls, provide for the integration of what is in each case, depending on the position of the viewer, on their other side and therefore visible as beyond or transcendent. This meshing of here and there, nature and culture, architecture and environment, concrete and soil, etc., cannot be adequately captured in terms of the sacred and profane, holy and unholy, religious or secular, see Brnić 2019, 123f. It is better regarding the light, but the interpretation of hierophany appears a bit artificial in Brnić 2019, 220f. Vester 2019, 34, gives Ando’s opinion regarding the integration of spirituality in everyday life, and on 211f. regarding transcendence. On the other hand, Brnić’s considerations regarding nothingness and emptiness as pivotal dimensions in the architecture of Ando are very helpful, see Brnić 2019, 206f. Looking back from here to what Brnić says regarding the Ando’s “Church of Light” in Osaka, build in 1989, see Brnić 2019, 196f. Looking ahead to the conference building in Weil am Rhein, the walls, and their sparse apertures as makers of light and thus communicative, are more inclusive than exclusive elements that had become much more visible, and transcendence had become more the quality of an enlightenment than a hierophany. Brnić very clearly realizes the liminal function

The square-shaped system of the garden walls in Hyakudanen also relates them aesthetically and symbolically to the Rokko complex of residential houses in Kobe. This complex is situated on the mountainside of mount Rokko, and features gardens on the roof terraces. Vester describes them as ‘hanging gardens.’<sup>41</sup> The square-shaped systems of both the Rokko complex and Hyakudanen contrast them in an interesting way with the architectural features of Hompuku-ji’s adjoining garden also located on Awaji Island, just over 3km away from the Hyakudanen gardens. The oval form of the Hompuku Buddhist temple includes a roof consisting of a pond over a subterranean chamber, which are integrated into the landscape. The Hyakudanen gardens and the Hompuku Buddhist temple communicate with the surrounding scenery through the walls, but the grammar of the architectural language is quite different in each case.<sup>42</sup> Ando conceives of the structure’s circle as representative of the perfect divine, and the ellipse as the perfect human form. The circle in the temple construction therefore has kind of absolute, static meaning, while the oval is more relative, liberal and dynamic in character.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to these basic organic forms, the square represents the simplest geographic form. Both communicate with each other in each piece of Ando’s art.<sup>44</sup>

The Hyakudanen forms an integrative part of the Yumebutai, or the ‘stage of dreams.’ The former’s garden walls in combination with its paved walkways and stairs leading the visitor up and down, relate to what Ando explained regarding the construction of the Ishikawa Nishida Kitaro Museum of Philosophy (2002):

My intention with the path was to open a gap (*ma*) in everyday life for one who walks the path so that he or she can have an opportunity to think about his or her self. I also positioned a ‘garden of nothingness (*mu na teien*)’ inside the building which is surrounded by walls and is open to the sky, framing a portion of it.<sup>45</sup>

In the present case of Hyakudanen in Awaji, the ‘Garden of Nothingness’ is constructed outside of the buildings and the walls, and the walkways create the gaps. The concrete garden walls in the Hyakudanen form a series of courtyards enclosing the plants and the soil, separating them from the slopes and exposing them to

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of the walls in Ando’s architecture when he describes the garden wall in the Vitra conference building in Weil am Rhein and compares it with the wall of a traditional Japanese Zen Garden, see Brnić 2019, 158–60.

<sup>41</sup> Vester 2019, 102f, see also the illustrations on p. 435.

<sup>42</sup> Vester 2019, 154, and 473, illustration no. 88.

<sup>43</sup> Tadao Ando, quoted in Vester 2019, 197f.

<sup>44</sup> See Vester 2019, 202–205 on the basis of quotations from Ando.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted from Brnić 2019, 206f.

the sky.<sup>46</sup> In combination with their location; on the hillside of an island oriented towards the surrounding sea, the walls show what Ando asserts is characteristic of ‘Japanese roots,’ which are sensitive “towards place and nature” because of:

the geographical context of Japan [...], as it is an island surrounded by sea on four sides. It is filled with mountains, rivers, and greenery where variegation flourishes throughout the seasons. The delicate sociological balances of the *shimaguni* (island country) have sharpened Japanese sensibilities and caused an inimitable culture to burgeon.<sup>47</sup>

Genealogically speaking, the architecture of Ando stands on the shoulders of traditional Japanese aristocratic, Buddhist-monastic, and Shinto-shrine building designs, a style which is also visible in many Japanese store houses, residential houses, tea houses, and treasure houses.<sup>48</sup> The interior wall construction in these cases often includes one or more circles of walls within enclosed spaces.<sup>49</sup> Ando’s architecture reduces this heritage of walls to their pure and simple form, using mainly concrete, positioning them in order to create both openness and closeness. The walls typically open the houses onto gardens and the garden towards edifices. This aesthetic language of Ando’s garden architecture allows each kind of religiosity or spirituality to connect to and identify distinct ideas of here and there, nature and culture, life and death, and light and darkness. The garden walls, like the walls of houses, cities, and territories, in their representative, protective, and power-asserting character, become manifestations of the in-between, which is intensified when they are reduced to their abstract forms.<sup>50</sup> When considering traditional Japanese garden architecture, Nitschke speaks about a “*unio mystica* of the right angle with the natural forms” as a “general motif of Japanese aesthetics.”<sup>51</sup>

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**46** Enclosing a space with walls in order to protect it and ‘to create an inner sanctuary’ was already a motive in 1973, when Ando built the Tonishima House in Osaka, see Jodido 2021, 15; regarding concrete as construction material, see 16f and the examples of residential houses portrayed in this book.

**47** Tadao Ando, quoted in Jodido 2021, 8f.

**48** See Vester 2019, 10–13, 160f, 186–88, 205–8, 246–51.

**49** A helpful survey of what Japanese garden architecture offers, see Wiede 2018, 97–222.

**50** See Vester 2019, 137–40, 246–57.

**51** Nitschke 2003, 16.

## Garden Walls as Constructive Makers of Spaces for Sufi-Religiosities

*The Gardener's Garden* offers another elucidating example of a garden in which the walls can be seen in the photos and play a pivotal role in creating the specific character of the park in which the garden is located. The walls of the Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh, or Prince's Garden transform the garden into a kind of heavenly place on earth. The garden is situated in the dry mountainous area of the south-eastern Iranian province Kerman. Only the mountain range of the Kūh-e Palvar in the east separates the area where the garden is from the Dasht-e Lūt, the desert of Lut. The garden is located near the small town of Mahan. Toby Musgrave in *The Gardener's Garden* introduces it by claiming: "If there was ever an example of how a garden can be an earthly paradise, Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh is it."<sup>52</sup> The garden was first created in the early years of Qajar emperor Naser al-Din Shah's reign (1848–96), in the 1850s for one of his children, Mohammad Hasan Khan Qajar Sardar Irvani. Approximately 40 years later, the garden was extended under the local governor Naser al-Douleh (1880–91).

The grounds are an example of a modern Persian imperial garden.<sup>53</sup> It could even be described as a condensed version of a classical palace garden, since the whole complex represents the transformation of imperial gardens towards more closely resembling gardens of the small minority of nobility at the time in Iran, including gentry, intellectuals, and merchants and other wealthy people. Musgrave points out several allusions to Moghul gardens, such as the Nishāt Bāgh and the Shālīmār Bāgh, both in Srinagar, in the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir administered by India. The clearest indications of this allusion are in the central role of water in each of these compounds: watercourses, water basins, and fountains form the primary structures in these complexes. In addition, the surrounding mountain ranges dominate the scenery in each of the gardens. In fact, water is always the core element that structures and runs through Persian gardens, which are also the source of inspiration for later gardens throughout the Islamic world.<sup>54</sup> In the case of Persian gardens and their later iterations across the Islamic world, the garden is consistently representative of paradise. This representation promoted the ruler of the garden (traditionally an emperor or sultan, later urban intellectuals, merchants, and other wealthy people or institutions) as

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<sup>52</sup> Musgrave 2014, 46.

<sup>53</sup> The first is Pasargadae, see Boucharlat 2009, 47–64.

<sup>54</sup> The paradigmatic role of the Iranian or Persian garden in this regard is emphasized by Lohlker 2009, 113–24.

a good, just ruler, who provides the world with an abundance of water, beauty, and aesthetic harmony.

In case of the Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh three types of walls form the characteristic design of the garden. First, the walls enclosing the ca. 375m long and ca. 124m wide garden, form a rectangle that stretches from south to north up the mountainside, with an apse in the north. The apse forms a half circle, or a half ellipse, encompassing the whole width of the garden.<sup>55</sup> Seen from the air, as one photo in *The Gardener's Garden* shows, the complex resembles a green colored shadow cast by a mosque complete with a cupola on top, stretched by the sinking evening sun.<sup>56</sup>

The second type of walls are those of the buildings. The prestigious Sardār Khāneh, the emblematic pavilion at the south entrance of the garden appears not only on the cover of Penelope Hobhouse's book *Persian Gardens*, but can also be found in many tourist guides and advertisements illustrating the beauty of Iran. Nonetheless, Musgrave describes the condition of the building in 2014 as "in a state of disrepair."<sup>57</sup>

In the north, at the foot of the closing apse, the large main building, the royal residence, is situated. Members of the royal family stayed there on their way from Kerman to the Persian Gulf, as Mahmoud Rashad recounts.<sup>58</sup> To the left and right of the main entrance of the garden on the south side of the complex are the guest suites. On the northwestern side are the service buildings and the storehouses for the palace. The latter buildings do not form part of the shape of the garden, unless one circumambulates the whole complex from the outside. From this perspective, the buildings of the palace economy look like any typical city construction of loam in this region of Iran.

The third type of walls, which form the primary shape of the Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh, are those of the eight terraces ascending the hill from south to north. Each landing forms part of a waterfall which stretches over the 270meter-long water basin that runs through the length of the garden from the terrace in front of the palace down to the Sardār Khāneh. To the left and right, the water basin is flanked by trees on each terrace and by rectangular beds of flowers and other plants, which are surrounded by trees as well.

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<sup>55</sup> See the floor plan in Hobhouse 2005, 137.

<sup>56</sup> Musgrave 2014, 46, photo by Georg Gerster.

<sup>57</sup> Musgrave 2014, 46. European gardens in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries sometimes displayed artificial ruins to stimulate the idea of fantasy and as reminders of history. This is the impression a visitor temporarily might have, but surely was not intended by those who designed the garden in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>58</sup> Rashad 2000, 321.

From the perspective of the visitor, who enters the garden from the south, the length of the complex appears shortened and pushed together by the waterfalls, which optically elevate the palace and bring it into focus. The terraces are only visible according to their height; from the entrance, the length is imperceptible. This impression changes completely if one climbs to the first floor of the Sardār Khāneh. Then, the alley of trees creates an optical illusion that elongates the distance to the palace, which aligns with the walls, the stairs, and the basins of the terraces. From this point of view, the royal residence appears as a far distance somewhere at the feet of the mountains. A similar optical illusion can be viewed from the other direction. Looking from above from the position of the bigger water basin beneath the palace, the Sardār Khāneh with its beautiful structure and features, which can be seen through the windows of the upper floor, appears in close perspective, joined by the slowly, step by step, descending water basin. If one is standing on the terrace of the palace or even on its upper floor looking down, the buildings of the entrance appear far away and appear tiny and small.

All kinds of walls create perspectives, which not only communicate the social differences between those who are visitors, owners, and servants, but also allude to the metaphorical and symbolic imaginary world of the Sufi traditions and their poetry. The system of *qānāts*, or canals, which transport water from the mountains into the garden and feed the central water channel symbolize hidden treasure and wisdom. The fountains and water basins symbolize knowledge and insight, which expropriate themselves and return back into oneself. The water itself is almost endless in its symbolic richness. The paradisiacal character of the whole complex is particularly created by the surrounding walls, which separate the outside desert from the abundant greenery colorful plants, and peaceful, relaxing interior. With their limiting function, the garden walls increase and emphasize the impression of a paradise on the one side and a desert on the other.

Even if one is unfamiliar with Sufi traditions, he or she will very likely comprehend the metaphor of the complex: the experience of being lost in the desert, traveling towards the garden and climbing up the path towards the main entrance, followed by feeling relieved after entering the garden and being confronted with the abundance of water, cool shadows, and harmonious order. Viewing from different perspectives the world inside and outside the garden might even elicit a kind of euphoria created by the whole experience.

Musgrave explains the symbolism of the garden and in doing so demonstrates how walls and plants interact:

Running along the terraces on either side of the watercourse are beds filled with roses and bedding plants. The beds separate twin-paved paths, the outer of which is flanked by an avenue of cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*). In Islam these trees are symbolic of eternity,



and here they also draw the eye to the pavilion and the mountains beyond. The space between the cypresses and the high walls is planted with orchards of pear and pomegranates. Shaded by large chinar or plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*), these open spaces are the perfect spot to soak up the tranquil atmosphere of this paradise in the desert.<sup>59</sup>

The complex of the Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh could best be understood as a three-dimensional Sufi *Dīvān*, a collection of Sufi poems. This understanding underlines the area of the garden, which is connected by the waterways, leaving the garden in the south and running towards the city of Mahan. Here in Mahan is where the mausoleum of Shah Ne‘matollah Vali, a famous scholar, author of a *Dīvān*, and founder of a Sufi-order, the *Ne‘matollāhiya*, is located.<sup>60</sup> Ahmad Shah, who belonged to the Indian Bahman dynasty and was a follower of this important Sufi scholar, constructed the Mausoleum in 1437.<sup>61</sup> The architecture and facilities of the shrine allude in many ways to a garden as representation of the eternal paradise. This is evident in the floral wall paintings, the ornate tiled cupola, and the elaborate prayer carpets on the floors.<sup>62</sup> The extensive complex like the palace features several water basins and a series of inner courtyards.

Since its creation, the mausoleum has been an important destination for religious pilgrims. The Qajar garden of Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh therefore can be interpreted as a three-dimensional statement of those who designed it, with which they paid their respect to Shah Ne‘matollah Vali. In doing so they created a three-dimensional discourse field, in which the garden and the shrine constantly communicate and converse with each other in the eyes and experiences of the visitors of both places. The frameworks of the discourse field are the walls, inverting the garden into the mausoleum and vice versa. In each case this demonstrates the power, cultural tastes, piety, and religious devotion of those who created and own(ed) the complexes in continuity with one another.

## Conclusions

Vester’s articulation of the significance of walls in Japanese architecture and in Ando’s designs can be applied with few changes to other examples,<sup>63</sup> particularly the described Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh:

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<sup>59</sup> Musgrave 2014, 46.

<sup>60</sup> Algar and Burton-Page 2012.

<sup>61</sup> Rashad 2000, 320; for details see Algar and Burton-Page 2012.

<sup>62</sup> Rashad 2000, 320f; for the garden-related imaginary world of Iran, see Lohlker 2009, 113–23.

<sup>63</sup> See the idea of the Chinese garden as outlined in Wiede 2018, 32–41.

Just as little as the compositional intention of Japanese architecture ends at the garden wall, Ando's architecture and composition of space does not end there. Even more, his composition often does not end at the surface of the earth but connects celestial with aboveground space.<sup>64</sup>

The same can be said about the Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh. The Sufi symbolism does not end at the garden wall, but includes all elements of the garden. The trajectory, particularly of the garden walls brings into the grounds the hardly identifiable shift from that which is conceived as religious or spiritual into other cultural practices, experiences, productions, and imaginations and vice versa. Garden walls mark the in-between and thereby transform the elements of the garden complex. The more distinctively and perspectively insurmountable these elements are arranged, the greater the transforming power. The view from one side creates the desire to see it from the other side. To set a wall to deliberately stimulate its transgression, or at least create the wish to transcend it,<sup>65</sup> is not only a characteristic of Ando's architecture and the garden *Divān* of Bāgh-e Shāhzādeh, but is also an architectural element which is used by Libeskind in the *Garden of Exile* at the Jewish Museum (1989–99) in Berlin. In the latter case, the concrete garden walls become almost prison walls representing the inevitable situation of expatriates living in a protected, yet foreign area which is never truly home. The garden walls are perspectively transgressed by forty-nine concrete stelae which elevate the olive trees in the garden towards the sky, making them appear unattainable.<sup>66</sup> Here Libeskind envisions the walls as power markers, showing how the hegemonic aspect of a wall can be transcended by the imaginary world of a garden.

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**64** Vester 2019, 221: "Genauso wenig wie die kompositorische Absicht der japanischen Architektur nicht an der Gartenmauer endet, so endet auch Andos Architektur und Raumkomposition nicht dort. Vielmehr noch endet seine Komposition häufig auch nicht an der Erdoberfläche, sondern verbindet überirdischen Raum mit oberirdischem Raum."

**65** See also Wiede 2018, 150–55, where he describes the 'view over the fence' as an important element of Zen garden architecture.

**66** Libeskind 1999, and Jüdisches Museum Berlin, <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/libeskind-building>, accessed January 2, 2023.

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**Part II. Religion II: Agency in the Context of Religious Tradition and Change**



Robert Launay

# Pioneers of Piety

Youth as Agents of Islamic Renewal

## Piety Reconfigured

Fifty years ago, when I first came to Korhogo in Côte d'Ivoire, no young Muslim women wore *hijāb*. The only women I can remember wearing *hijāb* were old, well past menopause.

Nowadays, the sight of a young Muslim woman in *hijāb* is so commonplace it is unremarkable. Of course, in and of itself, *hijāb* is not a reliable index of the piety of the wearer.<sup>1</sup> However, the change in collective norms of dress is a real indicator of shifting religious sensibilities, of new meanings of what it means to be pious or, at the very least, to appear to be so. In any case, *hijāb* is simply the most visible indicator of new meanings and patterns of pious living, not by any means restricted to young women but equally if less immediately visible among young men. Such a development, perhaps needless to say, is part of an overall process of Islamic reform in twentieth century Africa.<sup>2</sup>

The preoccupation with Islamic piety among youth, and especially young women, has been at the centre of recent debates in anthropology. Mahmood's ethnography of the women's mosque movement in Cairo depicts the participants' newfound and highly self-conscious focus on pious practice as a project of ethical self-formation.<sup>3</sup> Schielke basing his ideas on his observations of young men in a northern Egyptian village, questions the ability of most individuals to maintain a consistent ethical focus on piety in light of conflicting attraction to other 'grand schemes' such as romantic love or material comfort.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Mahmood's and Schielke's positions are hardly irreconcilable. Mahmood is concerned with the rationale of the women's mosque movement, its embodied logic; while Schielke discusses the reach of piety movements and their capacity to attract adherents – not necessarily consistent ones – and the extent to which these adherents actually follow their precepts. However, neither argument grapples with piety in the long term. The situation I described above in Korhogo is common throughout

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1 Renne 2018; Sounaye 2021.

2 Loimeier 2016.

3 Mahmood 2005.

4 Schielke 2015; see also Schielke and Debevic 2012.



much (though not necessarily all) of the Muslim world. There has clearly been a relatively recent ‘pious turn,’ especially among youth and among women. Nor, for that matter, have changing paradigms of piety exclusively characterized Islamic societies; the explosion of charismatic Pentecostalism has been roughly contemporary.<sup>5</sup> In order to understand the pervasiveness of piety (at least relative to past practice) among contemporary Muslim youth, it is essential to understand the forms of piety that new practices have replaced.

While I use the term ‘piety’ here, if only because this is the way in which the debate has been phrased in English, I am conscious of its intrinsic ambivalence. It simultaneously embraces an interior dimension, the extent of the believer’s devotion to God, and an exterior dimension, the behavioural indices of devotion. Regularly performing *ṣalāt* (prayer) and fasting during Ramadan constitute conventional signs of devotion, but Muslims will admit that only God knows whether they are sincere or whether they are performed in response to social pressures to conform. The French term *religiosité*, ‘religiosity,’ focusing on exterior signs rather than interior sentiments, is in many ways preferable. The changes I observed were, to a limited extent, in exterior signs, but even more in the ways they were used to evaluate individual conformity to religious norms, the kind of religious behaviour that was expected of different actors. ‘Piety,’ as I am using it here, is not necessarily an interior state, but rather an evaluative grid.

## Hierarchies of Piety

The Muslim community in the neighbourhood of Koko, in the town of Korhogo in modern Côte d’Ivoire, predates colonial rule. Korhogo was one of several Senufo chiefdoms in north-central Côte d’Ivoire. These chiefdoms hosted Mande-speaking Muslim minority communities, who were part of a Muslim trading diaspora that linked them economically to wider regional networks. Typically, as in Koko, these Muslims lived in separate neighbourhoods, distinct from the non-Muslim majority. Under colonial rule, Korhogo became a major administrative hub, and the largest town in northern Côte d’Ivoire. As such, it attracted a considerable number of immigrants, many of them Muslim. Some (by no means all) of the local Senufo population began to convert to Islam as well. The neighbourhood of Koko ceased to be the Muslim quarter of Korhogo per se, though it

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., Gifford 2004; Marshall 2009.

retained the Friday Mosque and supplied its imam. It retained its distinct identity as the site of Korhogo's oldest, original Muslim population.<sup>6</sup>

In Koko, norms of Islamic piety in the 1970s and 1980s corresponded broadly to social hierarchies, specifically concerning age and gender.<sup>7</sup> Men were expected to be more pious than women. The older one was, the more piously one was expected to behave. *Worossos*,<sup>8</sup> persons born into slave status – those whose parents were both slaves – were entitled and sometimes expected to engage in obscene joking, especially on specific occasions (weddings, funerals), behaviour that was intrinsically impious and indeed shameful for *horons*, persons of free status.<sup>9</sup> Aside from these ascribed statuses, religious scholars (*karamokos*) as well as their advanced students preparing for careers as religious experts were also, unsurprisingly, expected to conform to rigorous standards of Islamic piety, regardless of age. (Since there were no women religious scholars in the community at that time, I will not add regardless of gender, though any such women would also have been subject to equally strict sharia norms.) Last but not least, hajjis and hajjas, those who had performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, were also expected to live impeccably pious lives. The Hajj, I was repeatedly told, implied the pledge to live out the rest of one's life in piety. The respect to which a hajji or hajja was entitled, indexed by the right to wear a special circular turban, was in recognition of such exceptional religiosity.

The capacity to pronounce blessings (*du'a*) was a conventional marker of one's expected level of piety in the course of everyday life. On one hand, perfunctory and stereotypical blessings were a routine feature of greetings for everyone except children. On the other hand, blessings could be longer and more elaborate, notably on ritual occasions such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals, but also on formal occasions such as a person's arrival from or departure on a long journey. These blessings consist of a long string of relatively stereotypical utterances, generally pronounced by an elder, the more senior the better. I once asked a young man to teach me such blessings, naively assuming that their highly conventionalized nature would make this a relatively simple task for anyone with a native knowledge of the language. To my surprise, he answered that he did not know how to bless, that I ought to ask an elder or a religious scholar. My immediate reaction was to suspect that he was either being coy or uncooperative. Only

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<sup>6</sup> Launay 1982; Launay 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Launay 1992.

<sup>8</sup> For convenience I am using the English plural -s rather than the Mande plural -w for Mande terms.

<sup>9</sup> Launay 1977.

later did I realize that the act of blessing was a demonstration of social as well as linguistic competence and that he literally felt unable to bless, at least elaborately. A proper blessing needed to be pronounced by someone who was (and was entitled to be) pious, and whose entreaties to God on behalf of someone else consequently carried some weight.

Admittedly, such a hierarchical scale for evaluating expectations of piety was subject to ambiguity if not outright contradiction. Hypothetically, one might wonder how the piety of an elderly woman might compare with that of a middle-aged man. In fact, criteria such as age and gender were applied independently, and there was no effort to construct a consistent overall system. On the contrary, inconsistencies were an integral part of the system. This was most apparent in the example of *worossos* and their licensed employment of impious obscenities. For example, one elderly hajja, who also happened to be a *worosso*, usually presented an image as a paragon of piety. Yet I remember her, on the occasion of marriage festivities, gleefully dancing and singing obscenities in the company of other *worosso* women. On a different occasion, a wedding in a nearby village, a Quranic schoolteacher was clearing a path for the bride and her companions with a machete, a task normally reserved for *worossos*. All of a sudden, he raced up to me, gesturing with his machete that he would castrate me unless I ransomed myself with a token payment – a typical example of obscene *worosso* humour that left everyone else in stitches. In context, such impious obscenities in no way compromised the reputation of their perpetrators of their piety. Not only were different categories of persons expected to demonstrate different modalities of piety (or impiety); the same persons might without a problem display different patterns of pious behaviour in different contexts.

Such flexibility certainly did not shield individuals from censure if they were considered to have violated appropriate norms. The marital misadventures of one hajji are a case in point. A successful businessman living in the bustling metropolis of Abidjan, he had promised his educated wife that he would never marry other wives. However, after returning from the Hajj, he married two other women in secret. Ultimately, both marriages became public knowledge, and subjects of gossip for weeks. The hajji's insistence that these marriages were entirely consistent with a pious demeanor because they protected him from the temptation to indulge in extramarital sex failed to convince anyone else. Had he been an ordinary middle-aged man, his marital shenanigans would only have been a fleeting subject of gossip, evidence of relatively commonplace human failings. The fact that he was a hajji made the story far more compelling. A hajji's behaviour is supposed to be irreproachable. Another well-to-do middle-aged friend of mine alluded to this incident when he explained to me why he had not yet undertaken the Hajj. "I haven't quite finished misbehaving yet," he commented puckishly.

In short, hajjis, religious scholars, senior women, and especially senior men faced reproach if they failed to live up to expectations of piety. More surprisingly, perhaps, youth also faced censure if they adopted an overly pious demeanor. *Yere bonya*, literally, “making oneself big,” was also a form of impious behaviour. This consisted of self-aggrandizement; any speech or behaviour which suggested that one considered oneself superior to others. Overly conspicuous piety, particularly on the part of youth who were not expected to display too much piety, was an egregious example – and by implication impious! This is not, of course, to suggest that youth were never pious, but rather that modesty and discretion were considered an essential attribute of piety. This was particularly true for young women. Advanced Quranic students – invariably male in Koko – were on the contrary expected to demonstrate their piety in their public behaviour. However, they constituted a very specific exception to the general rule.

In this way, standards of piety consistently reinforced the ideology of seniority that was central to kin group membership in Koko. Age, gender, and free/slave status were the criteria that defined authority within these groups. I once witnessed a meeting where a middle-aged man was being chastized for striking his older brother, who had broken his bicycle pump and refused to replace or repair it. The consensus was overwhelmingly that the older brothers’ behaviour in no way justified his younger brother’s egregious defiance of the principle of seniority. (My diplomatic friends would have suggested that the younger brother appeal to someone even more senior than his older brother). This is not to suggest that rules of seniority, any more than expectations of piety, were always determining factors, much less inflexible. Rather, rules of seniority furnished a protocol that made it possible to resolve disputes and to maintain an always relative cohesion. To the extent that Islamic piety and social seniority tended to coincide, the legitimacy of the social domination of youth and of women was sanctioned in religious terms. This hardly suggests that piety was a mechanical reflection of kin group hierarchies. Even so, in religious terms, women and youth were relatively marginalized. To an extent, this provided youth with a modicum of freedom. Up to a point, their indiscretions and lack of attention to religious obligations were tolerated by their elders. But it also meant that their voice carried little if any weight.

## Changing Norms: Secularism and Salafism

As long as kin groups exercised control over critical resources, such domination might have seemed acceptable, or at least inevitable. For the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, Koko’s wealth was based on weaving, an

exclusively male activity.<sup>10</sup> Senior men controlled the output of their unmarried sons and other junior kinsmen, allowing them to engage in medium- and long-distance trade in luxury cloths. Preference for endogamous marriage within the kin group gave elders control over marriageable women. Young men depended on their approval in order to marry, the first step towards achieving elderhood. The introduction of machine-produced textiles undermined the economic basis of this subordination of youth, but as long as patterns of endogamous marriage persisted, hierarchies of age and gender continued to operate in more or less the same fashion.

European schooling ultimately undermined the hierarchical ideology of kin groups (and indirectly of older paradigms of Islamic piety) but only in the long run. In the first place, Western education came very late to Korhogo and the north of Côte d'Ivoire, compared to the rest of the colony. Shortly after Independence, in 1962, only 17% of school-age children in Korhogo were enrolled in primary school, compared to a national average of 45% and over 80% in much of the south of the country.<sup>11</sup> A friend of mine, the first in his family and perhaps one of the very first in Koko, remembered how he was forcibly escorted to school by soldiers, shortly after the end of the Second World War. Before then, Muslim parents had successfully resisted sending any of their children to French schools. Once the precedent was established, his younger brothers attended school without incident, and primary schooling for boys (though not at the time for girls) became relatively commonplace though still not universal by any means. It was only when girls began to attend school in large numbers that the system of arranged marriage within the kin group began to fall apart. First of all, it was deemed inappropriate for wives to be better educated than their husbands, as this might threaten patriarchal authority within the family. The more educated the potential bride, the smaller the pool of eligible husbands within the kin group. The point was not lost on young women who did not want to be married off without their consent. For adolescent girls in secondary schools, this also delayed the age of marriage, which might be as young as sixteen, shortly after puberty. These women were in a far better position to insist on marrying the man of their choice. In the process, they set an example for girls with little or no education, undermining a system of marriage that, in the absence of the economic constraints that had once prevailed, maintained the ideology of seniority that underpinned the cohesiveness of local kin groups.

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<sup>10</sup> For a fuller account of the precolonial and early colonial economy of Koko, as well as of the dynamics of kinship and marriage, see Launay 1982.

<sup>11</sup> Roussel 1965, 60.

Schooling threatened the system of Islamic piety, not only structurally but ideologically. French public schools were notoriously and aggressively secularist, not only in France but also in Africa. This was still the case in Korhogo in the 1970s, well after Independence in 1960. The personnel in primary schools were entirely Africanized. On the other hand, the major secondary school in Korhogo was almost entirely staffed by French *coopérants*, with the notable and telling exceptions of the director and the gym teacher. Of course, the secular ideology of French teachers certainly does not explain its appeal to African pupils. The decade or so after Independence seemed to open up a vast field of opportunities, as well-paid civil service positions formerly or even still monopolized by the French (for example, secondary school teachers) were gradually opened up to qualified, educated Africans. French education, along with the secularist values it embodied, seemed to be the passport to a lucrative career. As it turned out, such a bright future was (or arguably, was made) untenable, financed by extravagant loans that the Ivorian government was enticed to take out and then obliged to pay back. Programmes of structural adjustment stipulated sharp decreases in government spending, drastically dimming the prospects for graduates of secondary schools and even universities.

In light of the situation, it is no surprise that secularism quickly lost its new-found appeal among secondary school and university students. A secular ideology would have enabled them to blend into a civil service where Muslims still constituted a minority. In the absence of such prospects, secularism seemed yet another mirage. At the same time, they had no nostalgia whatsoever for older modalities of piety that privileged men over women and older persons over youth. Educated youth remained acutely aware of their achievements compared to their (in Western terms!) less educated elders. In short, they were unwilling to renounce or, more precisely, to minimize their identity as Muslims, but also unwilling to engage with Islamic piety on their parents' terms. Rather, they were drawn to a paradigm of Islamic piety that stressed the mastery of an abstract code, evaluating individuals not in terms of social origins or age but according to the rigour with which they observed the code of piety. Religious merit was not entirely unlike academic merit, not least including an emphasis on study that involved understanding and indeed internalizing the principles underlying the rules.

This new paradigm of piety was, very characteristically, embodied in an association, the Association des Étudiants et Éléves Musulmans de Côte d'Ivoire (AEEMCI), the Association of Muslim Students of Côte d'Ivoire, founded in 1973.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed account of the AEEMCI and other new Muslim associations in Côte d'Ivoire, see Miran 2006.

At the same time, a growing number of West African students were returning from abroad after receiving religious training from the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia.<sup>13</sup> Established in 1961, the Islamic University of Medina was deeply committed to training students from outside Saudi Arabia in the Salafi canon of Islamic thought. There were close affinities between these young Saudi graduates and the Muslim students of the AEEMCI. The University credentials of the Saudi-educated students were readily recognizable to Western-educated students, even if the content of the curriculum was radically different. The kind of education they received was sharply distinct from the classical training that was the norm for established religious scholars in Korhogo and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> For them, Arabic was a spoken and not simply a written or recited language, pronounced without the heavy accent characteristic of established scholars. (Short-wave radio programmes emitted from North Africa had familiarized ordinary Africans with the sound, if nothing else, of Arabic spoken by native speakers). In short, the Saudi returnees provided the students of the AEEMCI with a model of a style that simultaneously demarcated them from their elders while affirming their Islamic identity.

Not surprisingly, given its student roots, the AEEMCI was particularly invested in projects of education. In Korhogo, for example, it fostered the creation of an *École Franco-Arabe*, a school that taught male pupils a curriculum in both French and Arabic, preparing them for the primary school certificate exam. It taught Arabic literacy using the methods of Western education while focusing on Islamic values. At a national level, the AEEMCI organized annual seminars open to the public, but primarily aimed at an educated student population.<sup>15</sup> These seminars were held in different towns throughout the country, deliberately avoiding Abidjan, by far the largest city in Côte d'Ivoire, in order to reach as broad an audience as possible. Seminars were held in Korhogo in 1985 and 1996. Initially, they focused on broad themes of particular relevance to youth: education of Muslim youth; Islam and work; the Muslim family; the contribution of Islam to national development; and the requirements of Islamic worship (*ibāda*). As Côte d'Ivoire became increasingly polarized, and Muslims increasingly targeted through a thinly-veiled Islamophobic project of *Ivoirité*, 'Ivorianness,' seminars tended to focus on the role of Islam and the Muslim community in the formation of the nation.

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<sup>13</sup> Thurston 2015; Østebø 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Launay 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Miran 2006, 334–37.

Although the young men trained at the University of Medina were, to varying degrees, apostles of Salafi doctrine, the bulk of Muslim youth in Korhogo were little concerned with doctrinal issues. Rather, they manifested a real and fundamental change in sensibilities, and focused on the cultivation of a pious lifestyle: regular prayers, fasting, abstaining from alcohol, and wearing Islamically acceptable modest attire. This was the moment when *ḥijāb* became standard modest attire for Muslim women, not only in Korhogo but throughout many Islamic communities in West Africa. Women who wore the *ḥijāb* were by no means indicating a commitment or even an attraction to Salafi ideals. Indeed, this might, but did not necessarily entail, the kind of cultivation of virtue suggested by Mahmood. Rather, for many if not most youth – not only the educated – such modes of piety was more a disposition, *habitus*, than a fully reflective stance. Even so, the consequences were considerable. Standards of piety became uniform, rather than reflections of social hierarchies. This uniformization of expectations of pious practice served to normalize such changes as the adoption of *ḥijāb*.<sup>16</sup>

Such shifts in modalities of piety are hardly, needless to say, specific to Korhogo. They are not, in any straightforward sense, representative of shifts from a parochial, specifically West African, practice of Islam to globally standardized norms. Rather, as Rinehart has pointed out, they are, or at least were until relatively recently, typical of Islamic practice throughout the Islamic world, where local practices could be compared to the dialects of a language.<sup>17</sup> This implies that many dialects are mutually comprehensible, even if not recognizable as belonging to the same language. Moreover, all speech is dialectical, that is to say locally inflected. In this sense, local features of Islamic practice in Korhogo were different from, but equivalent to, local practices elsewhere in the Islamic world. The globalization of a uniform tradition is, Reinhart argues, as recent as it is pervasive.

## Past Precedents: Shifting Paradigms of Religiosity under Colonial Rule

It would seem tempting to categorize past Islamic practice in Korhogo as ‘traditional,’ in the process of being replaced by an Islamic modernism that takes the form of standardized piety. The 1980s and 1990s were hardly the first time that

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. LeBlanc 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Reinhart 2020.



Islamic practice in Korhogo had undergone rapid and radical change, and youth had been primary agents of change in the past as they were more recently. Before the advent of colonial rule, the Muslim community of Korhogo was divided into two hereditary categories: *mory* (scholars) and *tun tigi* (warriors).<sup>18</sup> Such categories certainly did not determine the occupations of individuals. Few ‘scholars’ pursued a career in religious learning, and these tended to belong to specific specialized lineages within the broader ‘scholar’ category. Even fewer ‘warriors’ engaged in warfare, especially since the chiefdom of Korhogo was ruled by non-Muslim Senufo. Rather, the division embodied a far more general ideology that stressed that Islamic scholarship on one hand, and warfare and rule on the other, were antithetical activities.<sup>19</sup>

‘Warriors’ and ‘scholars’ were not at all subject to the same standards of Islamic piety. ‘Scholars,’ of course, were expected to conform to sharia norms as they understood them, though in some respects this could be quite different from contemporary practice, especially as far as youth were concerned. For example, one older woman told me that, in her youth, unmarried girls normally went about bare breasted, and would only cover their breasts after they were married. Unmarried youth had openly acknowledged lovers (I was still able to observe this in some villages as late as the 1970s) and were permitted to indulge in sexual experimentation short of intercourse. Nowadays, such behaviours would be considered profoundly reprehensible in Islamic terms, but in the past, they were considered perfectly acceptable, indeed normal, for ‘scholarly’ youth. Indeed, they reinforced notions that, as we have seen, endured far longer that norms of piety varied along lines of age and gender. On the other hand, ‘warriors,’ elders as well as youth, were not bound by the same expectations. They did not necessarily perform *ṣalāt* regularly, much less fast throughout the month of Ramadan, and they readily consumed alcohol, notably the millet beer regularly brewed by their Senufo neighbors.

‘Scholar’ and ‘warrior’ boys and adolescents were educated along entirely divergent lines. ‘Scholar’ boys, at least those of free status, invariably received Quranic schooling, learning at the very least to be able to recite half the Quran (*kurana taran*, “splitting the Quran”) and more usually the entire Quran (*kurana jigi*, “putting down the Quran”). Relatively few pursued religious studies beyond this point, except for scions of specialized scholarly lineages. “Warrior” boys, on the other hand, were initiated into *lo* societies. The process of initiation was hardly different from that of their Senufo neighbours, though the initiation groves of

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<sup>18</sup> Launay 1982; Launay 1988.

<sup>19</sup> Sanneh 2016.

Muslim ‘warriors’ were rigorously separate, as were those of ‘caste’ groups such as blacksmiths, leatherworkers, and sculptors as well as encapsulated minorities. For a cycle of several years, boys spent part of the year in the initiation grove, learning secret rituals and submitting to hazing and other ordeals on the part of elders and older initiation cohorts. The rituals involved masquerades representing various spirits, with each grove possessing its own repertoire of masks. Within the confines of the grove, blood sacrifices would be performed for the various spirits, sacrifices that are of course flagrantly inconsistent with sharia norms. On specific occasions, the masks would emerge from the sacred groves and dance in public. Indeed, ‘warriors’ would celebrate the month of Ramadan with masquerades rather than with fasting. In this manner, social categories were visibly manifest, not only in terms of different degrees of ‘piety’ but also in terms of different forms of religious observance.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, ‘warrior’ youth staged a revolt. They refused to be initiated into the *lo* societies. The timing was hardly fortuitous. Forced labour was only abolished in France’s African colonies in 1946.<sup>20</sup> The conditions were brutal, sometimes fatal. The chief of Korhogo, Peleforo Soro (or Gbon Coulibaly, as he was often known) enjoyed excellent relations with the colonial administration and was easily able to threaten young men who opposed the established order with condemnation to forced labour. His power rested, at least in part, on his control over the initiation societies, and he would actively have resisted any threat to their authority, such as the revolt of the young ‘warriors.’ As it were, I was told that they had to endure severe beatings, but once the threat of forced labour was removed, the consequences of their revolt were less dire.

Of course, the abolition of forced labour is only one part of the explanation. It made the revolt possible, but hardly explains the motives that led the young men to refuse initiation in the first place. These radical changes in attitudes were the product of a shift in the centre of gravity of the Muslim community of Côte d’Ivoire from the north of the country to the south. Before the colonial period, Islam was limited to the northern half of the country (anachronistically speaking, of course, as the country itself did not exist!), and at that to a minority in most places, including Korhogo. Islam was associated with the Mande trading diaspora that extended from the Sahel to the limits of the forest that covered the southern half of Côte d’Ivoire; trade between the forest and the savanna was conducted along the frontier, which constituted a barrier for Muslim penetration.<sup>21</sup> Colonial rule effectively abolished such barriers, while at the same time fostering

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<sup>20</sup> Zolberg 1969, 74.

<sup>21</sup> Launay 1978.

the unequal development of different regions. Cocoa (and later robusta coffee) grown in the forest became the colony's leading export and a significant source of wealth for cocoa farmers. This new wealth fostered the rapid growth of new urban centres in the forest, a region which (unlike the northern savanna) had no urban tradition. Migrants from the north flocked, some temporarily and some permanently) to these southern towns. Building on long-distance trade networks dominated by Muslims, they rapidly came to dominate the informal economy of the new southern towns.

Many of these immigrants from the north were not Muslims, at least initially. Conversion to Islam was a way of integrating into Muslim networks that controlled the informal economy.<sup>22</sup> In turn, these new converts spread Islam back to their regions of origin, spurring the rapid Islamization of the colonial French African savanna region.<sup>23</sup> Precisely because of its novelty, the new Islamic religious culture that emerged in the towns of southern Côte d'Ivoire was relatively homogeneous. Converts from religious traditions the colonial authorities labelled 'animist' were particularly eager to stress their newfound Islamic credentials by actively disavowing anything that smacked of 'animism.' To 'warrior' youth from Korhogo who immigrated to the southern towns, participation in initiation societies that closely resembled those of their 'animist' Senufo neighbors came perilously close to 'animism.' Their revolt, and the ensuing abolition of the 'warrior' initiation societies, was clearly inspired by the new Muslim culture of the towns in the south.

Such changes did not only affect 'warrior' groups. Excision ceremonies for young women, practiced by 'scholars' as well as by 'warriors,' were also abolished shortly thereafter. Formerly, such ceremonies would celebrate the excision of a cohort of young adolescent girls, signaling the beginning of their passage into adulthood and announcing their marriageability. Such ceremonies were held for 'warrior' and 'scholar' girls alike. Nevertheless, they suggested unwelcome parallels with initiation ceremonies for 'warrior' boys, and consequently their eradication was relatively uncontroversial. The end of the ceremonies in no way ended the practice of excision itself. Instead, it was arranged by families individually and privately, rather than being a collective and public occasion.

The emergence of a Muslim culture in the towns of southern Côte d'Ivoire had broader implications for the practice of Islam in Korhogo. The mushrooming Muslim population required imams for local mosques, teachers for Quranic schools, and a sufficient number of Islamic scholars overall. Their prosperity con-

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<sup>22</sup> Launay and Soares 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Launay 2010; Peterson 2011.

tributed to their development as centres of Islamic learning, ultimately eclipsing centres of learning in the north. Many of the established middle-aged Islamic scholars I know in Korhogo had indeed pursued advanced study in the southern towns rather than in Korhogo or elsewhere in the north. Returning home, they brought with them a new style of Islamic practice pioneered in the south that formed the basis of a more uniform national, and indeed regional religious culture.

In particular, these new observances centred on sermons, particularly as part of funeral rites. I was told that, in the past, sermons were not a common occurrence in Korhogo. The imam of the Friday Mosque would, of course, give the *khutba*, the requisite sermon. However, this was recited in Arabic, the appropriate excerpt from a book of Arabic sermons in the imam's possession. Few of the people praying at the mosque on any occasion would have been able to understand the sermon, and even fewer if any at all interested in its content. Its recitation was understood as a ritual requirement rather than an act of communicating any particular content. The closest equivalent to a sermon was the exegesis of the Quran held in the mosque during the month of Ramadan. Funerals were celebrated by dancing rather than sermons. Indeed, many of the changes effected by this shift in religiosity involved the suppression or at least the limiting of dancing for societal initiation rites, for excision, and for funerals. This is not to suggest that there was any attempt to suppress dancing on all occasions. Weddings, for instance, were occasions for much dancing, and an attempt to introduce sermons ultimately met with no lasting success.<sup>24</sup>

Most commonly, funeral sermons were held on the fortieth day after burial. Additional sermons might be given on the third and the seventh day, and also one year afterwards. Sermons were not given to commemorate the funerals of children or adolescents, but only of adults. The standing of the deceased individual (or, more pointedly, the wealth and standing of the sponsors of the sermon) determined the number of sermons delivered in their honour, other than on the quasi-obligatory fortieth day. Sermons were expected to be engaging, even entertaining. Preachers with a reputation for putting their audiences to sleep were rarely if ever invited to give sermons. Sermons were often about the importance of prayer and its proper performance, for example the correct procedures for ablutions or the correct pronunciation of Arabic words. In a very different register from the abolition of initiation societies and excision ceremonies, the sermons were a relatively standardized practice of Islam in Côte d'Ivoire.

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<sup>24</sup> Launay 1992.

## Conclusions

These shifts in norms of Islamic religiosity in the mid-twentieth century clearly show that the recent emphasis on Islamic piety among women and youth is by no means a historically unique phenomenon, and consequently it needs to be placed within a broader perspective. In both cases, in the 1950s and the 1990s, fundamental changes in norms of religiosity, and in the practices and expectations for different categories of persons, accompanied sweeping social and economic shifts. The 1950s saw the precipitous decline of weaving and the cloth trade, once the mainstay of Korhogo's Muslim community, but also of the mechanisms whereby elders controlled the labour of their dependents. Young men had little incentive to stay home when they had far more lucrative opportunities in the towns of the south. The new towns of the south became the cradle of a national Muslim community that encompassed older Muslim towns and neighbourhoods in the north, an integration that entailed the adoption of new, more standardized, patterns of worship. At the same time, the southern communities acknowledged and, in some ways, even reinforced membership of the home communities in the north. Muslims in the southern towns were distinguished as Korhogoka (people of Korhogo), Odienneka (people of Odienne), etc. Such regional affiliations ("people of Korhogo" also included individuals and groups from the hinterland) were ultimately defined through affiliation to kin groups. Consequently, while norms of piety changed in important ways, the hierarchy of piety that bolstered authority within these kin groups remained relatively unchanged.

This was hardly the case in the 1990s, where programmes of structural adjustment imposed from outside on the Ivoirian government undermined the state's and a fortiori what had once been its single Party's economic role in ensuring the livelihood of many, especially educated, youth. The State, in turn, had ambivalently bolstered the authority of the kin groups. Admittedly, kin obligations were seen by high government officials as a brake on dynamic economic individualism and ultimately the economic development of the country as a whole. Even so, the state mirrored the attitudes of the former colonial government, fearing that challenges to authority, even the authority of elders, might foster attitudes of rebelliousness that would threaten their own hegemony. Economic reforms that limited the resources, and consequently the soft power, of the state indirectly and unintentionally undermined established patterns of authority, in religion as well as in politics and in kinship.

These social and economic changes were experienced most directly by youth. The world of their parents ceased to make intuitive sense to them. Religion is one (though only one) way of making sense of the world, in particular the social world, and so it is hardly surprising that these shifts are reflected in terms of

paradigms of religiosity. More recently, such shifts have been spurred by phenomena often characterized in terms of ‘globalization’ and ‘neo-liberalism.’ Such forces can be invoked, not entirely inappropriately, to explain new norms of pious practice. It remains important to understand those forms of practice they have replaced, in order to understand why, all of a sudden, youth may find them inadequate, even though they seemed perfectly acceptable, if not self-evident, in the past. More importantly, a kind of presentist myopia can make such shifts seem radically new, indeed *sui generis*. Religious change, however, is not a phenomenon peculiar to ‘late modernity.’ We need to understand the present in terms of a longer-term perspective and cease to imagine it as radically unique.

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Benedikt Pontzen

# ‘Speaking for Islam’

Three *Malams* and Their Claims to *‘ilm* in a *Zongo* in Asante

## Introduction

If I have a problem or a question, I go and ask the *malams* [Islamic scholars]. I can go to any *malam*, as all of them are Muslims. But usually, I will try to see several *malams* and ask them their opinion. Hence, I know that what they all agree on is the correct thing, because they will all quote the Quran, and I can learn from their replies what the Quran and the Sunna tell me. As for the rest, where they do not agree, I have to see, but then I know what the Quran has to tell.

Such was the reply of Layanu,<sup>1</sup> an ‘ordinary believer,’ to my question about how he goes about seeking advice from the Islamic scholars in his community. Among Ghanaian Muslims, Islamic scholars are commonly referred to as *malams*. The word *malam* stems from the Hausa designation of Islamic scholars – *mālam* – which, in turn, derives from the Arabic word *mu‘allim* (scholar, teacher).<sup>2</sup> As Layanu hinted at in his reply, the *malams* tend to disagree in their interpretations of the Islamic scriptures. This became also clear to me when I asked several *malams* in Kokote Zongo<sup>3</sup> about their perceptions of the Islamic knowledge (*‘ilm*) discourses and practices of *malams* belonging to other Muslim groups. They consistently replied: “*Ɔmɔnnim*.” (They [the other *malams*] do not know.).

Islamic knowledge is a central value in the Islamic tradition and in Muslim communities. *‘ilm* appears as a core concept in the Quran<sup>4</sup> and in the Hadith col-

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1 This essay is based on ethnographic fieldwork on lived Islam in Kokote Zongo in the Asante town of Offinso in Ghana (Pontzen 2021). I carried out fieldwork in this ward from 2011–12 and have visited the place repeatedly since then. Asante Twi is my main research language. All interlocutors are referred to by aliases in this text.

2 At the time of my research, there were no female Islamic scholars in Kokote Zongo. The Hausa designation for female scholars is *mālamā*. As I have not met and interacted with female Islamic scholars, my data and discussion have a marked male bias, see Pontzen 2021, chap. 4, for a more extensive discussion.

3 *Zongos* are wards of Muslim immigrants in southern Ghana. These immigrants stem from across the West African subregion and have settled in southern Ghana over several generations to conduct trade or find work and income in the local economy, Pontzen 2021, 75–78.

4 Rosenthal 2007 [1970], 19–20.



lection *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.<sup>5</sup> *ʿilm* is a paramount virtue in Muslim societies across the world and throughout history.<sup>6</sup> In Ghana’s *zongos*, *ʿilm* is commonly understood as Islamic knowledge which comprises a thorough knowledge of the Quran, the Sunna, and their surrounding scriptures, proficiency in classical Arabic, and an acquaintance with ritual requirements and practices. It takes years of study to acquire the level of learning expected from an Islamic scholar, and the *malams* are constantly involved in deepening their *ʿilm* and debating their divergent tenets. Meanwhile, the *malams* also act as moral authorities in their communities, as Islam provides the heterogeneous populations of the *zongos* with a common ground and shared values. As the *malams* embody and deploy *ʿilm* in their communities, their *ʿilm* and *ādāb* (demeanour, manners) are closely intertwined. Based on both, the people of the *zongos* accord the *malams* the authority to ‘speak for Islam’<sup>7</sup> to them.

The *malams* are neither a homogeneous group, nor do they share the same notions and practices of *ʿilm*. Besides their individual differences in erudition and their divergent interpretations of the Islamic tradition, there are three major Islamic groups with distinct traditions, conceptualizations, and institutions of Islamic knowledge in the *zongos* to which the *malams* belong. The *nkramo* adhere to locally established, yet historically changing traditions of Islam. The Tijaniyya Sufis supplanted the Qadiriyya order as the leading Islamic group in the *zongos* in the mid-twentieth century. The Tijaniyya held Islamic hegemony in these wards until the 1970s, when they came under attack by the reformist Sunna. The Sunna emerged in Ghana during the 1970s and openly criticized the Tijaniyya for their Sufi tenets and practices. This resulted in open contestations and struggles for Islamic hegemony between both groups that continue to this day.<sup>8</sup>

In this essay, I portray three *malams* from Kokote Zongo belonging to these different Islamic groups and trace their biographies of learning. The *malams*’ differing practices of Islamic knowledge convey an idea of the social dynamics of *ʿilm* and the ongoing contestations among them. In this chapter, I show that *ʿilm* is not a given body of Islamic knowledge but embodied in people, engrained in diverse practices, and constantly negotiated in different discourses. This derives from the different hermeneutical engagements with the Islamic scriptures by these *malams*, who hence make shared but also divergent senses of the Islamic

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5 Al-Buhari 2010.

6 E.g. Ahmed 2016; Bowen 1993; Brenner 2001; Kresse 2007; Lambek 1993; Launay 2016; Pontzen 2021; Soares 2005; Zaman 2002.

7 Pontzen 2017; cf. Gaborieau and Zeghal 2004; Krämer and Schmidtke 2006.

8 Cf. Dumbe 2013; Kobo 2012; Pontzen 2021.

tradition – as has been the case for other Islamic scholars across the world and throughout history.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, *‘ilm* emerges as a diverse and contested field, but it also has a common ground in the Islamic scriptures and tradition; and as the *malams* strive to assert themselves and their divergent tenets in their communities, they participate in and perpetuate the “discursive tradition”<sup>10</sup> of their religion.

In what follows, I first locate this essay within the anthropology of knowledge and research on the social dynamics of *‘ilm* in Muslim societies in and beyond Africa. Thereafter, I briefly summarize the history of *zongos* in Ghana and the diversity of Islam within them to introduce the setting of my research. Thereby, I seek to convey an impression of the diverse and contested field in which the three *malams* whom I portray thereafter strive to make a name for themselves. Having portrayed the *malams* and their biographies of Islamic learning, I compare and discuss their distinct Islamic epistemes and knowledges. The *malams* have acquired their different notions of *‘ilm* in disparate formations which rely on different epistemologies and are engrained in distinct knowledge practices. Thus, *‘ilm* emerges as a diverse and contested phenomenon, and I show that this impacts not only on how the *malams* acquire and maintain religious authority in their communities but also on how the people of the *zongos* conceive and live their religion. In this sense, *‘ilm* is simultaneously part of the social fabric and the social construction of reality within these wards but also diverse and contested.

## ***‘Ilm* and the Social Construction of Reality**

Fredrik Barth defines knowledge as “what a person employs to interpret and to act on the world.”<sup>11</sup> As he elaborates, human knowledge is “constructed within the traditions of knowledge of which each of us partakes.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, knowledge is a social and communicative phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> As knowledge is socially distributed and communicated, it circulates in various media and venues, and while it is certainly coined by its carriers, it also impacts them, their relations to the world, and their engagement with it. In this sense, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann con-

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ahmed 2016, chap. 5; Lambek 1993, 8–15; Zaman 2002.

<sup>10</sup> Asad 1986.

<sup>11</sup> Barth 2002, 1; cf. 1995, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Barth 2002, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Berger and Luckmann 1967 [1966]; Knoblauch 2014 [2005]; Schütz and Luckmann 2003.

sider people's knowledge as "the social construction of [their] reality."<sup>14</sup> Barth, who follows them in this, highlights three analytically distinguishable aspects of knowledge which are empirically inseparably intertwined.<sup>15</sup> First, any tradition of knowledge contains a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about the world. Secondly, knowledge must be instantiated and communicated via one or several media as a series of partial representations in the form of words, concrete symbols, pointing gestures, or actions. Thirdly, knowledge must be distributed, communicated, employed, and transmitted within a series of instituted social relations.<sup>16</sup>

The task of an anthropology of knowledge is hence to record, describe, and analyse people's assertions about the world, the media in which these circulate, the social distribution of various assertions and media, and the dynamics that result from these. This research programme has been implemented and further refined in numerous studies of the social production and changing dynamics of Islamic knowledge in Muslim societies across the world and throughout history.

Franz Rosenthal and Shahab Ahmed have highlighted the central importance of *'ilm* in the Islamic tradition and consequently suggested to conceptualize the study of Islam as research into the changing history of Islamic knowledges and hermeneutics.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, empirical studies of the central value and social dynamics of Islamic knowledge in Muslim societies and transregional networks of Islamic scholars have firmly established that *'ilm* is not a given, or abstract body of knowledge, but part of people's lifeworlds.<sup>18</sup> At its core, *'ilm* derives from and consists in a thorough engagement with the Islamic tradition by individual students and teachers as they participate in diverse traditions, communities, and networks of Islamic learning. Hence, *'ilm* is an inherently historical and socially differentiated phenomenon as well as an integral part of wider social dynamics. As one of the central pillars of Islamic authority, *'ilm* lends social respectability and influence to its carriers in Muslim societies, but it is also subject to constant changes and debates.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, we encounter different communities and traditions of Islamic learning in Muslim societies across the world and history. Meanwhile it takes years of study under different teachers to acquire the *'ilm* that renders one an Islamic scholar. Consequently, *'ilm* is unequally distributed

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<sup>14</sup> Berger and Luckmann 1967 [1966].

<sup>15</sup> Barth 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Barth 2002, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal 2007 [1970]; Ahmed 2016, chap. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Bang 2014; Bowen 1993; Diagne 2018; Eickelman 1978; Haj 2009; Lambek 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Eickelman 1978; Pontzen 2017; Zaman 2002.

and differentiated, and as Islamic scholars constantly contend for authority in their communities, they compete with one another and challenge their divergent tenets. Hence, *'ilm* emerges as a diverse and contested field.

In this sense, the dynamics of *'ilm* in Muslim societies and networks in Africa are no different from, but part of the Muslim world. For too long, Africa and Islam on the continent have been considered peripheral to the Muslim world and have been marginalized in Islamic studies.<sup>20</sup> This has resulted in images of peripheral, nescient, or solely recipient African Muslims who adhere to a somewhat tarnished 'African Islam.'<sup>21</sup> Such images not only fail to do justice to the immense diversity of Islam on the continent,<sup>22</sup> but they also perpetuate and reify the colonial invention of Africa<sup>23</sup> and must therefore be discarded. Moving beyond tropes of Islam in Africa as peripheral or marginal, Islam and its diversity in Africa must be considered as both: part of Islam, and part of African lifeworlds.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, *'ilm* in Africa is part of the social fabric and wider social dynamics. Recent studies of transregional traditions and networks of Islamic learning in West and East Africa in their *longues durées* have firmly debunked images of nescient or solely recipient African Muslims.<sup>24</sup> As critically engaged thinkers and contributors to transregional debates and traditions of Islamic learning, African Islamic scholars have always partaken in and contributed their interpretations and tenets to the discursive tradition of Islam.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, empirical studies of contemporary transmissions and practices of Islamic knowledge in Muslim societies across the continent have demonstrated the immense diversity and divergent trajectories of Islamic learning in Africa that remain irreducible to a single account.<sup>26</sup> In his extensive comparative studies of Islamic reform movements in Africa, Roman Loimeier has illustrated how Islamic reform in Africa is not only a religious but also a social phenomenon and must therefore be located within the social dynamics in which it unfolds.<sup>27</sup> As Loimeier demonstrates in his detailed accounts of Islamic reformists and their activities in northern Nigeria and Zanzibar, Islamic education and knowledge are central

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**20** Launay 2006; Østebø 2022b. In turn, Islam has been considered foreign to Africa by Western scholars and was hence marginalized and widely neglected in African studies as well, Launay 2006.

**21** Loimeier 2002; Loimeier 2013, chap. 1; Pontzen 2021, 9–12.

**22** Loimeier 2013; Seesemann 2002.

**23** Mudimbe 1988.

**24** Bang 2014; Jeppie and Diagne 2008; Ware 2014.

**25** Kane 2016; Kresse 2007.

**26** Lambek 1993; Pontzen 2021; Soares 2005.

**27** Loimeier 2003; 2016; cf. Kobo 2012; Østebø 2012.

fields in which Islamic reform plays out and becomes part of the changing social fabric.<sup>28</sup> That *‘ilm* and Islamic education in Africa are anything but unchanging or monolithic has also been established in recent studies of the historical transformations of Islamic learning in Africa since the end of colonial rule. Islamic education in Africa has seen tremendous changes since the early twentieth century, as local Islamic scholars have adapted their education and curricula to fit into colonial and state schools or refused to do so and upheld different styles and traditions of Islamic learning.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile, *‘ilm* and Islamic education also intersect and change with the social status, age, or gender of their carriers<sup>30</sup> which further complicates the picture.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, *‘ilm* in Africa is a highly differentiated, dynamic, and contested phenomenon that remains irreducible to a single account. Furthermore, Africans are anything but nescient or peripheral to Islam; they are critically engaged thinkers and original contributors to the vast discursive tradition of this religion. Hence, *‘ilm* in African Muslim societies and its changing dynamics must be considered in their full complexity to reach an adequate understanding of Muslim life on the continent and to move beyond essentializing images of an ‘African Islam.’ In this essay, this is what I undertake in regard to Islam and *‘ilm* in a Ghanaian *zongo*.

## Islam in a *Zongo*

The word *zongo* derives from the Hausa word *zangō* that originally referred to the encampments of the trading caravans that traversed the West African subregion and connected its southern forest belt with the Sahel.<sup>31</sup> *Zongos* formed as ports of trade in these long distance trading networks and have served as the main conduits for the exchange of goods and people in this subregion at least since the eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Various people from different places of origin, backgrounds, and languages participated in and were connected by this trade. Hausa served these heterogenous people as the *lingua franca*, and Islam provided them with

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<sup>28</sup> Loimeier 1997; 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Brenner 2001; Launay 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Frede 2014b; Hill 2022; Hoechner 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Arhin 1979, 6; Schildkrout 1978, 67.

<sup>32</sup> Cohen 1969; Lovejoy 1980.

shared norms, values, and a common ground.<sup>33</sup> Thus, *zongos* formed as heterogeneously populated Muslim communities across West Africa over the centuries.

In Asante, these trading caravans were barred entry into the region as the political authorities of the dominion sought to monopolize transregional trading activities on their territories.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the first *zongos* to form in Ghana were located at the northern borders of the Asante dominion in cities like Bole, Yendi, Kete Krachi, and Salaga; where the populations of the *zongos* quickly outstripped the local ones.<sup>35</sup> With the fall of the Asante dominion in 1874 and the ensuing colonial occupation of the region, these traders were free to move and settle in the colonial territories where they founded their own wards which became the *zongos*.<sup>36</sup> As other *zongos* in the Asante region, Kokote Zongo was founded as a strangers' ward in the Asante town of Offinso in the early twentieth century by immigrants from the northern regions. These immigrants came to find work in the region's transforming economy and to conduct trade with their areas of origin. From early on, Kokote Zongo assembled people from diverse origins and backgrounds who frequently converted to Islam upon settling in this ward, so that Kokote Zongo emerged as a Muslim community. Their common religion provided the heterogeneous people of this *zongo* with shared norms, values, and a common ground, allowing them to intermarry and integrate into a Muslim community.<sup>37</sup> Yet, from its beginnings Islam in the *zongos* was anything but monolithic or unanimously agreed upon. In the *zongos* as much as elsewhere, Islam has always been a diverse, contested, and dynamic religious tradition. Various actors have vied for Islamic hegemony in these wards and competed with one another for religious authority.

At present, there are three main Islamic groups in the *zongos*: the *nkramo*, the Tijaniyya, and the Sunna.<sup>38</sup> Members of these groups identify as Sunni and jointly distinguish themselves from the Ahmadiyya and the Shia who also gained a foothold in Ghana's *zongos* during the twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> *Nkramo* is the generic Asante Twi designation for Muslim, and all Muslims in Asante refer to themselves as such. Numerous *nkramo* in the *zongos* adhere to locally established yet historically changing Sunni traditions of Islam. The Tijaniyya Sufi order emerged

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<sup>33</sup> Cohen 1971; Launay and Miran 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Pontzen 2021, 36–43.

<sup>35</sup> Arhin 1979.

<sup>36</sup> Pellow 2001; Pontzen 2021; Schildkrout 1978.

<sup>37</sup> Pontzen 2021, 78–84.

<sup>38</sup> In this chapter, I stick with the common designations of these groups in the *zongos*, cf. Dumbe 2013; Kobo 2012; Pontzen 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Dumbe 2013; Hanson 2017.

in Ghana's *zongos* in the mid-twentieth century. The Tijaniyya supplanted the previously dominant Qadiriyya Sufi order and held Islamic hegemony in these wards until the early 1970s. Since that time, the Tijaniyya have been openly challenged by the reformist Sunna who have also become an important Islamic group in these wards over the decades. While the Tijaniyya adhere to Sufi tenets, the Sunna propagate a reformist Islam and have openly criticized the Tijaniyya for their Sufi tenets and practices. As these groups uphold different Islamic epistememes and knowledges, their ongoing contestations have rendered 'ilm in the *zongos* into a contested and changing field on which the *zongos'* Islamic scholars compete with one another as they struggle for religious authority.

### Three *Malams* and Their Claims to 'ilm

In what follows, I portray three *malams* from different Islamic groups in Kokote Zongo to convey an idea of their distinct notions and traditions of 'ilm. Summarizing their divergent biographies of Islamic learning, I trace their individual trajectories and contextualize their distinct notions and practices of Islamic knowledge. Doing so, I stick with the terms employed by my interlocutors in their narratives.<sup>40</sup> Malam Hussain is an *nkramo* who was brought up by his elders in local traditions of Islamic learning. Malam Abdul Razak belongs to the Tijaniyya order and was educated in their Sufi traditions of Islamic learning. Malam Hamidou of the Sunna group has acquired his 'ilm in reformist traditions of Islamic learning. As will become apparent, these *malams* hold divergent notions of 'ilm that derive from the varying traditions of learning of their respective Islamic groups. A central difference of their disparate notions of 'ilm lies in their divergent recognition, understanding, and involvement in 'scriptural' ('ilm *zāhīran*) and 'spiritual' Islamic knowledge ('ilm *bāṭīnan*).<sup>41</sup> Following the presentation of their biographies of learning and their differing notions of 'ilm, I compare their distinct epistemologies and conceptions of 'ilm and reflect on the resulting debates and dynamics of Islamic knowledge and authority in the *zongo*.

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<sup>40</sup> Our conversations were mainly in Asante Twi, but terms like covered, deep, scriptural, spiritual, or straight were part of the vocabulary used by my interlocutors to describe their education and practices of Islamic learning. I mark these terms of my interlocutors by quotation marks in my text.

<sup>41</sup> Our conversations were mostly in Asante Twi, but all three *malams* used the words "scriptural" and "spiritual" to qualify or explain their notions of 'ilm *zāhīran* and 'ilm *bāṭīnan* to me.

## From the Nkramo: Malam Hussain

Malam Hussain is an *nkramo* in his early fifties.<sup>42</sup> He settled in Kokote Zongo in 1994. Before that, he had travelled across the region in his quest for *ilm* and offered his workings as a *malam* (*malam adwuma*<sup>43</sup>) to generate an income. When I enquired about his belonging, he replied: “*Me dea: Walk alone.*” (My thing: Walk alone.). As an *nkramo* he is “just a Muslim” and not a member of any Islamic “sect.” He considers all Muslims as Sunna (following the Prophetic tradition) as long as they abide by the Quran and the Hadith (reports of a deed or saying of the Prophet). As all Muslims must study these scriptures, their knowledge, interpretation, and implementation are not confined to a specific group but a divine obligation for all Muslims. Accordingly, he has studied under different Islamic scholars in his life, and while he is aware of their differing tenets and practices, he nonetheless considers their dealings in the Islamic scriptures and tradition as varied discourses and practices of *ilm*.

Malam Hussain was born into a family of *nkramo* Islamic scholars in the Asante town of Kade. His father had come to Asante from the northern city of Wa as an itinerant *malam*. Malam Hussain began his Islamic formation under his father, learning Arabic, the Quran, and some divination techniques from him. He continued his education under his grandfather, a prominent *malam* in Wa, who instructed him in the same subjects and in the manufacture of Islamic remedies and amulets and their appertaining esoteric knowledge. Both his teachers were reluctant to embrace the Tijaniyya teachings and practices, which they regarded as superfluous. Hence, they neither partook in these nor trained him in them. After he had completed his Islamic studies under his elders, Malam Hussain travelled across the region and studied under *malams* in Mali and Nigeria as well as at the locally renowned reformist Centre for Islamic Research in Nima, Accra. Over the years, he has thus studied under *nkramo*, Tijaniyya, Ahmadiyya, and Sunna *malams*. Hence, he has a fair idea of their divergent tenets. Accordingly, he opts for a reliance on the Islamic scriptures and acknowledges any kind of *ilm* that

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<sup>42</sup> My portrayal of Malam Hussain is based on several conversations about his becoming and being a *malam* that we had since 2011. At present, Malam Hussain is a rather marginal figure in Kokote Zongo as rumours about his character and demeanour have severely damaged his reputation.

<sup>43</sup> *Malam adwuma* refers to a variety of Islamic practices and counselling offered by the *malams* that range from therapeutic conversations and moral advice to esoteric practices like divination or ‘spiritual insights’ and also include the manufacture of Islamic amulets and remedies on behalf of their clients. These practices are subject to ardent debates in the *zongos*, Pontzen 2020; Pontzen 2021, chap. 5; Pontzen 2022.



derives from them as Islamic, while simultaneously recognising different ways to engage with and interpret these.

Over the years, Malam Hussain has not only studied “the scriptural” of the Quran and thus acquired a ‘scriptural’ Islamic knowledge that he refers to as *‘ilm zāhīran*. From his *nkramo* and Tijaniyya teachers, he has also learned to perceive and dwell on “the spiritual” of the Quran, the *‘ilm bāṭinan* that lies “covered” within it. According to Malam Hussain, the Sunna have not learned to “go deep” into the Quran and therefore cannot fathom what he has learned in his spiritual formation and dwelling on the scriptures. Like his ancestors, he remains sceptical towards the supererogatory ritual practices of the Tijaniyya and neither participates in these, nor does he perceive them as necessary for acquiring *‘ilm*. As most people of Kokote Zongo (several of whom have received their religious education from him), he considers himself an *nkramo* who follows and perpetuates his forefathers’ teachings of the Quran and Sunna.

After settling in Kokote Zongo, Malam Hussain founded a *makarantā* (Quran school) and offered his workings as a *malam* (*malam adwuma*) to the people of this ward, drawing on his *‘ilm* and the esoteric sciences he learned from his forefathers and during his years of travelling. He was successful and established himself as a prominent *malam* in Kokote Zongo. He delivered sermons in the central mosque and led the Friday prayer occasionally. However, when the imam of the central mosque passed away in the mid-2000s, he was ousted from the circle of eligible successors. He became furious and admonished the people of Kokote Zongo in one of his sermons. This severely damaged his reputation and rendered him a *persona non grata* in his community. Thereafter, he began working as an itinerant *malam* again. He returned to Kokote Zongo in 2010, where he found his *makarantā* in the hands of the reformist Sunna who criticized his esoteric practices and claims to spiritual *‘ilm* in their teachings. He became embroiled in quarrels with the Sunna over the *makarantā*, and while he was able to reclaim his Quran school, he lost many of his students to the Islamic school of the Sunna reformists.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the Tijaniyya refuse to acknowledge him as someone from their ranks, as he does not participate in their rituals or integrate into their hierarchy. Thus, while Malam Hussain largely does his own thing, the other *malams* regard him with suspicion.

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<sup>44</sup> In the *zongos*, Quran schools (*makarantā*) have a long history. The Quran schools are commonly run by one or several *malams* who teach the attendants the Islamic scriptures, practices, and tenets. Islamic schools are a more recent innovation in the *zongos*. These institutions teach their pupils in Islamic and secular subjects, see Owusu-Ansah et al. 2013; Pontzen 2021, 154–60.

## From the Tijaniyya: Malam Abdul Razak

Abdul Razak was born in the mid-1980s. He is the son of one of Kokote Zongo’s elders.<sup>45</sup> As an up-and-coming Tijaniyya *malam*, he identifies as a member of this Sufi order, integrates into its hierarchy, and participates in its ritual gatherings. Thanks to his Tijaniyya formation and continuous participation in their rituals, God has, in Abdul Razak’s words, “opened my eyes and heart for me,” so that he has become able to “see” God and His workings in the world. Thereby, Abdul Razak has gained access to and acquired a “deep” understanding of the *‘ilm bāṭinan* that lies covered in God’s word and creation. He relies on this insight and his Islamic learning in the *malam adwuma* he offers to a growing number of patrons.

Abdul Razak was born into a family of traders in Bolgatanga. He received his basic Islamic education in the *makarantā* of Sheikh Tahir, a renowned Tijaniyya scholar in northern Ghana. Sheikh Tahir instructed him in the *‘ilm zāhiran* of the Arabic language and of the Islamic scriptures. Once he had acquired a basic knowledge of these, the sheikh also induced Abdul Razak into uncovering the *‘ilm bāṭinan* that lies covered within the Islamic scriptures. In his teens, the sheikh guided him through the *tarbiyya*, the ‘spiritual training’ or ‘mystical education’ of the Tijaniyya.<sup>46</sup> Thanks to this tutelage, Abdul Razak has acquired and honed his faculty of “seeing God.” After giving him the *ijāza* (permission) to enter the *Ṭarīkat al-Tijāniyya* (path of the Tijaniyya), Sheikh Tahir revealed to him a certain *dhikr* (litany in remembrance of God) and instructed him in its recitation. According to Abdul Razak, it is central to perform a *dhikr* not solely with the tongue but “in the heart,” as God makes himself known to His believers in their heart as repeatedly stated in the Quran (e.g. 39:22). As he performed the *dhikr* in ritual seclusion, God opened his heart and granted him *ma‘rifa* (a state of unification with the divine) thanks to which Abdul Razak acquired spiritual insights into God’s being. Thereafter, he returned to his sheikh who guided him through the interpretation of these insights and then revealed a more advanced *dhikr* to him which he performed in seclusion again. This went on for some months, during which Malam Abdul Razak advanced into “deeper” levels of understanding of God’s word and being that only those who have also reached

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<sup>45</sup> My portrayal of Malam Abdul Razak is based on several conversations on his becoming and being a *malam* that we had since 2011. At present, Malam Abdul Razak works as an itinerant *malam* in the Asante region and has begun to establish himself as a renowned *malam* in Kokote Zongo.

<sup>46</sup> Hill 2007, 36; Seesemann 2011, 71.

and experienced this kind of knowledge could fathom. After completing his Islamic education under Sheikh Tahir, Abdul Razak was turbaned a *malam* in the local mosque.

Thereafter, Abdul Razak moved to Sunyani for his studies and to further his education under the Tijaniyya *malams* of the city and to work as an instructor in their *makarantā*. As he became well-versed in *‘ilm* and the esoteric sciences, Abdul Razak also began to offer his *malam adwuma* to the people of Sunyani. In 2010, he moved in with his father in Kokote Zongo to prepare a room for his impending marriage. Moving places, he placed himself under the leadership of established Tijaniyya *malams* in Offinso, participated in their ritual gatherings, worked as an Islamic teacher, and offered his *malam adwuma*. Thereby, he gained a certain reputation, but as he was unmarried and still finishing his Islamic formation, he did not yet strive to establish himself as a *malam* in this town but continued to travel the region in his quest for *‘ilm* and to offer his *malam adwuma*.

As Abdul Razak elaborated in our conversations, *‘ilm zāhiran* and *‘ilm bāṭinan* are two different, but interlaced aspects of Islamic knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, he considers his Tijaniyya formation and ritual practices as indispensable in his quest for *‘ilm*. First, his *malams* taught him the *‘ilm zāhiran* required to read and understand the scriptures which provided him with the basis to “go deep into the scriptures” and gain insights into the *‘ilm bāṭinan* that lies covered within them. Furthermore, his participation in the Tijaniyya *dhikr* rituals purifies his being and bestows a divine presence (*baraka*) on him, thanks to which he can acquire further insights into God’s being. Over time, he thus draws closer to God, like other Tijaniyya have done before, to eventually become one with Him; Abdul Razak joins his forefingers to illustrate this. These are the *walis* (friends of God), and, “*in shā’ Allāh*” (God willing), he will reach this state as well. In order to reach this state, he must continue to travel on the path that his Tijaniyya elders have walked before him who are therefore closer to God than he is. Malam Abdul Razak recognizes their superiority and integrates into established Tijaniyya hierarchies that depend on one’s level of learning and insight as well as on one’s closeness to God. As a well-respected Tijaniyya, Malam Abdul Razak has also earned a good reputation in Kokote Zongo’s Muslim community where he is widely recognized as an up-and-coming *malam*.

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<sup>47</sup> Malam Abdul Razak would commonly interlock his fingers to underline this point in our conversations.

## From the Sunna: Malam Hamidou

Malam Hamidou is one of the leading Sunna *malams* in Kokote Zongo and frequently delivers sermons to disseminate ‘ilm in the community.<sup>48</sup> Like the other two *malams*, Malam Hamidou bases his ‘ilm on the Quran and the Sunna, but he does not perceive any ‘spiritual’ aspect in these and acknowledges as ‘ilm solely what derives from them in a “straight” way. According to his reading of the Quran, the scriptures are all clear (e.g. 16:89, 41:3), so there is nothing covered or spiritual in them, and those who proclaim otherwise “turn” the scriptures instead of reading them “straight.” Thus, Malam Hamidou professes a solely ‘scriptural’ ‘ilm, and while he thus shares discursive and intellectual ‘ilm *zāhiran* with the other two, he does not recognize their ‘ilm *bāṭinan* as Islamic knowledge or as a ‘deeper’ aspect of ‘ilm.

Malam Hamidou was born in Kokote Zongo into a family of traders in the mid-1980s. His parents were ardent members of the Tijaniyya, but he was set on a different path during his Islamic formation. He received his basic Islamic education in Kokote Zongo’s *makarantā* from the Tijaniyya Malam Sheikh Fousseini. From early on, he developed a keen interest in Islamic learning and attended sermons by other *malams*. There, he met with Malam Nurudin who had recently returned from his studies at the reformist al-Azhariyya Islamic School in Kumase and roamed the *zongo* to disseminate what he had learned there. Malam Nurudin interacted mainly with the *zongo*’s youngsters, as the elderly did not allow him to preach in their mosques. Malam Hamidou enjoyed Nurudin’s preaching, as he not only gave ample *dalīl* (quotations) from the scriptures but also translated and interpreted his quotations for his captive audiences. Quite intrigued by this accessible, new style of teaching and preaching, Malam Hamidou joined a study circle with other youngsters where Malam Nurudin instructed them in Arabic as they read and interpreted the scriptures together.

After Malam Hamidou had convinced his uncle to financially support him in his Islamic studies,<sup>49</sup> he followed in Malam Nurudin’s footsteps and enrolled at the al-Azhariyya Islamic School, where he studied Arabic and the Islamic scriptures with various *malams* who instructed him in the intellectual reading and

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<sup>48</sup> My portrayal of Malam Hussain is based on several conversations about his becoming and being a *malam* that we had since 2011. At present, Malam Hussain is a respected *malam* in Kokote Zongo, leads prayers in his own mosque, and works as an Islamic teacher in a local school.

<sup>49</sup> His uncle was a Tijaniyya and a successful businessman who wanted to assure himself and his business of God’s blessing by covering the Islamic study expenses of his nephew in the form of *ṣadaqa* (pious donation).

interpretation of the scriptures. His teachers stressed the importance of an independent pondering over the Islamic scriptures and also offered their individual interpretations of them. Meanwhile, they all agreed that there is nothing spiritual that lies covered in them, which kept Hamidou's studies solely scriptural. In the mid-2000s, he graduated with a diploma in Islamic studies from this institution and became an Islamic teacher. In addition to teaching, Malam Hamidou operates a *makarantā* for Kokote Zongo's Muslim women and co-organizes another for the *zongo's* children. He preaches at various events and occasionally leads the Sunna community in Friday prayers. Thereby, he has gained a notable reputation. However, Malam Hamidou does not offer esoteric *malam adwuma* like the other two, as he rejects the *'ilm bāṭinan* and the spiritual episteme on which this work relies. He only performs scriptural rituals like prayers or recitations of the Quran for others. He does not manufacture any spiritual remedies or talismans like the other two *malams* but only procures prophetic medicine (*tibb*) and exorcism (*ruqya*) to his clients following the instructions in his books. The people of Kokote Zongo nonetheless appreciate his *malam adwuma* and come in numbers to seek his counsel and to request his prayers on their behalf.

Yet, Malam Hamidou and his Sunna cohorts also face criticism in their community. Commonly, the Sunna have been criticized as being "too strict" in their readings and implementations of the Islamic scriptures and tradition, especially because they frequently rank the scriptures above established social norms and values. When the Sunna emerged in the *zongos*, they openly criticized conventional Islamic practices, like funeral prayers or the manufacturing of Islamic charms, and those engaged in these activities. The accused, who were often their elders, did not take this lightly and rebuked their critiques, which led to open conflicts. This resulted in the Sunna abstaining from Islamic gatherings. Hence, the others perceived the Sunna's criticisms as not only disrespectful but as promoting *fitna* (schism) in the community. According to their critics, this uncompromising attitude also meant that the Sunna are completely nescient of other traditions and practices of Islamic knowledge and therefore unable to fathom their *'ilm bāṭinan* and its related practices.

## **Distinct Epistemes and Knowledges: On *'Ilm Zāhīran* and *'Ilm Bāṭinan***

As Islamic scholars, these three *malams* have several things in common. It took them years of study to acquire their *'ilm*, and they have all travelled widely to further their Islamic knowledge under different *malams* during the years of their

formation. The *'ilm* that they have acquired over years of study comprises several aspects. As *ḥuffāz* (sing. *ḥāfiẓ*; memorizer of the Quran), the *malams* have fully memorized the Quran; they are well-read in the Hadith and fluent in classical Arabic; they are well-versed in the Islamic tradition; they know how to perform a variety of Islamic rituals and they lead their fellow Muslims in these; they can authoritatively comment on the Islamic scriptures and bring them to bear on people's queries and ongoing debates. All three *malams* are members of larger networks of Islamic learning, and they deploy their *'ilm* in their communities to make a living. As *malams*, these men work as Islamic teachers, preachers, ritual specialists, counsellors, and healers in their communities. In these functions, they rely on and disseminate their *'ilm* as they teach or counsel their fellow Muslims and thus 'speak for Islam' to them.

Yet, these *malams* were formed in different traditions of Islamic learning. Hence, they hold divergent conceptions of *'ilm* and adhere to diverse practices of Islamic knowledge. As these *malams* are aware of their divergent tenets and practices, they constantly challenge one another in their teachings, sermons, and counselling. In turn, ordinary Muslims from the *zongo*, like Layanu (mentioned briefly in the introduction), seek the advice of *malams* from different Islamic groups to make up their own mind on the issue at hand based on what they have learned. While the *malams* appear as central figures in the transmission, circulation, and contestation of *'ilm* in the *zongo*, their fellow Muslims do not follow them blindly. Instead, they critically engage with what they learn from them. Thereby, the people of the *zongo* carry the divergent and contested tenets of the *malams* into their mundane exchanges and Islamic practices. In turn, the *malams* comment on these exchanges and practices in their teachings and sermons so that *'ilm* emerges as a diverse and contested part of the social fabric of the *zongos* that is constantly in the making.

As we encounter divergent assertions, media, practices, and institutions of *'ilm* among these *malams*, *'ilm* emerges not as a coherent body of Islamic knowledge, but as a diverse and contested field. A central difference between the *malams* lies in their divergent recognitions and understandings of *'ilm zāhiran* and *'ilm bāṭinan* and the diverse assertions, epistemes, and practices that result from these. Whereas *'ilm zāhiran* comprises an open and discursive knowledge of the Islamic tradition that is acquired through intellectual effort, *'ilm bāṭinan* constitutes a covered and personal knowledge of the Divine that is acquired mainly through ritually induced experiences.<sup>50</sup> This distinction between different aspects of *'ilm* has been central for centuries in Sufi thought and practice, and it

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50 Cf. Frede 2014a; Hill 2007; Radtke 1994; Seesemann 2011; Wright 2015.

has always been subject to contestations by other Muslims who did not share in the epistemes and practices of *‘ilm bāṭinan* encountered among the Sufis.<sup>51</sup>

These different aspects of *‘ilm* permeate and are, in turn, sustained by different Islamic knowledge practices, epistemologies, and institutions. *‘Ilm zāhiran* is transmitted and acquired in open settings like sermons, the *makarantā*, or the Islamic schools. In these institutions, language and discourse not only serve as primary media but are also something to be learned. Recitations, readings, and interpretations, as well as intellectual reasoning about the scriptures take centre stage. In this sense, *‘ilm zāhiran* relies on and promotes *ijtihād* (individual reasoning), an individual and intellectual reasoning when interpreting the scriptures,<sup>52</sup> as all my interlocutors highlighted. The more personal *‘ilm bāṭinan* is acquired via experiential engagements by the divine, which cannot be transmitted by the means of language or by other humans, as the revelation of divine cognizance solely depends on God. In their quest for *‘ilm bāṭinan* and ritual practices that might lead to its revelation, my interlocutors therefore stressed the importance of personal and practical instructions, upholding the principle of *taqlīd* (imitation), the emulation of those who are more advanced on their path to God.<sup>53</sup> However, this was not a question of setting one aspect against the other. Both Malam Hussain and Malam Abdul Razak have spent years studying the Islamic scriptures and continue pondering them. Similarly, Malam Hamidou has studied under *malams* whom he cherishes for their *‘ilm* and whom he strives to emulate in various regards. Yet, the three *malams* conceive and value the different aspects of *‘ilm* and their respective epistemes, discourses, and practices disparately. Malam Hussain considers *‘ilm zāhiran* and *‘ilm bāṭinan* as complimentary aspects of an encompassing *‘ilm* that he pursues in personal studies and ritual performances. Malam Abdul Razak also considers *‘ilm zāhiran* and *‘ilm bāṭinan* as complementary aspects of an encompassing *‘ilm*, but he pursues them by following the *Ṭarīqat al-Tijāniyya* (path of the Tijaniyya), which he perceives as indispensable in his quest for *‘ilm*. Malam Hamidou acknowledges only *‘ilm zāhiran* as *‘ilm* and therefore rejects the notion of *‘ilm bāṭinan* and its related episteme and practices. Nonetheless, all three *malams* share in *‘ilm* and participate in its constant remaking in their community.

According to my interlocutors, their *‘ilm* is founded on their Islamic studies and engagements with the Islamic scriptures and tradition. Yet, as highlighted by

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51 De Jong and Radtke 1999; Radtke 1994; 1999.

52 Ibrahim 2016.

53 Ibrahim 2016.

Michael Lambek, “texts by themselves are silent;”<sup>54</sup> the way in which scriptures are read, referred to, made sense of, and put into usage relates them to people’s lives.<sup>55</sup> As they relate the Islamic scriptures to people’s queries and lives, the *malams* ‘speak for Islam’ to the people of the *zongo*. In the process, they mediate and produce ‘ilm in their community. Yet, the *malams* diverge in the ways they make sense of the Islamic scriptures and tradition, so they often contradict or contest their divergent interpretations. Hence, the *malams* are not merely transmitters of a monolithic Islamic knowledge but draw on and contribute to divergent discourses and practices of ‘ilm that nonetheless share a common ground in the Islamic scriptures and tradition. Tracing the divergent Islamic formations of these *malams* as well as the distinct knowledge discourses and practices that have resulted from these, ‘ilm does not emerge as a given body of Islamic knowledge but as a social phenomenon that is not detachable from its carriers, institutions, discourses, and practices. ‘Ilm is not an abstract entity contained in people’s minds and books – although these certainly matter –, but a diverse and contested phenomenon that takes shape in multiple and divergent social, material, and historical relations. ‘Ilm is hence open to and derived from people’s varied engagements with the Islamic scriptures and tradition while these provide ‘ilm with a common ground, so that in the *zongos* as much as elsewhere, ‘ilm is subject to and part of a discursive tradition.<sup>56</sup> This is informed by and, in turn, informs the divergent transmissions, institutions, discourses, and practices of Islamic knowledge present among the three *malams* from Kokote Zongo. As elsewhere, Islam in this *zongo* is marked by an irreducible diversity as the people of Kokote Zongo understand and live their religion in diverse ways, which impacts the Islamic authority ascribed to and embodied by their *malams*.

## Conclusion: ‘Ilm and Authority

As ‘ilm emerges as diverse and contested, the *malams* must constantly assert themselves and their tenets in ongoing debates in the *zongos*. In doing so, they refer to the Islamic scriptures and tradition as their common ground, while simultaneously making divergent senses of them. As the *malams* assert themselves and their divergent notions of ‘ilm in their communities, they draw on and perpetuate

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<sup>54</sup> Lambek 1990, 23; cf. Krämer and Schmidtko 2006, 4; Shils 1981, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Ahmed 2016, chap. 5; Gaborieau and Zeghal 2004, 19; Østebø 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Asad 1986; cf. Ahmed 2016.



different traditions of Islamic learning with their divergent practices, discourses, and institutions of *‘ilm* that inform and support one another. In the process, the *malams* create open, diverse, and contested Islamic knowledges, whilst they ‘speak for Islam’ to the people of the *zongo* who, in turn, accord them the authority to do so or, as in the case of Malam Hussain, deny it to them. The *malams*’ Islamic authority depends on their recognition by their fellow Muslims, and this recognition is based on the *malams*’ participation in the discursive tradition of Islam, their Islamic knowledge practices, and their *ādāb* (demeanour). Accordingly, *‘ilm* is not an abstract body of Islamic knowledge but engrained in people’s divergent discourses and practices and constantly contested among them. Consequently, Islamic authority in the *zongos* emerges as a diverse and contested field.

As argued by Hans-Georg Gadamer, authority hinges on its recognition by those over whom it is exercised.<sup>57</sup> Distinct from power, authority has,

its final ground not in an act of submission and abdication of reason but in an act of acknowledgment and recognition – namely, the recognition that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that his judgement therefore has precedence over one’s own.<sup>58</sup>

The people of the *zongo* recognize their *malams* as religious authorities by acknowledging their superiority of judgment and insight in Islamic matters, which they have acquired through years of study and devotion. The *malams* speak for Islam to the people of the *zongo* as they relate the Islamic scriptures and tradition to their lives. Accordingly, their authority is founded on what Max Weber designates as “traditional grounds – resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them.”<sup>59</sup> However, as Alasdair MacIntyre points out, a tradition is kept alive in its critical engagements by those who adhere to it: “A living tradition [...] is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”<sup>60</sup> As traditions are constantly (re-)made by those who live them, ‘traditional’ authority is not acquired through “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions” as suggested by Weber but ascribed by others as they recognize one’s critical engagement in and contributions to the tradition that makes for their common ground. Moreover, the Islamic tradition is not ‘immemorial’ but consists of humankind’s diverse engage-

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<sup>57</sup> Gadamer 1990 [1960], 281–90; cf. Lambek 1993.

<sup>58</sup> Gadamer 1990 [1960], 284.

<sup>59</sup> Weber 1972 [1921], 124.

<sup>60</sup> MacIntyre 2007 [1981], 222.

ments with divine revelation.<sup>61</sup> The Islamic scriptures and tradition lay a common ground for the people of the *zongo* in which they have found common values and integrated into one community. However, this ground is open to divergent engagements and implementations, and these feed into an ongoing discourse in which the *malams* and the people of the *zongo* evaluate and contest their disparate knowledge discourses and practices. Thereby, they stand on and (re-)affirm this very ground while they (re-)make it at the same time. Thus, ‘*ilm* and Islamic authority emerge as open projects that are constantly in the making.

## Interlocutors referred to in the text

Layanu, Kokote Zongo. Early twenties, unmarried. *Nkramo* and ordinary believer, works as a cook. Several conversations and interviews; befriended with the author.

Malam Abdul Razak, Kokote Zongo. Early thirties, married with children. Tijaniyya *malam* working *malam adwuma*. Several conversations and interviews; befriended with the author.

Malam Hamidou, Kokote Zongo. Early thirties, married with children. Sunna *malam*, Arabic and Islamic teacher. Host of and befriended with the author. Several conversations and interviews.

Malam Hussain, Kokote Zongo. Early fifties, married with children. *Nkramo malam* and Islamic teacher. Works *malam adwuma*. Several conversations and interviews.

Malam Nurudin, Kokote Zongo. Early fifties, married with children. Sunna *malam* working as Islamic teacher at an Islamic school. Several conversations and interviews.

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61 Ahmed 2016; Asad 1986.

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Andrea Brigaglia

# Between the Sociology of Religious Authority and the Anthropology of Religious Discourse

Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara and His Blasphemy Trial in Nigeria

## Introduction: Islamic Revival, Religious Authority, and Fragmentation

Roman Loimeier's first monograph, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria*,<sup>1</sup> was based on a thick description of twentieth-century northern Nigerian Islamic networks of 'revival,' or rather, in his words, "reform." The question of religious authority was also a central feature of that book; Loimeier's working definition of Islamic networks being precisely "systems of influence of their respective leaders."<sup>2</sup> He also drew attention to the competition among revivalist networks: the competitive dimension of revivalism was described both in terms of political strategies (forging alliances and/or adjusting to changes in the political sphere) and discursive mechanisms (theological disputations). Emphasis was also placed on the struggle for leadership *within* revivalist networks. The pages that *Islamic Reform and Political Change* devoted to the Sufi order of the Tijaniyya-Ibrahimiyya (better known as *Fayḍa Tijāniyya*), for instance, provided ample details of the several internal crises that, from the 1970s onwards, transformed what had been the most spectacularly fast-growing religious movement in Nigeria through the 1950–60s, into "a multitude of locally competing networks" marked by "old rivalries," "quarrels" and "bitter feuds."<sup>3</sup>

In his book, Loimeier also delved lengthily into details of another Sufi order, the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya, i.e. the branch of the of the Qadiriyya that, from the 1930s onwards, had grown in Kano around the charismatic leadership of Sheikh

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<sup>1</sup> Loimeier 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Loimeier 1997, 16 (emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> Loimeier 1997, 51. Details of the competition between the Nasiru Kabara and the Ali Kumasi branches of the Qadiriyya in Kano, are also discussed in the book on pp. 67–69; Loimeier's conclusion, however, is that this conflict was ultimately influential in helping the process of consolidation of the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya, rather than challenging it.

Muḥammad al-Nāṣir al-Kabarī (d. 1996; better known as *Nasiru Kabara*).<sup>4</sup> The Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya appeared in Loimeier’s analysis as an exceptionally cohesive network. This assessment was indeed an accurate depiction of the state of affairs in the order during the time covered by his research. Relatively smaller demographically than the Tijaniyya and thus more governable, the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya had a centralized leadership embodied in the person of the *Quṭb* (axial Saint) Nasiru Kabara. Strategically centred in a headquarters of high visibility and symbolic prestige (the head-*zāwiya* personally run by the sheikh in the Kabara quarters, facing the western gate of the Kano Emir’s Palace) the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya functioned during Nasiru Kabara’s life as the archetypal Sufi *ṭarīqa* – a Weberian network of *muqaddams* and *murīds* cohesively rallied around a charismatic *walī* – and unlike other Nigerian Sufi groups, it did not experience a “splitting-up into numerous local and regional networks.”<sup>5</sup>

After Nasiru Kabara’s death in 1996, however, in a time not covered by Loimeier’s research, the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya experienced the most severe internal rift in the recent history of any Sufi order in Nigeria, seeing two of Kabara’s sons, Qaribullah and Abduljabbar, engaged in a bitter personal, political, and religious conflict. This rift took a dramatic turn in 2021, when Abduljabbar was arrested and tried for blasphemy by a *sharī’a* court in Kano backed by a coalition of Islamic scholars that included, amongst others, his brother Qaribullah.

The goal of the present contribution is to summarize the last two decades of social and political history of the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya and, in particular, to fully capture the political and discursive trajectory of Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara’s life in its dramatic nature. In doing so, this chapter, after a first section narrated in the classical framework of the political sociology of religion, gradually shifts to the anthropology of religious discourse.

## The House of Kabara, 1950s–1996

When he died in 1996, Kabara left a gigantic legacy behind. He authored between 116 and 146 scholarly works in Arabic and Hausa,<sup>6</sup> including, amongst others: an unpublished, voluminous Quranic exegesis; a published Hausa translation of the Quran;<sup>7</sup> various treatises in defence of the Qadiriyya and of Sufism in general;

<sup>4</sup> Loimeier 1997, 52–70; 71–103. On Nasiru Kabara, see also Loimeier 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Loimeier 1997, 68.

<sup>6</sup> For two partially overlapping lists, see Loimeier 1991, and Hunwick and O’Fahey 1996, 321–39.

<sup>7</sup> Brigaglia 2005, 424–49.

and dozens of poems, both in Arabic and Hausa – mainly, but not exclusively, of the Prophetic *madiḥ* (eulogy) genre.

Perhaps more importantly, he led a wholesome revival of the Qadiriyya. The latter had functioned, through the nineteenth century, as the foundation of the cultural and political identity of Islam in northern Nigeria, but had more recently experienced a steady decline due at least in part to the rapid expansion of a ‘rival’ Sufi order, the Tijaniyya.

At the young age of 12, Kabara entrusted the Emir of Kano Abdullahi Bayero’s (rul. 1926–53) counsellor, Wali Suleiman (d. 1939), who was about to leave on a Pilgrimage, with a letter addressed to Sheikh Abū al-Ḥasan al-Sammānī, the representative of the Qadiriyya-Sammaniyya in Medina. As a result of this letter, Kabara was appointed as a Qadiri-Sammani *muqaddam* (spiritual deputy), introducing in Nigeria a new, independent Qadiri *silsila*.<sup>8</sup> Not only he progressively obtained all the *silsilas* of the various branches of the Qadiriyya that existed in Nigeria (*Ahl al-Bayt*, Kuntiyya, Shinqitiyya, Arusiyya-Salamiyya-Asmariyya), but he also established direct links with their respective mother-*zāwiyas*, especially cultivating connections with the Qadiri-Sammani branch in Khartoum (Sudan), and the Qadiri-Arusi-Salami-Asmari in Libya. In this way, he superseded all his previous affiliations with the local representatives of these branches in Nigeria, affirming himself as an authority on his own right.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in 1953, he travelled to Baghdad, where he was directly appointed by the descendants of the founding saint of the order, ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī (d. 1166), as the foremost *khalīfa* (representative) of the Qadiri order in West Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Kabara’s revivalist attitudes were also noticeable in the sphere of ritual. In this, he partook in the ‘ecstatic mood’ that, largely by the initiative of the Tijanis, had come to dominate the Nigerian Islamic religious culture of the mid-twentieth century. Realizing that many Nigerian youths were attracted to the Tijaniyya because of their public displays of *dhikr* and outward manifestations of ecstasy and divine gnosis, Kabara encouraged a similar extroversion of Qadiri ritual practices, which in Nigeria, had hitherto been confined to a relatively private dimension of Sufi worship. To this aim, he introduced a set of ritual ‘innovations’ that he either drew from the practices of Qadiri lodges of the Arab world with which he had established links, or that had previously existed in Nigeria but had become

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<sup>8</sup> Loimeier 1997, 53.

<sup>9</sup> Possibly during a visit to Tunisia, Kabara also received the *silsila* of the Qadiriyya-Manzaliyya from ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Manzālī, and he introduced it in Nigeria for the first time, Hunwick and O’Fahey 1996, 322.

<sup>10</sup> Loimeier 1997, 55.



stagnant: *al-dhikr bi-l-anfās* (*dhikr* accompanied by rhythmic breathing and body oscillations); *al-dhikr bi-l-bandīr* (*dhikr* – in this case, the reading of Arabic and Hausa odes in praise of the Prophet – accompanied by the beat of a tambourine); and yearly *mawkīb* (public procession through the streets of Kano ending with a collective *ziyāra*, ritual visit, to the Qadiri saints buried in the *Waliyyai* cemetery).

The nature of Kabara's religious engagement had changed from the early 1970s on, when one of his former students, *al-Qāḍī* Abubakar Mahmoud Gumi (d. 1992), publicly embraced a Salafi-inspired critique of Sufism. This change was especially visible after 1978, when Gumi's students established the Izala organization (*Jamā'a 'Izālat al-Bid'a wa-Iqāmat al-Sunna*) as a base for activist Salafism in northern Nigeria.<sup>11</sup> Reacting to Gumi and Izala, Kabara softened the tones of his scholarly debates with the Tijanis, joining them in a common effort to defend the legitimacy of Sufism from its critics, and authoring a number of treatises on the subject.<sup>12</sup>

Through the years, Kabara always carefully navigated his relationship with the traditional political establishment. On the one hand, he was a close confidant of the Sultan of Sokoto Abubakar III (rul. 1938–88), who was a passionate supporter of the Qadiriyya and, between the late 1940s and the mid-1950s, a staunch opponent of the Tijaniyya. In Kano, however, whose emirs had been, since the early twentieth century, active members of the Tijaniyya, he was directly involved in the Emirate Council, of which he was a member until 1960. Perhaps more significantly, Kabara also maintained the highly symbolic rank of *mai tafsirin Gidan Sarki* (Quranic exegete of the Kano royal house) throughout his life by performing ritual oral exegesis of the Quran during the month of Ramadan, at the Emir's Palace.

In recognition of his role as the champion of the Qadiriyya, in 1974, at a time of intense competition between Izala and the Sufi orders in northern Nigeria, Sultan Abubakar III bestowed upon Kabara the symbolic title of *Amīr al-Jaysh* (leader of the [Qadiri] army) and gifted him with the sword of Abubakar III's ancestor Usman Dan Fodio (d. 1817), the founder of the nineteenth-century Islamic state known as the "Sokoto Caliphate," who had been a Qadiri too.

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<sup>11</sup> Loimeier 1997, contains a lengthy section on Izala (pp. 207–324). For a more updated study, see Ben Amara 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Umar 1999, 357–85.

## Rift in the House of Kabara

Kabara had refrained from appointing any of his several sons from his four wives as his official successor (*khalifa*) and head of the religious network run from his house, popularly known as *Gidan Kadiriyya* (the house of the Qadiriyya). Rather, he distributed his religious authority through indirect symbolic investitures among some of the most gifted of them. For instance, he bestowed the position of *mai tafsiri* of the Kano royal house upon his second eldest son, Qaribullah (b. 1959); he entrusted one of Qaribullah's younger brothers, Kasyuni (Mūsā al-Qāsiyūnī), with the public reading and translating into Hausa of the *Kitāb al-Shifā'* of al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (d. 1149), performed during the month of Ramadan; and he nominated another son, Abduljabbar (b. 1970), known as a gifted and fearless speaker, as *Amīr al-wā'izīn* (Chief Preacher) of the Qadiriyya.<sup>13</sup> Three days after the death of Kabara, his closest students jointly proclaimed Qaribullah Kabara as the new *khalifa*, and all the children of the deceased, accepting the investiture, paid homage to their senior brother.<sup>14</sup>

Barely three years after Kabara's death, the political sphere of northern Nigeria experienced a radical change that had an immediate effect on the religious sphere. Military juntas, often led by northern Muslim generals, had ruled Nigeria for most of its post-independence history. Under military rule, Muslim scholars like Kabara had, in most cases, maintained a bond of cordial but cautious distance from political power. With some exceptions,<sup>15</sup> political authorities were generally never questioned by Muslim leaders. The government, when needed, would rely on the mediation of clerics to boost support for its policies; but as clerics did not hold political positions as such, they were perceived by the masses as relatively independent and 'apolitical,' as it were.

In 1999, Nigeria's return to democracy radically altered the habitual status quo in the relationship between politics and religion: politics, previously intended mainly as an executive power and the exclusive prerogative of the military, became *siyasa*. While this Hausa term derives from the Arabic *siyāsa*, meaning "politics" in any of its connotations, in Nigeria it is mainly used in reference to the electoral campaigns that typically characterize a democratic dispensation. From 1999 onwards, *siyasa* suddenly became a pervasive aspect of social life,

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<sup>13</sup> Shehu 2017, 200–1.

<sup>14</sup> Isa 2016, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Two important exceptions are the Islamic political activism of Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, inspired by the Iranian revolution, and of the Jamā'at al-Tajdid al-Islāmī (Umar 2011), inspired by the thought of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers.

manifested especially in the constant competition among parties and candidates in federal, gubernatorial, and local government elections. In the Muslim north, and especially in Kano, the political competition inherent in the system of *siyasa* also overlapped in complex ways with long-standing forms of religious competition, especially, but not exclusively, between Sufi orders and Salafi groups. From the early 2000s onwards, moreover, such intra-Islamic religious competition was further boosted by the *sharī'a* reforms that gave religious scholars a bigger share, and a direct stake, in state-level administrations, and as heads or members of state-run *sharī'a* bodies.<sup>16</sup>

In 1999, politician Rabi'u Kwankwaso of PDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) was elected as Governor of Kano State. As Kwankwaso had relied on the electoral support of the *Gidan Kadiriyya*, the latter's *khalifa*, Qaribullah Kabara, was rewarded by being nominated as chairman of the Hajj Commission. Kwankwaso, however, gradually came under popular criticism for his perceived hesitancy in enacting *sharī'a*-inspired reforms of the State's legal system. In 2003, during the elections in Kano, Ibrahim Shekarau of ANPP (All Nigeria's People's Party) focused his campaign on the promise of finally implementing *sharī'a* in Kano. Relying on huge popular support canvassed mainly by the coordinated action of Salafi organizations,<sup>17</sup> Shekarau easily secured his election. Quite naturally, many of the critical appointments in the various Kano *Sharī'a* Commissions created by the new Shekarau government, went to the Salafi-oriented scholars that had supported his campaign. Unsurprisingly, the new governor came under criticism by the Qadiris and the Tijanis, who accused him of being excessively biased in favour of the Salafis.

With the 2007 elections approaching, Shekarau decided to change his tactics. Realising that the support of the Sufis would be critical to ensure his re-election, he made some reconciliatory moves (and allegedly, some donations in cash)<sup>18</sup> towards some Sufi networks of the city. Gradually, Kabara's sons started competing over who was to represent the Qadiriyya vis-à-vis the State authorities, which now, obviously 'courted' the order. In 2006, in anticipation of the State gubernatorial campaign, a clear rift emerged, and Kasyuni and Abduljabbar started to publicly accuse the *khalifa*, their half-brother Qaribullah (born to a different mother than theirs), of corruption and ineptitude in running the affairs of the order. During the 2007 campaign, Qaribullah continued to campaign for the PDP,

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<sup>16</sup> The best introduction to the *sharī'a* reforms in Nigeria is Weimann 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Ben Amara 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Isa 2016, 67.

while Abduljabbar shifted his support to Shekarau.<sup>19</sup> When the latter ultimately secured re-election, he rewarded the younger scion of the Kabara family with funds to build mosques and schools.

In the year 2009, the leadership crisis of *Gidan Kadiriyya* reached a peak, with the two factions boycotting each other at the main ritual functions of the order. At that point, Abduljabbar decided to focus his energy on building an independent Sufi network, the *Mujamma' Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* (Union of the People of the Cave, henceforth MAAK). Originally established in 2000 as a reading group, MAAK had gradually turned into a youth wing of the Qadiriyya and, from 2009 onwards, started to function as Abduljabbar's own Sufi order, independent of Qaribullah's 'mainstream' Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya. Leveraging on Shekarau's support, MAAK was able to establish a huge network of branches and mosques in various local governments of Kano State and beyond.<sup>20</sup>

So far, the development of the Qadiriyya-Nasiriyya since the death of Kabara appears to fit a classical Weberian sociological model: after the death of the Saint, a conflict emerges between two of his sons, manifesting the problem inherent in the transformation of 'charismatic authority' into 'traditional authority'; as Qaribullah and Abduljabbar are also the offspring of two different mothers, the crisis between the two also display a 'clan' dimension. The successive developments of the rift, however, suggest that, in the making and unmaking of religious authority, more complex processes are at work.

On one hand, no religious network lives in isolation from its broader religious environment; thus, the rift between Qaribullah and Abduljabbar needs to be read in the context of the strategic game the two played in relation to the other existing Islamic networks of Nigeria, in particular, of Kano city. In other words, if the Weberian sociology of religion offers a model that can predict that a rift *might* occur among two claimants to the inheritance of the same charismatic authority, the questions of *why* the rift in the *Gidan Kadiriyya* developed at a particular time, and of *how* it developed, can only be answered in the context of a political sociology of Islam in Kano that takes a step outside of the door of the house of Kabara, and guides us in exploring the nexuses between the latter and the other major actors of Islam in Kano.

On the other hand, the complex ways in which such nexuses were negotiated in different ways by Qaribullah and Abduljabbar, eludes a purely sociological analysis. To better account for such complexity, a discursive turn is needed, one that allows us to take more seriously, and to dig into, the engagements of

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<sup>19</sup> Isa 2016, 70.

<sup>20</sup> For a synopsis of the mosques controlled by MAAK, see Shehu 2017, 212.

the protagonists of the dispute with their religious and intellectual tradition. My focus, thus, will now shift to the trajectory drawn by Abduljabbar's religious and intellectual journey, which ultimately resulted in a dramatic – and in no way sociologically predictable – blasphemy trial.

## Abduljabbar Kabara: Strategic and Discursive Trajectories

Born in 1970, Abduljabbar had already had the opportunity to develop a relatively independent scholarly trajectory during his father's lifetime. Since the late 1980s, in fact, amongst his siblings, he was solely allowed by his father to run a teaching circle (*zaure*) of his own inside *Gidan Kadiriyya*. Then, in 1993, he enrolled at the University of Baghdad to pursue a degree in Islamic Studies. Sending one of his scions to study in Iraq was obviously part of Nasiru Kabara's strategy to cement his ties with the head-*zāwiya* of the Qadiriyya there: alongside his formal studies, in fact, Abduljabbar also attended the private teaching circles of the Madrasa Jilaniyya, a Sunni theological institute attached to the mausoleum of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī in Baghdad. What Kabara could not foresee, however, was that his experience in Iraq would also plant the seeds in the young Abduljabbar for independent reflection on the Sunni theological tradition.

While Iraq in the post-Saddam era has been the theatre of the most violent sectarian Sunni-Shiite crisis experienced anywhere in the modern Muslim world, the attitudes towards Shiism that Abduljabbar encountered in the 1990s in the Sunni scholarly community of Baghdad were rather inclusive. It is well known that the political praxis of the Iraqi Baathist Party was based on a deep mistrust of the Shiites, feared mainly because of their potential connection to Iranian interests. Less known, however, is that the religious *discourse* enjoined by the Baath Party through its religious institutions, was formally conceived as a non-sectarian one that, by banning any mention of Sunnism and Shiism as two distinct theological traditions, aimed at creating a generic Islamic national identity that, Saddam hoped, would be a source of stability for the country.<sup>21</sup> A foreign Sunni student like Abduljabbar, enrolled at a public university for an Islamic Studies programme in the 1990s, was more likely to be exposed to the non-sectarian discourse of the Iraqi State, than to its sectarian practices.

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<sup>21</sup> For a succinct overview of Sunni-Shiite relations in Iraq, see Louër 2020, 109–21. For a more detailed analysis of Baathist policies vis-à-vis religion in Iraq, see Helfont 2018.

Obviously, many of the Iraqi religious scholars, both Sunnis and Shiites, did not passively accept the Baathist official discourse on religion. Those who taught Abduljabbar at the Madrasa Jilaniyya, however, mostly belonged to the network of perceivably ‘non-sectarian’ Sunni Sufis, on whose interpretation of the Islamic tradition the Baath bureaucracy relied to moderate the potentially explosive tension between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq. Among them, in particular, were ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Rāwī and ‘Abd al-Karīm Biyāra (d. 2005), both of whom taught Abduljabbar.<sup>22</sup> The first was a famous Naqshbandi and Qadiri-Rifa‘i Sufi scholar from Irbil; the second, a Kurd, was a vigorous opponent of Salafism and the Mufti of the Republic of Iraq under Saddam Hussein.<sup>23</sup> The grassroots Qadiri community of Baghdad, too, with whom Abduljabbar spent most of his time, displayed a friendly attitude towards the Shiites.<sup>24</sup> The mausoleum that was the focus of Abduljabbar’s devotional routine in Baghdad, and the attached *madrasa* where he attended classes, are both located in Bāb al-Shaykh, a neighbourhood home to a majority Shiite population. During his daily visits to the mausoleum of Sīdī ‘Abd al-Qādir, Abduljabbar would contemplate one of the versions of the Qadiriyya *silsila* inscribed on its walls in a calligraphic script.<sup>25</sup> This *silsila* linked Sheikh ‘Abd al-Qādir to the Prophet through the latter’s descendants who are also venerated as Shiite imams (from al-Jilānī through various early Sufis up to Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī; then from al-Karkhī to ‘Alī al-Riḍā and six generations of Shiite imams up to Ḥusayn, ‘Alī, and the Prophet). The shrine’s committee engaged in a number of common activities with Shiite organizations,<sup>26</sup> especially with the Husayniyya al-Ahmadi (an institute of higher Shiite religious learning) and with the al-Khullānī mosque.<sup>27</sup> Abduljabbar certainly had a chance to mix and exchange views with Shiite students and scholars there. The young Nigerian

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**22** Shehu 2017, 202–3.

**23** During the US invasion of Iraq, Biyāra supported the Iraqi resistance and issued fatwas that declared *jihād* under occupation a religious obligation (*farḍ*). For a brief biography, see Al-‘Alī 2020. While supporting resistance to the US invasion from a pro-Baathist point of view, Biyāra was also a longtime critic of al-Qa‘ida.

**24** Machlis 2019.

**25** Al-Gailani 2016, 128.

**26** Al-Gailani 2016, 103.

**27** Al-Gailani 2016, 217–22. In more recent years, “the Jilānī shrine has (...) built up a record of obliging and hosting public and government initiatives to bring the warring religious sects together for public interfaith dialogue, including hosting one of the special unification Friday prayers, where Shī‘i imams share Sunnī imams’ pulpits and vice versa, as part of a national programme to reduce sectarian estrangement.” Al-Gailani 2016, 341. The latter development was subsequent to Abduljabbar’s sojourn in Baghdad, but he was certainly aware of it as he maintained close contact with the *zāwiya*.

student could also observe Shiite worshippers, especially women, visiting the mausoleum and being offered by its Qadiri imam, on request, a *turba* to perform their prayers according to the Shiite ritual.<sup>28</sup>

In 1994, while he was still in Iraq, Abduljabbar received the news of the outbreak of the first Shiite-Sunni sectarian crisis in Nigeria, which followed the announcement by Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, leader of the then most popular platform of Islamic political activism in the country, the ‘Muslim Brothers,’<sup>29</sup> that he had embraced Shiism. Feeling deceived by their leader, many of his Sunni followers left the movement in rage. El-Zakzaky and his core students, on their part, went on to create the first explicitly Nigerian-run Shiite platform in the history of the country, the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN).<sup>30</sup> Over the following years, the IMN would gradually but constantly grow in followership, and Shiism, while largely remaining a counterculture, would come to occupy a place of its own in the Islamic landscape of northern Nigeria.

We cannot know for certain how Abduljabbar reacted to the emergence of Shiism in Nigeria. What we do know, however, is that the emergence of the IMN as an openly Shiite platform triggered new adjustments in Islamic inter-group relations in Nigeria. These realignments, as I will show in the following pages, would first open up an autonomous strategic and discursive space for Abduljabbar and MAAK, and later, suddenly and dramatically close it.

For the Salafis, the emergence of Shiism opened a new polemical front to boost their credentials as the vanguard of Sunnism in Nigeria: within a few years, the main mission of the Salafi *da‘wa* (religious mission) in Nigeria was redefined, from uprooting (*‘izāla*) the heretical innovations (*bid‘a*) of the Sufis, to defending the reliability of the Sunni Hadith corpus and the status of all the Prophet’s Companions from Shiite critiques. This meant that, at least in some cases, the polemics against Sufism were relatively softened in Salafi discourses. Prompted by Salafi attacks, the Nigerian Shiites also attempted to reach out to the Sufis, by leveraging discursively on the shared “love for *Ahl al-Bayt*,”<sup>31</sup> the

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**28** Al-Gailani 2016, 144. The *turba* is a small, rounded piece of clay that is used as a place of prostration for the forehead. Its use is recommended in Shiite jurisprudence, the favoured *turba* being the one made with the soil of Karbala, the site of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom.

**29** Unrelated to the Egyptian movement/party by the same name.

**30** For the history of the emergence and fragmentation of Shiism in Nigeria, see Isa and Adam 2017.

**31** Songs in praise of ‘Ali and Fāṭima are a common feature of Sufi popular culture in Nigeria. Especially in Kano, there are many families who claim Prophetic descent (*shurafā’*); they are mostly affiliated with the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, and they are the objects of special veneration in the Sufi circles of the city.

household of the Prophet. As for the Sufis, generally they found respite in the new wave of Salafi-Shiite polemics from decades of straining, and not always successful attempts to defend themselves from Salafi critiques: in the new polemical context, leveraging on the attempts by both Salafis and Shiites to reach out to them as allies, they promoted themselves as the ‘moderate middle way.’ Individually, however, this meant that they oscillated in their responses. At times, especially in the early 2000s, some Sufi leaders made diplomatic moves towards the Shiite IMN,<sup>32</sup> hoping to create a wider strategic front against Salafism. Later on, however, realizing that anti-Shia attitudes were becoming increasingly popular in the grassroots Sunni public opinion, but also that the Federal Government was starting to frame Shiism as a potential security threat comparable to Boko Haram, a clear majority of Sufi scholars joined the dominant choir of anti-Shiite Sunni discourse, and actively contributed to the progressive isolation of Shiism (or at least, of the IMN as the most visible Shiite movement) from ‘mainstream’ Nigerian Islam. By the 2010s, the IMN had come to be widely represented in Nigerian Sunni popular discourse, across Salafis and Sufis, as a pariah.<sup>33</sup>

Contrary to most Sufi groups active in Kano, Abduljabbar’s MAAK came to occupy a decidedly Shia-friendly position. While Abduljabbar did not establish personal links with El-Zakzaky, MAAK actively tried to reach out to the Shiite youth of Kano, to the point that the group has been described as “a trans-*tariqa* activist anti-Salafi movement” that included, besides a Qadiri core and Tijani constituencies, also Shiites.<sup>34</sup>

As a one-man led movement created by a young Sufi scholar who had brusquely severed links with one of the major Sufi lodges in Kano; and being open, in principle, to rally Qadiri, Tijani, non-affiliated, and Shiite youth, MAAK also came to be perceived as an audacious attempt by Abduljabbar to “steal mem-

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**32** In the early 2000s, for instance, the weekly Hausa magazine *Al Mizan*, an official IMN outlet, hosted a regular column by a major Tijani scholar of Kano, Sheikh Yusuf Ali. A collection of *Al Mizan* issues published in 1999 and 2002 is in the possession of the author.

**33** The growth of anti-Shiism in Nigeria, both in popular culture and government policies, was caused by various internal and external factors: diffuse popular concerns around the police-like control that the IMN headquarters exercised over an entire neighbourhood in Zaria City, amplified by the recent memory of the Boko Haram experience in the Gwange quarters of Maiduguri; spread of anti-Shia theological pamphlets from the Middle East; resonance in the Nigerian Muslim public of the Middle Eastern sectarian/geo-political conflict in Syria; and pressure exercised by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the Nigerian political establishment. For an attempt to read the political and theological trajectory followed by anti-Shiism in Nigeria through a historical, contextual analysis of Hausa anti-Shia songs, see Brigaglia and Isa 2020.

**34** Shehu 2017.



bership” from other Sufi orders, and as a disturbance to the harmony that largely characterizes the relationships between the main Sufi families of Kano. As a result, the cordial relationship that Abduljabbar had managed to build with some senior Tijani leaders like Isiyaka Rabiū (d. 2018) and Dahiru Bauchi,<sup>35</sup> gradually shifted to open hostility.<sup>36</sup>

Even more unsettling than these strategic patterns was, arguably, the nature of the religious discourse that Abduljabbar started to articulate in public through MAAK. During his time in Iraq, Abduljabbar was exposed not only to a Shiite-friendly Sunni community, but also to a peculiar perspective on the politico-religious crisis of early Islam. This perspective could be described, in a nutshell, as a boldly anti-Umayyad and pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* version of Sunnism. The latter formula does not refer to a distinct theological school within Sunni Islam, but to a broad array of Sunni religious sources that, in their interpretation of early Islamic history, share with Shiite historians and theologians an openly critical view of the Umayyad dynasty, along with an acknowledgement of the fact that the Prophetic family (*Ahl al-Bayt*) were the victims of Umayyad political persecution. Yet, by stopping short of rejecting the legitimacy of the first three Sunni Caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān) and of developing an organic jurisprudential and theosophical theory of the Imamate as Shiites do, these sources still fall within the scope of historical Sunnism.

The above trend was far from exceptional or marginal in Sunni history, as the founders of the canonical schools of Sunni jurisprudence are all recorded to have espoused these views in a more or less mild form. In Nigeria, pro-*Ahl al-Bayt* sentiments, in principle, could have been part and parcel of a vernacular, mainstream Sunnism, as they are transmitted in the sources of the two most important Sufi orders in the country: as discussed above, in fact, the Qadiriyya claims an Alid-Husayni *silsila* and its founder was a descendant of both Ḥasan (paternally) and Ḥusayn (maternally). As for the Tijaniyya, its founder claimed *Ḥasanī* descent, and is reported as having approved of the ritual curse of Yazīd (d. 683), the sworn enemy of *Ahl al-Bayt* and the veritable founder of the Umayyad dynasty after the death of his father Mu‘āwiya (d. 683).<sup>37</sup> In practice, however, while pietistic forms

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35 As recently as 2009, Dahiru Bauchi and Abduljabbar Kabara were featured, respectively, as guest speaker and co-speaker at a mawlid event in Lagos, see “Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi/ABDULJABBAR MAULID’09 5/14.” Video, 14:59. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9mjDf6Dwds>, accessed December 8, 2023.

36 For details of the growing hostility between Abduljabbar, Rabiū, and Bauchi, see Shehu 2017, 221–23.

37 As reported in the collection of Aḥmad al-Tijānī’s sayings compiled by al-Sufyānī, saying no. 263.

of devotion towards the *Ahl al-Bayt* have always been encouraged in Nigerian Sufism, the dominant attitude has generally been to discourage historical enquiries into (or at least, public discussion of) the political discord between Ḥusayn and Yazīd or, worse, between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya. Having *kyan zato* (good-thinking) of the earlier generations of Muslims is enjoined as a virtue, and delving into issues that might lead to *mummunan zato* (evil-thinking) or worse, *batanci* (insulting) of one of the Prophet’s companions (*sahabbai*), like Mu‘āwiya, or followers (*tabi’ai*), like Yazīd, is considered a grievous sin (*kabīra*).

Abduljabbar’s two *magna opera*, the Arabic treatises *Jawf al-farā* and *Muqad-dimat al-āzifa*, are mainly devoted to a critique of the Umayyads and of what Abduljabbar identifies as their ongoing legacy in Sunni Islam, that is *nāṣibiyya*, “hatred for the Prophet’s descendants.”<sup>38</sup> Argued in countless instances in the two books and in his public lectures, Abduljabbar’s views can be summarized in the following points:

- Contemporary Salafis are the inheritors of the *nāṣibī* attitude of the Umayyads.
- While *nāṣibī* attitudes do not conform to original Sunnism, they are represented in many spurious narrations, transmitted by untrustworthy companions or followers of the Prophet and uncritically accepted in the hadith collections upon which the Sunni canon relies.
- The medieval Damascene scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1324), like no other figure before him, was responsible for resuscitating *nāṣibī* attitudes after their relative decline, and for reshaping Sunnism around them.
- The traditional Sunni attitude of shunning any controversial issue, along with Sunnis’ excessive reliance on fallible Hadith collections like those of Bukhārī and Muslim, had gradually allowed *nāṣibī* views to unconsciously creep in even among Sufis.
- Many of the narrators (like Abū Hurayra) who opposed ‘Alī, also transmitted Hadiths that portray the Prophet in an undignified way; these Hadiths are used today by “Orientalists” (*mustashriqūn*), “Jews” (*yahudawa*), and various “enemies of the Prophet” in the West to belittle Islam.
- Today, Islam has two main enemies: Salafī “extremism” and Western anti-Muslim prejudice; in both cases, these challenges necessitate purging Sunnism from *nāṣibiyya* and its baggage of spuriously crept narrations.

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<sup>38</sup> This meaning of the term *nāṣibī* (literally, a “hater”) has been popularized through centuries of Shiite heresiographical discourses, where it has a function analogous to *rāfiḍī* (“rejecter”) of the legitimacy of the Caliphate of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar in Sunni heresiography.

Questioning the reliability of the canonical Hadith collections thus turned into a recurrent *topos* in Abduljabbar's Islamic discourse. Over the years, Abduljabbar engaged in various open debates (*muqābalāt*) around the reliability of the Hadith corpus with Nigerian Salafi leaders,<sup>39</sup> who often accused him, in their responses, of being a crypto-Shiite. The Tijanis, as well as Abduljabbar's fellow Qadiris, for the most part refused to engage him publicly on the issue. Abduljabbar, however, continued to speak out and, perhaps partly emboldened by the public of his oral lectures, who appeared to be waiting for a new occasion to celebrate a new 'shell' being dropped during one of his lectures, became increasingly provocative in style. In some of his oral lectures, for example, the critiques of some of the Hadith narrators were seasoned with piquant commentaries aimed at ridiculing the Sunni canonical corpus as a whole:

Let me give you another example. It's a story about the Prophet Solomon that we find in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī. The Prophet Solomon – peace be upon him – was totally naked [*zigidir*] in the bathroom, having his bath. Suddenly, a rain of gold started to pour down from the sky, so he started running around, totally naked, trying to catch the gold, holding his vest in his hands so as to catch more gold. When God questioned him for his behaviour, Solomon answered: 'Oh God, how can I let your mercy go to waste?' – and kept running around naked to collect more gold. This is in Bukhārī... it's in Bukhārī, which the scholars consider infallible... when what we see here is only a plain attack on the dignity of a prophet. [In another Hadith] we read that while the Prophet Moses was naked, a stone stole his vest; that he followed the vest – naked! – into the middle of the town, shouting to the stone 'Bring my vest back to me!' – all naked! – and only then, his vest was returned to him, so Moses took the vest and used it to beat the stone. The Hadith goes on to even mention the number of times Moses beat the stone with his vest: it says three, five, or eight. This too is in Bukhārī... I can fill a whole lecture with Hadiths from Bukhārī that, by God, are less reliable than the legend of *Kōki* the Spider.<sup>40</sup> [...] One should just feel ashamed that people can say 'They are part of your religion.' [...] All this nonsense, we have turned it into our religion. We see big-bearded scholars memorizing these fairy tales, and people cheering them: 'Look at the great scholar, look at the knower of religion!' A 'scholar' because of what knowledge? The knowledge of all these fairy tales he has swallowed up in his head!<sup>41</sup>

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**39** For one example available on YouTube, see his 2013 debate with Sheikh Alkasim Hotoro ("Cikakkiyar Muqabala tsakanin Sheikh Alqaasim Bn Umar Hotoro da Abduljabbar Nasiru kabara." Video 1:50:50. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHWyls7DTS8>, accessed December 8, 2023).

**40** *Kōki* the Spider is the protagonist in many popular Hausa legends.

**41** Abduljabbar Kabara, "Tafsir jauful fara 120. Tatsuniyoyin cikin bukhari tareda Sheikh abduljabbar kabara." Video, 36:53. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LqTiqd-AQ>, accessed December 8, 2023.

The transmitters of these Hadiths would often be labelled by Abduljabbar as “terrorists” (*‘yan ta’adda*), while their designation in traditional Sunni Hadith scholarship as *rijāl al-ṣaḥīḥ* (men whose reports are reliable according to the standard of [al-Bukhārī’s] *Ṣaḥīḥ*), would be mocked in Hausa as *rijāl al-sai-wa-daransu* (men who deserve being cursed). Abduljabbar’s rhetoric, simultaneously fiery, fearless, and comic, rapidly contributed to increase the popularity of his lectures, which his public obviously found entertaining, and, at the same time, the outrage of the broader scholarly community of Kano. A deep, unbridgeable rift was thus created between the followers of MAAK and the rest of the Muslims.

## Prelude to the Abduljabbar Trial

Since the early 2000s, *shari‘a* reforms in northern Nigeria have opened up the possibility for State-run courts to issue death sentences for blasphemy, at least to Muslims.<sup>42</sup> Despite this fact, no high-profile blasphemy trial was held in the country for a long while. In 2015, however, an unprecedented blasphemy trial occurred that drew the attention of the national media, in the case of Abdulazeez Dauda, also known as Abdul Inyass, a member of the *‘Yan hakika* sub-branch of the *Fayḍa Tijāniyya*. While the *‘Yan hakika* share with “mainstream” *Fayḍa Tijāniyya* the common devotion to the Senegalese Ibrāhīm Niasse (d. 1975), they have gradually come to be considered as two distinct groups because of their different attitude towards the *shari‘a*. The *‘Yan hakika*, in fact, display some antinomic tendencies, considering the performance of the obligatory rules of Islamic law superfluous for the believer after the attainment of *ma‘rifa* (divine gnosis).<sup>43</sup> Mainstream *Fayḍa Tijāniyya*, on the contrary – many of whose leaders are steeped in the Islamic jurisprudential tradition and often perform important roles in Islamic courts and State-run *shari‘a* commissions – cultivate a combination of exoteric and esoteric knowledge.<sup>44</sup> Shunned and ridiculed by “mainstream *Fayḍa Tijāniyya*,” the

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<sup>42</sup> Christians, on the contrary, are not liable in the current dispensation to be tried for blasphemy by a *shari‘a* court. Contrary to well-known cases in Pakistan, in Nigeria occurrences of violence meted out for blasphemy to Christians have occurred outside of the courts. A recent example is the action of a mob that in Sokoto, lynched Christian student Deborah Samuel (*BBC News* 2022). In the debates that followed, most northern Islamic scholars, across the Salafi-Sufi spectrum, morally justified the unlawful killing, arguing that Muslims were motivated to act by the inability of the current dispensation to prosecute Christian blasphemers.

<sup>43</sup> On the *‘Yan hakika*, see Isa 2022.

<sup>44</sup> See Wright 2015.

'*Yan hakika* are usually left alone, and they have come to constitute a unique sub-culture, occupying a marginal, but safe space in the Islamic landscape of northern Nigeria. However, in May 2015, a recording started circulating through social media in which, speaking at a public function, Abdul Inyass stated that "Ibrāhīm Niase is superior to the Prophet Muḥammad." The man was immediately arrested by the Kano State police, and a long, secretive trial for blasphemy started. Five months later, he was condemned to death for blasphemy.<sup>45</sup>

Islamic scholars unanimously approved the arrest of Abdul Inyass and the verdict that condemned him. For Salafis, it was an opportunity to raise awareness of the dangers deriving from Sufis' excessive devotion to their saints. For Sufis, and especially for the Tijanis, it was a welcome occasion to neatly distance themselves from their "unruly offshoot" and disown them publicly. Abduljabbar, too, publicly supported the verdict. He, however, also seized the opportunity to insist on his broader, long-held argument about the "excesses of some Sufis," developing it for the first time into a direct attack on the Tijaniyya and its leadership. The '*Yan hakika*, he stated, did not emerge from a void, but stemmed from the core esoteric teachings of the *Fayḍa Tijāniyya*. Amid the cheering shouts of his audience, Abduljabbar went on to promise that a new book of his entirely dedicated to the shaming of the Tijanis would be published soon.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, in some of his other lectures (which I have not to date been able to assign a time subsequent to or preceding the Abdul Inyass blasphemy case), Abduljabbar went on to openly belittle the religious legacy of Ibrāhīm Niase and to ridicule his poetry in praise of the Prophet.<sup>47</sup> These statements, delivered in oral lectures but circulated through YouTube and social media, created a definitive fracture between Abduljabbar and the leadership of the Tijaniyya, which in most cases, up to that point, had avoided openly taking sides in the rift between the two sons of the house of Kabara. This fracture added to the existing one between Abduljabbar and his

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<sup>45</sup> *BBC Hausa News* 2016. As of August 2020, Abdul Inyass remained in detention waiting for the Kano State Governor to sign approval of his death sentence.

<sup>46</sup> "Sheikh Abduljabbar nasir kabara Raddi ga yan Haqiqa." Video 3:44. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQFR\\_eqbQAO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQFR_eqbQAO), accessed December 15, 2023; see also "Mummunan zaginda abduljabbar yayima Ibrahim inyas," Video 2:56. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xANTv-rdUg>, accessed December 15, 2023. In August 2020, a similar blasphemy trial would take place in Kano (*BBC News* 2020). On this occasion, the event would resonate strongly among western media and human rights groups. Even in this case, the victim was a young Tijani, and Abduljabbar supported the verdict.

<sup>47</sup> "Sheikh Abduljabbar Akan Yan Addinin Hakika," Video 7:05. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nesJjmr-f4I>, accessed December 15, 2023.

fellow Qadiris, consummated after his split from Qaribullah, and to the one with the Salafis, which had followed his critique of the Hadith corpus.

Increasingly isolated from Nigerian ‘mainstream Sunnism’ in all its various declinations (Salafi, Qadiri, Tijani), Abduljabbar’s image was indirectly damaged by the gradual banishment of the Shiite IMN. This culminated in November 2015, when the Governor of Kaduna State, after a supposedly casual encounter between his convoy and a Shiite procession in the streets of Zaria City, launched a big security operation against the group: hundreds of Shiites were extrajudicially killed, the headquarters of the IMN bulldozed, and the leader of the movement, Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, arrested without trial.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, the Federal Government issued special legislation outlawing the IMN and designating it as a “terrorist organization.”<sup>49</sup>

The silence of the Nigerian Sunni scholarly community around the Government’s repression of the Shiite IMN (and in many cases, their explicit endorsement and praise), suggested that the political and discursive space for the expression of dissenting Islamic voices in Nigeria, once characterized by a vibrant openness, was progressively closing down.<sup>50</sup> Abduljabbar was reportedly wary of the risk of becoming the next possible target. In December 2016, a customary MAAK procession called *zagayen hatuma* (Procession of the Talismans)<sup>51</sup> coincided with a political meeting attended by the President of the Federal Republic, Muhammad Buhari. At one point, the procession encountered the presidential convoy. After the latter allowed the former to pass by, Abduljabbar reportedly stated that “if it were not for the talismans we carry with us today, we would have witnessed a remake of the Zaria events” that had resulted in a massacre of Shiite followers.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See Brigaglia and Isa 2017, 145–47.

<sup>49</sup> *Africa News* 2019.

<sup>50</sup> One significant exception was the senior Tijani leader Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi, who repeatedly called for El-Zakzaky’s release (*Abna24* 2018).

<sup>51</sup> *Zagayen hatuma* is a procession performed in Kano during the month of the Prophetic birth (*mawlid*). From the time Abduljabbar, after the rift with his brother, had discontinued attending the *mawkib* of the Qadiriyya, *Zagayen hatuma* had become the most important ritual occasion to mark the public space of Kano with MAAK’s presence.

<sup>52</sup> Abdullahi Hamisu Shehu, personal communication to author, 5 July 2021.

## The Abduljabbar Blasphemy Debate

Abduljabbar did little to counter the view that MAAK had an affinity with the banned IMN: in 2017, he was visited by an IMN delegation aimed at raising his support to call upon the Federal Government for the release of the incarcerated Shiite leader El-Zakzaky. In September 2020, he sent a goodwill message to the IMN annual conference, calling for El-Zakzaky's release.<sup>53</sup>

In November 2020, he had a golden opportunity to restore his public persona in the eyes of the Nigerian Sunni community, when he was interviewed by *BBC Hausa* for the popular programme, *Ku san malamanku* (Know your 'ulamā'), where Islamic scholars belonging to different theological trends present their life and views to the public. However, on that occasion Abduljabbar made yet another declaration that, with all probability, contributed to sealing his fate:

I used to say I am not a Shiite. But now that my research has deepened, I can see that Shiites have more evidence on their side than Sunnis, so there is no reason to frighten me with this issue anymore. To everyone who says that I am a Shiite, I would first ask 'what is Shiism according to your definition?' And based on his answer, I would answer on my turn. If he says that Shiism is 'insulting the companions,' where did I insult them that you consider me a Shiite? And he would not be able to respond. [...] Now, let me tell you: sound research proves that on 75% of the issues about which there is conflict, the Shiites are correct. All the hundreds of books that surround me are Sunni books, and they prove that. So today, if you called me a Shiite I would not mind. My concern would be to be called a Sunni. That would concern me more. What I mean by that is not the Sunna as such but being considered part of the so-called *Ahl al-Sunna*.<sup>54</sup>

The interview, as it was to be expected and as Abduljabbar himself certainly anticipated, caused a huge uproar on Nigerian Islamic social media. During the following months, the name of Abduljabbar Kabara, the 'crypto-Shiite who had finally come out of *taqiyya*,' was on everyone's tongues and keyboards. In the media tumult around his name, a number of excerpts from his recent public lectures, where he made some of his 'over the top' statements, went viral on social media. While most of these statements touched on followers (like Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya) and companions (like Mu'āwiya and his father Abū Sufyān<sup>55</sup>), according to his

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<sup>53</sup> *Capital Post* 2020.

<sup>54</sup> *BBC Hausa News* 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Abū Sufyān was a chief of the Quraysh and, for most of Prophet Muḥammad's career, one of his worst enemies. When the Muslims conquered Mecca in 630, however, he converted to Islam, so he is considered a companion by the Sunnis. His son Mu'āwiya was nominated by Caliph 'Umar (d. 644) as the Governor of Syria, and would later oppose 'Alī's claim as Caliph, establish-

critics some of them were to be considered abusive towards the Prophet himself. In response to widespread calls to action, in February 2021 the Governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Ganduje, issued an executive order that ruled, for reasons of public security, the immediate closure of all mosques and schools run by MAAK, and a ban on Abduljabbar voicing his “inflammatory preaching” in public.<sup>56</sup>

Abduljabbar, now virtually under house arrest, publicly protested his ban in a new *BBC* interview.<sup>57</sup> It also seemed to him that the moment he had always expected had finally arrived: now, the Kano scholarly community could not continue ignoring him and would have to engage his views. He thus seized the opportunity of the ban on his preaching to release numerous statements where, flaunting coolness and composure, he made calls for a public, open debate (*muqābala*) in which all the contentious points in his preaching would be subjected to scrutiny. Many among the Nigerian scholars originally ignored the call. The content of Abduljabbar’s statements was so undignified towards the Prophet, they argued, that holding a public debate discussing these views would ultimately contribute to the spread of *batanci* (“slander” against the Prophet or his companions); Muslims should, in fact, even stop spreading these statements via social media.<sup>58</sup>

In the meantime, a group of Muslim scholars had submitted a list of nine controversial and/or blasphemous statements made by Abduljabbar, along with partial recordings drawn from his public lectures, to the Kano government. As a result, pressure to allow a public debate continued to mount. The controversial points included the following:<sup>59</sup>

- A discussion of the Hadiths on the Battle of Uḥud contained in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections of Bukhārī and Muslim. In a version transmitted by Anas b. Mālīk, argued Abduljabbar, some details were interpolated that were absent from

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ing an alternative Caliphate in Damascus and nominating his son, Yazīd b. Mu‘āwiya (d. 683), as his successor. When the forces of Yazīd crushed the opposition of ‘Alī’s son (and the Prophet’s grandson) Ḥusayn in Karbala (10 October 680), the Umayyad Caliphate was definitively established.

<sup>56</sup> Shuaibu 2021.

<sup>57</sup> *BBC Hausa News* 2021a.

<sup>58</sup> For the recording of a statement to this effect issued by the Tijani Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi on 6 March 2021, see “Sheikh Dahiru Bauchi Yayiwa ABDULJABBAR Fata Fata Akan Wauta Da Yayi A Janibin Annabi Da Nasiha.” Video, 16:24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAMoVdwLkmM>, accessed December 8, 2023.

<sup>59</sup> The full debate is available on YouTube in eight parts, under the title “MUQABALA | ABDULJABBAR TARE DA MALAMAI” (link to Part 1, video, 26:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufh5wgI31DA>, accessed December 8, 2023).



the ‘original’ versions of the Hadith. These details described the heroism of a companion named Ṭalḥa b. ‘Ubayd Allāh in such a way that the latter appeared braver than the Prophet himself. These stories, added Abduljabbar, served the purpose of “elevating the government (*gwamnati*) of Ṭalḥa and destroying the Prophet’s government.” Ṭalḥa, the protagonist of these Hadiths, had fought against ‘Alī at the famous Battle of the Camel (656): the stories that had him fighting heroically in Uḥud were, Abduljabbar argued, a mere attempt to buttress the case of his camp against ‘Alī’s. Moreover, he added, at the time of Uḥud Anas b. Mālīk was only four years old, so the veracity of his witnessing the event should be questioned. Abduljabbar’s statement, argued the Kano scholars, was a defamation (*batanci*) of the Prophet’s companions.

- A discussion of the famous “Hadith of pen and paper,” according to which the Prophet had wished to release a written testament before his death but was prevented from doing so by ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Although the incident is narrated in Sunni sources, Shiite ones interpret it to suggest that on the occasion, the Prophet had wished to nominate ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib as his successor. Abduljabbar, in his discussion, did not provide a clear-cut opinion about what exactly, in his views, was contained in the Prophet’s testament. However, he did suggest that the event proved that ‘Umar was fallible and described the latter’s decision as “the worst calamity (*musiba*) in the history of Islam,” without which “all the chaos (*fitna*) that has been experienced by the early Muslim community” would not have occurred. This statement amounted to a defamation of ‘Umar according to Abduljabbar’s critics.
- A critique of a Hadith (no. 13,424 in the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal; also reported by al-Bayhaqī and other sources) narrated by Anas b. Mālīk from Mughīra b. Shu‘ba, quoted by Abduljabbar during his lectures on the book *Jawf al-farā* (lecture 84) and described by him as a “dirty Hadith” (*hadisi kazami*). In this Hadith, Anas reports that the Prophet used to send Anas’ mother, Umm Sulaym, to examine the private parts of the women he (the Prophet) intended to marry. In some of the narrations, Abduljabbar added in his lectures, Umm Sulaym was even instructed by the Prophet to “taste the mouth” of the suitable women by kissing them. In Abduljabbar’s interpretation, these Hadiths, which attribute to the Prophet the “habits of the *Jāhiliyya*” (the culture of the Arabs before Islam) and that today, are quoted by anti-Muslim authors who want to belittle Islam, were forged by Anas b. Mālīk to suggest a special intimacy between his family and the Prophet. Besides being defaming of a companion, these statements, the Kano scholars argued, also bordered on blasphemy against the Prophet.

- A critique of the many Hadiths, also narrated by Anas b. Mālik and appearing in various forms in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim and other Sunni sources, concerning the marriage between the Prophet and Ṣafīyya bint Ḥuyayy after the Battle of Khaybar. In an oral lecture, discussing the reports (whose validity he rejected) of the circumstances of the wedding, Abduljabbar claimed that they described this wedding as a form of “forced marriage” (*kwace*) and “rape” (*fyade*). In the same lecture, Abduljabbar also criticized as inauthentic and belittling to the dignity of the Prophet other Hadiths according to which, in a playful encounter between the Prophet and a man of Medina, the two kissed each other. Abduljabbar’s depiction of these Hadiths, argued the Kano scholars, should be considered blasphemous towards the Prophet.
- A critique of another Hadith, also narrated by Anas b. Mālik and relayed in Ibn Ḥanbal’s *Musnad* and in Bukhārī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ*, according to which, during the battle of Khaybar, Anas saw the “whiteness of the Prophet’s thigh.” The contentious aspect of this narration is that in Islamic jurisprudence, the thigh is considered part of a man’s *‘awra* (private parts), which should always remain covered in public. For Abduljabbar, this Hadith too was interpolated by Anas to claim a special intimacy with the Prophet, which was unacceptable as it degraded the latter’s dignity. For his opponents, on the contrary, it was only Abduljabbar’s discussion of the Hadith that had a slanderous and blasphemous effect.
- A critique of another Hadith (*Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī, book 67: Hadith 103), also narrated by Anas b. Mālik, according to which the Prophet engaged in sexual intercourse with all his wives, one after another, in the same night. Abduljabbar questioned how Anas could have this information, for it did not befit the Prophet’s dignity to reveal such aspects of his intimate life. The especially controversial aspect of Abduljabbar’s views, in this case, was not his rejection of the Hadith per se, but his comment that a Hadith of this kind is unacceptable because it portrays the Prophet as a *bunsuru* (a billy-goat, in Hausa is a symbol of unrestrained male sexuality). This grossly vulgar statement was, the accusers argued, another instance of blasphemy.
- A critique of another Hadith, this time narrated by Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh and reported in the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd (variations of which also appear in the collections of Muslim, Tirmidhī, and Ibn Ḥanbal), according to which, when the Prophet saw a woman in Medina, he rushed to have sexual intercourse with his wife Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. The controversial statement, like the one above, was that in attempting to ridicule this Hadith, Abduljabbar had argued that it portrayed the Prophet as a ‘womanizer,’ considered to be another unacceptable blasphemy.

The public debate, originally scheduled by the Kano government for March 2021,<sup>60</sup> was postponed several times, until it was finally held on Saturday 10 July 2021. After accepting the invitation with an official letter dated 8 July, Abduljabbar continued to flaunt his confidence, posting pictures of himself on social media surrounded by 300 books that, he claimed, would support his arguments during the debate. On the day of the debate, Abduljabbar faced a panel of scholars representing the major Islamic trends in Kano: representing the Qadiriyya, Sheikh Mas'ud b. Mas'ud Hotoro; representing the Tijaniyya, Sheikh Abubakar Mai Madatai; representing Izala, Sheikh Kabiru Bashir Kofar Wambai; and representing the Salafiyya (a generic term indicating Salafi scholars not affiliated with Izala), Sheikh Muhammad Rabiu Umar Rijiyar Lemo. The debate was to take place at the Kano State *Shari'a* Commission and to be moderated by Bayero University Kano Professor of Education (and deputy secretary of Nigeria's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs), Salisu Shehu, a Salafi-oriented but unaffiliated intellectual. For each of the nine topics under discussion, a maximum of five minutes would be allotted for the panel's questions to Abduljabbar, and 30 minutes for discussion, divided as follows: ten minutes for Abduljabbar's first answer; ten minutes for the panel to respond; five more minutes for Abduljabbar; and finally, five more minutes for a final response by the panellists.

The debate lasted over four hours and resulted, on the whole, in defeat for Abduljabbar. Often appearing unusually hesitant and intimidated, the fiery scholar that in front of his own students, had delivered some of the most vigorous performances of the *radd* (Islamic scholarly refutation) genre that had been ever witnessed in Nigeria, suddenly appeared powerless, wasting the minutes allotted to him in complaints about the impossibility of exhausting, in a few minutes, a debate that required the analysis of several versions of the same Hadiths reported in various sources. Towards the end of the debate, Abduljabbar asked for a second round, and accused the sitting of being vitiated by the bias of the Chair, Prof. Salisu Shehu, in favour of his opponents:

All the statements I am accused of, I am only exonerating the Prophet – may God's blessing and peace be upon him – from them. I require that a new date be fixed so that we may discuss again with these scholars to fully present the picture. [...] All the things I am saying, I am saying them in order to purge [the Hadith corpus] from the lies that have been reported about the Prophet. If this sitting had been held in sincerity, I would have been given sufficient time to debate. Ten minutes is not enough to expound on all the books that I have brought with me. [...] I should also have been allowed to be partnered with someone in my

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60 BBC Hausa News 2021b.

favour, but then I saw that the ‘judge’ [*alkali*] of the debate was someone who is known to support the views of those I am debating against.

On the following day, an official communiqué signed by the moderator of the debate stated the following:

[The debate was held after] persistent public outcry and written complaints from concerned majority segment of the Ulama in the state on the manner exhibited and statements being made by Abduljabbar Nasir Kabara in his preaching, lectures and writings regarding Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), his companions and some notable Islamic scholars of high repute, which are considered disrespectful, sacrilegious and inciting, [...] with a total of six question-and-answer sessions with an equal allocation of time to both sides. The main questions by the representatives of the Ulama revolved around the use of vulgar, inappropriate and defamatory language which Abduljabbar Nasir Kabara was accused of in his teachings, summons and preaching.<sup>61</sup>

According to the communiqué, although audio recordings were played of such statements, and the question was posed to Abduljabbar to show where he had sourced the reports from authentic books, the latter had ended up “avoiding the questions or issues raised” and “introducing unrelated issues.” In conclusion, “all the hadith Abduljabbar Nasir Kabara quoted were found to be wrongly translated and interpreted while some were weak” and “none of the representatives of the Coalition of the Ulama were satisfied with the responses by Abduljabbar Nasir Kabara.”<sup>62</sup> For the panel, the fact that words like ‘billy-goat’ and ‘womanizer,’ were used by Abduljabbar in reference to the Prophet, but were never to be found in the texts of the Hadiths discussed by him, was sufficient evidence that the latter had concocted them; thus, the responsibility of proffering them as blasphemous insults to the Prophet fell back on him, and not on the Hadiths he hoped to be critiquing.<sup>63</sup>

The following Friday, 16 July 2021, the Kano government ordered the arrest of Abduljabbar on account of “blasphemy, incitement and sundry offences” made during his lectures dated 10 August, 25 October, and 20 December 2019. During the first hearing on the issue, the Upper *Shari‘a* Court of Kofar Kudu, Kano, remanded him in prison,<sup>64</sup> initiating a trial that ended only on 15 December 2022,

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<sup>61</sup> Giginyu and Shu’aibu 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Giginyu and Shu’aibu 2021.

<sup>63</sup> See the comments by Muhammad Sani Umar Rijiyar Lemo, a member of the panel, in “Cikin Huduba Dr. Sani ya yi tsokaci kan hukuncin da Alkali Sarki Yola ya yankewa Abduljabbara.” Video, 6:44. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPYnWcxgZUC>, accessed December 15, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Adesina 2021.

when Judge Ibrahim Sarkin Yola, based on section 382 of the Kano State *Shari‘a* Penal Code, delivered the court’s sentence of death by hanging for blasphemy.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

The blasphemy debate was widely praised by the northern Nigerian Sunni public as the definitive capitulation of Aduljabbar. Among the top Nigerian Muslim scholars, only the imam of the National Mosque in Abuja, Sheikh Ibrahim Makari, tried to issue a mild statement of seeming discomfort, arguing that while Aduljabbar was guilty of a “grave sin,” his statements, issued in ignorance and without slanderous intent, did not amount to outright blasphemy.<sup>66</sup> Openly supporting Aduljabbar, remained his full brothers Ibrahim Mu‘azzam, Kasyuni, Askiya, Yahya, and Aburumana, who, along with their sisters, issued an open letter to the president of Nigeria that requested his office to intervene directly in the matter. Their brother, they claimed, had been “persecuted by some clerics in Kano who harbour personal and unfounded grudges” against him, and who “unjustifiably manipulated our brother’s recorded preachings and falsely accuse him of blasphemous statements against the personality of the holy Prophet of Islam.”<sup>67</sup> Besides them, only the Shiite IMN – which, as discussed, had already come to be treated as outlaws in the country – issued public statements in support of Aduljabbar.<sup>68</sup>

As this chapter has tried to show, a purely sociological model is insufficient for explaining the rifts in the Kano Qadiriyya following the death of Sheikh Nasiru Kabara. It is only, in fact, by taking seriously Aduljabbar’s discursive engagement with the Sunni tradition, that the drama of a trajectory that started as a revivalist project and ended in a blasphemy trial can be understood to the fullest. In Talal Asad’s definition,

A tradition consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has

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<sup>65</sup> Zango 2022.

<sup>66</sup> “maganar #Prof #maqari akan muqabalar ABDULJABBAR.” Video, 24:55. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I9ezRhM4oYg>, accessed December 15, 2023.

<sup>67</sup> Majmū‘at Abnā‘al-Sheikh Muḥammad al-Nāṣir al-Kabarī (Union of the Sons of Sheikh Muḥammad Nasiru Kabara), “Open letter to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.” The text has circulated on social media. See also *Muryar ‘Yanci* 2021.

<sup>68</sup> *Sahara Reporters* 2021. Already in February, when Aduljabbar had been banned from preaching, the IMN issued a statement in his support, *Hutudole* 2021.

a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a *past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a *future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a *present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions).<sup>69</sup>

Abduljabbar's saga started as an attempt to carefully redraft the Sunni tradition through a thorough critical engagement with its collective past (narrations of early Umayyad history), its present (renegotiation of sectarian boundaries with Shiism), and its imagined future (purging the tradition from the cumbrous legacy of stories interpolated by 'fanatical' followers of the Umayyads, so as to build a community that would be stronger in the face of internal and external opponents). As Abduljabbar's discourse came to inescapably touch on the sacred symbol of the 'seven authentic' collections of Sunni Hadith, however, the space for his vision to be articulated publicly started progressively closing down, and the perception that his revivalist project was bound to *destroy* the tradition from within, gradually increased in the community around him. To make things worse, northern Nigerian Sunni discourses had started to move in a direction that was diametrically opposed to the one advocated by Abduljabbar: as demonstrated by the Zaria events of November 2015 and by the following reaction of the '*ulamā*', in fact, excluding Shiism altogether from the tradition so as to defend the corporate interests of the Sunnis across the Sufi-Salafi divide, was presented in the public sphere as a political and religious priority, for the purity of Islam and for the security of the Nigerian state. Perhaps under the illusion that, as a scion of the "*Qutb* of Kano" Nasiru Kabara, Abduljabbar would remain untouched; or maybe, induced to become more confrontational by the enthusiasm of the MAAK crowd that attended his lectures; or even, simply influenced by his unrestrained personal character, over the years Abduljabbar responded to the negative effects of his preaching by harshening the tones of his lectures and creating more enemies for himself, until he remained virtually alone, alienated from all but his loyal followers. In insisting that many canonical Hadiths portrayed the Prophet in an unsuitable way, Abduljabbar probably had a point, in principle; but his indulgence in voicing his views in a language that sounded, in turn, like a vulgar form of belittling, ultimately laid the foundations for the accusation of blasphemy.

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<sup>69</sup> Asad 2009, 20.

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Lisa Maria Franke

# Alternatives to Conveying Religious Knowledge

Islamic Influencers – Insights from Egypt

## Introduction

Academic research on Islam in Egypt often focuses on the entanglement of religion and politics, mostly analyzed with regard to public spaces. This article seeks to nuance the focus on pious activism and the idea that Islam dominates everyday life in Egypt, by drawing on the example of the Islamic television guide, Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, and taking the impact of his spiritual messages into consideration.<sup>1</sup> My research on individual pieties, on being religious and *doing* being religious, has opened up the worlds of individuals who are different; different in the sense that they seek inspiration from religious teleguides as influencers. These individuals have stopped going to their local mosques on Fridays for various reasons. These reasons are part of the hypotheses that Roman Loimeier and his team analyzed explicitly during the work on the European Research Council Advanced Grant “Private Pieties: Mundane Islam and New Forms of Muslim Religiosity: Impact on Contemporary Social and Political Dynamics” between 2016–22 at the University of Göttingen. Drawing on fieldwork with young Alexandrians, this contribution considers how their spirituality is influenced by public religious figures such as Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, who incorporate the everyday life experiences of ordinary Muslims into their interpretation of Islamic sources. Being one of several Islamic influencers in Egypt Ḥusnī focuses on religious education, but also on education for and advice in everyday life practices. He is a well-known presence on television and social media, and he also publishes books, especially guidebooks and other written material. In his writings he highlights the importance of striving for balance in one’s life and one’s belief. His self-marketing is one of his keys to success and the reason for his many disciples and consumers of his work.

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<sup>1</sup> This contribution has been greatly inspired by Roman’s mentorship and is thus situated in the realm of his own research within the context of religious reform, processes of religious transformation and challenging authorities. Parts of this chapter are based on an earlier version of the article, see Franke 2023.

Since the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (also referred to as the 25 January revolution), understandings of Islam have undergone efficacious changes in the country and beyond. The ousting of President Hosni Mubarak was followed by the election of the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohammed Morsi, whose presidency has greatly affected the way Islam is perceived. Restrictions imposed during Morsi's rule in the name of religion, such as the closure of cinemas, resulted in disappointment in the 'Islamization project' of his regime.<sup>2</sup> In the direct aftermath of the revolution, public debates over religiosity ensued and an unprecedented momentum of political and religious plurality gave rise to a wide array of movements and political factions in the public sphere.<sup>3</sup> This in turn resulted in a re-positioning and questioning of political and religious authorities. For many individuals this also included reconsidering their religious identities. As Khaled Fahmy states in his reflection on the downfall of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013: "Egyptian society finds itself, confronting and raising [...] very, very deep questions [...]. [W]hat to do with Islam? What is the proper position of [...] Islam [...]?"<sup>4</sup> While Fahmy's assertion holds true for larger political debates, in this article, I examine how these questions have impacted the positioning of public religious figures, such as Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī. In addition, I consider how his teachings and the impulse for change effectively set in motion a process of individualization. Many Egyptians whom I spoke with expressed the need for such changes and to form their own opinions and develop their positions. More generally: What mechanisms and strategies do religious influencers employ to deal with current social dynamics and processes of individualization and requests for alternative religious guidance?

The change in power from Mohammed Morsi to President Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi in 2013 was characterized by further social restrictions in an attempt to limit the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood. In particular, public religious spaces such as mosques were regulated.<sup>5</sup> In response, my initial, heuristic questions were: Why have some Egyptians stopped going to the mosque, and what does this apparent disenchantment with public religion symbolize?<sup>6</sup> How do the daily lives of those who do not follow mainstream Islam look? These questions led to others about the influence of public religious figures and their power over the individual's

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Haenni 2016; El Esrawi 2019; Brown 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Haenni 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Fahmy 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bano and Benadi 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Franke 2021b.

negotiation of intimate religiosities: What role do public religious figures<sup>7</sup> play in processes of negotiating one's religious identity, and how do they create and design religious knowledge accordingly? What is unique about Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, and how can the attraction of his teachings be assessed or explained? What is the content of his spiritual message and why do many believers follow his guidance?

The turmoil of the revolution and its aftermath have been meticulously described and analyzed by various scholars.<sup>8</sup> Mona Abaza in particular highlighted how young individuals searching for identities have been torn between agency and passivity since the revolution.<sup>9</sup> She identifies insecurities, generational differences, and misunderstandings in terms of values and appreciation amid dystopian environments. This article expands on the existing academic scholarship by dealing with searches for identity among young Egyptians; taking this a step further by adding the dimension of the public religious figure Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī and his teachings to the analysis.

This research on individual pieties, being religious, and *doing* being religious produced insights into the worlds of individual believers and their sources of spirituality. The case of Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, especially in the latter respect should be emphasized since he and his programs have been referred to by many of my interlocutors as a source of spiritual inspiration and guidance. During the years 2016–19, I lived in Alexandria, where I carried out ethnographic research. The following analysis and findings are based on the interviews I conducted as part of this project. In addition to public figures such as Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, I examined those voices that hinted at tendencies distinct from mainstream Islam, which express alternative spiritual options and different versions of belief.<sup>10</sup> My primary sources consist of qualitative, individual interviews and group discussions, participative observation, and written, audio, and visual sources of Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī in Arabic (leaflets, 'grey literature', websites, books, TV and radio broadcasting programs, and social media). I also consulted the Quran and Hadith to follow up with the religious references made by Ḥusnī and my interlocutors. I conducted interviews with Muslim Egyptians who consider themselves to be 'different' in terms of mainstream religiosity and social expectations. All their names have been anonymized and personal details have been changed. I spoke with both men and women aged 15–75, some of whom participated in the 25 January revolution.<sup>11</sup> All are Alex-

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<sup>7</sup> See Brown 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Saad 2012; Fahmy, Boutaleb and El Chazli 2019; Schielke 2015; Abaza 2012; Abaza 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Abaza 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Winegar 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mehrez 2012.

andrians from middle class milieus with high school and/or university degrees. Alexandria formed the centre for my research; having myself grown up in Alexandria, I was reliant upon, and grateful for, my social network there. In addition, Alexandria is a vibrant city with diverse, heterogeneous religious milieus, such as Sunni, Coptic, Sufi, and Salafi communities.

## Performing Religiosity

Looking at the case of Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī it becomes clear that his success is built around his public personality, his message, and his performance. He focuses on individual spiritual development and well-being by offering transparent and trustworthy services and religious content. At the same time, the relationship between the person, namely Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, and the religion, i.e. Islam, is meandering in his public presentation and re-presentation. This fluidity is exemplary of how the person himself incorporates and conveys a religious message by means of his public personality and performativity. Thus, Ḥusnī's success necessarily consists of the religious message that he conveys, of himself as model believer, and of the products and interactions that he creates to communicate with his audience. He serves both the majority and individuals, entreating them to stay on the religious path or to take it up; and consequently live a religiously conforming life according to those Islamic principles that he preaches, explains, and invites his audience to include in their everyday life routines. According to his writings, he aims at making Islam visible and interesting, especially to modern, young (upper-)middle class milieu generations of Egyptians. The intention is to increase their spirituality and to harmonize society by focussing on concepts of love and religiosity in interpersonal relationships with the aim of encouraging individuals, communities, and societies to engage in peaceful and appreciative social interaction.<sup>12</sup>

## Who is Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī?

Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī was born in Egypt on 28 August 1978. He is a graduate of Ain Shams University in Cairo and obtained his BA degree in Business in 2000.<sup>13</sup> After

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<sup>12</sup> See Ḥusnī 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wikipedia, accessed March 15, 2021.

leaving his career in commerce to becoming a preacher of Islam, he took courses at the *Ma'had i'dād al-du'ā'* (Institute of training preachers) in Cairo to receive certification to legally teach the principles of Islam to the public. The institute is part of *Wizārat al-auqāf* (the Egyptian Ministry of Awqaf) and an official training institution for religious content structured around Sunni Islam.

Ḥusnī hosts regular sessions and call-in programmes on different Egyptian television channels, among them *Iqra'* and *On E*, which are available worldwide via satellite. He not only hosts these programmes as a religious teleguide, but he is also the producer. His weekly programme on the *Iqra'* channel is broadcasted every Friday. Other than programmes on television, Ḥusnī is also present on the radio. For example, he hosts a radio programme on *Nujuum FM*, called '*Aysh al-lahza* (Live the Moment). During the holy month of Ramadan, Ḥusnī broadcasts special seasonal programmes on television and radio.

Apart from his media presence on more than 13 television and radio programmes, Ḥusnī also preaches and lectures at different mosques in Cairo, such as Masjid Yūsuf al-Ṣaḥābī in Hejaz Square in Heliopolis, and Masjid al-Ḥuṣārī in 6<sup>th</sup> of October City. These weekly lessons take place every Wednesday after *Ṣalāt al-maghrib* (sunset prayer) in summer. In winter he lectures on Wednesdays after *Ṣalāt al-‘ishā'* (night prayer). The lectures are delivered under the title *Al-Ḥadīth al-Qudsī* and focus on conveying religious content with advice for everyday life.<sup>14</sup> At Masjid Bilāl ibn Rabāh in Moqattam, he delivers the *khutba* (sermon) during Friday prayers twice a month.

In addition to preaching in mosques, Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī is a writer and the author of numerous books. Some of his books are transcripts of his lectures or broadcasting programmes, while others are new and independent manuscripts. All of these books have in common that they highlight the name of the author in large letters and include his picture on the cover. The book titles range from *Al-kanz al-mafqūd* (The Hidden/Lost Treasure), *Risāla min Allāh* (A Message from God) and *Qiṣṣat ḥubb* (Love Story) to *Siḥr al-dunyā* (The Magic/Enchantment of the World). The titles hint at the content, which typically deals with the entanglement of religious and mundane tasks.

As noted, Ḥusnī is a public personality, a writer, and a religious guide and leader. However, his activities are not limited to established broadcast media and written sources, he also maintains a presence on social media.<sup>15</sup> Here, his activities are broad and encompass networks such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Insta-

<sup>14</sup> These are the sayings directly attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad and thus represent a special category of Hadith.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Hirschkind 2012; Kazi 2016.

gram and SoundCloud. With almost 57 million followers across these platforms, and 4.67 million on YouTube, his social media presence is noteworthy. Up to early 2021, his YouTube video lectures have received more than 287 million views.<sup>16</sup>

While his media presence continues to grow, with rising numbers of clicks, listeners, and viewers, especially on social media, Ḥusnī has also faced problems and complaints by his opponents. In June 2020, he was accused of being a supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood in a complaint submitted by an Egyptian lawyer to the Egyptian Public Prosecutor and the State Security Prosecution. The complaint claimed that Ḥusnī was opposed to the current political leadership, indicated by his support of the Muslim Brotherhood. This accusation was based on a tweet posted by Ḥusnī, stated in Egyptian Arabic: “In times of (mental) chaos only mingle with your close beloved ones. And do not mingle with the (mental) groups because they may lead you to wrong/prevent you from the right path. Don’t get influenced by the majority.”<sup>17</sup> However, following the complaint, he did not face any legal charges or consequences.

Despite this incident, Ḥusnī remains a popular religious figure who captivates a large audience not only in Egypt but also worldwide. His lectures and preaching are popular, and often cited in everyday conversations, as I noticed during my field research. In addition, Ḥusnī participates in social activities and hosts various charity events; he is also the Director of the ‘Umar al-al-aṛḍ Charity Foundation for Human Development. He also offers special services to his community, such as selling smartphone mobile apps for Quran recitations. To connect with his audience directly and to interact with participants, he regularly invites individuals, both adults and children, to various competitions, ranging in purpose from preaching to Quran recitation.<sup>18</sup> These competitions are public events and encourage active participation of his followers. Other public events, such as public performances and rallies, are also part of Ḥusnī’s agenda and transform his virtual character into a real person, who is available and visible beyond the screen.

It is striking that Ḥusnī is a religious teleguide who combines global religious trends with local social transformations. The latter are closely linked to global processes of individualization and an increasing use and consumption of social media. “Imagined communities” – to borrow the term from Benedict Anderson –

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<sup>16</sup> See *The Muslim* 500, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Wikipedia, accessed March 15, 2021, translated from Arabic by the author.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ismail 2020.

throughout the past decade have been transferred from public or private spaces to virtual spaces in the digital realm.<sup>19</sup> According to Mohamed Ismail,

Hosni's discourse represents a local form of Islam that takes into consideration globalization and the reconciliation of dissonant hybrid identities by neglecting the traditional Islamic meta-narratives concentrating on the mini-narratives that achieve salvation and self-help.<sup>20</sup>

Ḥusnī has transformed himself into a role model that displays various religious, social, and individual layers. While he does not publicize his private life, political opinions, or a specific religious direction, he propagates a model of a lived religion and religious vitality to be practiced by individuals. He calls for individuals to become agents in their intimate ability to create and modify religion. Ḥusnī claims that religion is not only defined by the authorities – although he is not explicitly against authorities – yet the disenchantment with public religion can only be met by enchanting the religious in the intimate space of the individual.<sup>21</sup>

Ḥusnī's embodiment of the mundane is visible in his appearance. In public, he often wears a button-up shirt sometimes combined with a jacket, dark trousers, and a watch on his wrist.<sup>22</sup> His beard is short and closely trimmed, and he usually smiles, making direct eye contact with the camera. He looks neat, fresh, healthy and happy. This appearance, which incorporates an idealized version of himself as an open minded, (enchanted) modern Muslim is a crucial element in his success. In line with conveying a flexible and modern religious message, he provides access to Islam through various media, thus making religion available to everyone at any time. Accessibility, according to Ḥusnī, is considered key if religion is to be part of everyday life.

Yet not everyone I talked to during my field research was fond of his programmes or his public image. Amira for example, an unemployed 49-year-old mother of two children, who lives in a middle-class area of Alexandria stated:

Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī is very popular among so many people. Everyone likes him. They like how he speaks, the topics he discusses, that he only talks about life and Islam and not about politics. I don't like him. I think he is fake. To me, it doesn't feel real or authentic what he says. And this sleek appearance, always happy and although he tries to be on the same level as us, I have the feeling that he thinks to be better than us. And I don't like that. We should listen to God and to our hearts and not some self-made sheikh who is not qualified to teach

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Anderson 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Ismail 2020, 146.

<sup>21</sup> See Weber 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ḥusnī 2020.



us how to be religious. This is my opinion. What I can see is the big business that he created around his figure, that he is a businessman selling his soul for his own profit. How can this be religiously accepted?<sup>23</sup>

From the perspective of consumption in the context of religious information and material, Ḥusnī tries to combine the image of a role model with selling Islam. To be precise, this selling of Islam is actually the marketing of selected aspects of Islam. These aspects suit the multifaceted religious identities of his audience, who are heterogeneous and diverse in terms of age, profession, relation to God (i.e. Islam), experience in practicing religion, gender, marriage status, and area of living.

## Success Beyond Religious Normativity

Interestingly, Ḥusnī, as well as other religious guides, are often called, in the academia of the Global North, televangelists or television preachers. I do not favour these terms in the context of Islam, since they both come from Christian backgrounds.<sup>24</sup> From an emic perspective these guides are sheikhs or *shuyūkh*; for pragmatic translation reasons I will use the term religious guide, religious teleguide, or religious influencer.

The strategies of these religious teleguides go far beyond the religious content that they aim to convey. According to Yasmin Moll:

At the same time, the success of the televangelists' own shows increasingly relies on their ability to navigate between, and capitalize on, different genres and forms of media that go beyond any conventional boundaries of the 'religious' or even the specifically 'Islamic'.<sup>25</sup>

Here, she points out how popular music is employed in the trailers and opening sequences of the television shows, which gives the impression that they mimic music videos. Ḥusnī's show *Al-kanz al-mafqūd* (The Hidden/Lost Treasure) for example, includes the well-known voice of Mohamed Fouad, a popular Egyptian singer.<sup>26</sup> Noteworthy is that the profane song vocalized by Mohamed Fouad is not perceived as inconsistent to the religious teachings of Ḥusnī. On the contrary, in

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with author, Alexandria, May 23, 2021. All quotes from interviews have been translated by the author.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Moll 2010b.

<sup>25</sup> Moll 2010a.

<sup>26</sup> See Moll 2010a.

combination, the song and the lecture are perceived to mutually affect each other and thereby intensify the message.<sup>27</sup>

This is exactly Ḥusnī's aim: to establish himself as a role model who triggers a natural emotion in his followers in the sense that religion, i.e. Islam, is on the same level as everyday life expectations and requirements.<sup>28</sup> The idea here is not a fixed entity but something that oscillates between the person and the religion, and which resembles the fluid character of Ḥusnī's success. It is thus not surprising that profane music is played at the opening sequences, which is part of the strategic intention. During my field work in Alexandria, I came across a popular life-work-religion-balance approach employed by many practicing and believing Muslims who are searching for an ecological, 'green' version of Islam compatible with intimate notions of well-being, a phenomenon that I call 'organic Islam.'<sup>29</sup> Ḥusnī treads a similar path: focusing on spirituality over normative aspects of Islam, in response to the voices and needs of its followers, who are, as stated above, often young, educated, and belong to middle-class milieus.<sup>30</sup> These voices can be found on social media where they express their needs, asking mostly for inspiration, guidance, about how Islam can be maintained and practiced, and about the meaning of life.<sup>31</sup> Thus, innovation, and being aware of trends and future developments, are key aspects of the image Ḥusnī wants to convey.<sup>32</sup> By interacting with his followers, he is able to perceive their needs and requests and respond to them with a hybridized or entangled personal, religious brand with which they can identify.<sup>33</sup> The relation between him and his public has become a natural, dynamic process of mutual inspiration. The transformative power, in the sense of transforming oneself by becoming more religious, was palpable during many of the interviews I conducted in Egypt. These interlocutors for instance referred to Ḥusnī as an example of how Islam should be discussed, taught, and portrayed in public. They expressed their pride in him from a nationalist perspective as fellow Egyptians, often adding that more religious guides should follow his example. As Dalia, one of my interlocutors, stated, the importance lies in the combination of the content and the wrapping of the message (in a Hendrian way).<sup>34</sup>

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**27** See Moll 2010a.

**28** Cf. Kreil 2006; Lewis 2010.

**29** Cf. Franke 2021a.

**30** Cf. Echchaibi 2011.

**31** Ryder 2003, 352.

**32** See Wise 2003; Winegar 2008.

**33** Cf. Ryder 2003.

**34** Hendry 1993.

Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī is not a sheikh like the others that we know. He is dressed normally, and he speaks our language [Egyptian Arabic], he talks about everyday life, issues that concern us as teenagers, young adults, and family persons. It is a lot about relationships with others. And it is also about how we can remain spiritual in an Islamic sense in our hectic lives that are dominated by work, family and commuting. His unique ability is to remain calm and not shout during his shows, to use examples from his own environment, to take us seriously and not treat us like little stupid children. We feel understood and valued even in our imperfections and failures. And he also conveys the message of the holy Quran in an understandable way, it is not just about citing and referencing, he gives illustrative examples and how the times of our prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, can be understood and incorporated in our everyday lives today. It is not that I am a regular follower, but I understand how he reaches out at us and how this makes a difference for many of us who are struggling with Islam. Not because they doubt, but because our lives have become so busy and we often do not make enough time for our belief. Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī helps us to be practicing Muslims no matter how crazy our schedules have become.<sup>35</sup>

Dalia hinted in her account at a goal that many of my interlocutors had – a balanced life, which is in line with Islamic norms and at the same time leaves enough space for personal interpretation and creativity: a life-religion-balance, similar to the work-life-balance approach mentioned above.<sup>36</sup>

## **Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī in the Tradition of Islamic Religious Scholars: Networks, Digital Islam and the Transmission of Modern Islamic Thinking**

Ḥusnī is of course not a singular phenomenon of Egyptian teleguides. He follows the tradition of Islamic scholars who apply modern technologies in their outreach. Regarding the case of Egypt, ‘Amr Khālīd was one of the first popular persons who used television programmes for their mission to convey the message of Islam to the people. Previously, since the invention of the radio in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century, radio programmes, alongside the much older format of books and lectures, were the primary methods for spreading religious knowledge. Although television devices and programmes quickly became popular following their introduction into mainstream media in the 1950s, it was only in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that they became part of most middle-class households in Egypt. The popularity and influence of modern Islamic scholars is thus closely tied to

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with author, Alexandria, June 18, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> See Franke 2021a.

the development of media technology. More recently, since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the internet became important as a platform for communication and (re-)presentation of religious figures.

## **Surrounded with Emotions, Love, Compassion: Spiritual and Religious Content**

My analysis of the content of Ḥusnī's sermons, shows, social media posts, and books is in line with most of my interlocutors' impressions, who stated for example, that they notice "a focus on relationships," as Dalia put it. More generally, a focus on emotions, especially on love and compassion can be identified. Ḥusnī takes the individual into consideration and highlights that one should aim at 'higher' results in social relationships.<sup>37</sup> He advises his followers to maintain a religious (which ideally evolves into a pious) mindset by practicing religion on a daily basis – he refers especially to praying regularly and reading the Quran. According to Ḥusnī, Islam and society in Egypt can only flourish and grow if social relationships are prioritized in terms of emotions, love, care, and compassion. Moreover, Ḥusnī considers it necessary for religiosity to be fostered and included in even the busiest everyday life. Ḥusnī therefore does not present Islam as a religion that is normative and punitive, rather he emphasizes the spirituality of Islam and the compatibility of this religion with personal interests, development, and success. His main message is to look and read beyond the written word. This approach will reveal the true message, enlighten spirituality and enhance one's relationship with God. By using illustrative examples from his own life, he creates proximity with his audience. To these everyday life examples, he regularly adds examples from the Quran and Hadith, first by recitation and then through explanation.<sup>38</sup>

Another aim of Ḥusnī is to bring the written sources of Islam (especially the Quran and Hadith) closer to the people and render them more understandable for the masses. These sources require interpretation, since they are not always self-explanatory, neither in the content nor the language used. Thus, by repeating the message in Egyptian Arabic, paired with examples from everyday life, the audience is able to get closer to God.<sup>39</sup> Ḥusnī encourages his disciples to engage with the written sources, even if they are not fully understood. He argues that

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ismail 2020.

<sup>38</sup> See Moll 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ismail 2020.

through repetition and recitation an enhanced religious mindset will be achieved in the sense of growing (being) closer to God and thus, also becoming more deeply connected to one's religious self. Rituals, such as praying and fasting, as well as practicing kind and loving behaviour towards others is equally important.<sup>40</sup> The key to a successful, prosperous, and satisfying life then is not necessarily a full understanding of Islam as a religion per se but cultivating strong faith and spirituality by practicing religion in terms of rituals. The improvement of the individual and intimate self are at centre stage in these programmes, such as *Fann al-ḥayāt* (The Art of Life).

Salvation and the afterlife are not necessarily key concepts that Ḥusnī focusses on. However, some of his shows are called *Allāh* (God), *‘Alā bāb al-janna* (At the Door to Paradise) or *‘Alā tariq Allāh* (Road to Allah). These shows clearly focus on how his followers can collect *ḥasanāt*<sup>41</sup> in order to be prepared for paradise.<sup>42</sup>

## Selected Examples from Ḥusnī's Books

Ḥusnī has written several books in Arabic on various topics such as self-improvement, success, relationships, and motivation. His books are known for their practical advice and relatable tone, which resonates with many readers. The above-mentioned paradigm that Ḥusnī applies in his lectures, audio, and video lessons is also part of how he structures his written output about self-improvement, motivation, and success. In the book *Khada‘ūk faqālū...* (They deceived you and said...) the author follows the same configuration. Ḥusnī begins with an introduction in which he writes about the reasons that make a change in perspective necessary. His approach in the book is to give readers the tools to transform perceived negative emotions and accusations into a loving attitude with the help of references from normative Islamic sources. He wants his readership to understand Islam as a peace bringing message, that not only transforms the self but also those around them.

One of Ḥusnī's most popular books is *Insān jadīd* (New Human). In this book, the author implores his readership to adopt the above-mentioned technique which aims to help readers achieve their goals and reach their full potential. The

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Franke 2021a.

<sup>41</sup> *Ḥasanāt* is the Arabic term for deeds, good deeds, or points that count towards the evaluation of being granted permission to enter paradise.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Saleh 2012; Schulz 2006; Mittermaier 2019.

book covers a range of topics, such as time management, positive thinking, and goal-setting, and provides practical advice on how to implement these concepts in one's life. Another publication worth mentioning in this context is *Fakkara* (To Think), which focuses on the importance of maintaining a positive mindset and attitude in order to achieve success and happiness. In the book, Ḥusnī provides tips and techniques for developing a positive outlook and overcoming negative thoughts and emotions. Topics such as visualization, affirmations, and positive self-talk, are designed to help readers implement these concepts in their daily lives. Again, perseverance, hard work, self-love, and the love of God are highlighted. Ḥusnī has also written books on the topic of relationships, such as *Qiṣṣat ḥubb* (Love Story), and *'Aysh al-laḥẓa* (Live the moment), which offer advice on how to live peacefully with one's spouse. For example, the former is a self-help book that focuses on providing advice and guidance on building successful romantic relationships. The book covers a wide range of topics related to love, including communication, trust, intimacy, and conflict resolution. It also aims to help readers develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their partners, as well as identify common pitfalls that can sabotage relationships. The book presents a mix of psychological insights, personal anecdotes, practical tips, and exercises designed to help readers improve their love lives. The author draws on his own experiences and observations as a lay therapist and relationship coach to provide insights and advice that are both relatable and actionable. Overall, *Qiṣṣat ḥubb* (Love Story) is a comprehensive guide to building and maintaining healthy and fulfilling romantic relationships.

In the context of Islam as a guiding religion and path to salvation, Ḥusnī has written several books on spirituality and Islamic faith, such as *Yaum fī l-janna* (Day in Paradise) and *Fī ma'īyat Allāh* (In the Presence of God). These books explore the teachings of Islam and offer supervision on how to live a spiritually fulfilling life. In most of his publications Ḥusnī focuses on personal development and growth, with an emphasis on positivity and self-motivation. Many of his works aim to help readers overcome negative thought patterns and develop a more optimistic outlook on life. He also emphasizes the importance of communication skills and developing healthy relationships with others. Some of his books on spirituality and religion explore the Islamic faith and its teachings, while others focus on more general themes of spirituality and personal growth. Overall, Ḥusnī's books share the common themes of personal empowerment and self-improvement. His works are aimed at helping readers cultivate a positive mindset and develop the skills necessary to succeed in life.

Another rather popular book is *Fann al-ḥayāt* (The Art of Life), which is a self-help book that focuses on achieving happiness and success through personal development. The book provides practical steps and advice on how to

overcome obstacles and achieve one's goals. Noteworthy is also *Al-Thaman* (The Price), which emphasizes the importance of hard work and perseverance in achieving success. The book provides guidance on how to set goals, develop a positive mindset, and maintain motivation. Ḥusnī's other books cover topics such as communication skills, leadership, and personal finance. *Kalima* (Word) is a book on effective communication and public speaking, while *Al-Qinā'* (The Mask) provides advice on how to live with one's true personality without having to wear a mask. In summary, Ḥusnī's books in Arabic offer practical advice on personal development, success, and relationships. His writing style is known for its relatability and practicality, which has made him a popular author in the Arabic-speaking world.

## Concluding Remarks

As this chapter has demonstrated, lecturing about the realm of spirituality is designed to focus on enhancing the disciple's religiosity; in being religious and performing religion, in the sense of *doing* being religious. In this approach, the mindsets and emotional desires of individuals are the central focus. Messages about individual needs, comfort, and a sense of well-being are woven into the lecture. These intimate conditions are expected to return the investment, namely, the time and money spent by the disciple, with an added value in the personal level of satisfaction. In this sense the individual becomes emotionally satisfied due to the consumption of the religious message. According to many of my interlocutors, religious guides are often accused of influencing or manipulating their audience. Thus, the notion of trust comes into play as an important factor for the persistence of the message, something that Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī focuses on by excluding political issues from his lectures. Moreover, by incorporating his religious messages in everyday life processes, he also employs mechanisms and practices of transparency and integrity to lend credibility, authenticity, and profoundness to the image of his own figure. He focuses on relationships in terms of social links between the person and the disciple, i.e. the social spirit. Consequently, for my interlocutors, trust and transparency are the most important aspects of 'following' Ḥusnī, and following to his religious guidance, while at the same time maintaining and fostering individuality. In this sense engaged 'following' does not mean uniformity, but rather defines individuality by consciously listening, reading, watching certain aspects or episodes of Ḥusnī's programmes, and deducing the religious content of his message. Spiritual influencers are judged by their disciples based on these categories, namely trust and transparency, which

in turn may lead to controlling strategies implemented by the actors behind the influencers to assess and continuously improve their offers in terms of performance. This may then lead to the co-creation of spiritual brands by their consumers. Ḥusnī's engagement and direct interaction with his followers on social media and responding to their demands serves as a strong example of this. His spiritual approach is leading in the domain of religious guidance in Egypt and beyond, using various forms of print and online media to reach his followers. As a religious scholar Ḥusnī focuses on individuals as disciples of his lectures, aiming at enhancing and fostering their spiritual mindset and improving their religious practices.

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**Part III. Society I: Social and Political Aspects of  
Change, and the Search for Identity from Historical  
and Cultural Perspectives**



Stefan Reichmuth

# Brushing Max Weber against the Grain in African Historiography

The Case of Pre-Colonial and Colonial Ilorin

## Introduction

In Roman Loimeier's rich and multi-faceted studies and publications on Muslim societies in Africa, that he developed with remarkable continuity and consequence over the last decades, an interplay of three central themes stands out. These themes appear in his earlier research on Nigeria and Senegal and continue in his more recent works on East Africa and contemporary Tunisia. The first one is his focus on Islamic reform and on Muslim reformist groups and movements, which he traced from their historical roots in 18<sup>th</sup>-century West Africa to the post-colonial states and societies in different regions, culminating in his landmark general overview, published in 2016.<sup>1</sup> In his study, he combines issues of religious and political ideology in his approach to Islamic reformism. His analyses focus on the transformation of political and educational institutions, and on how economic globalization has impacted these. The second theme is the determined attention he has paid to processes of secularization in Muslim states and societies, both in the political and the cultural spheres, which he took into full account in his study on State and Society in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Senegal. This perspective was also central to his recent book on Tunisia.<sup>2</sup> The third theme, which has formed a productive link between the first two, is a focus on the development of the institutions and networks of civil society in African Muslim contexts.<sup>3</sup> This includes the Sufi networks in Nigeria and Senegal, the organizations and movements founded by Islamic reformist scholars and activists, and the non-religious and anti-Islamist groups and associations in present-day Tunisia. In the latter case, Loimeier views the survival of the Tunisian state as hinging on this rich, variegated civil society and its ability to find political and social compromises between otherwise highly antagonistic religious and non-religious actors; in his

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1 E.g. Loimeier 1997; Loimeier 2010; Loimeier 2016; Loimeier 2022a.

2 E.g. Loimeier 2001; Loimeier 2022b.

3 E.g. Loimeier 2001. Processes of individualization that contribute to the secular trends in Muslim societies are also discussed in Loimeier 2019.

view, religious life has undergone considerable individualization over the last decade and remains constantly under negotiation.

In Loimeier's analytical framework, Max Weber's concepts related to sociology of religion clearly play an important role. Weberian perspectives shape his understanding of the influence of religious attitudes on social and economic life and on the remarkable parallels between early European Protestantism and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Islamic reformism. The latter is seen by him not only as a reaction to secularist tendencies within state and society, but also as driven by a Weberian 'disenchantment of the world' in its critique of traditional pious practice. The identification of elements of a 'work ethic,' that went along with a new consciousness of time and time management in contemporary Islamic reformism also show the comparative use of Weber's influential sociological concepts.<sup>4</sup>

In the following the productivity of Weberian models for the historiography of Muslim societies in West Africa will be further highlighted. This overview is derived from the results of a study on the Islamic emirate of Ilorin (western Nigeria), which emerged in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and became part of the Sokoto Caliphate. The research for this was conducted in the second half of the 1980s and early 1990s as part of the Nigeria study group in Bayreuth which was led by Jamil Abun-Nasr, from which Loimeier's work on the Sufi networks and the Izala movement in Kano (Northern Nigeria) also originated. Research in this group was shaped by an interest in the history of the Muslim states and societies in Nigeria since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their colonial and post-colonial predicaments, and by an attempt to view and describe the development of religious doctrines and movements in this part of West Africa in relation to the social and political context of the time. As will be shown in this recapitulation, Weberian concepts proved their usefulness far beyond the European and Christian contexts for which they were originally developed.

This comparative enterprise requires going against the grain of Weber's chief intention, which was to bring out the predominantly European and Christian origins of the modern urban world and its capitalist economy. This chapter will show that, as analytical perspectives for an assessment of Ilorin and its socio-cultural structure and development, Weber's comparative urban studies tie in remarkably well with his reflections on the religious conduct of life as a factor shaping the ethical and economic outlooks of social groups.<sup>5</sup> This might shed further light on the well-known parallels in the spread of Islam and Christianity in Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where Islam is generally

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Loimeier 2012; and especially Loimeier 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Weber 1985 [1922], 245–381; Weber 1978b, 399–634; Weber 1984 [1920]; Weber 1978a.

acknowledged as a pioneer whose lead the Christian missions found hard to catch up with.<sup>6</sup> Both the political and communal structures established by the Ilorin Muslims, their Islamic ethical outlook, and the remarkable successes of their proselytizing and preaching activities at home as well as in the south of Nigeria thus come out as independent contributions to the ‘African middle-class’ which Christian missionaries had hoped to create among the Yoruba.<sup>7</sup>

## **Ilorin since ca. 1800: Emirs and Scholars in a Multi-Ethnic Emirate**

The history of Ilorin continues to be a major stumbling block in the established concepts of Nigerian political and cultural geography.<sup>8</sup> Its emergence and growth were closely connected with the simultaneous downfall of the most powerful Yoruba empire of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of the Islamic movements and states in Northern Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> Ilorin thus acquired a double character as the seat of an Islamic polity and as a ‘shareholder’ in the Oyo political heritage with links to the rest of the Yoruba world. This has always unsettled the imaginary Nigerian map and its neat regional divisions which were generated by British colonial rule and reinforced by the political struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. These divisions have been revived time and again during political crises into the present. This double character has shaped Ilorin both in its urban appearance and in the cultural outlook of its population.

Considering the political ambiguity of its location and its shifting alliances with the southern Yoruba cities, Ilorin’s influence as a centre of Islamic learning has continued, along with its impact as a flourishing centre of trade and manufacturing. The internal struggle for the configuration of its inter-ethnic balance, which remains a source of friction and competition and has been renegotiated and reshaped at different points in Ilorin’s history, never questioned the Islamic religious framework of the city which reflects and represents its different constituent groups.

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<sup>6</sup> For this esp. Peel 2000, chap. 7, 187–214.

<sup>7</sup> Reichmuth 1998, 179. For the social aims of the Christian missions in Nigeria, Ajayi 1981 [1965], 17.

<sup>8</sup> If not otherwise stated, the reader is referred for the following account of Ilorin history to H. O. A. Danmole 1980; O’Hear 1983; O’Hear 1997; Reichmuth 1998; Reichmuth 2003.

<sup>9</sup> For the history of the Oyo Empire and its downfall, Law 1977. For the Islamic movements in Northern Nigeria and West Africa in general see the overview in Loimeier 2013, 108–34, with further reference.



The dual structure of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ilorin, with the emir at the head of two well-established hierarchies of warlords and imams, differs somewhat from the emirate cities of the Sokoto empire, and from the successor states of Old Oyo in the south. In the latter, Islam remained under the guardianship of the Obas, Baaleş and military commanders, and was organized into unified communities under their chief imams, which simultaneously remained separate bodies that were firmly embedded into the Yoruba city states.<sup>10</sup>

The central position of Islam in Ilorin was strongly shaped by the religious movement initiated by Şāliḥ Janta (d. 1823), a Fulani scholar and itinerant preacher with links to western Sudan and Kebbi. He had toured Borgu and northern Yorubaland before settling in Ilorin around 1817, at the invitation of Afonja, the Oyo general who had risen in rebellion against his royal overlord. Afonja had been developing Ilorin into a centre of international trade while also looking for the military support of the local Muslims. Through his preaching and teaching activities, Şāliḥ succeeded in winning the support of diverse Muslim groups which had settled in and around Ilorin (mainly Hausa, Kanuri, Wangara, Fulani and Nupe). He also attracted Muslim slaves, craftsmen, warriors, and scholars from different parts of the Oyo Empire and from the troubled regions in the north. Şāliḥ established Ilorin as a centre for religious emigration (*hijra*), shaping his Friday Mosque in imitation of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina.<sup>11</sup> He also took on the title of scholar (Ar. *‘ālim*, Yor. *‘ālimi*) which was apparently given to him by the Muslim community. Apart from being a honorific for a learned person, this title carried special weight among people originating from the Bornu empire, where it was given to leaders of Muslim scholar settlements (*mallemti*).<sup>12</sup> In the eastern parts of central Sudan, the figure of the *‘ālim* had since the 16<sup>th</sup> century become an object of eschatological expectation, something which is reflected in the Arabic writings of the leaders of the Sokoto *jihād* movement.<sup>13</sup>

Şāliḥ, or *‘Ālimi* who became widely known under this new name, probably had some connections with the movement of ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye in the north, where his sons are said to have been active as warriors before joining their father in Ilorin. The increasing tension and diversity of regional interests between the growing power of the Muslim warriors in Ilorin and Afonja, the Yoruba general

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**10** Gbadamosi 1978; Peel 2016, 137–40; for Ile-Ife Laitin 1986, 51–75, also relying on a Weberian framework for his comparison between Islam and Christianity; for the Muslim community in Ede see Nolte, Olukoya, and Jones 2017.

**11** On this mosque Reichmuth 1997; Reichmuth 1998, 33f.

**12** Bobboyi 1993.

**13** Norris 1990; Reichmuth 1995; Reichmuth 2003, 262ff.

and head of the town, came to a bloody conclusion within a year after Şāliḥ's death in 1823. Afonja was overthrown and killed in a military coup. Şāliḥ's son 'Abd al-Salām (Abdusalami) succeeded in bringing Ilorin into the realm of the Sokoto Caliphate as an emirate under the authority of Gwandu.

The internal structure of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ilorin established a dual hierarchy of warriors and religious offices, with the emir at the head of both, as mentioned above. Although Alimi's sons became the first emirs of the town, his own position remained a focus of memory and religious authority; he was transformed into a foundation saint with a sacred rank (*jāh*), which ensured protection for his town and is still referenced in prayers even today. The delicate balance of the distinct ethnic constituencies in Ilorin came to be enshrined in this dual hierarchy. The claim of the Islamic scholars and teachers (Yor. *alūfá/afáà*) as a source of communal and political authority and legitimacy found its expression in the local saying "The Scholar is the father of the ruler" (*afáà ni bàbá ọba*).<sup>14</sup> This could also be understood as referring to the fact that the father of the first emirs had indeed been an Islamic scholar, something which could come up as an argument whenever there was tension between the emir and the religious establishment. With their religious services and their teaching activities, the Islamic scholars and teachers always remained in close interaction with the other professional groups of the city.

## A Look at Ilorin through a Weberian Lens: Corporate City, City Saints, and Cultic Association

The dual structure of Ilorin combined the characteristics of a centre of Muslim military power with the old West African tradition of autonomous or privileged scholar settlements, the latter widely seen as peaceful centres of trade and agriculture, and with a sacred reputation. This novel kind of arrangement, often emerging from the large-scale migration of diverse Muslim groups, was among the major results of the *jihād* movements of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in the western and central Sudan. Ilorin provided one of the most striking cases of this fusion.

The novelty of this large-scale urban experiment, with its complex military, manufacturing, and commercial setups and its Islamic institutional and educational frameworks, calls for a sociological model which takes both socio-political

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<sup>14</sup> Reichmuth 1998, 143.

and cultural factors into account. The political and communal structure of Ilḡrin, as much as that of the other successor states of the Oyo Empire, must be assessed against the background of the corporate framework of the older polity. As stated above, Weber's comparative and historical model of the city<sup>15</sup> is used here to account for the interplay of the factors which shaped the emergence of this novel type of urban society in the region. The criteria given by Weber for a city can also be applied to Ilḡrin:<sup>16</sup>

1. Fortifications, consisting of a ring of city walls which was widely extended during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
2. A number of flourishing markets, which were supplied by the local agrarian and craft production as well as by the position of the city within a flourishing long-distance trade between the Saharan and Sub-Saharan regions and the Atlantic coast; including one of the largest slave markets of the region.
3. Autonomous legal institutions, based in the case of Ilḡrin on a symbiosis of Islamic and customary law.
4. Associational structure (*Verbandscharakter*), represented in Ilḡrin by the ward structure with its leading warlords (*Balḡguns*) and quarter heads (*Mḡgàjīs*), and the mosque communities and their imams.
5. Autonomous administration, with local participation in the appointment of authorities, identifiable in Ilḡrin in the established rotation of local offices between different families. This practice was normally recognized by the emirs, and even more by the emirate council of the leading warlords, which elected the emir and played a crucial role in the decision making of the emirate. The emir's court officials and his guards (*Ḍḡngàri*) were responsible for the administrative running of the day-to-day affairs. As already mentioned, the hierarchy of the offices of the warlords (*Balḡguns*) and the leading imams reflected the ethnic and regional balance of the constituent groups in the town.<sup>17</sup> Weber was well aware of the special character of West African urban institutions. He mentions the ruler of the Fanti (i.e. the Fante in southern Ghana) as an example of a city king acting in council,<sup>18</sup> an arrangement which closely resembles the division of power in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ilḡrin.

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**15** Weber 1985 [1922], 727–814; Weber 1978b, 1212–1372.

**16** Weber, 1985 [1922], 736; Weber 1978b, 1226.

**17** For the expression of this unwritten constitution in a prayer litany mentioning the saints, imams and scholars of the town, Reichmuth 1995.

**18** Weber 1985 [1922], 743; Weber 1978b, 1240f.

Another aspect of the urban qualities defined by Weber was Ilorin's function as an agrarian centre. The city relied for its agrarian production to a large extent on slave labour, with most warlords and other households maintaining their farms and plantations in its metropolitan districts.<sup>19</sup> Ilorin was also a military community organized by military leaders (*Baloguns*, *Mogajis*), which was equally responsible for taking care of the city's fortifications. The "ascent from bondage to freedom," a promise offered by the European city model since Antiquity and into the early Middle Ages,<sup>20</sup> can also be identified in the early stages of Ilorin's history, when it had become a refuge for Muslim slaves from Yorubaland. Conversion to Islam and Islamic learning equally provided a promising avenue to manumission by pious masters, in a city whose economy otherwise remained strongly dependent on slave labour and whose military leaders were frequently former slaves themselves. At the same time, the weaving and textile industry, mainly established by migrants and refugees from the old Oyo Empire, became the economic backbone of the free population in the city, and came to be practiced even within many families of Islamic scholars and teachers.

Ilorin's constitutional origin can be described as a confraternity (*Schwurverband*) of different Muslim groups in the town, which eventually brought about the overthrow and death of Afonja, the Oyo general and head of Ilorin. This provides a strong parallel to the history of many important medieval cities in Europe, where a king's deputy or a bishop were often defeated and expelled and their government functions usurped by patricians or popular participants of the communal alliance.<sup>21</sup> As in the European cases, the city established itself through a cultic association with its patron saint, its official celebrations of Islamic religious holidays, its hierarchy of religious offices, and with the mosques whose functions resembled the communal role of the Christian parishes in European medieval cities.<sup>22</sup> One significant difference should be mentioned: whereas the Christian clergy and the monasteries with their legal and economic independence often played a sharply contested role in the social and political fabric of many European cities,<sup>23</sup> the Muslim scholars and imams were fully integrated into the city structure of Ilorin. Along with a complete absence of Islamic foundations which do not seem to have taken root among Muslims in that part of West Africa, pri-

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<sup>19</sup> For the category of the agrarian cities, "Ackerbürgerstädte," Weber 1985 [1922], 722, 730; Weber 1978b, 1217ff.; the economic role of the metropolitan districts within the economy of Ilorin is extensively discussed in O'Hear 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Weber 1985 [1922], 742; Weber 1978b, 1238.

<sup>21</sup> Weber, 1985 [1922], 748f.; Weber 1978b, 1250ff.

<sup>22</sup> Weber, 1985 [1922], 744ff.; Weber 1978b, 1246ff.

<sup>23</sup> Weber, 1985 [1922], 795f.; Weber 1978b, 1333f.

vately run educational institutions became crucial factors in the religious and professional structure of the city and were among its most dynamic elements.

## Islamic Education and the Conduct of Urban Life I: Quranic Schooling as Communal Initiation

Turning to the significance of Islamic education and learning for the socio-cultural structure of Ilorin as well as for its impact upon other Yoruba communities and cities, Weber's concept of a religious influence on the 'conduct of life' (*Lebensführung*) of the believers provides a helpful point of reference.<sup>24</sup> In his definition, the religious quest for salvation produces certain consequences for practical behaviour in the world:

[...] a quest for salvation in any religious group has the strongest chance of exerting practical influences when there has arisen, out of religious motivations, a systematization of practical conduct resulting from an orientation to certain integral values. The goal and significance of such a pattern of life may remain altogether oriented to this world, or it may focus on the world beyond, at least in part.

As it developed in Ilorin, the role of Quranic education in the transmission of important socio-cultural norms of conduct can be clearly seen. It provided a framework for communal initiation and for the imparting of integral values of urban life.<sup>25</sup> The Quranic school was the first institution of regular schooling for children in Yoruba society. The entrance age of 7–10 years, common in former times, normally coincided with the first apprenticeship in crafts and trades. The first marriage often stood at the end of both apprenticeship and Quranic education. There was usually a high percentage of female students, much higher than elsewhere in the emirates of Northern Nigeria. This was related to the prominent role of the market women in the economic life of the town, and also to the absence of early marriage practices among the Yoruba. A large proportion of the Quranic students in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were adults. They were often local converts to Islam or immigrants who were attracted in large numbers to Ilorin. Quranic education and the elementary and advanced stages of further Islamic learning

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<sup>24</sup> For Weber's definition of this term which plays a central role in his sociological thought, Weber 1985 [1922], 320f.; Weber 1978b, 528ff., quotation in the text above from 528, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph.

<sup>25</sup> For the following in full detail Reichmuth 1998, 101–13; the summary account given here elaborates on Reichmuth 1997, 235f.

(*ilm*), can be seen as part of an educational package which the town had to offer, and which included reading and writing (to a varying extent), religious instruction, and professional training in different crafts, as well as equitation and military skills. A common practice which contributed to urban integration was ‘marriage by charity’ (Yor. *sàràà*), whereby poor and promising foreign students were matched with a wife by their teacher or by other families in a marriage which did not involve the usual gifts and payments, and which also provided the newcomer with support in a local neighbourhood. The inhabitants of the rural metropolitan districts would normally send their children to the schools in the town, which had been established by their patrons for their slaves and clients.

The names of the letters and vowel signs used for the spelling of the Arabic text (Yor. *àjítú*) in Quranic training was determined by the language of the teacher and his neighbourhood; apart from Yoruba, Fulfulde, Hausa, and Nupe are attested. The elementary tenets and practices of ablution and prayer were also taught, and the rhythm of the prayer times shaped the teaching hours. Islamic scholars skilled in elementary astronomy and time calculation were the guardians of the calendar and determined the predominant order of time in the city. The Quranic school was the first agent of the inculcation of this temporal order. By the 1980s almost every school had a clock hanging on its walls. Clocks of different types, especially those indicating prayer times, had become a common present given by grateful students to their master.

The initiatory function of the Quranic school as a first entry into public and adult life was and still is marked by the *walīma*, a celebration, held in honour of a student’s completion of learning certain *sūras* of the Quran. The pattern of these celebrations, which was still followed in the 1980s, conveyed certain symbolic messages alluding to the content of the completed *sūras*. This symbolism can be reconstructed from the common literature about the special qualities (*khawāṣṣ*) of certain Quranic *sūras*, and is also explained in an earlier study on Islamic culture in the town as a form of wisdom (*ḥikma*) connected with these celebrations.<sup>26</sup> Ilorin developed a specific program for them, which differs from the practices in the northern parts of Nigeria and in southern Yorubaland. Celebrations start with the recitation of *sūras* acknowledged for their protective character, or for their promise of success and wellbeing (*Sūras* 105 *Al-Fīl*, 87 *Al-A‘lā*, and 36 *Yāsīn*). Their completion by the pupil involved the distribution of specific dishes to the teacher and fellow students. In the case of the “*Sūra* of the Elephant” (*Sūra* 105), a dish of cooked beans symbolizes the hot bricks which fell upon Abrahā’s army when he attacked Mecca in the year of Prophet’s birth. For the second celebration (*Sūra* 87)

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<sup>26</sup> Described at some length in Aghākā, 1981, 54–57.

a cock must be slaughtered, whose meat is traditionally regarded as improving memory, brain, voice, and procreative capacity, and thus supports the successful memorizing promised by God (*Sūra* 87:6 *sa-nuqri'uka fa-lā tansā*, “We will let you recite, and you will not forget”). For the completion of *Sūra Yāsīn*, often known as the ‘Heart of the Quran,’ small livestock (*an‘ām*) is mentioned as a sign of God’s benevolence to humankind (*Sūra* 36:7). Thus, feasting on the meat of a slaughtered sheep or goat confirms this bounty.

The second and third occasions of celebration shift the symbolism of the meal towards a call for a responsible life as a believer. The fourth is connected with *Sūra Barā’a* (*Sūra* 9), which provides the strongest call for a clear break with unbelief and paganism, and for fighting against unbelievers. The meal normally also requires a slaughtered goat or sheep. The final *walīma* for the completion of the whole Quran, follows a solemn recitation of the first five verses of *al-Baqara* (*Sūra* 2), which define the religious ideal of the active believer committed to the Muslim community. For both male and female students, celebrations are in most cases postponed to the day before their wedding. The final *walīma* is preceded by a nightly celebration, followed in the morning by a solemn public recitation in front of the imams and scholars of the neighbourhood. A cow is then slaughtered.

The ceremonial transition from a grateful acceptance of God’s blessing and promise to an active and responsible membership in the Muslim community, provides a complex and rich example of the common symbolic use of Quranic texts for different situations in social and personal life. This is still a basic element of Nigerian Muslim culture today. Although the entrance age to the Quranic school has become much younger than before (3–4 years as opposed to 7–10 years previously), the common postponement of the *walīma* shows that, at least until the end of the 1980s, it had retained its function as a religious initiation into adult life and its social values and expectations.

## Islamic Education and the Conduct of Urban Life II: *‘ilm* Schools and Communal Ethics

A considerable number of Quranic students continue with the study of other religious texts and disciplines, including the translation and interpretation of the Quran. These *‘ilm* studies<sup>27</sup> begin with the translation of Arabic texts into the local language of instruction (in the 19<sup>th</sup> century mostly Hausa and other languages

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27 Reichmuth 1998, 116–24.

from the north, nowadays mainly Yoruba). The programme of elementary *‘ilm* studies in Ilorin and further south is still based on a number of well-established short texts and poems which precede longer books studied in the different disciplines. Basic statements of ritual and dogma, moral exhortation (*wa‘z*) and poems in praise of the Prophet are combined with some introductory Arabic grammar. These short, elementary texts of diverse origin, sometimes attributed to ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye, show a clear tendency towards an Islamic mass education with a specific range of moral topics. These include the praise of knowledge, learning and trust in God as a base for success in both worlds, and for social liberation and advancement. Vices which are most strongly condemned include lying, avarice, pride, and contempt of others. The virtue of generosity receives much praise and is even said to save a pagan from hell. The texts also include recommendations for each day and its propitious activities.

Beside this elementary programme, all the *‘ilm* disciplines common in the central Sudan have been well represented with fairly high standards in Ilorin.<sup>28</sup> This testified to the remarkable rise of a new centre for Islamic learning, which had occurred within only a few decades since the emergence of the Muslim community in the town. Apart from Māliki *fiqh* and Arabic language and grammar, a complex blend of Quranic exegesis and translation (*tafsīr*), ethical admonition (*wa‘z*) and Prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) formed the core of Islamic studies in Ilorin. A pervasive focus on wisdom can be identified in the discourse on knowledge and on ethical, moral, and eschatological topics. This also included literary and Sufi texts and provided a common scope for most disciplines in local teaching and preaching. The *wa‘z* topics which are discernible in the study literature of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Ilorin roughly fall within the following categories:

1. Elaborate catalogues of virtues and vices, stressing the individual responsibility of the believer for their faith and deeds, and also the necessity of pursuing an honest profession built on diligence, modesty, and self-reliance. Legitimate gains from trades, crafts, and agriculture are linked to the duty of giving alms and deepening one’s religious knowledge.
2. The praise of knowledge itself, which is presented as providing a firm link between God and the human intellect. The authority and saintly status of teachers and scholars is much dwelt upon and contrasted with envy as a major vice which might endanger their position in the next world.
3. Admonition of the youth, calling for their respect (*adab*) vis-à-vis their parents and teachers and for their sincere commitment to religious duties and to a religious life. The pursuit of learning, on the other hand, may allow for rivalry

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<sup>28</sup> Reichmuth 1997, 236f.; Reichmuth 1998, 124–44.



- among the students. It may even loosen the bonds of parental authority and the established ranks of seniority. A student will suffer many hardships and deserves to be honoured and respected like a martyr (*shahīd*).
4. Admonition of women, reinforced by the Prophet's frightening visions of the punishment of disobedient and licentious women in hell. The call for their respect and obedience vis-à-vis their husbands is combined with emphasis on the necessary care of husbands, and on the mutual contributions to a harmonious and blessed matrimonial life. Marriage is presented throughout as an obligation for both men and women.
  5. Eschatology and the Day of Judgment, and the Signs of its approaching, and the legitimate hope for the intercession (*shafā'a*) of the Prophet and of the pious scholars and the saintly people at this final moment of terror.

Apart from their ethical teaching, the reputation of Islamic scholars is closely connected with the *ḥisāb* discipline, which in Ilorin, as elsewhere in Nigeria, combined elementary arithmetic and astronomical and astrological calculation with kabbalist techniques and the design of magical squares. Elements of *ḥisāb* also underlay the vast literature of prayers and magico-therapeutic devices from which every scholar built up their own collection during their professional career.<sup>29</sup>

The intricate combination of religious doctrine, Arabic language, and ethical wisdom with the initiation into the use of prayers and magico-therapeutic rituals for personal and individual needs and affairs has given Islamic knowledge its particular character in Ilorin. It has provided the basis for the reputation of the scholars who held offices as imams and teachers, preachers, advisers, and healers. As a large part of the population took part in their educational activities, Quranic education and Islamic learning have also provided a common base for the ethical identity and social status of the free within urban society at large. This can, of course, also be stated of other Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. Although scholars have been known to take care of the needs of the military elite, including providing personal advice and instruction and in the form of prayers and amulets, their ethics clearly fell in line with civilian conduct and with urban professional life, in which they often took part themselves. Many adults pursued Islamic studies with them along with their own crafts and trades. The civilian communal identity shaped by this combination was to be reinforced rather than weakened after the waning of Ilorin's political and military power. In the early

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<sup>29</sup> For an analysis of some of the *ḥisāb* texts and methods practised and transmitted in Ilorin and Northern Nigeria, Rebstock and Reichmuth 2020.

colonial period, the annual income estimated by the British administrators for ordinary Islamic scholars (listed as ‘scribes’) equaled that of other artisans like weavers, tailors, and construction workers, and their numbers surpassed even those in Kano, the largest city in Northern Nigeria.<sup>30</sup> Quranic learning had become a basic element of popular identity in the town, to the extent that the first popular party which was founded in Ilorin in 1954, the *Ilorin Talaka Parapo* (Alliance of the Common People of Ilorin, ITP) chose the Quranic slate (*lawḥ*) as its emblem.<sup>31</sup>

## **Conclusion: Gains of a Weberian Reading of Ilorin’s Socio-Cultural and Educational Structure for an Understanding of the Transformation Processes in 19<sup>th</sup> and Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Yorubaland**

The urban and educational institutions and values which have been outlined for Ilorin are close enough to Weber’s models to warrant their application, and to place the development of a Muslim polity and society in line with his Christian examples. However, the attempt at a Weberian assessment of Islamic learning and education and the significance of these for the structural framework and the ethical outlook of Ilorin and its society has led to a result which might appear paradoxical. A militant Islamic city state, which had been centrally involved in the outbreak and course of the Yoruba wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, simultaneously transmitted a civilian Islamic ethic both within and far beyond its own realm. This transmission was successful indeed: even people originating from communities which were at war with Ilorin were attracted to this cosmopolitan city and to its itinerant scholars and traders in the south.<sup>32</sup> At a time when Ilorin itself, as well as the southern Yoruba states still built their wealth to a considerable extent on a slave economy, the liberating force and status-building of Islam and Islamic learning was propagated by scholars and by returnees to their towns who had been warriors and sometimes were even former slaves themselves! This is a far cry from Weber’s views on the aristocratic warrior ethics of early Islam, and he certainly would not have foreseen the possible influence of an Islamic city and its Islamic conduct of life upon a Yoruba society which strongly paralleled that

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<sup>30</sup> Reichmuth, 1998, 78ff; based on Priestman 1922.

<sup>31</sup> Reichmuth 1998, 85.

<sup>32</sup> For Ilorin’s influence on southern Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Reichmuth 1998, 171–79.

of Christianization. The attempt here at gaining new insights into the interplay among the different religious factors which were at work in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Yorubaland has brought Ilorin into the historical narrative of the Yoruba path to modernization, from which it has for the most part been excluded and sometimes resolutely kept out as an antagonist.<sup>33</sup> This was achieved by taking some of Weber's urban and ethical ideal types, which he had developed for Europe and Christianity, beyond the exclusivist argument for which they have been so often used.

This is by no means a unique exercise in contemporary Islamic studies. In an earlier volume on Weber's theories and his views on Islam published in 1987, Rudolf Peters took up some of the Islamic reform movements of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century and discussed the outlook of their leaders and scholars in different parts of the Muslim world.<sup>34</sup> He identified in them a number of parallels with Weber's concepts of puritanism and charismatic leadership. However, as their cases did not lead in his view to any sizeable innovation in the political setup of their regions, Peters concluded that the religious factor in general had not played the innovative role which was attributed to it by Weber in the shadow of the rise of modern capitalism and the political revolutions of that period, and that innovation was more dependent on other social and economic factors.

The conclusion which can be drawn about the development of Islamic education and learning in Ilorin goes in a different direction. It rather points towards a convergence of Islam and Christianity as factors in a socio-cultural change which unfolded in precolonial and colonial Yorubaland.<sup>35</sup> Although the emirate had been incorporated into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, its close contacts with the south which had grown during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in spite of the wars provided the basis for migration, involving teaching and preaching activities along with trade and other crafts. As in the case of other once powerful Yoruba cities like Ilesha which found itself pushed to the margin of political and economic development, there was a growing influence by returning migrants on the home community, which came to reshape its internal structure and its relations with the outside world. This process of a local 'discovery of Nigeria,' which has been described in exemplary fashion by John Peel about Ilesha, can also be attributed to Ilorin.<sup>36</sup> It was the Islamic activities and successes of the Ilorin people in the

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**33** The interaction of the different religions in the making of Yoruba society and culture was taken up and discussed at length by Peel 2000; and also in Peel 2016, his last book which was published posthumously.

**34** Peters 1987. A critical discussion of Max Weber's concept of the 'Islamic City' can be found in Jürgen Paul 2003.

**35** See for this Reichmuth 1997, 242f.

**36** For Ilesha Peel 1983; for Ilorin Reichmuth 1998, 183–203.

south which fed back in a similar manner to their hometown, introducing new religious movements and educational innovations which were to reshape the local perception of their city as an Islamic centre.<sup>37</sup> After its impact on the general development of Yoruba culture and society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the religious estate of Ilorin thus contributed in a number of ways to the educational modernization process within Ilorin itself, and to the modernization of Islamic educational institutions all over Yorubaland.

The application of Weberian concepts and categories to the case of an Islamic city and emirate in western Nigeria, including its multi-ethnic allegiances and complex regional identity, has revealed a trend in engagements with Weber which was laid out already – as early as 1944 – by Ephraim Fischhoff in his thoughtful overview of the controversial debate about the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.<sup>38</sup> Looking back on this discussion he came to the following conclusion:

In the light of all this, Weber's thesis must be construed not according to the usual interpretation, as an effort to trace the causative influence of the Protestant ethic upon the emergence of capitalism, but as an exposition of the rich congruency of such diverse aspects of a culture as religion and economics.

This would also hold for the application of Weber's model on non-Christian and non-European societies, for which his sociology has continued to demonstrate its productivity as well as its potential for controversy in a wide range of socio-cultural and regional fields.<sup>39</sup> The case of a West African Muslim society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century that has been presented here further illustrates this potential.

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<sup>37</sup> This is a central topic in Alabi 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Fischhoff 1944. The quotation in the following can be found on p. 76. German translation of the article in Weber 1978a, 346–79, and of the quotation on p. 369. For a similar assessment see Bendix 1966–67, esp. 273; in the German version in Weber 1978a, esp. 390f.

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Ulrike Freitag

# Of Jewels, Eyeglasses, and Books

Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb as Booktrader and Publisher in the Early 1920s

## Introduction

We have established a new store in Gamāliyya, Cairo where we sell and buy all sorts of merchandise, it is a store prepared to distribute all types of goods. We are able to perform what we are being asked to do, and to distribute everything sent to us, whether on commission or at our expense. If your Honour sees that you would like to sell coffee, rice, sugar, soap or other goods of this sort we can open this new connection between us. Books and their trade are stagnant and troublesome.<sup>1</sup>

In this rather disillusioned letter dated 30 October 1919, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Qatlān (d. 1931), brother-in-law and business partner of Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb (1886–1969), offered their Jeddah partner Muḥammad Naṣif (1885–1971) a line of commerce other than trade in books. Of Damascene origin, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān had both relocated to Cairo during the final decade of Ottoman rule. This had placed them out of reach of Ottoman authorities wary of the rise of Arab claims to a larger share in the ruling of the Empire, if not Arab self-determination or even independence.

While we know little about Qatlān, al-Khaṭīb, who was merely thirty-three years of age at the time the letter was written, already looked back on a long career. After attracting the attention of the Ottoman authorities through his nationalist activities while in secondary school in Damascus and Beirut, he continued to be a politically active law student in Istanbul. Following this, he moved to Ottoman-controlled Hodeida, where he served in the British consulate as an

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Qatlān (Cairo) to Muḥammad Naṣif (Jeddah), 30 October 1919, King Faysal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS), document 01985. All of the documents quoted in this text are from KFCRIS, hence I will only mention the correspondents, their place (on first mention), the date of the letter and the document number. I would like to acknowledge the generous help of Dr. Sa‘ūd al-Saḥḥān in granting me access to the documents. Dr. Suad al-Ghafal transcribed the documents, Rizan Abdulaziz answered my linguistic questions and Franziska Ortlieb helped with editing the final version. I thank Prof. Werner Ende for providing me with the 1979 catalogue of the press as well as an undated copy (probably around 1951) of Muḥammad Bahjat al-Atharī. I am also immensely grateful for his comments on the text. I further wish to thank Adam Mestyan as well as the editors of this volume for their suggestions.



interpreter from 1907–09. In his spare time, he rallied support for constitutional ideas among Yemeni intellectuals. Al-Khaṭīb then settled in Cairo for the first time where he took up journalism as a profession while still maintaining his political activism. At the same time, he co-founded the bookshop *al-Maktaba al-Salafiyya* together with Qatlān, which not only sold books but also funded the printing of some of them.

For some time, the pair were partnered with Rashīd Riḍā's bookshop *Maktabat al-Manār* in 1912, and al-Khaṭīb also collaborated with Riḍā in the founding of the school Dār al-Da'wa wa-l-Irshād. During the First World War, Qatlān and Riḍā kept the printing and bookselling business going. However, it would seem that either during or shortly after World War I, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān separated their business again from that of Riḍā.<sup>2</sup> If we follow Lauzière, according to whom Qatlān founded the short-lived periodical *al-Majalla al-Salafiyya* in 1917 to promote the bookshop of the same name, the assumption would be that the separation of the two printing and bookselling businesses had occurred during the war.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, al-Khaṭīb had moved to Mecca at the instigation of British intelligence to establish *al-Qibla*, an official newspaper in support of the leader of the Arab Revolt, Sharīf Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, who was backed by Britain.<sup>4</sup> It must be during his time in the Ḥijāz region of Arabia that al-Khaṭīb came to know Muḥammad Naṣīf. Al-Khaṭīb, who had quickly become disgruntled with Sharifian rule in the Ḥijāz, spent the years 1919 and 1920 in his native Damascus. There, he edited the official newspaper of the Arab government in Damascus until its fall at the hands of the French.

Thereafter, al-Khaṭīb returned to Cairo where he resumed his activities as a journalist and bookseller. It was in 1920 or 1921 that the bookstore *al-Maktabat al-Salafiyya* was expanded to include a printing house. This might have been established (probably as a commissioning business) during al-Khaṭīb's first stay in Cairo. According to Rizvi, this publishing enterprise "became active" in the early 1920s.<sup>5</sup> Al-Khaṭīb also eventually founded two important newspapers, *al-Zahrā'*, 1924–29 and *al-Fatḥ*, 1926–48.<sup>6</sup> In later years, he became the editor of

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<sup>2</sup> Mestyan 2023, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Lauzière 2015, 37. According to Kochbeck 2020, the separation from Riḍā occurred only after the war.

<sup>4</sup> Mestyan 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Rizvi 1991, 51.

<sup>6</sup> According to Sa'īd Dāūd 2008, 188, al-Khaṭīb established, in 1921, also Maṭba'at al-Fatḥ in order to publish the journal by this name (which was published only much later). Given the difficulties of setting up one publishing house discussed in this article, this seems highly improbable. I thank Bettina Gräf for providing me with a copy of this book.

the journal of the Muslim Brotherhood, *Majallat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* (1933–37) and of al-Azhar University’s journal (*Majallat al-Azhar*, 1952–59). While it is al-Khaṭīb’s role as a journalist with *salafī* leanings that has attracted attention, it is his activities as a publisher and bookseller with which this chapter is concerned.<sup>7</sup>

On the basis of a survey of the catalogue entries of approximately 250 letters, most of which were co-signed by al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān and addressed to an array of correspondents in the period between 1919 and 1924, a selective reading of some thirty of these gives a good idea of the intellectual and business network the two entrepreneurs needed to establish and expand their printing business. It ranged from Cairo to – unsurprisingly – Bilād al-Shām, and also included Iraq and the Hījāz. However, neither the territories South of the Arabian Peninsula (Yemen, Oman, or the Gulf emirates) nor the Maghreb seem to have played a notable role. Discussions in the letters involve the search for manuscripts, debates about what to edit and publish, and how to compose, print and market particular literary genres.

This chapter is limited to the mundane information about the book trade and printing in the economically depressed aftermath of World War I, building on work done by Schwartz and others about the late nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> When establishing their business, “al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān cared about making a living and avoiding bankruptcy,” rather than about the finer points of defining the term or even a canon of Salafiyya, as Henri Lauzière has aptly remarked.<sup>9</sup> This notwithstanding, their use of the term *salafī* contributed to the development of a new notion of Salafiyya beyond the earlier, strictly theological understanding linked to Ḥanbalī theology.

Even if we follow Lauzière’s analysis of the flawed conceptual history of Salafiyya, a retrospective consideration of al-Khaṭīb’s activities and writings, at least from the publication of the journal *al-Zahrā’* in 1924 onwards, we would probably arrive at the conclusion that he formed part of a group of Muslim Arab nationalists concerned with religious and social reform from a modernist perspective while holding *salafī* theological beliefs (used here in a traditional sense) – a group whom Lauzière calls ‘balanced reformers.’<sup>10</sup> Among the audience of these writers and activists were no longer primarily scholars (*‘ulamā’*) and a small

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<sup>7</sup> On al-Khaṭīb’s trajectory, see Ende 2012; al-Khaṭīb 1399/1979b, 3; Mayeur-Jaouen 2002, 227–55; Rizvi 1991 and Kochbeck 2020, 274.

<sup>8</sup> Schwartz 2017, 26; cf. El Shamsy 2020; Mestyan 2021, 18–29.

<sup>9</sup> Lauzière 2015, 42.

<sup>10</sup> Lauzière 2015, 38ff.

bureaucratic elite, but a rapidly expanding educated middle class, the so-called *effendiyya*.<sup>11</sup> While, for all intents and purposes, the very practice of publishing and concerns about making accessible old and new knowledge to a wider audience was an important part of the renewal processes to which Loimeier has paid so much attention in his work, the current state of analysis of the letters does not allow deeper investigation into the convictions of the two entrepreneurs. They fit Ayalon's description, written about the "makers of the Arab *nahḍa*" (or renaissance) of the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of being "at once the choosers, producers, and distributors of printed texts."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the developments described here sit at the juncture between the *nahḍa* and the onset of the turbulent post-Ottoman era. Incidentally, letter-writing, which was the genre used for the analysis of this scholarly network, formed part of the practices characterizing the *nahḍa*, even if it has much older roots. The proliferation of letters in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the result of the rapid spread of literacy and a widening participation in the newly created and rapidly expanding public sphere. To these, various publications, most notably in the form of journals, contributed in a crucial manner.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, as literacy spread, so did a new style of writing which, while very polite, was also much more direct than that of letters in earlier centuries. This said, the styles of letters differed depending on the sender, recipient and purpose.<sup>14</sup>

Their correspondence allows us a vivid glimpse into the everyday concerns of the two entrepreneurs as they struggled to set up their business and were confronted with a range of challenges. Once the printer had been established, the need to obtain contracts and market the output dominated the correspondence. Far from the detailed insights gained by anthropologists, the letters nevertheless offer a unique perspective on a trade which is important to those of us concerned with the intellectual history of Islam and its reform in the Arab world. This chapter thus contributes in a minor way to both the study of reform in which Loimeier's work has broken new ground, and the methodology employed by him, namely historical anthropology.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it highlights the importance of scholarly

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11 The term *effendiyya* came to refer to the educated and mostly urban middle class in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, cf. Eppel 2009, 535–39.

12 Ayalon 2016, 48.

13 Cf. Hamzah 2017, 1–19. On the important aspect of the infrastructure of the *nahḍa*, cf. Patel 2013, 201–23.

14 On the genre of letters and changing styles, see Ben-Bassat and Zachs 2013, 1–25. While the corpus used for this article might offer more insights regarding commercial letters among the literati, such an investigation is not the topic of this article.

15 Loimeier 2016.

networks, another concept which Loimeier has helped to popularize in the field of Islamic intellectual history.<sup>16</sup>

Acknowledging a number of limitations is necessary. I have no information as to whether the collection used for this study, which is held at the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies in Riyadh, is a complete set of the business correspondence between 1919 and 1924. Furthermore, the responses to most letters are not present in the collection held by the Centre. Most importantly, due to the conditions of the pandemic, I was unable to access the entire collection after an initial foray made in 2019. Hence, many of the questions which arose once I had consulted the selected letters, which I copied, and after having gone through the catalogue in more detail, cannot be answered at present.

## Selling and Printing Books after World War I

As the initially quoted letter shows, the book trade was anything but a flourishing business right after the end of the First World War. Therefore, Qatlān and al-Khaṭīb decided to branch out and use their network to trade just about any goods available and in demand throughout their network. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf in Jeddah, the descendant of a prominent family of notables who was himself both a prominent intellectual and political figure and best known for his impressive library and hospitality, proved a particularly promising link for this undertaking. Besides being among Jeddah's foremost notables and a leading *muthaqqaf* (intellectual), Naṣīf was also involved in trade in an important Red Sea harbour that had long connected Egypt with the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean.<sup>17</sup>

The letters do not indicate whether Naṣīf entered into the suggested trade in rice or other staples. Rather, he remained a steady customer of the books offered by the bookstore and, later, the print business. He did, however, use his Cairo connection to order smaller items and goods not readily available in the Ḥijāz for himself and his acquaintances. Thus, in June 1921, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān sent him a supply of spectacle frames and lenses.<sup>18</sup> Naṣīf repeated the order for eyeglasses in November 1922, adding soap and medicine. It seems that, on this occasion, Naṣīf also sent a doctor's prescription recipe and exact instructions about where to purchase the required items.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Loimeier 2000.

<sup>17</sup> For Naṣīf see Aḥmad and al-'Alawī 1994 and Freitag 2017, 292–308.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 13.6.1921, no. 2032.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 29.11.1922, no. 2078; cf. 28.10.1922, no. 2069.



or had themselves taken the initiative, cannot, at present, be ascertained. They also corresponded with a certain Sayyid al-‘Ajja in Damascus, concerning the sale of cloth.<sup>25</sup> Again, they seem to have expedited goods that were then sold in Damascus, as per the comment on the receipt of a cheque and the sending of goods.<sup>26</sup>

Did al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān continue their diversified business after 1922, by which time their press was firmly established and would have presumably allowed them to concentrate on what, both before and after the immediate post-war-period, seems to have been their core business interest? Or did they only continue to a limited degree to supply Muḥammad Naṣīf, their wealthy contact in Jeddah, as a means to maintain cordial relations with a wealthy partner who was also crucial to the editing and publishing business? One way or another, the collection contains no more letters about further business ventures. Given that al-Khaṭīb also worked as a journalist, and that the long accounts contained in the correspondence, as well as the practicalities of organizing and sending goods must have occupied much of his and Qatlān’s time, it is possible that general trade was only a transient means to accumulate sufficient capital for their publishing of and trade in books.

While a full history of the bookstore and press is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is noteworthy that the bookshop and publishing house still exist to this day. In 1938, the publishing house moved to Rawḍa-Island, where it remained for a long time.<sup>27</sup> After Muḥibb al-Dīn’s death, his son Quṣayy, a trained historian, continued the business, as is evident from the catalogue which he published in 1979 and in which the edited works of his father are prominently featured in one-page advertisements.<sup>28</sup> After Quṣayy’s death, his three sons pursued the reprinting of the works of their grandfather and father.<sup>29</sup> Since 2018, the *Maktaba Salafiyya* in Doqqi has morphed into a bookshop by the name *Maktabatī* (My Library), supposedly due to pressure by the security forces worried about the sale of books of a distinctly *salafī* leaning.<sup>30</sup> These bookshops were and still are a continuation of the one established by al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid al-‘Ajja, Damascus, 22.8.1922, no. 2040.

<sup>26</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid al-‘Ajja, 29.9.1922, no. 2066; the entries for further letters of 23.12.1922, no. 2076; and 27.12.1922, no. 2077, do not reveal further detail.

<sup>27</sup> Dāūd 2008, 188. The Rawḍa address is still given in the brochure by al-Atharī which was based on a lecture held in the summer of 1951 in Beirut, see al-Atharī 1951, 7.

<sup>28</sup> See al-Khaṭīb 1399/1979a, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27, 31, 35, 39; cf. Dāūd 2008, 189.

<sup>29</sup> Dāūd 2008, 189f.

<sup>30</sup> *Al-Dustūr* 31.10.2019, <https://www.dostor.org/2892588>, accessed June 22, 2023.

## The Printing Press

On 13 June 1921, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān had important news for Muḥammad Naṣīf. Apologizing for delays in sending goods which he had ordered, they informed him that this was partly due to a tardy supplier, and partly linked to

our preoccupation with preparing a new place for the *Salafi* Printing Press and Bookstore near al-ʿAtaba. The press is ready to print all types of books and journals and commercial matters in a very quick and precise manner because it is powered by electricity. We have attached a bookshop to it which will be important because it markets rare, printed books and manuscripts from all regions [...] we are perfectly prepared to print whatever you need at a low price and with much attention to proper correction, especially as those who head the printshop and bookshop are eminent scholars in *ʿilm* and *adab* and language and history [...].<sup>31</sup>

Whether the move of the bookstore was related to the addition of the printing press to their business, as suggested by Ghazal, or whether it was the consequence of a more general rapid growth and expansion, or was for altogether different reasons, cannot be established at present.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the new location of the publishing house is interesting; the original business location had been in Gamāliyya, which was the traditional centre of book and printing shops near al-Azhar University.<sup>33</sup> Although not far from Gamāliyya to the west, ʿAtaba Square is located at the junction of the old and new quarters built or refurbished in the mid-nineteenth century. Providing new types of entertainment in the form of gardens, public squares, hotels and the opera, the quarter around ʿAtaba Square attracted the new educated urban elite.<sup>34</sup> Did the proximity of a post office, which would have facilitated the distribution of books, also play a role?<sup>35</sup>

A letter to one of their partners, Sayyid Nuʿmān al-Aʿzamī (1874–1940), indicates that the two entrepreneurs were very aware of the changing audience for books, and the developing reading habits among Cairene literati. Al-Aʿzamī (d. 1950) was a bookseller, publisher, and editor of classical works with whom they sought long-term cooperation.<sup>36</sup> However, he seemed to follow what was quickly becoming an old-fashioned style. Thus, in the letter at hand, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān

<sup>31</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 13.6.1921, no. 2032.

<sup>32</sup> Amal Ghazal 1997, 135.

<sup>33</sup> Schwartz 2017, 27.

<sup>34</sup> Cairoobserver, “Cairo’s 19<sup>th</sup> Century Transformation in 7 Points” 2013; Mestyan 2017, 84–89.

<sup>35</sup> This was suggested to me by Adam Mestyan.

<sup>36</sup> On Nuʿmān al-Aʿzamī, ʿAwwād 1969, 400. I am indebted to Prof. Werner Ende for this information.

advise Sayyid Nu‘mān on how to publish an encyclopaedia (*qāmūs*) which he had proposed should not be organized in chapters but arranged according to the final letter of a word, as had been customary. Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān suggested that the volume rather be arranged according to the first letters. The customers buying newly printed books, they wrote, were students and *effendiyya* who would not know this customary kind of arrangement. In this they differed from the behaviour of the mass of religious students (*jumhūr ṭalabat al-‘ilm*) who had originally created this arrangement. The latter, however, were not the clientele the new printer was targeting, as they would only buy cheap books. Therefore, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān advised al-A‘zamī that his approach was a “mistake with regard to the current taste” (*‘ayban bi-l-nisba ilā l-dhawq al-‘aṣrī*) which they as the printers were not willing to follow.<sup>37</sup>

## The Economics of Printing

Printing involved all types of technical considerations beyond the preferences of potential customers, such as the types and sizes of the fonts, the quality of the paper, and the number of copies printed. All of this affected the price of publication and hence had to be negotiated with authors and customers.<sup>38</sup> They could also print photographs and inform their prospective clients of the price.<sup>39</sup> Photographs, particularly postcards, also offered a related line of business. Thus, they sent a sample postcard featuring ‘the Arab flag’ to Sayyid Nu‘mān, offering a variety of motifs such as images of rulers like Emir ‘Abdallāh of Transjordan, and of leading Syrian politicians.<sup>40</sup> It remains open to speculation whether this offer was ever taken up. One cost we do not learn about is that of the salaries of the people employed to verify and edit texts, or of the printers. Even though Muḥibb al-Dīn and Qatlān might have been doing some of the editing, as their comments to their correspondents suggest, they at times outsourced this “to one of the ‘ulamā’ at an agreeable price.”<sup>41</sup> It is an interesting

<sup>37</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid Nu‘mān al-A‘zamī, Baghdad, 2.8.1922, no. 2035.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid Nu‘mān al-A‘zamī, Baghdad, 2.8.1922; no. 2035; cf. letter to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 29.11.1922, no. 2184.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid Nu‘mān al-A‘zamī, 2.2.1923, no. 2104; to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 29.11.1922, no. 2184.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid Nu‘mān al-A‘zamī, 2.8.1922, no. 2035.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid ‘Abdallāh Daḥlān, 30.7.1923, no. 2153; on the editing by themselves, see al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Nu‘mān al-A‘zamī, 2.8.1922, no. 2035.



shift that the *'ulamā'*, whose style in organizing knowledge was considered to be outdated, were now thought to be good editors, probably due to their knowledge of classical texts.

The question of how the printing of manuscripts was financed cannot be answered satisfactorily on the basis of the letters examined so far. Certainly, the question of who had to carry the risk of print, which, beyond the labour involved, also included the cost of the paper, storage and marketing, as Schwartz has shown, was a matter of concern.<sup>42</sup> In an apparently complicated negotiation with Nu'mān al-A'ẓamī, they informed him that the terms of a commission price for printing, which he had suggested, were not acceptable.

Besides the economic questions at the heart of this matter, the specific style of negotiation which reflects a particular *adab* (etiquette) in letters among the literati is also quite noteworthy. While the following quotation from the letter offers interesting observations on both style and content, it does not answer the question of whether or not the modes of funding discussed were one among many, or the dominant mode of financing for manuscript printing. At any rate, Sayyid Nu'mān later chose to publish in Baghdad, although whether this was due to the practicalities of publishing near his home or a result of disagreements about how to publish, remains an open question.<sup>43</sup>

The type of commission suggested by Sayyid Nu'mān, they wrote, was one which

we have not accepted from anyone. It [commission] only exists for the guilds (in trade with goods sold in large quantities, or cloth), or what resembles this in terms of goods sold in large quantities not needing much attention. For those, it suffices if one informs the merchant from one's desk by telephone. As for books, you might know the mentality of the book traders and the necessity to discuss [commission rates] with them in detail. In order to provide the [book] guild with cheap copies, we must visit all bookstores, and must meet with them. Our conscience does not allow us to contract any one person to buy from us at the price they consider correct, as we want to serve not only ourselves. We mention this to you not to obtain a higher commission, or to say that we cannot accept anything else, but we leave the matter to your consideration, both regarding the present issue as well as what comes after it [...].<sup>44</sup>

The marketing of books was a laborious affair, as becomes clear from this and other letters. In August of 1922, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān informed their correspond-

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<sup>42</sup> Schwartz 2017, 28f.

<sup>43</sup> 'Awwād 1969, 400, lists one volume printed in Cairo in 1341/1922–23 and four printed in Baghdad between 1351/1932–33 and 1356/1937–38.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid Nu'mān al-A'ẓamī, Baghdad, 2.8.1922, no. 2035, 3.

ent Muḥammad Rashīd Effendī al-Mawāṣīlī that they had put together a catalogue of books available from their bookstore. They hoped that, once this catalogue was printed, it would prove an important marketing aide. Many, if not all the books listed were printed by their own press.<sup>45</sup> A number of letters to business partners accompanied the catalogue of the *Maktaba Salafiyya* in a drive to increase market visibility. The catalogue was also used to approach potential new business partners, such as the *Maktabat al-‘Arab* in Cairo, the *Maṭba‘a Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Nizāmiyya* in Hyderabad, and others.<sup>46</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān also suggested to their partners that they advertise particular publications in newspapers.<sup>47</sup> Personal letters to a number of booksellers were again penned when the first issue of al-Khaṭīb’s new journal *al-Zahrā’* was published in August 1924.<sup>48</sup>

In order to ensure the security of their printing business, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān wrote copious amounts of correspondence hoping to obtain more permanent contracts. One such contract was apparently the printing of a school newspaper for the privately run, nationalistically oriented school *Rawḍat al-Ma‘ārif* in Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup> In 1922 and 1923, they corresponded with two individuals involved with the school, among them the prominent poet, educator and writer Is‘āf al-Nashāshībī who also happened to be one of their authors.<sup>50</sup> Correspondence on the subject then ceases, possibly indicating that they did not pursue the project further.

The contact with the Iraqi Ministry of Education seems to have been more successful. At the time, it was in the hands of the prominent Arab educationalist Sāfi‘ al-Ḥuṣrī. In 1924, a number of letters were addressed both to the Minister, as well as to the Director of Education in Basra. These letters were concerned with the shipment of hundreds, and sometimes thousands of copies of books

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45 Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Rashīd Effendī al-Mawāṣīlī, 24.8.1922, no. 2038.

46 Letters of 13.10.1922, no. 2060; 16.10.1922, no. 2063 of; 12.1.1923, no. 2083; 6.6.1923, no. 2141; 19.9.1924, no. 2271.

47 Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Rashīd al-Mawāṣīlī, Baghdad (?), 24.8.1922, no. 2038.

48 Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 25.9.1924, no. 2273; Muḥammad al-Hāshimī, 18.9.1924, no. 2270; Mudīr al-Maṭba‘at Ḥukūma al-Sharq al-‘Arabiyya, 11.10.1924, no. 2278; Du-byān and Kuzbarī, Damascus and Aleppo, 21.8.1924, no. 2262; Ṣāliḥ b. Yaḥyā, 22.8.1924, no. 2263; Sayyid ‘Abdallāh, 21.8.1924, no. 2264.

49 On the school, see “*Kuliyat rawḍat al-ma‘ārif al-waṭaniyya (al-Quds)*.” Wikipedia, accessed January 23, 2022.

50 For the publication of Nashāshībī by the Maṭba‘a Salafiyya, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Is‘āf al-Nashāshībī, Jerusalem, 23.1.1923, no. 2101; 22.9.1924, no. 2272; he is mentioned in a letter to an Istanbul representative of the school, Sayyid Taysīr Du-byān, 9.1.1923, no. 2095; and they also wrote to the editorial staff of the journal, 13.9.1922, no. 2043. About Nashāshībī see “Isaaf al-Nashashibi,” Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, <https://www.paljourneys.org/en/biography/9849/isaaf-al-nashashibi>, accessed January 23, 2022.

apparently destined for use in Iraqi schools.<sup>51</sup> For instance, 3000 copies of the third edition of the *Mabādī' al-Qirā'a al-Khaldūniyya* (Principles of Khaldunian Reading), and 350 copies of the famous textbook *Tā'rikh al-'Arab wa-l-Islām* (History of the Arabs and of Islam) by Muḥammad 'Izzat Darwaza were sent.<sup>52</sup> Conveniently, this historical work, which was widely used in Arab schools, had been printed by al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān's press in Cairo. Letters with the author concern details such as the inclusion of maps in the book. It seems that Darwaza was also an avid buyer of their books.<sup>53</sup> We know less about the genesis of the primer *Mabādī' al-Qirā'a*, but it is highly likely that this textbook was also a product of their press. Interestingly, and not dissimilar to what is still a common complaint among recipients of government contracts, it seems that the Ministry of Education took its time to settle the no doubt considerable bills.

In early 1924, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān also offered to provide al-Khaṭīb's earlier, Mecca-based journal *al-Qibla* with a new letterpress. The offer gives some idea of the considerable value of the printing stock.<sup>54</sup> According to a biography of the Saudi politician and journalist, Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Naṣīf (a cousin of the aforementioned Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf), the stock came from the old press of al-Manār. With it, Naṣīf, together with 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Qatlān, wanted to establish a *Maṭba'a Salafiyya* in Mecca in 1928, in order to publish books which, according to a later biography, reflected the "Salafi madhhab."<sup>55</sup> The press was also used to print the newspaper *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* from 1932 onwards. At least two questions arise: Was it really the old printing stock of al-Manār, or possibly that of al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān, which *Ṣawt al-Ḥijāz* acquired, given al-Khaṭīb's good connections with Muḥammad Ḥusayn Naṣīf? Did Qatlān at that stage leave Cairo and the joint business, or can this press be considered an extension of the Cairo business discussed in this article?

51 Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Mudīr al-Ma'ārif Minṭaqat al-Baṣrā, 5.8.1924, no. 2258; and to Wazīr al-Ma'ārif bi-l-'Irāq, 28.8.1924, no. 2259, no. 2183, no. 2198; without date, no. 2199.

52 The book is commonly quoted as *Mukhtaṣar Tā'rikh al-'Arab wa-l-Islām* – in one letter, it is referred to as *Mukhtaṣar al-Islām* no. 2217 (no date nor addressees) – otherwise as *Tā'rikh*. On its importance for Arabism see Dawn 1988, 67–91.

53 Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sayyid 'Izzat Darwaza, Nablus, 19.5.1924, no. 2252, no. 2255; 15.10.1924, no. 2280; 27.10.1924, no. 2282.

54 Document no. 2204, the date is given as 8 Jumādā al-thāniyya or 14 Kānūn al-Thānī 4, meaning probably 14 January 1924.

55 al-Qash'ami 2010, 8.

## Transport and Payments

Logistics of transport were another matter troubling the entrepreneurs. Immediately after World War I, the Sharifian government in the Ḥijāz seems to have imposed limitations on the postal services. In a letter to Muḥammad Naṣīf, Qatlān apologized for apparent delays in sending what had been ordered. Contrary to all other territories – Qatlān even mentions British Sudan as an apparent epitome of a backward and remote place – registered parcels were not accepted by the Ḥijāzī post. Thus, books could only be sent without registration – thus incurring a certain risk (of loss or plunder) for the recipients, or they could be expedited with appointed travellers.<sup>56</sup>

The different means of transport demanded by customers came with different prices, but also different levels of security. When Muḥammad Rashīd Effendi al-Mawāṣīlī complained about the freight costs of Qurans sent from Cairo to Damascus, he was told that trains tended to be expensive. After all, the books travelled first on a train from Cairo to Alexandria, then on a ship to Beirut and then, once again, on a train from Beirut to Damascus. This, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān argued, was still cheaper than if al-Mawāṣīlī had purchased the books from Istanbul, given the risk of theft (presumably during transport from Istanbul to Damascus).<sup>57</sup> Ships were also used to send books to Baghdad via Basra. Increasingly, air transport was seen as an alternative. It seems to have already been common even for heavy items such as books, and was used quite frequently for letters.

How did commissioners, fellow booksellers and other customers pay for their services across the economically and politically fragmented Middle East? The letters illustrate a time of transition from older ways of transferring money through intricate systems of credit and the exchange of services, to bank transfers. The older system was still very much in place in the dealings with the Ḥijāz, while in trade with Iraq and even Indonesia, banks took an increasing share of the business.

The letters to Muḥammad Naṣīf illustrate the complicated system of registering payments and debt, often involving third parties, as well as banks. In one instance, Naṣīf had paid twenty English pounds into the Bank of London which resulted in al-Bank al-Ahlī in Cairo crediting al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān with 1,943 (presumably Egyptian pounds).<sup>58</sup> Three days later, they sent him another account in which sums are mentioned paid by third parties, apparently on Naṣīf's behalf, so

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<sup>56</sup> Qatlān to Naṣīf, 8.10.1919, no. 1981.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Rashīd Effendi al-Mawāṣīlī, 24.8.1922, no. 2038.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 27.10.1919, no. 1985, 2.

that they registered a credit on his part in their books.<sup>59</sup> On occasion, a money-changer in Suez was employed to transfer money to Jeddah.<sup>60</sup> Clearly, al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān sent books (and possibly other goods) on behalf of Naṣīf to recipients in various places such as Istanbul and Ṣaidā, as well as to the Arab Academy of Damascus.<sup>61</sup> It cannot be ascertained at this stage whether all of these were business transactions. However, it is likely that at least the books for the Arab Academy were a gift from Naṣīf.

The letters reflect that money transfers, regardless of whether through letters of credit, moneychangers, or banks, were frequently subject to delays, quite apart from the aforementioned issue of clients deferring payment. Such problems are further illustrated in a letter to the – presumably Iraqi – priest Sulaymān Ṣā'igh, whose *History of Mosul* they had been asked to print. In the letter, they reported that the last cheque sent by the priest had been rejected by the Ottoman Bank.<sup>62</sup>

## Conclusion

This article has provided some insight into the practicalities underlying the establishment of an eventually very important pan-Arab publishing house headed by a highly influential activist, journalist, and publisher in the period from the 1920s to 1960s, Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb, together with his brother-in-law. It reflects on the difficulties involved in conducting business in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, but also on the resilience of those involved. When the going became tough, they resorted to widening the goods they offered to their customers. Networks among former Ottoman Arab intellectuals of a similar Arabic-Islamic outlook enabled them to succeed in this enterprise and to establish the basis for the publication and distribution of religious works, and particularly those which nowadays could be characterized as *salafī*. However, the bookshop and printer produced and marketed a much wider spectrum of publications, presumably to attract customers of the *effendiyya* from beyond the decidedly religious or nationalist circles.

The changing location, but also the information on the evolution of financial transactions and transport illustrate the process of modernization through the

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<sup>59</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 27.10.1919, no. 1985, 2; and 30.10.1919, no. 1985, 3.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Muḥammad Naṣīf, 30.9.1922, no. 2052 and 28.10.1922, no. 2069.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Naṣīf, 18.3.1924, no. 2231; and 1.11.1919, no. 1985.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Khaṭīb and Qatlān to Sulaymān Ṣā'igh, Iraq (probably Mosul), 17.1.1924, no. 2209; for the agreement of printing and payment, see letter of 17.1.1924, no. 2187.

lens of one single business. The article also introduced the reader to a range of business practices, as well as to the very polite style in which scholars conducted business.

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Martin Riexinger

## Warum der falsche Prophet im Nil ertrinkt

Unorthodoxe Bemerkungen zur postkolonialen Lesart von al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ Roman *Mausim al-ḥiğra ilā l-šimāl*

1966 erschien in der vom Congress for Cultural Freedom herausgegeben Zeitschrift *al-Ḥiwār* der Roman *Mausim al-ḥiğra ilā l-šimāl* (Zeit der Nordwanderung) des in England lebenden sudanesischen Autors al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ (1929–2009), der zuvor im selben Organ mit Kurzgeschichten und der eher bukolischen Erzählung *ʿUrs al-Zain* (Die Hochzeit des Zain) hervorgetreten war.<sup>1</sup> Im Kontext der arabischen Literatur seiner Zeit, steht das Werk etwas isoliert da. Der Verfasser gehörte keinem literarischen Zirkel an und äußerte sich öffentlich nicht zu seinen Werken. Er tat sich auch nicht mit Äußerungen zu politischen Fragen oder poetologischen Überlegungen hervor. Nachdem Erscheinen von *Bandaršāh* 1971/76, einem Doppelroman in der Nachfolge zum hier besprochenen Werk, beendete er zudem seine literarische Aktivität. In seinen letzten beiden Lebensjahrzehnten trat er mit Essays in arabischen Zeitungen hervor und gab westlichen und arabischen Medien Interviews, die meist jedoch diesen Roman nur peripher berühren und wegen des großen Abstands zu dem Roman problematische Quellen für seine Intention sind.

Obwohl es abseits der Zentren der literarischen Diskussion entstanden ist, gilt das Buch mittlerweile als zentrales Werk der modernen arabischen Literatur, ja der Weltliteratur.<sup>2</sup> Ein Grund hierfür ist der Bruch mit der dominierenden sozialrealistischen Darstellungsweise durch die Fokussierung auf den Bewusstseinsstrom der beiden Protagonisten.<sup>3</sup> Es wurde bereits 1969 ins Englische übersetzt. Andere westliche Sprachen folgten. Auf Deutsch erschien der Roman jedoch erst 1998, übersetzt von Regina Karachouli.<sup>4</sup> Die Forschungsliteratur hat in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten einen beachtlichen Umfang erreicht. Einen Teil verfassten jedoch nicht Experten auf dem Gebiet der modernen arabischen Literatur, sondern Literaturwissenschaftler mit Interesse an Genderforschung und

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1 Holt 2019.

2 So wählte es das britische Literaturmagazin *Granta* zum besten Buch des Jahres 1966, Savaş 2018.

3 Wielandt 1980, 464.

4 Ṣāliḥ 1981, im Folgenden Mhš.



postkolonialen Theorien. Ausgangspunkt ist daher vielfach die englische Übersetzung des Romans.<sup>5</sup>

Das komplizierte Verhältnis eines der Protagonisten zu mehreren Frauen aus verschiedenen sozialen und kulturellen Sphären und in verschiedenen Ländern, wie auch der Gebrauch von maskuliner und femininer Symbolik war Ausgangspunkt für eine Anzahl ergiebiger Studien auf der Basis gendertheoretischer und psychologischer Ansätze.<sup>6</sup> Ein anderer, häufig aber problematischerer Deutungsansatz kommt aus dem Bereich postkolonialer Theorien. In entsprechenden Artikeln werden die beiden Hauptfiguren des Romans, Muṣṭafā Saʿīd und der namenlos bleibende Ich-Erzähler, als Talking Heads einer vermeintlich vom Autor intendierten politischen Botschaft gedeutet.<sup>7</sup> Interpretationen auf der Grundlage dieses Zugangs begünstigen zudem, dass in das Werk eine Ost-West oder Nord-Süd-Dichotomie hineingelesen wird. Ein markantes Beispiel ist eine der ersten umfangreichen arabischen Analysen von Ṭarābīšī, der auf psychoanalytischer Grundlage zu dem Schluss kommt, dass Ṣāliḥ ‚Nord‘ und ‚Süd‘ als politische-kulturelle Einheiten ‚gendert‘ (*tağnis*) in dem er beide mit entsprechender aggressiv-phallischer bzw. passiver, weicher Sprachsymbolik männlich und weiblich konnotiert.<sup>8</sup> Die Fokussierung auf den Ost-West- oder Nord-Süd-Gegensatz geht meist damit einher, dass der Protagonist Muṣṭafā Saʿīd als Opfer des Kolonialismus betrachtet wird. Von diesem häufigen Deutungsmuster weicht die Analyse von Wielandt jedoch deutlich ab. Jüngst trat zudem Holt mit einer diametral entgegengesetzten Einordnung von Ṣāliḥs politischem Standpunkt hervor, worauf zum Schluss zurückzukommen sein wird.<sup>9</sup>

Bei dem Versuch dem Roman solch eine West-Ost- oder Nord-Süd-Dichotomie als tragendes Prinzip aufzuzwingen, wird verkannt, dass er vor dem Hintergrund der sudanischen Geschichte und der spezifischen Identitätsproblematik dieses Landes geschrieben wurde. Der Verfasser thematisiert nicht allein das Verhältnis des Landes zur kolonialen Großmacht Großbritannien. An vielen Stellen lässt der Autor Personen des Romans über die als peripher wahrgenommene Stellung des Sudan gegenüber den ‚entwickelteren‘ arabischen Ländern, aber auch über dessen Beziehung zum Afrika südlich der Sahara reflektieren. In der Hauptfigur Muṣṭafā Saʿīd selbst vereinen sich die arabisch-islamischen und subsaharisch-

<sup>5</sup> Parry 2005; Tsaaior 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Siddiq 1978; Zeidanin 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Elsheshtawy 2005, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Ṭarābīšī 1977, 5–17 (generelle theoretische Grundlagen), 142–85 (Interpretation des Romans), siehe auch S. 306–09 im Kapitelabschnitt „Sudan im Spannungsgeflecht Westen – arabische Welt – subsaharisches Afrika“.

<sup>9</sup> Wielandt 1980, 466.

afrikanischen Elemente des Landes, eine Vereinigung, die nur vor dem Hintergrund der eigenen, internen Kolonialisierungsgeschichte zu verstehen ist. Der Roman ist damit ein Beispiel für die komplexen Interaktionen zwischen den ‚Kernländern‘ der ‚eigentlichen‘ arabisch-islamischen Welt und Afrika südlich der Sahara, dem Thema, dem Roman Loimeier sein wissenschaftliches Interesse gewidmet hat, wobei er stets hervorhebt, dass die Resultate dieser Interaktion keine minderwertige Kopie darstellen, sondern kulturelle Synthesen eigenen Rangs sind.<sup>10</sup> Neben diesem den historischen Hintergrund berührenden Einwand gegen die Deutung des Werks als Thesenroman spricht auch ein literarischer Aspekt, nämlich die komplexe Erzählstruktur, die jegliche Illusion sicheren Wissens, um wen es sich bei der Hauptperson überhaupt handelt, untergräbt.

In diesem Aufsatz soll zunächst dieser grundlegende Aspekt tiefer analysiert werden als dies in früheren Interpretationen geschah. Danach soll die Auffassung von der Ost-West-Dichotomie als grundlegendem Prinzip des Romans einer detaillierten Kritik unterzogen werden, um ausgehend davon einen alternativen Deutungsansatz zu formulieren, der die Kritik der nachkolonialen akademischen Eliten in den Vordergrund rückt.<sup>11</sup>

Die Arbeit mit dieser Fragestellung wirft eine weitere Problematik auf. Wie alle bedeutenden Romane der literarischen Moderne prägt *Mausim al-hiġra ilā l-šimāl* ein komplexes intertextuelles Geflecht voller Anspielungen auf andere literarische Werke. Bisher wurden dabei primär die Bezüge auf die westliche Literatur in Betracht gezogen. Vorrangig zu nennen sind die Inversion der Figur des europäischen Eroberers Kurtz in Conrads *The Heart of Darkness*,<sup>12</sup> das Motiv des Eifersuchtsmords aus Shakespeares *Othello*<sup>13</sup> und die Beziehung des ‚wilden‘ Caliban zur ‚zivilisierten‘ Miranda und dem weisen Lehrmeister Prospero aus *The Tempest*,<sup>14</sup> und generell das in der deutschen Romantik entstandene und in der *gothic novel* weitergeführte Doppelgängermotiv.<sup>15</sup> Wie in Thomas Manns *Doktor Faustus* reflektiert die Personenkonstellation dämonisches Genie/weniger begabter Ich-Erzähler zentrale politische und kulturelle Konflikte des Landes.<sup>16</sup>

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10 Loimeier 2002.

11 Der Begriff ‚nachkolonial‘ wird hier als Begriff zur zeitlichen Periodisierung gebraucht, im Gegensatz zum Begriff ‚postkolonial‘, der einen ideologischen Standpunkt bezeichnet.

12 Elad-Bouskila 1998, 78–81; Hassan 2003, 89–90. Eine weitere Parallele ist die Rekonstruktion des Lebenslaufs durch den Ich-Erzähler.

13 Makdisi 1992, 812; Alhawamdeh 2013.

14 Worüber Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd selbst womöglich ein Buch geschrieben hat, Mhš 139; Lowry 2001, 161–63.

15 Elad-Bouskila 1998, 83–84; McInnis 2008.

16 Lowry 2001, 161f.

Wenig ist dagegen zu Anregungen aus dem arabischen Kontext geforscht worden. Hassan zeigt auf, wie Šālīh den Optimismus des ägyptischen Bildungsromans mit intellektueller Hauptfigur in seinem Roman unterminiert.<sup>17</sup> Während er in seiner Analyse von Šālīh's Nachfolgewerk *Bandaršāh* sehr ausführlich auf Referenzen aus der vormodernen arabischen Literatur eingeht, gilt dies – sieht man von Hinweisen auf Abū Nuwās-Zitate ab – nicht für seine Untersuchung von *Mausim al-ḥiğra ilā l-šimāl*.<sup>18</sup> Anspielungen auf Tausendundeine Nacht zeigt van Leeuwen in einem Kapitel von *The Thousand and One Nights in Twentieth Century Fiction* auf.<sup>19</sup>

Wenig beachtet wurden hingegen Anspielungen auf die Prophetenbiographie und Vorstellungen über das Reich des Übersinnlichen (*ğāib*) sowie Ibn Ḥaldūn's Reflexionen über die Stellung des Gelehrten in Politik und Gesellschaft, denen ein zentrales Motiv des Romans entstammt. Ignoriert wurden zudem Referenzen auf das Werk von Ford Madox Ford, mit denen Šālīh das Bild eines krisengeschüttelten Großbritanniens zeichnen, dass die Dichotomie dominanter Westen/Norden/unterlegener Osten/Süden ebenso weniger eindeutig erscheinen lässt wie die differenzierte Darstellung von sudanesischer Geschichte und Gesellschaft.

## Plot und Darstellungsweise

In den ersten beiden Kapiteln erweckt der Roman den Eindruck, er bestehe aus zwei Handlungssträngen.<sup>20</sup> Im ersten Kapitel, das wie die Etablierung einer Rahmenhandlung wirkt, kehrt der Ich-Erzähler, ein gerade promovierter Anglist aus der Schicht der Dorfnotabeln, in seinen Heimatort an der Biegung des Nils im gerade unabhängig gewordenen Sudan zurück.<sup>21</sup> Ein zugezogener Mann mitt-

<sup>17</sup> Hassan 2003, 83–87.

<sup>18</sup> Hassan 2003, 139–45. Ebenso analysiert Elmarsafy Bezüge zu sufistischen Vorstellungen in anderen mit dem fiktiven Dorf Wad Ḥāmid verbundenen Werken Šālīh's, doch nicht in diesem Roman, Elmarsafy 2012, 52–65.

<sup>19</sup> Van Leeuwen 2018, 62–75; kurz auch Hassan 2003, 112; Holt 2019, 83–85.

<sup>20</sup> Lowry betrachtet die Erzählzeit und die nicht erzählte Vergangenheit des Ich-Erzählers als weitere Zeitebenen, Lowry 2001, 163–80. Zur Problematik der ersten Zeitebene siehe hier S. 296–98 im Kapitelabschnitt „Wie der Leser ins Schwimmen gerät: Die Auflösung der realistischen Illusion“. Die Vergangenheit des Ich-Erzählers taucht hingegen gelegentlich auf, erscheint mir jedoch eher als ein Mittel zur Charakterisierung als ein Handlungselement.

<sup>21</sup> Auf die ‚britische‘ Zeit nehmen verschiedene Akteure Bezug. Die Einordnung des ersten Handlungsstrangs in die Periode unmittelbar vor der Unabhängigkeit durch Hassan (Hassan 2003, 185) ist daher unhaltbar. Der 1898 geborene Muṣṭafā Sa'īd ist ca. 60 Jahre alt. Seit seinem Prozess 1927 sind 30 Jahre vergangen, Mhš, 49.

leren Alters, dessen Name Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, der Ich-Erzähler, auf Nachfrage von seiner Familie erfährt, weckt sein Interesse und beginnt nach mehreren Versuchen der Kontaktaufnahme im zweiten Kapitel seine Lebensgeschichte zu erzählen. Zunächst berichtet jener in chronologischer Abfolge davon, wie er als Halbwaise bei der Mutter in Khartoum aufwuchs, das gerade eröffnete Gordon College besuchte und ein Stipendium zum Besuch einer *tanwīya* in Kairo erhielt,<sup>22</sup> wo er unter Vormundschaft des kinderlosen englischen Ehepaares Robinson einige Jahre verbrachte.<sup>23</sup> Von nun an berichtet er ohne chronologische Ordnung von seinem Dasein als flamboyanter Intellektueller im Bloomsbury der 1920er Jahre und seinen sexuellen Beziehungen zu vier englischen Frauen, von denen zwei, Sheila Greenwood und Ann Hammond, Selbstmord begingen, und eine weitere, Isabella Seymour, an Krebs verstarb. Das Verhältnis zur vierten Frau gestaltete sich hingegen völlig anders. Jean Morris, eine junge Frau, die ihre Herkunft nie offenbarte, verweigerte sich jahrelang seinem Werben.<sup>24</sup> Die Beziehung zu ihr legalisierte er mit einer schmucklosen Hochzeit auf dem Standesamt. Es war die erste Ehe eines Sudanese mit einer Europäerin.<sup>25</sup> Doch ersticht er sie schließlich. Einer Hinrichtung wegen Mordes entgeht er ungewollt aufgrund des Plädoyers seines früheren konservativen Professors und ideologischen Rivalen Maxwell Foster Keen. Keen bewegte die Geschworenen dazu, auf Totschlag zu befinden, so dass Saʿīd nur eine Haftstrafe verbüßen musste.<sup>26</sup> Über die Zeit zwischen der Entlassung Muṣṭafā Saʿīds aus dem Gefängnis und seiner Ansiedlung im Dorf erfährt man im Roman nur anhand eines Reisepasses, den er dem Ich-Erzähler zeigt, dass er verschiedene europäische Länder sowie China bereist hat. Dass er Großbritannien verlassen hatte, als sich der Zweite Weltkrieg abzeichnete, wird erst in den Aufzeichnungen Saʿīds, die der Ich-Erzähler im vorletzten Kapitel findet, erwähnt.<sup>27</sup>

Im dritten Kapitel bricht die realistische Illusion zusammen. Es beginnt damit, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd während der Nilflut nach der Feldarbeit nicht nach Hause kommt und als ertrunken gilt. Zuvor hat er den Ich-Erzähler als Verwalter seines Nachlasses und Vormund seiner beiden kleinen Söhne eingesetzt und ihm

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22 Mhš 27.

23 Mhš 28.

24 Mhš 31, 34.

25 Mhš 59.

26 Für welchen Tatbestand er verurteilt wird, expliziert der Roman nicht. Das erschließt sich allein aus dem Strafmaß einer mehrjährigen Haftstrafe.

27 Mhš 22, 153. Dass er, wie Hassan behauptet, eine Stelle in der sudanesischen Verwaltung gesucht habe (Hassan 2003, 110), dafür findet sich kein Beleg und es ist angesichts seiner Vorstrafe nicht plausibel.

für die Söhne den Schlüssel zur geheimen Kammer in seinem Haus anvertraut.<sup>28</sup> Der Ich-Erzähler beginnt in den folgenden Jahren, inzwischen Beamter in der Bildungsbehörde, in einer vermeintlichen Fortsetzung der Rahmenhandlung die Biographie Muṣṭafā Saʿīds weiter zu rekonstruieren. Im Laufe dieses Prozesses wird die Suche nach Informationen über dessen Lebensweg zum einzigen Lebensinhalt des Ich-Erzählers. Eine klare Trennung von Rahmenhandlung und Biographie wird unmöglich. Bei der Rekonstruktion des Lebensweges stützt sich der Ich-Erzähler zum einen auf einen ehemaligen Schulkameraden,<sup>29</sup> einen englischen und mehrere sudanesischen Ministerialbeamte sowie die Dorfbewohner. Zum anderen referiert er wiederholt Aussagen von Muṣṭafā Saʿīd in der ersten Person, ohne dass der Roman hierfür eine explizite Erklärung liefert.<sup>30</sup> Der Ich-Erzähler nimmt sich zusehends als einen schwachen, da weniger begabten Abklatsch von Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, dem ersten sudanesischen Intellektuellen, wahr.

Eine Nebenhandlung im Mittelteil des Romans ist das weitere Schicksal von Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Witwe Ḥusna, der Tochter einer der angesehenen Familien des Dorfes. Der 70-jährige Dorfmacho Wad al-Rayyis, bekannt für seine zahlreichen Scheidungen, bittet den Ich-Erzähler eine Ehe mit ihr zu arrangieren. Dieses Ansinnen schlägt jener empört aus, informiert sie aber darüber.<sup>31</sup> Ḥusna zeigt hingegen Interesse am Ich-Erzähler. Obwohl er sich von der etwas älteren Frau angezogen fühlt und ihr Interesse an ihm wahrnimmt, verweigert er sich einer Ehe mit ihr. Selbst als sein Jugendfreund Maḥḡūb ihm zu dieser Heirat rät, weigert er sich, weil er bereits verheiratet ist und Polygynie ablehnt. In Wirklichkeit fürchtet er jedoch, dass sein Leben mit dem Muṣṭafā Saʿīds verschmelzen könnte.<sup>32</sup> Schließlich wird Ḥusna gegen ihren Willen von ihrer Familie mit Wad al-Rayyis verheiratet. Als jener versucht mit Gewalt den Geschlechtsverkehr zu erzwingen, kastriert und tötet sie ihn, wie sie selbst angekündigt hat. Danach ersticht sie sich selbst.<sup>33</sup>

Im Mittelteil des Romans werden auch einige Nebenfiguren charakterisiert und Gespräche über die Lebensumstände im Dorf sowie die Stellung des Sudans in der arabischen Welt und Afrika geführt. Der Ich-Erzähler beschreibt zudem die

**28** Mhš 49f., 69–71.

**29** Mhš 54–57.

**30** Mhš 71–73, 95–99.

**31** Mhš 79–84, 89–90, 99.

**32** Mhš 92f., 99, 106, 1109. Seine eigene westlich geformte Ablehnung des ruralen Traditionalismus und Patriarchalismus (Wielandt 1980, 473f.) blockiert den Ausbruch einer anderen Figur aus diesem System.

**33** Mhš 99, 126–30.

sudanesische Ministerialbürokratie, eine Fahrt durch die Wüste und eine panafrikanische Bildungskonferenz. Diese Details mögen auf den ersten Blick als Abschweifungen von der eigentlichen Handlung erscheinen. Der Mittelteil endet im achten Kapitel mit dem Streit des Ich-Erzählers mit seinem Jugendfreund Maḥḡüb, inzwischen Vorsitzender der örtlichen Landwirtschaftskooperative. Maḥḡüb, der ein ordentliches Begräbnis von Ḥusna verhindert hat, bezeichnet sie als verrückt. Er wirft dem Ich-Erzähler vor, sich jetzt zu empören, wo er sie hätte heiraten können, woraufhin er beginnt seinen Freund zu würgen. Dann erhält der Ich-Erzähler selbst mit einem Knüttel einen Schlag auf den Kopf und fällt in Ohnmacht.<sup>34</sup>

Den Auftakt zum Finale bildet das lange neunte Kapitel. Es beschreibt, wie der Ich-Erzähler in die in englischem Stil eingerichtete Bibliothek Muṣṭafā Sa'īds eindringt, allerdings ohne dass explizit aufgelöst wurde, ob er aus seiner Bewusstlosigkeit erwacht ist. Mithin ist unklar, ob es sich um Realität oder einen Alptraum handelt. Seine Motivation ist nicht Liebe, sondern der Neid darauf, dass Muṣṭafā Sa'īd es vermochte, eine grundlegende Entscheidung zu treffen.<sup>35</sup> Hier findet er ein von Muṣṭafā Sa'īd gemaltes Portrait von Jean Morris in Öl,<sup>36</sup> ausschließlich englischsprachige Bücher<sup>37</sup> und Fotos von ihm und den englischen Frauen, zu denen er Beziehungen unterhielt.<sup>38</sup> Dazwischen referiert er einen Brief von Elizabeth Robinson<sup>39</sup> und weitere Aufzeichnungen, die über die näheren Umstände ihres Todes Auskunft geben.<sup>40</sup> Darunter befinden sich viele unbeschriebene Seiten sowie Zeichnungen, die Muṣṭafā Sa'īd von Dorfbewohnern angefertigt hat. Besonders viele zeigen Wad al-Rayyis, der für ihn in ähnlicher Weise ein Faszinosum darstellte, wie er selbst es für den Ich-Erzähler war.<sup>41</sup> Die Erklärung für die Tötung Jean Morris durch Muṣṭafā Sa'īd lautet, dass sie ihrem Mann auch nach der Eheschließung den Geschlechtsverkehr verwei-

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34 Mhš 128, 131–34.

35 Mhš 135f.

36 Mhš 137, 156f. Die Beschreibung erinnert an die Künstlerin Jane Morris, die mehreren prä-raffaelitischen Malern als Modell für eine *femme fatale* diente.

37 Mhš 138–39.

38 Mhš 140–41, 143.

39 Mhš 148–49.

40 Mhš 149–53.

41 Mhš 135–67; Makdisi 1992, 814. Hier klingt unverkennbar das Schatzkammermotiv aus *Tausendundeiner Nacht* an, van Leeuwen 2018, 70–73; aber auch wie Kurtz seine Dokumente in die Obhut von Marlow gibt, Conrad 2006, 68, 71. Die Begabung Muṣṭafā Sa'īds als bildender Künstler, ist wohl eine Reminiszenz an die musikalische Begabung des ‚universal genius‘ Kurtz, Conrad 2006, 71f.; Mhš 153.

gerte. Der Streit eskalierte, als sie mit einem Taschentuch auf *Othello* anspielend eine Affäre andeutete. Eifersüchtig wie Shakespeares Dramenheld erstach Muṣṭafā sie im Bett, nachdem es zum Geschlechtsakt gekommen war, das Zusteichen schildert er als endlich geglückte Vereinigung.<sup>42</sup>

Erschüttert von der Begegnung mit den Abgründen seines Alter Ego begibt sich der Ich-Erzähler zum Nil, steigt ins Wasser, wird von der Strömung ergriffen. Er schwimmt verzweifelt gegen das Ertrinken an, während er am Ufer seine Familie zu sehen meint. Erschöpft scheint er auf festen Boden gelangt zu sein. Mit dem Schrei „Hilfe! Hilfe!“ (*al-nağda! ... al-nağda!*) schließt der Roman.<sup>43</sup>

## Wie der Leser ins Schwimmen gerät: Die Auflösung der realistischen Illusion

Ob die Rettung letztlich erfolgt, darüber schweigt der Roman sich aus und verweigert damit dem Leser eine Auflösung der Frage, um was es sich bei dem Narrativ des Ich-Erzählers überhaupt handelt.<sup>44</sup> Dabei beginnt die Erzählung ganz konventionell. Die ersten Sätze wenden sich an eine imaginäre Leserschaft („meine Herren“) und erwecken somit den Eindruck, es handele sich um einen retrospektiven Bericht.<sup>45</sup> Ein Gespräch des Ich-Erzählers mit seinem Großvater und kurze Kontakte mit Muṣṭafā Saʿīd werfen ein erstes Licht auf dessen Persönlichkeit. Die letzte Zusammenkunft mündet in Muṣṭafā Saʿīds autobiographischen Bericht im zweiten Kapitel.

Bis zu diesem Punkt erweckt der Roman die Illusion der Aufschlüsselung einer Biographie in einer Rahmenhandlung in konventionell realistischer Manier. Nach dem Verschwinden Muṣṭafā Saʿīds im dritten Kapitel wird diese Illusion langsam unterminiert. Während einerseits die Suche nach dessen Identität mit den Konventionen der Detektivarbeit fortgesetzt wird, spricht der für tot Gehaltene zum Ich-Erzähler, ohne dass dies in irgendeiner Form erklärt wird. Zudem verwirren manche Berichte mehr als sie erklären. So behaupten Ministerialbeamte in Khartoum, Muṣṭafā Saʿīd sei durch seine Teilnahme an britischen Ver-

<sup>42</sup> Mhš 164–67; zur Weigerung auch schon Mhš 37f.; Shakespeare, *Othello*, III.4, 240–47.

<sup>43</sup> Mhš 168–71. Der doppelte Ausruf ist eine Anspielung an Kurtz Sterbeworte „the horror ... the horror,“ Conrad 2006, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Im Nachfolgeroman *Bandaršāh* taucht der Ich-Erzähler als Nebenfigur namens Muḥaimid auf, was nicht bedeuten muss, dass dies von Anfang an geplant war.

<sup>45</sup> Mhš 5; wieder zu Beginn des vierten Kapitels, Mhš 65.

schwörungen reich geworden und lebe nun wie ein Lord in England auf dem Land, während der Ich-Erzähler ihn als Landwirt von bescheidenem Wohlstand kennenlernte.<sup>46</sup>

Ein Detail, das in der Forschungsliteratur weitgehend unbeachtet blieb, aber einer realistischen Deutung entgegensteht, ist das erwähnte Faktum, dass dem Kapitel in Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Bibliothek die Bewusstlosigkeit infolge des handgreiflichen Streits mit Maḥḡūb vorausgeht. Das neunte Kapitel schließt daran unmittelbar mit der Schilderung an, wie der Ich-Erzähler die Tür zur Bibliothek öffnet. Dass er aus der Ohnmacht erwacht sei, wird nirgends erwähnt. Damit bleibt offen, ob es sich um ein reales Ereignis handelt oder ob die Suche nach Dokumenten über das Leben Muṣṭafā Saʿīds und dem anschließenden Eintauchen in den Nil ein Alptraum in der Bewusstlosigkeit ist. Zwei Fragen bleiben am Ende des Romans daher unbeantwortet und bieten so mehrere Deutungsmöglichkeiten. Die Vorstellung eines an ein Publikum gerichteten Berichts aus der Rückschau, wie ihn die ersten Sätze nahelegen, ist nur eine unter zahlreichen Deutungen und vielleicht nicht einmal die plausibelste.<sup>47</sup> Vielmehr muss man sich angesichts der unklaren Grenzen zwischen Schilderungen des ‚real‘ Erlebten und dem Zustand der Bewusstlosigkeit fragen, ob es sich um einen inneren Monolog des Ich-Erzählers im Moment des Ertrinkens oder beim Kampf dagegen handelt, in dem er das eigene Leben und das Muṣṭafā Saʿīds rekapituliert, wobei nicht aufgeklärt wird, ob der Ich-Erzähler tatsächlich gerettet wird? Oder handelt es sich um Reflexionen aus dem Jenseits?<sup>48</sup>

Aufgrund der Unmöglichkeit, aus dem mehrdeutigen Plot eine eindeutige und ‚reale‘ Fabel zu abstrahieren,<sup>49</sup> verliert der Leser bei der Lektüre der ‚Antigeschichte‘<sup>50</sup> den festen Boden unter den Füßen und gerät ins Schwimmen: eine geniale Verbindung von Form und Inhalt.

Die Verunsicherung des Lesers verläuft parallel zu der des Ich-Erzählers. Diese Entwicklung unterstreicht den Wandel der Metaphorik: Im ersten Kapitel überwiegen Vergleiche mit Bäumen und Wurzeln, welche die starke Verankerung des Ich-Erzählers in einer eher statischen dörflichen Gemeinschaft unterstreichen

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46 Mhš 59f.

47 Lowry 2001, 164.

48 Tageldin 2009, 96.

49 Im Sinne des russischen Formalismus, Chatman 1978, 19f.

50 „In a genuine sense such texts may be called ‘antinarratives,’ since what they call in question is, precisely, narrative logic, that one thing leads to one and only one other, the second to the third and so on to the finale. But it is incorrect to say that they are without plot, for clearly they depend for their effect on the presupposition of the traditional narrative line of choice,” Chatman 1978, 56–59.



sollen.<sup>51</sup> Ab dem dritten Kapitel überwiegen dagegen Vergleiche aus den semantischen Feldern des Fließens und Wanderns. Hierauf wird auch mit Blick auf die Identität des Sudans zurückzukommen sein.<sup>52</sup>

Zweifel am Realitätsgehalt der Erzählung nährt aber nicht allein die Erzählstruktur. Muṣṭafā Saʿīd werden Eigenschaften zugeschrieben, die über das allgemein Menschliche hinausreichen. Für die der plausiblen Alltagserfahrung widersprechende Existenz eines gegiebelten Hauses aus Backstein mit Bibliothek und englischen Möbeln in einem sudanesischen Dorf bietet der Roman keine Erklärung an.<sup>53</sup>

Eine im zweiten Kapitel platzierte Äußerung Muṣṭafā Saʿīds in seiner abschließenden Rede vor dem High Court während des Mordprozesses wirkt auf dem ersten Blick als Zeugnis mentaler Verwirrung. Sie gewinnt für den Ich-Erzähler aber nach Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Tod tiefere Bedeutung. Getrieben von Todessehnsucht verteidigt er sich nicht, und verkündet, er sei eine Illusion oder Lüge.<sup>54</sup> Nach dem Verschwinden Muṣṭafā Saʿīds drängt sich dem Ich-Erzähler der Gedanke auf, Muṣṭafā Saʿīd (oder gar er selbst) sei eine Lüge und keine reale Person, und bezeichnet ihn so auch gegenüber Dritten.<sup>55</sup> Das wirft eine weitere alternative Deutungsmöglichkeit auf: Ist Muṣṭafā Saʿīd nicht vielmehr eine Projektion, eine Einbildung des Ich-Erzählers?<sup>56</sup>

Allerdings legt Ṣāliḥ auch eine andere Fährte, die eine triviale Erklärung möglich erscheinen lässt: Maḥḡūb erwähnt und verwirft einmal en passant das Gerücht, wonach Gegner des Genossenschaftsprojekts Muṣṭafā Saʿīd ermordet haben sollen.<sup>57</sup> Ist es also doch eine ‚straightforward murder story,‘ wie Ṣāliḥ Jahrzehnte später seinen ursprünglichen Plan formulierte,<sup>58</sup> und führt er den Ich-Erzähler und die Leser an der Nase herum?

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51 Mhš 6, 9.

52 Mhš 53.

53 Mhš 15, 91; Makdisi 1992, 815–16.

54 Mhš 36.

55 Mhš 52f., 110.

56 Mhš 87; Wielandt 1980, 465.

57 Mhš 105.

58 Ṣāliḥ 2009, 3:55–3:57.

## Die beiden Wesen Muṣṭafā Saʿīds

Wenig Aufmerksamkeit schenkt die Forschungsliteratur dem Sachverhalt, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd mit zwei völlig konträren Persönlichkeitsstrukturen auftritt. Hassan, der diesen Zug hervorhebt, betrachtet ihn als Ausdruck der Widersprüchlichkeit seines Charakters. Das trifft die Sache nicht ganz, da sich die konträren Wesenszüge klar den verschiedenen Lebensphasen Muṣṭafā Saʿīds zuordnen lassen.<sup>59</sup>

Als der Ich-Erzähler Muṣṭafā Saʿīd erstmals im Dorf wahrnimmt, war dieser gerade aus England zurückgekehrt und saß beim Treffen der Männer des Dorfes unauffällig und schweigsam im Hintergrund.<sup>60</sup> Generell hält sich Muṣṭafā Saʿīd eher im Hintergrund und redet wenig.<sup>61</sup> Beim ersten Gespräch erklärt Muṣṭafā Saʿīd dem Erzähler, dass er das Dorf als seinen Wohnort ausgesucht habe, weil es so ruhig sei.<sup>62</sup> Die meisten Dorfbewohner wissen über ihn und seine Vorgeschichte wenig, abgesehen davon, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd viele Jahre im Ausland verbracht hat. Das legt nahe, dass sie sich nie in großem Stil mit ihm unterhalten haben. Der Großvater des Ich-Erzählers ist eine der wenigen Ausnahmen. Auf den unbedeutend wirkenden Sachverhalt im Verhalten Muṣṭafā Saʿīds wird später noch zurückzukommen sein, nämlich dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd in dieser Phase lacht.<sup>63</sup>

Muṣṭafā Saʿīds zurückhaltendes Wesen im Dorf kontrastiert mit dem Bild des Überfliegers auf der Schule in Khartoum und dem des flamboyanten Intellektuellen in Bloomsbury. Am Gordon College gilt er als Wunderkind und wird mit übermenschlichen Eigenschaften beschrieben (*muʿǧiza*), weil er mit seiner Eloquenz und seinen Leistungen die Aufmerksamkeit von Lehrern und Klassenkameraden auf sich zieht. Von seinen Mitschülern wird er bewundert aber auch beneidet. Mühelos eignet er sich die englische Sprache an, während die anderen sie sich hart erarbeiten müssen. In einer Art intellektueller Synästhesie existieren für Muṣṭafā Saʿīd die verschiedenen Grenzen zwischen den Fächern nicht. Gedichte erscheinen ihm wie mathematische Gleichungen, mathematische Formeln wie Verse. Als führendes Mitglied aller Vereine stand er zwar oft im Mittelpunkt, war aber vielfach auch allein für sich, nicht zuletzt, da er keinem Stamm angehört und damit außerhalb der prägenden Struktur der sudanesischen Gesellschaft

<sup>59</sup> Hassan 2003, 114–15.

<sup>60</sup> Mhš 8.

<sup>61</sup> Mhš 6f. Die einzige Ausnahme ist, dass er bei der Vorstandssitzung des landwirtschaftlichen Projekts Bauern zusammenstaucht, die frühzeitig Wasser auf ihre Felder geleitet haben, Mhš 16.

<sup>62</sup> Mhš 13.

<sup>63</sup> Mhš 13.

steht.<sup>64</sup> Dies ist einer der Punkte, an denen deutlich wird, dass die Deutung von Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Verhalten als Resultat der Entfremdung durch den Kolonialismus nicht überzeugt. Er war von vornherein ein Fremder wie er selbst betont.<sup>65</sup> Die Kontrastfigur ist in dieser Hinsicht der Großvater des Ich-Erzählers, ein Genealoge der mit den Abstammungsverhältnissen und Stammesbeziehungen stromauf- und abwärts eingehend vertraut ist, weswegen er es missbilligt, dass Ḥusnas Familie der Eheschließung mit Muṣṭafā Saʿīd zugestimmt hat, obwohl er ihn persönlich wertschätzt.<sup>66</sup>

Als intellektueller Wortführer von ‚proto-woken‘ Gegnern des britischen Imperialismus verkündet Muṣṭafā Saʿīd in England eine neue Nationalökonomie, die im Gegensatz zur herkömmlichen Volkswirtschaftslehre nicht auf Zahlen und Statistiken, sondern auf Liebe aufbauen soll.<sup>67</sup> Im Dorf hingegen hat er als stiller Einzelgänger die Buchhaltung eines Landwirtschaftsprojekts übernommen, obwohl er weit eher als alle Einwohner dazu qualifiziert gewesen wäre, es zu leiten.<sup>68</sup> Hiermit wird aber nicht allein eine Veränderung in der Persönlichkeit beschrieben. Der Kontrast steht auch für den Gegensatz zwischen hochtrabenden ideologischen Projekten und pragmatischem, auf konkrete Verbesserungen ausgerichtetem Handeln.

Seine Stellung als Großintellektueller nutzt Muṣṭafā Saʿīd in London rücksichtslos aus, um Frauen ins Bett zu bringen, was mit zahlreichen Jagd- und Raubtiermetaphern unterstrichen wird.<sup>69</sup> Sein Ziel dabei ist allerdings nicht allein, und vielleicht nicht einmal primär die sexuelle Befriedigung, sondern das Gefühl der Macht, das er als Rache für den Kolonialismus „mit dem ---“ rationalisiert.<sup>70</sup> Im Dorf führt er hingegen eine unspektakuläre und fruchtbare Ehe mit Ḥusna, wenngleich wohl eine Vernunft-ehe, die eher auf gegenseitigem Respekt denn auf Leidenschaft beruht.<sup>71</sup>

Tabellarisch lässt sich dies folgendermaßen zusammenfassen:

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64 Mhš 26f.; aus der Sicht eines Mitschülers, Mhš 54, 57.

65 Mhš 24; aus der Sicht eines Mitschülers, Mhš 55.

66 Mhš 10.

67 Mhš 49, 61f.

68 Mhš 15.

69 Mhš 33f. Die Waffen sind stets vormodern und Kamele spielen eine wichtige Rolle, Makdisi 1992, 811.

70 Wielandt 1980, 464–66, 469–71.

71 Mhš 93; Hassan 2003, 114.

**Tabelle 1:** Die konträren Charakterzüge Muṣṭafā Saʿīds

In der Welt	Im Dorf
Extrovertiert, dominant	Introvertiert, bescheiden
Nationalökonomie ohne Zahlen Theoretiker	Buchhaltung der Kooperative Pragmatiker
Sexueller Ausbeuter	Verantwortungsvoller Ehemann
Lacht nicht	Lacht

Das Bild vom verantwortungsbewusst-bescheidenen Muṣṭafā Saʿīd im Dorf wird allerdings durch zwei Elemente dementiert. Mit seinem Verschwinden lässt er seine Frau ungeschützt zurück. Die Art und Weise, wie er alles arrangiert, damit der Ich-Erzähler seinen Lebensweg rekonstruiert, zeigt seinen Wunsch, erkannt und verewigt zu werden, und ist Ausdruck seiner ungebrochenen Selbstüberhebung.<sup>72</sup>

## Muṣṭafā Saʿīd als Doppelgänger

Die Forschungsliteratur ist sich darin einig, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd ein – wenngleich intellektuell überlegener – Doppelgänger (oder *alter ego*) des Ich-Erzählers und damit zugleich Archetyp des nachkolonialen Akademikers und Intellektuellen ist. Nicht zufällig wird er einmal für seinen Sohn gehalten.<sup>73</sup> Die negativen Seiten von Muṣṭafā Saʿīd ziehen den Ich-Erzähler in seinen Bann. Er empfindet Muṣṭafā Saʿīd als satanischen Widersacher (*saʿada šaiṭānī*)<sup>74</sup> und versucht zu verhindern, dass er mit seiner Person verschmilzt, etwa indem er sich weigert, seinen Gefühlen für dessen Witwe nachzugeben. Aber das hilft nichts. Nachdem er sich Zugang zur Bibliothek verschafft hat, steht er nicht wie erwartet einem Porträt Muṣṭafā Saʿīds gegenüber, sondern seinem eigenen Spiegelbild.<sup>75</sup> Muṣṭafā Saʿīd konfrontiert den Ich-Erzähler mit den negativen und bedrohlichen Seiten seiner Persönlichkeit und seiner sozialen Rolle.

Übersehen wird aber in den meisten bisherigen Deutungen, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd selbst die negative Seite seiner Person in einer anderen wiederfindet und durch Zeichnungen zu bannen versucht. Bei der Durchsicht der Porträts, die der

<sup>72</sup> Mhš 156.

<sup>73</sup> Mhš 60.

<sup>74</sup> Mhš 136.

<sup>75</sup> Mhš 153. In der Bibliothek redet er explizit von der Liebe zu Ḥusna, Mhš 143.

Ich-Erzähler in der Bibliothek entdeckt, zeigt sich, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Aufmerksamkeit vor allem dem Schürzenjäger Wadd al-Rayyis galt, der sich gegenüber Frauen im Dorf so verhält wie Muṣṭafā Saʿīd gegenüber seinen britischen Geliebten.<sup>76</sup> Beide definieren sich über ihren Penis. Während ein ehemaliger Student berichtet, dass Muṣṭafā Saʿīd „Afrika mit seinem --- befreien“ wollte, protzt Wadd al-Rayyis mit seiner „englischen Kanone.“<sup>77</sup> Zuletzt überlappt sich ihr Handeln in ähnlicher Weise wie das von Muṣṭafā Saʿīd und dem Ich-Erzähler. Die Weigerung von Jean Morris und Ḥusna, sich sexuell zu unterwerfen, beantworten beide Männer mit Gewalt. So finden beide Frauen Muṣṭafā Saʿīds schließlich den Tod, wenngleich er im Falle Ḥusnas selbst gewählt ist, nachdem sie den Gewalttäter gerichtet hat.<sup>78</sup> So sehr sich Muṣṭafā Saʿīd auch in London als bedeutender Intellektueller gebärdet, zeigt sein Handeln doch, dass seine Mentalität sich nicht von der eines Dorfmachos unterscheidet. Ebenso wie er seine sexuellen Eskapaden mit antiimperialistischen Phrasen und historischen Analogien ideologisch rationalisiert, so hat Wadd al-Rayyis, sonst ein Trunkenbold und Zotenreißer, die koranischen Worte *“al-riḡāl qawwāmūn ‘alā l-nisā”* (Die Männer stehen über den Frauen, Koran 4:34) zitierparat, um seinen Dominanzanspruch gegenüber dem weiblichen Geschlecht ideologisch zu rechtfertigen.<sup>79</sup>

## Parallelen zur Prophetenbiographie

Es ist bemerkenswert, dass einige Eigenschaften Muṣṭafā Saʿīds und Begebenheiten in seinem Leben Parallelen zur Überlieferung vom Leben Muḥammads und prophetologischen Konzepten aufweisen. Schon der Name Muṣṭafā ist ein Beiname Muḥammads. Sein Vater, ein Händler, ist wie Muḥammads Vater ebenfalls ein Händler und vor dessen Geburt verstorben.<sup>80</sup> Als der Ich-Erzähler Muṣṭafā Saʿīd trifft, ist er ca. ist sechzig Jahre alt. Zu Beginn des Romans bezeichnet der

<sup>76</sup> Mhš 136; so schon Nasr 1980, 98–100.

<sup>77</sup> Mhš 87, 122.

<sup>78</sup> Den Ich-Erzähler ekelt die Vorstellung, dass al-Rayyis zwischen ihren schwarzen Schenkeln liegen könnte wie Muṣṭafā Saʿīd zwischen den weißen, Mhš 90. Die Ḥusna-Episode unterminiert im Übrigen die anfängliche Idyllisierung des Dorfes durch den Ich-Erzähler. Harmonisch, verwurzelt, ruhig erscheint das Dorf aus der Perspektive eines jungen Mannes, der einer der führenden Familien des Ortes entstammt und es gewohnt ist, anderen beim Arbeiten zuzusehen, Mhš 9. Für eine Frau mit Freiheitswillen, den Ḥusna schon als Mädchen bewies (Mhš 103f.), stellen sich die Verhältnisse anders dar, Tomiche 1981, 389; Amyuni 1985, 31–35; Amyuni 1999, 212, 214.

<sup>79</sup> Mhš 101.

<sup>80</sup> Mhš 22f.

Großvater des Ich-Erzählers – auf den ersten Blick ohne erkennbaren Bezug zu Muṣṭafā Saʿīd – in einem Gespräch sechzig Jahre als das „Prophetenalter“ (*ʿumr al-nubuwwa*).<sup>81</sup> Lehrer und Mitschüler in Khartoum bezeichnen Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Begabung als *muʿǧiza* und wählen damit den Begriff, der für die Beglaubigungswunder von Propheten verwendet wird.<sup>82</sup> Als Muṣṭafā Saʿīd auf der Reise nach Ägypten einem christlichen Geistlichen mit auffallendem Kreuzifix begegnet, der seine besondere Persönlichkeit erkennt, erinnert dies an die Begegnung des Eremiten Bahīra mit dem jugendlichen Muḥammad auf der Handelsreise nach Syrien, der das Prophetenmal zwischen seinen Schulterblättern entdeckt.<sup>83</sup> In seiner ersten Lebensphase lacht Muṣṭafā Saʿīd zudem nicht.<sup>84</sup> Hier handelt es sich womöglich um einen Bezug auf eine – allerdings nicht unwidersprochene Auffassung – der zufolge Muḥammad nie in einer Form gelacht habe, die über ein freudiges Lächeln hinausging. Sie beruht auf einer Reihe von *aḥādīṭ* in den kanonischen Sammlungen und passt zu einer Reihe weiterer Traditionen, in den Lachen als unangebracht bezeichnet wird.<sup>85</sup>

Diese Parallelen zur Prophetenbiographie passen dazu, dass sich der erste Muṣṭafā Saʿīd selbst als Verkünder einer neuen, antiimperialistischen Botschaft versteht, und das nach einer *Hiğra*, also einer Auswanderung. Mit dieser Botschaft zieht er eine Gefolgschaft im intellektuellen Milieu Englands heran. Hier überschneidet sich die Anspielung auf das Prophetentum zudem mit der Parallelisierung zu Kurtz in Conrads *Heart of Darkness*, der sich an seinem Stützpunkt am Kongo mit einem bizarren Kult eine Gefolgschaft unter den Einheimischen herangezogen hat.<sup>86</sup>

## Muṣṭafā Saʿīd – eine Figur aus dem Reich des Verborgenen (*ǧaib*)?

Keine Parallele zum Leben Muḥammads, aber doch ein Zug, der Muṣṭafā Saʿīd aus der Normalität heraushebt, ist sein ungewöhnlich verlaufender Alterungsprozess. Während er als Zwölfjähriger wirkt als sei er bereits fünfzehn, als Fünf-

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81 Mhš 10.

82 Mhš 24, 48.

83 Mhš 28, 32f.

84 Mhš 26.

85 Sellheim 1964; Ammann 1993, 39–88.

86 Conrad 2006, 50, 55f.

zehnjähriger als sei er bereits zwanzig, erscheint er dem Ich-Erzähler bei der ersten Begegnung etwa fünfzig Jahre alt, also jünger als es seinem Alter von etwa sechzig entspräche.<sup>87</sup> Möglicherweise stellt dieser Wesenszug einen von mehreren Verweisen auf eine andere Figur aus dem Bereich islamischer Glaubensvorstellungen dar. Während die Hinweise auf Parallelen zu Muḥammad von Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd selbst und manchen Zeitzeugen geliefert werden, assoziiert Maḥḡūb ihn – stellvertretend für die Dorfbewohner – mit der apokryphen Gestalt Ḥiḍr und sein verschlossenes Haus mit der Schatzkammer Sulaimāns.<sup>88</sup>

Ḥiḍr wird im Koran nicht selbst genannt. Mit dem Namen wird aber in der späteren Tradition der Begleiter von Mūsā/Moses im Koran 18:60–82 bezeichnet. Durch die Identifikation mit dem Heiligen Georg oder aber dem Propheten Elias wurde Ḥiḍr der Staus eines Heiligen oder gar eines Propheten zugeschrieben. Seine von der Wurzel \*ḥ-ḍ-r für grün abgeleiteter Name weist auf mit Fruchtbarkeitsgottheiten verbundene Vorstellungen hin. Darüber hinaus wird über Ḥiḍr gesagt, dass er immer noch lebe, verschiedene Gestalten annehmen und an mehreren Orten gleichzeitig erscheinen könne. Dies ist nicht die einzige ihm zugeschriebene Eigenschaft, die er mit den *awliyā’* im Sufismus teilt. Er gilt als Nothelfer und als Übermittler von Wissen aus dem Reich des Verborgenen, dem *ḡaib*, wobei er sich dabei allerdings nicht immer eindeutig zu erkennen gibt und wofür er Gehorsam einfordert. Darüber hinaus ist er in besonderem Maße Gewässern verbunden. Diese Vorstellungen erfreuten sich in vormodernen islamischen Gesellschaften auch bei den Gelehrten breiter Akzeptanz, sieht man von den üblichen Verdächtigen wie Ibn al-Ḡauzī und Ibn Taymiyya ab. Doch ist es wohl ein Kennzeichen der Religiosität außerhalb der gelehrten Elite, Ḥiḍr eine zentrale Rolle einzuräumen oder ihn gar zu verehren.<sup>89</sup>

Die explizite Assoziation von Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd mit Ḥiḍr beruht auf ‚unheimlichen‘ Aspekten. Ḥiḍr lebt, trotz seines immensen Alters und man kann nicht sicher sein, ob Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd wirklich tot ist. Schließlich wurde sein Leichnam nie gefunden (was die Dorfbewohner mit dem Vorkommen von Krokodilen im Nil erklären). Das Verschwinden im Nil passt zu Ḥiḍrs Affinität zum Aquatischen. Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd ist direkt am Nil aufgewachsen und eines der wenigen Ereignisse aus seiner Zeit in Kairo, die er selbst bemerkenswert findet, gehört, dass er den Nil

<sup>87</sup> Mhš 6, 25, 27.

<sup>88</sup> Mhš 110f.; hierzu Scott 2009, 213–18 und van Leeuwen 2018, 68. Rimun verweist auf die mir nicht zugängliche Studie *al-Fulklūr fī ibdā‘ al-Ṭayyib Ṣālīḥ: dirāsa naqdiyya* von Muḥammad al-Mahdī Bishrī, der hierin einen Bezug zur Figur des *étranger sage* in der afrikanischen Folklore aber auch der modernen afrikanischen Literatur sieht, Rimun 2018, 221–23.

<sup>89</sup> Franke 2000. Zu Ḥiḍr als Vermittler von Einsicht im traditionellen sudanesischen Islam, Salomon 2013, 843–44.

durchschwamm.<sup>90</sup> Er hütet zudem in seinem Haus ein Geheimnis und niemand im Ort weiß, woher er kam. Von diesen Zügen abgesehen weckt aber auch seine Beziehung zum Ich-Erzähler Assoziationen zum Ḥiḍr-Mythos: Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd offenbart ihm verborgenes Wissen und hilft ihm so, sich selbst zu erkennen. Allerdings versucht er zugleich, ihn psychisch zu unterwerfen.

Der Ich-Erzähler assoziiert Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd ebenfalls mit Gestalten, die zwischen der sichtbaren Welt und dem *ḡaib* stehen, den Dschinn, ohne dass er ihn auf rationaler Ebene diesen Wesen zuordnet. Die Dschinn der traditionellen islamischen Vorstellungswelt, weisen zahlreiche Übereinstimmungen mit der Figur des Doppelgängers in der westlichen Literatur auf, als sie Projektionen negativer Wesenseigenschaften einer Person darstellen.<sup>91</sup> Die Affinität Muṣṭafā Sa‘īds zu den Dschinn zeigt sich, als der Ich-Erzähler bei einer Trinkgesellschaft im Hause von Maḥḡūb erstmals näher mit Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd in Kontakt kommt. Nachdem Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd zunächst den angebotenen Alkohol ablehnt, dann aber widerwillig trinkt, daraufhin einen Becher nach dem anderen zu leert und schließlich in Rage gerät, erschrickt der Ich-Erzähler ob der Heftigkeit seines Ausbruchs und meint, dass ein aus einer Erdspalte hervorkommender *‘ifriṭ*, ein Dschinn mit enormen Kräften wie in 1001 Nacht, ihn nicht stärker hätte erschrecken können.<sup>92</sup> Später assoziiert der Ich-Erzähler ihn mit einem Alptraum (*kābūs*) und einem Traumgesicht (*ṭaif sāḥir*), Erscheinungen, die in der traditionellen Dämonologie dem Wirken eines Dschinn zugeschrieben werden.<sup>93</sup> Umso mehr gilt dies für *ḥātif*, die Stimme ohne sichtbaren Ursprung. Diese Vorstellung wird im Roman zwar nicht genannt, drängt sich dem mit der islamischen Dämonologie Vertrauten jedoch auf, wenn der Ich-Erzähler im Mittelteil des Romans Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd reden hört.<sup>94</sup>

Doch so wie Muṣṭafā Doppelgänger ist und einen Doppelgänger hat, so ähnelt er den Dschinn und erscheint doch auch als ein von den Dschinn Geplagter. Während er im Dorf allgemein als gesetzt und ruhig wahrgenommen wird, erlebt seine Frau ihn in der Nacht unruhig und von Ängsten getrieben. Ständig habe er etwas gerufen, dass wie *ḡinn* oder *ḡin* klang. Von seiner Ehe mit Jean

<sup>90</sup> Mhš 32.

<sup>91</sup> Nünlist 2015, 245f., 298–325.

<sup>92</sup> Mhš 18; El-Ariss 2013, 97f. Das Verhältnis zum Alkohol ist ein weiterer Punkt, an dem sich Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd in London von Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd im Dorf unterscheidet. In London war er fester Bestandteil seines Lebens und seiner ‚Jagdzüge‘ (Mhš 54, 145).

<sup>93</sup> Schon bei einer den ersten Begegnungen (Mhš 14, 21) und nach dem Verschwinden in der Bibliothek (Mhš 54, 58); zu dieser Vorstellung Jacobi 1999.

<sup>94</sup> Nünlist 2015, 68, 326–34.



Morris hat er Ḥusna nie erzählt. Sie bringt den Vornamen Jean mit psychischen Leiden und dem Wirken von Dämonen in Verbindung.<sup>95</sup>

## Sudan im Spannungsgeflecht Westen – arabische Welt – subsaharisches Afrika

Wie eingangs erwähnt bezieht sich der Roman ständig auf das komplexe Spannungsverhältnis zwischen „arabisch“ und „afrikanisch“ im Sudan.<sup>96</sup> Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd wurde laut seiner Geburtsurkunde in Khartoum am 16.8.1898, also zwischen den beiden entscheidenden Siegen Kitcheners über die Mahdisten in Atbara und Omdurman, geboren.<sup>97</sup> Schon dies ist ein Hinweis darauf, dass seine Existenz eng mit der des Landes seit der Kolonisierung verwoben ist. Seine Abstammung reflektiert ebenfalls die komplexe Identität des Sudan, indem sich ihre beiden Komponenten, die arabische-islamische und die subsaharisch-afrikanische in ihr wiederfinden, die „arabische“ nicht ganz astrein. Im Gespräch mit dem ehemaligen Schulkameraden vom Gordon College erfährt der Ich-Erzähler, dass Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd aus der Ehe einer ehemaligen Sklavin aus dem Süden – ethnisch gehörte sie zu den Azande oder Bari – mit einem Angehörigen des ‘Abābida Stammes hervorgegangen sei.<sup>98</sup> Bei letzteren handelt es sich um im Laufe des 19. Jahrhunderts arabisierte kuschitische Beja beiderseits der ägyptisch-sudanesischen Grenze, die trotz ihrer sprachlichen Assimilation oftmals nicht als Araber anerkannt wurden.<sup>99</sup> Sie standen zudem mit den Ägyptern und dann den Briten beim Kampf gegen die Mahdisten im Bunde. In seiner Analyse folgt Nasr der Bewertung des ehemaligen Schulkameraden/Beamten, dass Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd durch seine dubiose Abstammung zum Verrat an der sudanesischen Gesellschaft prädesti-

<sup>95</sup> Mhš 94; El-Ariss 2013, 105–7.

<sup>96</sup> Eine Aussage wie “he is a culturally hybrid character who equally identifies with the occidental culture of England and the oriental culture of Sudan” setzt ja voraus, dass es “the culture of Sudan” gibt und dass sie “oriental” ist, Zeidanin 2016, 76. Ähnliches gilt für “He (his grandfather) is therefore the symbol of the stable society founded in popular Islam” (Nasr 1980, 95), was die anfängliche Wahrnehmung des Ich-Erzählers korrekt beschreibt. Doch dass die Gesellschaft des Dorfes stabil ist, bezweifelt jener bereits im dritten Kapitel.

<sup>97</sup> Mhš 21f.; Makdisi 1992, 811.

<sup>98</sup> Mhš 57; Hassan 2003, 91. Hier liegt im Übrigen wieder eine Parallele zu Kurtz vor, der mit einem halb-englischen Vater und einer halb-französischen Mutter sowie – implizit – einem deutschen Nachnamen Europa in seiner Gesamtheit verkörpert, Conrad 2006, 49.

<sup>99</sup> Hillelson 1960.

niert gewesen sei.<sup>100</sup> Doch ist es gewagt, daraus zu folgern, Şāliḥ Muştafa Sa‘id als ‚geborenen Verräter‘ präsentieren will. Bei Lesern mit Grundkenntnissen der sudanesischen Geschichte kann vorausgesetzt werden, dass sie wissen, dass die Verhältnisse komplizierter waren. Opposition gegen die Mahdisten war nicht so außergewöhnlich. Deren Aufstand richtete sich gegen das Nachbarland Ägypten, das den Sudan zu kolonisieren versuchte. Hierfür bedurfte Ägypten allerdings britischer Hilfe, die ihren Preis hatte: Die Überfälle im späteren Südsudan zur Versklavung der nichtmuslimischen Bevölkerung – wie Muştafa Sa‘ids Mutter – und der Sklavenhandel mussten unterbunden werden. Der Aufstieg des Mahdismus speiste sich nicht unwesentlich aus dem Unmut darüber, dass das eigene, ebenfalls „koloniale“ Expansionsprojekt im Süden mit erheblichen negativen ökonomischen Konsequenzen für den Norden unterbunden wurde.<sup>101</sup>

Muştafa Sa‘id selbst macht sich, wie bereits angedeutet, bei seinen sexuellen Raubzügen die Doppelidentität des Sudan zunutze und „fängt“ seine Frauen mal als „Schwarzafrikaner“ (mit christlichem Namen!) mal als Araber.<sup>102</sup> Seine Zimmer schmückt er – unter Ausnutzung der Unkenntnis der britischen Frauen – mit Versatzstücken afrikanischer oder islamischer Kulturen. Stammen Shilluk-Masken immerhin aus dem Sudan, kann ein Perserteppich aus Isfahan gerne als „islamicate“ betrachtet werden, doch wohl kaum als ein Bestandteil „seiner“ Kultur.<sup>103</sup> Der Eklektizismus erinnert an das Zelt des „Sheik“ im gleichnamigen Film („The Sheik“) mit Rudolph Valentino, der zu dieser Zeit die Frauen in seinen Bann schlug.<sup>104</sup> Gegenüber Isabella Seymour präsentiert er sich als Othello, „der sowohl Afrikaner und Araber ist.“<sup>105</sup> Da sie Tochter einer Spanierin ist, stellt er sich als Tāriq b. Ziyād vor, der die Iberische Halbinsel erobert hatte, wobei ihm die Ironie entgeht, dass die Spanierin Isabella von Kastilien das Ende von Al-Andalus herbeigeführt hatte.<sup>106</sup> Er gebärdet sich aber auch „primitiv und nackt“ (*bidā’iyyan wa-‘ariyan*) und weckt damit Assoziationen mit Caliban.<sup>107</sup> In seinem politischen Wirken ist für Muştafa Sa‘id allerdings Afrika und nicht der Nahe

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**100** Nasr 1980, 95.

**101** Warburg 2003, 27–28, 42–49; Collins 2008, 20, 28–29.

**102** Mhš 37; Nasr 1980, 95–96; Hassan 2003, 92–98, 100.

**103** Mhš 34f., 137.

**104** Mhš 56; „The Sheik“ 1921: Zwischentitel ‘When an Arab sees a woman that he wants, he takes her!’ ca. 47:20.

**105** Mhš 42; im Prozess legt er hingegen Wert darauf, kein Othello zu sein, der im Wahnsinn der Eifersucht seine Frau umbringt, Mhš 36; wenn Hassan feststellt, dass die Frauen ihn als Araber oder Orientalen ‚lesen‘ (Hassan 2003, 100), dann tun sie das, weil er sich so ‚schreibt‘.

**106** Mhš 46; Makdasi 1992, 811; Alhawamdeh 2013, 8.

**107** Mhš 41.

Osten der Bezugspunkt, wie sich an den Titeln seiner Publikation *The Cross and Gunpowder* (mit Bezug auf die christliche Mission) and *The Rape of Africa* ablesen lässt.<sup>108</sup>

Die periphere Stellung des Sudans in der arabischen Welt wird im Roman in verschiedenen Zusammenhängen thematisiert. Deutlich wird sie bereits in den Stationen des Lebenswegs. Erst nach einem vorbereitenden Aufenthalt in Kairo, dem Zentrum der modernisierten arabischen Kultur, kann Muṣṭafā Saʿīd nach Großbritannien weiterreisen.<sup>109</sup> In Anwesenheit des Ich-Erzählers entwickelt sich bei einer Trinkerei im Dorf eine Diskussion über die im Sudan verbreitete Praxis der Verstümmelung weiblicher Genitalien. Während die einen sie als integralen Bestandteil des Islams auffassen, sind sich andere im Klaren darüber, dass diese Praxis in ‚wirklich‘ islamischen Ländern wie Syrien und Ägypten unbekannt sei. Der Fortbestand der Praxis im Sudan sei im mangelnden Wissen um den eigentlichen Islam begründet. Hiermit bringen die Gegner dieser Praxis gleichzeitig zum Ausdruck, dass sie die untergeordnete Stellung des Sudan in der Hierarchie der arabischen Länder internalisiert haben, aber auch die lokale Tradition kritisch reflektieren.<sup>110</sup>

Da Ṣāliḥ die Komplexität des Sudan im Roman kontinuierlich zur Sprache bringt, ist klar, dass es als Selbstinszenierung Muṣṭafā Saʿīds zu bewerten ist, wenn er sich als Repräsentant des Ostens, Südens oder Afrikas gebärdet und dabei simple Dichotomien gebraucht.<sup>111</sup> Ṣāliḥ untergräbt diese Dichotomien damit, dass er in der Charakterisierung Muṣṭafā Saʿīds die Heterogenität der sudanesischen Bevölkerung einfließen lässt. Unter anderem verändert sich der Blick des Ich-Erzählers auf sein Heimatdorf. Erscheint es ihm im ersten Kapitel als ein Hort der Stabilität, so werden nach dem Verschwinden Muṣṭafā Saʿīds die jahrhundertelangen Wanderungsbewegungen thematisiert, die das Dorf wie das ganze Land geprägt haben. Vor diesem Hintergrund zeigt sich zudem, dass die sich aus dem Streit über die Genitalverstümmelung entwickelnde Identitätsdebatte kein Exkurs, sondern ‚Satelliten‘ sind, die außerhalb der eigentlichen Handlung stehend den zeitlich-geographischen Rahmen bestimmen und dessen Rolle für die Handlung definieren.<sup>112</sup> Doch charakterisiert Ṣāliḥ das Land nicht nur im Widerspruch zu simplifizierenden Dichotomien, er verweist mit Referenzen auf

<sup>108</sup> Mhš 125. Das dritte Werk, *The Economics of Colonialism*, ist weniger spezifisch.

<sup>109</sup> Mhš 30.

<sup>110</sup> Mhš 84–85.

<sup>111</sup> Dass jemand „purely Sudanese“ sein soll (Hamilton 2005, 55), ist mithin obsolet.

<sup>112</sup> Chatman 1978, 53–56, 101–45.

sudanische Verhältnisse implizit immer auf Dominanzverhältnisse, die vor und parallel zur britischen Unterwerfung des Landes bestanden.

## Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Stellung in Großbritannien

Die Stellung Muṣṭafā Saʿīds in der britischen Gesellschaft bevor er Jean Morris tötete, kann keineswegs als systematische Diskriminierung gedeutet werden. Ihm eröffnen sich vielmehr neue Möglichkeiten. Er ergreift sie und avanciert gesellschaftlich. Und selbst nachdem er seine Frau umgebracht hat, wird er eher milde bestraft. Gleichwohl soll hiermit nicht behauptet werden, dass Ṣāliḥ Kolonialismusapologie betreibt und negative Folgen für die sudanesischen Gesellschaft leugne. So nimmt der Titel von Muṣṭafā Saʿīds fiktiver Abhandlung *The Rape of Africa* wahrscheinlich Bezug auf den im Sudan tätigen Kolonialbeamten und -propagandisten Frederick D. Lugard, der von der „penetration of Africa“ schreibt.<sup>113</sup> Weitere Beispiele kolonialer Arroganz werden im Werk erwähnt. Hier aber geht es um die Frage, ob speziell Muṣṭafā Saʿīd als Opfer betrachtet werden kann, und die muss verneint werden.

Muṣṭafā Saʿīds privilegierter Status zeichnet sich bereits ab, als der Direktor des Gordon College ihm als Zwölfjährigen ein Stipendium für den Schulbesuch in Ägypten organisiert. Eine Kontrastfigur verdeutlicht, was der durchschnittliche Absolvent des Gordon College seiner Generation zu erwarten hatte: Der ehemalige Schulkamerad, den der Ich-Erzähler bei einer Zugreise trifft, konnte zwar Beamter werden, doch blieb fast sein ganzes Berufsleben lang demütigend auf einer unteren Stufe der Karriereleiter hängen. Erst kurz vor der Pensionierung und der Unabhängigkeit des Landes wurde er erstmals befördert. Die führenden britischen Beamten wiesen den Sudanesen auf den unteren Rängen die Schuld zu, wenn sich in der Bevölkerung Unmut über die Verwaltung regte.<sup>114</sup>

Die Briten, die Muṣṭafā Saʿīd prägen, sind aber keine dünnhäutigen Kolonialherren. Sein Ziehvater Richard Robinson, bei dem er in Kairo wohnt, ist stattdessen islamophil eingestellt und zeigt Muṣṭafā Saʿīd die Architektur Kairo. Später konvertiert er zum Islam und veranlasst, dass er beim Mausoleum al-Ṣāfiʿis begraben wird.<sup>115</sup>

**113** Lugard 1922, 1. 1922 liegt in der Zeit, in der Muṣṭafā Saʿīd akademisch Karriere machte, Schmidinger 2020, 41–42; Hassan 2003, 92–93.

**114** Mhš 56f.

**115** Mhš 29, 114, 150. Möglicherweise diente Ṣāliḥ Wilfrid Scawen Blunt als Vorbild für einen islamophilen britischen Akademiker.

Muṣṭafā Saʿīd profitiert von der Auffassung, dass die Kolonialherrschaft nicht ohne eine einheimische Führungsschicht aufrechterhalten werden könne. Deswegen kann er studieren. Seiner akademischen Karriere stehen keine Hindernisse im Weg. Seine Werke werden mit Begeisterung von der linken Bohème aufgenommen, wie er selbst erzählt und wie der britische Beamte, den der Ich-Erzähler auf einer Party in Khartoum kennenlernt, süffisant kolportiert.<sup>116</sup> Muṣṭafā Saʿīd kommt außerdem zugute, dass sich in Großbritannien das intellektuelle Klima gewandelt hat. Während die Gewissheiten und Selbstsicherheit der Vorkriegsära zerbrochen sind, gewinnen die Arbeiterbewegung und kolonialismuskritische Intellektuelle an Einfluss. Neben Keynes orientiert sich Muṣṭafā Saʿīd bei seinen sozialen Vorstellungen an den Ideen des linkschristlichen Sozialreformers Richard Henry Tawney.<sup>117</sup> Hassans These von Muṣṭafā Saʿīds „rebellion against the colonial system of education“ überzeugt nicht, da das Bildungswesen nicht eindeutig kolonial ist und Muṣṭafā Saʿīd darin reüssiert.<sup>118</sup>

Das Großbritannien, in dem Muṣṭafā Saʿīd Karriere macht, ist eben nicht mehr die von Selbstbewusstsein strotzende, unumstrittene Weltmacht der Jahrhundertwende, sondern ein von den Folgen des Ersten Weltkriegs gezeichnetes Land. Das zeigt sich bereits im ersten Kapitel: Während der erwähnten Trinkgesellschaft rezitiert er „ein englisches Gedicht,“ dessen Titel nicht genannt wird. Es erweist sich jedoch als ein Ausschnitt aus Ford Madox Fords *In October 1914 (Antwerp)*, in dem das vergebliche Warten englischer Frauen auf die Rückkehr ihrer Männer und Verlobten von den Schlachtfeldern Flanderns beschrieben wird.<sup>119</sup> Die Verse bereiten die Schilderung einer britischen Gesellschaft vor, die vom Trauma des Ersten Weltkriegs gezeichnet und in ihrer Selbstgewissheit erschüttert ist.<sup>120</sup> Der daraus resultierende Frauenüberschuss bietet Muṣṭafā Saʿīd auf seinen Jagdzügen reichlich Beute.

Bei der Wahl des Gedichts dürfte Ṣāliḥ mitbedacht haben, dass Madox Fords Romantetralogie *Parade's End* am Beispiel des „last Tory“ Christian Tietjen den

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**116** Mhš 54–55.

**117** Mhš 34–35, 123.

**118** Hassan 2003, 109. Daher sollte man Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Aussage (Mhš 98), die Schulen der Kolonialherren lehrten in ihrer Sprache ‚ja‘ zu sagen, nicht als Botschaft des Autors verstehen.

**119** Mhš 17f.; Madox Ford 1962, 377. Um welches Gedicht es sich handelt, ist in der Forschungsliteratur unbeachtet geblieben. Hierzu und zur falschen Rückübersetzung ins Englische von Rhys-Jones findet sich nur ein kurzer Eintrag auf einem Literaturblog, der die Bedeutung des Gedichts im Roman nicht behandelt, Rhodes 2010.

**120** Besonders eindrücklich Mhš 37f.: „in der Nacht zog ich in den Krieg mit Bogen Schwert, Lanze und Pfeilen. Ich sah die Soldaten zurückkehren, erfüllt von Angst, vor dem Grabenkrieg, den Läusen und den Seuchen.“

Niedergang der imperialen Oberschicht thematisiert: Der Karrierebeamte, für den die von Muṣṭafā Saʿīd verworfene Statistik die Königsdisziplin zur Kontrolle des Empire darstellt, steigt zum Antiquitätenhändler ab.<sup>121</sup> Die erschütterte Selbstgewissheit zeigt sich gerade bei Angehörigen der Oberschicht. Ann Hammond, eine seiner vier Geliebten, stammt aus einer reichen, in Wirtschaft und Politik vernetzten Familie. Doch findet sie ihm Leben der Oberschicht keine Zufriedenheit und sucht Erlösung in der Spiritualität des Ostens. Dabei gerät sie jedoch ausgerechnet an den Materialisten Muṣṭafā Saʿīd<sup>122</sup> Zu einem Vertreter dieser Oberschicht, dessen Selbstgewissheit hingegen ungebrochen ist, dem Professor Maxwell Foster Keen, hat Muṣṭafā Saʿīd während seines Studiums ein gespanntes Verhältnis. Er hat zwar trotz seiner konservativen und christlich missionarischen Einstellung Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Karriere gefördert, betrachtet ihn aber letztlich als Beleg für das Scheitern seines Zivilisierungsprojekts. Vor Gericht rettet er Muṣṭafā Saʿīds Leben, indem er ihn als ein edles Gemüt darstellt, den die Entwurzelung auf Abwege getrieben habe. Das milde Urteil wurde um den Preis der Exotisierung und eines ‚racism of low expectations‘ erkaufte.<sup>123</sup>

Muṣṭafā Saʿīd profitiert bei seinen Eroberungen aber nicht allein von der Sinnkrise der Oberschicht, sondern auch von den neuen Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten der unteren Schichten, ähnlich wie Sheila Greenwood, eine Bauerntochter aus Nordengland, die ein Studium am Polytechnikum anstrebt.<sup>124</sup> Ohnehin bewegt sich Muṣṭafā Saʿīd in Kreisen, die auf Distanz zum britischen Imperialismus und Konservatismus gehen.<sup>125</sup> Karitatives Engagement ermöglicht Isabella Seymour einen gelegentlichen Ausbruch aus der Langeweile einer Mittelklasseseehe. Hieraus erwächst ihre Empathie für die Unterdrückten. Muṣṭafā Saʿīd lernt sie kennen, als sie an Speaker’s Corner der Rede eines Mannes von den Westindischen Inseln zuhört, der die Gleichberechtigung der „Farbigen“ einfordert.<sup>126</sup> Exotische Anziehungskraft übt er aber auch auf andere Kreise aus. Der erwähnte britische Beamte erzählt, dass Salonlinke aus der Oberschicht Muṣṭafā Saʿīd als eine Art Maskottchen betrachteten, mit dem sie sich ihrer eigenen Toleranz ver-

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121 “Their class administered the world, not merely the newly created Imperial Department of Statistics under Sir Reginald Ingleby,” Madox Ford 1963 [1924], 1.

122 Mhš 34.

123 Mhš 36f., 38f., 96f.; in fast allen Analysen ist von ‚murder‘ die Rede, die juristische Bewertung war jedoch offenkundig ‚manslaughter‘.

124 Mhš 38, 124f.; ihre ländliche Herkunft macht sie zur Kontrastfigur zu Ḥusnā, weil sie eine Möglichkeit hat, ihrer Herkunft zu entkommen.

125 Ausdrücklich nennt er den Bruch mit dem viktorianischen Zeitalter, Mhš 33.

126 Mhš 40f.

sicherten.<sup>127</sup> Von dieser Aufmerksamkeit profitiert er jedoch nicht, als es darauf ankommt. Sein vermeintlicher Freund aus diesen Kreisen, der in Interpretationen des Romans meist übergangene Thomas Higgins, lässt ihn fallen, als er meint, ein erfolgreiches Plädoyer für die Todesstrafe in einem aufsehenerregenden Prozess könnte ihm zu einem Karriereschub verhelfen.<sup>128</sup> Voraussetzung hierfür wäre, dass die Rede das Kollegium von Geschworenen zu überzeugen vermag. Das besteht allerdings nicht allein aus Akademikern, sondern auch einem Arbeiter, Bauern, Bestatter und dem Inhaber eines Pub. Bei der Auswahl dieser Personen ging Şālih wohl davon aus, dass der Leser ihnen eine eher konservative Weltansicht zuschreibt. Sie folgen bei der Urteilsfindung allerdings Foster Keen, wobei mancher von ihnen seine Vorurteile gegen „Schwarze“ abgesehen hat.<sup>129</sup>

## Pragmatiker und Ideologen: Die Kritik von Vulgärentiimperialismus und nachkolonialen Eliten

Bereits als die beiden einander kennenlernen, kritisiert Muşţafā Sa‘id den Ich-Erzähler dafür, dass er englische Literatur als Studienfach gewählt hat, obwohl dieses Fach keinen praktischen Nutzen bringe. Stattdessen hätte er Maschinenbau, Landwirtschaft oder Medizin studieren sollen, weil diese Fächer für die Entwicklung des Landes von Nutzen sind.<sup>130</sup> Nach dem Verschwinden Muşţafā Sa‘ids nimmt der Ich-Erzähler diesen Gedanken in einem inneren Monolog wieder auf, rechtfertigt seine Wahl aber damit, dass alle Fächer allein dem individuellen Broterwerb dienen.<sup>131</sup> Diese Kritik komplementiert das Gespräch mit Maḥğüb, der trotz einer vergleichbaren, wenn nicht höheren Begabung, auf Beschluss seiner Familie nicht weiter zur Schule ging, „weil unsere Väter und Großväter Bauern waren, und Bauern keine Bildung brauchen.“ Mit seiner praktischen Intelligenz, aber auch mit der tatkräftigen Hilfe Muşţafā Sa‘ids, entwickelte er das örtliche Agrarprojekt zu einer funktionstüchtigen Genossenschaft weiter und verbesserte dadurch die Lebensverhältnisse im Dorf erheblich. Die Einkünfte erlauben die Anschaffung eines Busses, der das Dorf an die Außenwelt anbindet, und sogar die Planung einer Krankenstation, wenngleich deren Realisierung nur schleppend

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127 Mhş 60.

128 Mhş 35, 97.

129 Mhş 84.

130 Mhş 13.

131 Mhş 53.

vorangeht.<sup>132</sup> Maḥğūbs Pragmatismus erscheint gleichwohl nicht als makellostes Gegenbild zu den weltfernen Ideen des ersten Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd, denn das soziale Umfeld nötigt ihn zu Kompromissen. Er scheut sich daher die patriarchalische Ordnung anzugreifen, ja er übernimmt ihre Wertvorstellungen wie sich zeigt, als er Ḥusna als Schlampe abwertet. Und wenngleich er die weltfremden Politiker der Hauptstadt verachtet, wird er Mitglied „der Partei“ und integriert sich damit ins klientelistische System.<sup>133</sup>

Das Versagen der neuen Ordnung bei der Verbesserung des Alltags, das Maḥğūb beklagt, steht im Kontrast zum Auftreten der neuen nachkolonialen Elite aus den Reihen der Bildungsaufsteiger. Der Ich-Erzähler kann dies bei den Bürokraten der Hauptstadt und den Teilnehmern einer Konferenz über die Vereinheitlichung der afrikanischen Curricula beobachten. Wie Muṣṭafā Sa‘īd in der ersten Lebensphase inszeniert sich die neue Elite durch die Gestaltung eines Raums: den Konferenzsaal, für den derselbe Marmor Verwendung fand wie für den Sarkophag Napoleons. Ihn schmückt eine Einlegearbeit mit einer Karte der verschiedenen Länder Afrikas. Verschwendung paart sich mit Größenwahn. In der Tradition Napoleons werden unter dem Vorwand den Fortschritt voranzutreiben eigene Ambitionen befördert.<sup>134</sup>

Der beschriebene Raum existiert im realen Sudan allerdings nicht.<sup>135</sup> Ebenso existierte dort in den Jahren, in denen der Roman spielt, keine nationalistisch-sozialistisch-demokratische Einheitspartei. Vielmehr folgte auf das kurzlebige parlamentarische System, dessen größte Parteien politische Arme der wichtigsten Sufiorden waren, Ibrāhīm ‘Abbūds Militärdiktatur, unter der keine Parteien zugelassen waren.<sup>136</sup> Ṣāliḥ ging es in diesem Zusammenhang also nicht um eine getreue Schilderung des spezifisch sudanesischen Hintergrundes, sondern darum, häufige Züge verschiedener afrikanischer und arabischer Länder in der Zeit nach der Unabhängigkeit zu karikieren.

Hier ist auf Holt zurückzukommen, die darauf aufmerksam gemacht hat, dass der Roman zuerst im vom Congress for Cultural Freedom und damit indirekt von der CIA finanzierten Magazin *Ḥiwār* erschienen ist, mit dem der englische Über-

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**132** Mhš 101.

**133** Mhš 101, 104; Die Kooperativen stehen, anders als Holt meint, im Einklang mit der offiziellen Politik, Holt 2019, 82.

**134** Mhš 120–22.

**135** Holt assoziiert den Saal mit „the opulent new Ministry of Education building and at the University of Khartoum,“ Holt 2019, 82. Öffentliche Bauten im Sudan dieser Periode prägten jedoch den nüchtern-modernistischen ‚Khartoum Style‘ von ‘Abdalmun‘im Muṣṭafā und ausländischen Architekten, Osman, Osman, und Bahreldin 2011.

**136** Collins 2008, 69–81.



setzer Denys Johnson-Davies kooperierte. Ziel des Projekts sei es, mit der Idee der künstlerischen Autonomie die Solidarität afroasiatischer Intellektueller „nach Bandoeng,“ also der Gründung der Blockfreien Bewegung aus sozialistisch orientierten afrikanischen und asiatischen Ländern 1955, zu unterminieren.<sup>137</sup> Auch wenn man den teilweise an den Duktus einer Anklageschrift für einen Schauprozess gemahnenden Ton ihres Artikels befremdlich finden mag, ist ihr insofern zuzustimmen, als dass dieser Zusammenhang eine postkoloniale Lesart des Romans zumindest erschwert. Sie selbst nimmt ihn gegen die Vereinnahmung in Schutz und stellt die Frage in den Raum, ob Şālih seinen Förderern ein Schnippchen schlägt und implizit den neuen Kolonialismus kritisiert, indem er dem Befremden des Ich-Erzählers und der Wut Maḡḡūbs über die neue herrschende Klasse in seinem Roman Raum gibt.<sup>138</sup> Dabei übergeht sie jedoch, dass die Kritisierten im Roman sich eines antiimperialistischen und panafrikanischen Jargons bedienen, der eher an Bandoeng gemahnt, denn an amerikanischen Neokolonialismus. In der fiktiven Welt dieses Romans ist Muşţafā Saʿīd der Archetypus des ideologisierenden Intellektuellen und der Urheber dieser Gemeinplätze. Der Ich-Erzähler erkennt in den Teilnehmern der Bildungskonferenz Kopien Muşţafā Saʿīds, ein teilnehmender Minister hat gar bei ihm studiert.<sup>139</sup> Der Ich-Erzähler selbst zeigt sich, wie schon Wielandt betont, vom Vulgārantiimperialismus keineswegs beeindruckt und bestreitet einen fundamentalen Unterschied zwischen Engländern und Sudanesen.<sup>140</sup> Es liegt also durchaus nahe anzunehmen, dass Şālih für die Publikation seines Romans bewusst ein Organ abseits des arabischnationalistischen Mainstreams dieser Zeit gewählt hat.

Wie Şālih die nachkolonialen intellektuellen Eliten zeichnet, ist alles andere als schmeichelhaft, sowohl mit Blick auf ihre Eignung für die Politik als auch hinsichtlich ihres Lebenswandels. In einer Epoche, in der die führende Rolle der Intellektuellen in der Politik ein gängiger Topos in arabischen und afrikanischen Literaturen war, mag er damit recht allein gestanden haben. Die negative Auffassung Şālihs von der Befähigung der Intellektuellen zur Politik hat allerdings einen Vorläufer in der islamischen Geistesgeschichte, von dem er sich offensichtlich hat inspirieren lassen.

Bei der Diskussion der Voraussetzungen und Bedingungen guter Politik in seiner *Muqaddima* widmet sich Ibn Ḥaldūn der Frage, warum die Gelehrten von allen Gruppen der Gesellschaft am wenigsten für dieses Feld geeignet sind. Er

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137 Holt 2019.

138 Holt 2019, 85f.

139 Mhš 122.

140 Mhš 7; Wielandt 1980, 472–77.

erklärt dies damit, dass sie aus sinnlichen Erfahrungen allgemeine Prinzipien ableiten, die sie dann zur Beurteilung aller partikularen Begebenheiten anwenden. Dabei modellieren sie ihre Vorstellung der äußeren Welt solange, bis sie mit ihren allgemeinen Prinzipien übereinstimmt. Die Methode führt gerade im Bereich der Politik zu gravierenden Fehlern. Gefeit hiergegen ist Ibn Ḥaldūn zufolge der Durchschnittsmensch mit einer gesunden Anlage und mittlerer Intelligenz. So jemand neigt nicht zur Spekulation, sondern orientiert sich an den Dingen, wie sie sind. Bei allem was er beurteilt, berücksichtigt er die besonderen Umstände. So ist es weit weniger wahrscheinlich, dass er schwerwiegend irrt. Er beherzigt mithin die Weisheit des arabischen Verses: „Do not go out to deep when swimming, safety lies near the shore“ (Übersetzung Rosenthal).<sup>141</sup> Muṣṭafā Saʿīd hielt sich nicht an den klugen Rat und schwimmt weit hinaus. Der Ich-Erzähler tut es ihm nach, sieht aber zumindest den Fehler ein und erkennt, dass sein Ziel vor ihm am Ufer liegt und nicht unter ihm am Grunde des Nils.

Bedeutet dies nun, dass Ṣāliḥ mit dem Roman plumpem Antiintellektualismus das Wort redet und der Dichtung eine Absage erteilt? Das passt nicht zu seiner Biographie, da er selbst das prestigereiche Studium des Agraringenieurs aufgab, um sich der Literatur zu widmen.<sup>142</sup> Doch wie der gescheiterte Politiker Ibn Ḥaldūn hegt er offenkundig ein Misstrauen gegen die politischen Fähigkeiten jener Schicht, der er selbst angehört. Der erste Muṣṭafā Saʿīd entwirft und verkündet Visionen, daher die Stilisierung zum Prophet. Doch sind diese Visionen spekulativ, ohne Basis in der Realität. Er versteht die Politik primär als Feld, auf dem Rache für die Vergangenheit geübt werden soll. Zur Entwicklung tauglicher Projekte zur Verbesserung tatsächlicher Probleme trägt er hingegen rein gar nichts bei. Er ist zum einen Vorläufer jener, die teure panafrikanische Bildungskonferenzen organisieren und sich mit Napoleon identifizieren, aber zugleich nichts für den Fortschritt des Schulwesens tun. Er ist zum anderen das Gegenteil des zweiten Muṣṭafā Saʿīd, der – frei nach Max Weber – „langsam harte Bretter bohrt“,<sup>143</sup> wenn auch nur im kleinen Rahmen des Dorfes an der Biegung des Nils.

Wenn die Politik Sache der Pragmatiker ist, wozu dann Literatur? Diese Frage beantwortet Ṣāliḥ im Roman nicht explizit, zumindest hat er zeitnah keine poetologischen Texte veröffentlicht. Das ist eigentlich auch nicht notwendig, denn Struktur und Stil des Romans sprechen in dieser Hinsicht für sich selbst. Konsequenter sorgt Ṣāliḥ dafür, dass dem Leser bei der Lektüre alle Gewissheiten verloren gehen. Ständig wechseln die Perspektiven. Was Wahrheit, was Illusion ist,

<sup>141</sup> Ibn Khaldun 1967, vol. 3, 308–11.

<sup>142</sup> Fährdrich 2004, 187.

<sup>143</sup> Weber 1926, 67.

lässt sich nie endgültig klären.<sup>144</sup> Der Roman zwingt den Leser ständig neu zu fragen, die Dinge immer wieder aus einem anderen Blickwinkel zu betrachten, anstatt einfache Lösungen nahezu legen. Er ist ein autonomer Ort der Reflektion und Imagination, keine Programmschrift in symbolischer Verkleidung.

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144 Makdissi 1992, 808.

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Julia Koch Tshirangwana  
**‘Zanzibaris’ in Durban?**

South African Muslims and Racial Classification in 20<sup>th</sup> Century South Africa

## **Muslims in Today’s South Africa**

The demographic diversity of South Africa is longstanding, widely acknowledged, and currently in a process of further diversification with new immigrants arriving mostly from other countries in the Global South. Currently, 5.8% of the population, more than three million people, were born abroad. However, the total number and percentage of people with a migration background is much higher, as throughout the centuries colonial and race-shaping immigration policies welcomed mostly White Protestants. The now present socio-cultural ‘super-diversity’ in South Africa<sup>1</sup> is also reflected in the composition of the South African Muslim population. Different Muslim groups “came to South Africa subsequent to European control”<sup>2</sup> and additionally there are a few local ‘converts’ – or ‘reverts’ in the parlance of Muslim missionaries. Currently, two Muslim communities, e.g., in a shorthand called ‘Malay’ and ‘Indian,’ are equally represented in the country in terms of population numbers, whereas the Black African component of Muslims continues to grow in its population share and assertiveness. The complex relations within various local forms of communitarian organization and their administration are worth exploring anthropologically. The South African social structure has historically affected the dynamics of interrelations among Muslim communities.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I will, on the one hand, describe the Gujarati Muslims’ journeys and dwellings in South Africa. On the other, I present the case of a group which has been called ‘Zanzibari’ for much of the group’s history in Durban. This account will highlight complex and situational intertwinement. In contrast to other possible cases of immigrating African Muslims, such as those from Somalia,<sup>4</sup> Malawi, Senegal,<sup>5</sup> or other points of arrival, such as Cape Town,

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1 Vertovec 2015, 2.

2 Tayob 1999, 137.

3 Vahed 2010; Dangor 1997.

4 Sadouni 2013; Sadouni 2014.

5 Vawda 2017.

the Durban ‘Zanzibari’ case unfolds more readily the constructed and situational link between racialized groups and places over the course of 150 years.

This exercise is worth the effort. According to Kaarsholm, “little work has been done on African Islam in South Africa, and on relations between African and Indian Muslims [in South Africa].”<sup>6</sup> In the face of a strong image of Muslims as united by faith, this lack of attention is comprehensible. However, one might argue that these relations between ethnically differentiated Muslim groups are currently shifting from a racial hierarchy and patronage networks to more open contestation and assertion practices. This paper thus contributes to the emergent body of research on the interrelations between the politics of classification and identity in South Africa and, more specifically, on ‘inter-ethnic’ but co-religionists’ relations.<sup>7</sup> More broadly, it opens the path to explore in detail how local practices of religiosity are interconnected with trans-local and transnational processes, as well as with contemporary challenges of identity formation and socio-political contexts, e.g., in South Africa as opposed to countries of origin.

Two events, one reconstructed from local media reports and one witnessed during my own field research on Islamic reform in South Africa,<sup>8</sup> shall underline the relevance of this contribution to the volume in honour of Roman Loimeier’s scholarship, as it entails an analysis of the intersection of race and religion under changing historic and political conditions.<sup>9</sup> In 2019, the local press covered a newly founded Gauteng Muslim Shura Council engaging in a robust media debate, when it hosted a three-day conference in Johannesburg over Easter. As the tabloid *Al-Qalam* reported at the time, the question of racial differentiation versus Muslim unity was widely discussed.<sup>10</sup> The event itself took place over the Easter weekend, which in South Africa is habitually reserved for Islamic conferences from organizations such as the Tablighi Jamaat.<sup>11</sup> *Al-Qalam* writes that the organizer of the South African Black Muslim Conference (SABMC):

[...] pointed out that the conference will also focus on how to tackle the numerous challenges that Black Muslims face in the country, including issues of racism and classism. He said the idea was to create a Black Muslim cultural and religious identity in the same way as

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**6** Kaarsholm 2010, 224.

**7** Moola-Nernaes 2018, 51–54.

**8** See Koch 2016.

**9** According to Vahed, 246.433 Malay and 236.315 Indian Muslims live in South Africa, Vahed 2000, 44.

**10** Dockrat 2019.

**11** Vahed 2021, 55.

the Malay and Indian communities had established their own culture and religious identity for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

Black Muslims were trying to create a community “which we can identify with,” the organizer further stated, implying the impossibility to identify with the existing communities. In the process, he drew a line between anyone black and ‘indigenous’ and those considered ‘not indigenous.’<sup>13</sup>

This use of racialized identifications corresponds to an observation I made when I visited the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) in Queen Street in Durban in 2009. There, several of the staff members were of Gujarati, that is Western Indian, origin, such as the founder of the Centre, Ahmad Deedat (1918–2005), had been.<sup>14</sup> From the letters asking for study material it became clear that the IPCI worked often among American prisoners and among Europeans, the leading staff members’ background as Gujarati notwithstanding. My research interest, which was directed at the mobilities and religious practices of Gujarati Sunni Muslims who had recently crossed the Indian Ocean to work and live in South Africa,<sup>15</sup> was met with doubt. Three people there, independently of one another, asked whether my particular focus was an expression of racism on my side. They argued that any culturalization of Islam would neither do justice to Islam nor to the ideals of the new South African society. I heard that already for too long Islam in Durban was identified as ‘Indian.’ However, talking subsequently about the success of Gujarati businesses in South Africa and worldwide, I was told that Gujaratis were the “best racial group” and should be counted among the ‘Aryans’ because of their light skin.<sup>16</sup> Their economic success, moreover, was attributed to Gujarati Muslims’ “gratitude” and devotion to Islam, which had

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<sup>12</sup> *Al-Qalam* 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. <https://muslimsinafrica.wordpress.com/2019/05/10/the-south-african-black-muslim-conference-2019-prospects-and-problems-mawlana-dr-mae-ashraf-dockrat/>, accessed November 2, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> On Deedat and the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI) one can find a wide range of literature, delving, for example, into the rhetorical style of debates and its consequence, see Sadouni 2011; Sadouni; and Gazibo 2020; particular theologically relevant notions such as the “word of God,” see Croft 2018; or into the biographic direction, see Vahed 2012; Haron 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Koch 2016; Koch 2017; Koch 2019.

<sup>16</sup> I did not probe into this phrase and see two possible meanings to it; for one a reference to the history of Indo-Iranian/Aryan civilization, and/or, secondly a reference to the meaning the term received in the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s discourse which developed the idea of a ‘superior race.’ As I came across Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” frequently during fieldwork in India and in South Africa, appropriation and conflation appear likely.



uplifted the community as a whole, as much as Ahmad Deedat uplifted himself from humble origins to global fame.

The events of my afternoon visit to the IPCI office in Durban indicate the presence of racial aspects of identification in this context. The phrases I heard can be interpreted as extremely contradictory or at least incompatible. On the one hand, given the long and complicated process of struggle and accommodation, plus the global reach of Muslim ideas about the equality of all believers, the critique I faced was valid. Singling out one particular ethno-linguistic-religious group or caste in South Africa and studying “it” was likely inherently laden with assumptions about group-level differences. As an externally positioned anthropologist, I could be perceived as out of tune with the political realities in the country, where efforts of nation-building were widely celebrated. On the other hand, the significant value these South Africans ascribe to racially understood Gujaratiness testifies to the impossibility of eradicating belonging signifiers once established through group-level reproduction processes, e.g., endogamy. The assertion, moreover, resonated with the particularity which sociological and socio-linguistic studies have long since attributed to Muslim Gujaratis in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Their maintenance of caste and locality boundaries – dating from the pre-migration period in Gujarat at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century – is widely documented for this group, with Hindus and Hinduism as the main units to dissociate from. In retrospect, the events of my afternoon at IPCI foreshadowed the news of the founding of separate Black African Islamic bodies ten years later, as the concerns raised in 2019 during the South African Black Muslim Conference (SABM) have their counterpart in this racial pride. The SABM Conference’s thrust has been problematic for adherents of Sunni Islamic teachings that employ notions of a universal fellowship of Muslims. It resembles earlier versions of Black separatism sometimes associated with Islam, such as those proposed by the Nation of Islam in the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Yet, equally, in its stress on groups, the SABM Conference’s aims echo apartheid rhetoric which it explicitly aims to overcome.

## Differences and Their Perception: The Background

Religious differences and their perception obviously depend on the local context. In India, Islam was and is a religion of people who trace their ancestry mostly

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<sup>17</sup> Kuper 1960; Meer 1969; Klein 1990; Desai and Vahed 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Laremont 1999.

to converted local Hindus, but also to various immigrating groups from western and central Asia, who were already Muslims upon arrival.<sup>19</sup> In eastern Africa, on the other hand, the major categories Muslims can compare their religiosity with are Christianity and what are often called 'traditional African religions.' Then, in South Africa, Muslims are not spread evenly across the territory but mainly live centered in the metropolises. Although the percentage of Muslims, accounting for around 2% of the population, is comparatively low, their visibility in urban areas is high. In Johannesburg one can see now new mosques and schools in the vicinity of national highways and within the previously White neighbourhoods of the Northern suburbs.<sup>20</sup> The presence of Muslims is also visible in cities such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, and Polokwane (previously Pietersburg), where they were often part of the residing Indian population.<sup>21</sup> In the light of my own and other studies it becomes clear that the lived experiences of Islam in the South African Muslim community is greatly influenced by the internal racial separation within the Muslim community in the country.<sup>22</sup>

Historically, in South Africa the very organization of mosques differed regionally with the demographics as well. Whereas the Cape hosts a large number of mosques whose charismatic leaders and religious staff were also prominent in politicking, the East and the North much more often show a pattern of strong mosque committees, consisting of businesspeople or professionals, which dominate the clerics.<sup>23</sup> As Inga Niehaus highlighted, during apartheid there were recognizable differences in the readiness to become politically active amongst Muslims.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the stances Muslims would take towards racial identification and segregation were unlikely to be predetermined by any Islam-based identities as such.

In terms of intra-Islamic differentiation, one can find in South Africa, next to a small fraction of Shia Muslims, two main Sunni *madhāhib* (Islamic schools of thought, sg. *madhhab*): Hanafi and Shafiite. While Hanafi originally was local-

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**19** Misra 1964.

**20** Such as the Muslim School in Polokwane, the Waterval Islamic Institute in Johannesburg and the so-called Turkish Nizamiye mosque complex completed in 2012 at another hillside between Johannesburg and Pretoria. In Durban, the presence of mosques is less visible at outward highways than in the grid of downtown streets. Cf. Dinath, Patel, and Seedat 2014; cf. Sadouni 2007; Sadouni 2009; Sadouni 2011; Sadouni 2013; Sadouni 2014.

**21** Indians were not allowed to reside in the Orange Free State under apartheid. This meant that Muslim numbers in those parts of the country were and are still marginal.

**22** Cf. Koch 2016; Koch 2017; Argyle 1981; McDonald 2005; Niehaus 2008.

**23** Tayob 1999; Tayob 2010.

**24** Niehaus 2008, 143.

ized within central Asia and India, Shafiite was originally localized in southern Yemen and on the eastern and western fringes of the Indian Ocean, namely in coastal East Africa and Indonesia. These *madhāhib* offer their followers slightly different interpretations of legality and appropriateness of certain practices in prayers or (saint) veneration. For the ‘Zanzibari’-Gujarati relations in Durban, these differences played out in different ways historically; they were sometimes stressed and sometimes subdued. The celebration of the Prophet’s birthday and the fact that various per se transnational Sufi orders accept the practice of *ratiep* – between religious remembrance and art<sup>25</sup> – served as meeting points between various groups, cross-cutting the school of thought categorization.

The newspaper *Mail and Guardian* estimated in 2004 that there were around 5,000 persons identifiable as ‘Zanzibari’ in South Africa and reported that title deeds for around 5.2 hectares of highly valuable land had been handed over to the community by the KwaZulu-Natal Land Claims Commission.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the estimates for Gujaratis in South Africa are between 32,000 and 40,000, with a large majority of them identifying as Muslim. Whereas the adherence to a kind of ethnic or law-school specific kind of Islam is one option for South African Muslims, a number of reform movements advertises a de-culturalization of Islamic practices while promoting Islam under the conditions of increased spatial and social mobility after apartheid.<sup>27</sup> De-culturalization, however, may mean de-Indianization, de-Africanization or Arabization, as the Arabic interpretation(s) of Islam are often favored as being ‘purer’; not culturally inflected or closer to the original sources than Indian or African accounts. This paper touches on how both Muslim groups under consideration, Sunni Gujaratis and ‘Zanzibaris’ at various points in time in their South African history, used what can be called ‘Arabicity’ both for their self-identification and racial classification strategies.<sup>28</sup>

## South African Indian Muslims: Arrivals

Different variations of Islam present in South Africa originated from regions as distinct as South Asia and South-East Asia, eastern Africa, and the Arab Peninsula. The first persons of Islamic faith arrived in Cape Town as political pris-

<sup>25</sup> See Desai 1993; van der Veer 1992.

<sup>26</sup> <https://mg.co.za/article/2004-10-01-lost-tribe-gets-land-back/>, accessed November 14, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Loimeier 2018; Hansen, Sadouni, and Jeannerat 2009; Kaarsholm 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hansen, Sadouni, and Jeannerat 2009.

oners and slaves of the Dutch in the 1660s.<sup>29</sup> They made up the first of “three distinct waves of immigration”<sup>30</sup> of Muslims in what today is South Africa. In the present, the graves of prominent scholars and leaders from the first wave can still be visited around Cape Town. They are maintained by the Cape Mazaar Society.<sup>31</sup> The second wave of Muslims came with indentured labourers from India to Durban and the east coast in the 1860s, at a time when Dutch authority had given way to the British in the coastal parts of the country. The particular form and the large-scale implementation of indenture in South Africa, as much as in other places thought suitable for British-led sugar cane production, coincided with the takeover by royal British rule of India after a long period of Company rule. The turning point in that transition was the British counterinsurgency of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 which others call the ‘First War of Independence.’ Only then did the “impoverished British colony” of Natal become part of the global Indo-British endeavor of indenture.<sup>32</sup> Of approximately 150,000 indentured Indian labourers who arrived between 1860 and 1911, mostly from the northeast of India and from Hyderabad, between 7 and 10% were Muslims.<sup>33</sup> Most of the remainder were Hindus.<sup>34</sup> The caste data compiled by Bhana and Brain show that Muslim participation in the indenture system declined from a high level of around 19% in the early 1880s to a low level of only 3% by the end of the century: a decline Metcalf explains was a result of the administrators’ and planters’ apprehensions of them as being potential troublemakers.<sup>35</sup>

In 1871 the third wave of Muslim immigrants started to arrive, again from India but predominantly from the state of Gujarat, which had been excluded from the indenture agents’ territory. There, the industrialists and politicians had laid claim to the local workforce themselves.<sup>36</sup> These Gujarati immigrants were collectively known as ‘passenger Indians,’ because, notwithstanding their socio-economically diverse backgrounds and fortunes, they had paid their own fare to South

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**29** Mahida 1993.

**30** Ebr-Vally 2001, 273.

**31** Cf. <http://www.capemazaarsociety.com/>, accessed November 9, 2022.

**32** Metcalf 2007, 139. In 1845, Natal in South Africa was annexed by the British, whereas in the interior two Boer republics existed and the Cape had been a British colony since 1806.

**33** Bhana and Brain 1990, 22; cf. Kuper 1960; Vahed, 2000, 44.

**34** According to Ebr-Vally, “the *Hyderabadees* can be regarded as the first community of Indian Muslims to settle in present day South Africa,” Ebr-Vally 2001, 275; cf. Hansen 2003, 5. Being an Urdu-speaking Muslim originating from Hyderabad still has connotations of indenture or ‘cooliness’ in today’s South Africa, as my own research highlighted, Koch 2019.

**35** Cf. Metcalf 2007, 149.

**36** Metcalf 2007; Bhana and Brain 1990, 37.

Africa.<sup>37</sup> An estimated 80% of all Gujarati passenger Indians were Muslims. As a business community they would thrive comparatively well in South Africa.<sup>38</sup> Thus, contrary to developments in India, where Muslims faced a large-scale decline in political and economic power, the South African Indian community had an influential portion of leading Muslims in its midst, namely those from Gujarat. That explains why early on it was Gujarati Muslims who could engage the later arriving ‘Zanzibaris’ in a web of patronage.

Whereas the relationship with British contractors defined the arrival conditions of indentured Indians, Gujarati passenger Indians relied for their migration routes on networks built by other Gujarati Muslim settlements in the French territory of La Réunion<sup>39</sup> or Mauritius,<sup>40</sup> or on the even older Indo-Portuguese settlement areas of Goa, Diu, Daman, or Bassein. From biographical narratives collected during my own fieldwork in South Africa and in Gujarat, it became clear that Gujaratis, as much as Goans, had settled in the coastal towns of Portuguese Mozambique and all along the railway tracks that connected the ports to the hinterland and to the North of South Africa, via what today is Zimbabwe. My interlocutors called that route the “Beira corridor,” taking the Mozambiquan port town of Beira as a point of departure. Historical commercial directories confirm the presence of these regional Indian commercial and social contacts.<sup>41</sup>

Muslim Gujaratis in the past had rejected the categorization as Indian in various ways. Vahed narrates how in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Before the arrival of Hindus, passenger Muslims were incorrectly called ‘Arabs’ in Natal because of their religion and mode of dress.”<sup>42</sup> He sees such incorrect naming as a form of distancing between Muslim and Hindu Indians, in an effort to revive and instrumentalize religious differences. During apartheid the continuous Gujarati to-and-fro movements came to an end as a mutual boycott defined the relations between the newly independent India and a South Africa which turned into a republic by 1961.<sup>43</sup> This limitation of Indo-African mobilities took place against the backdrop of the spreading of Islamic reforms via the Arab Peninsula, where a growing number of South African Indian Muslims would travel to for pilgrim-

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<sup>37</sup> Bhana and Brain 1990, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Desai 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Némó 1983.

<sup>40</sup> Kuper 1960, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Bramdaw 1939.

<sup>42</sup> Vahed 2010, 617.

<sup>43</sup> In 1953, the government of South Africa prohibited the entry of wives, married outside the Union, and children born to them, with effect from 10 February 1956. Special permissions could be granted by the minister of the Interior only, cf. Kuper 1960, 3.

age. For example, the originally South Asian Tablighi Jamaat, founded in 1928, an inwardly oriented, explicitly non-political religious movement, gained a foothold in South Africa in the 1960s.<sup>44</sup> It gave religious expression to the social closure of and limited endogamy in South Africa, and moreover acted against the Christian missionaries active in South Africa.<sup>45</sup> Stressing the Arabicity of one's own Islamic practices also became part and parcel of the self-made man Ahmad Deedat's Islamic Propagation Center starting in the late 1950s, again especially in order to distinguish Muslims from Christians, and in South Africa, from Hinduism.<sup>46</sup> These snippets show how claims of Arabicity exist in a local environment scarcely aware of intra-Muslim differences. Current demonstrations in support of Palestine or arrested Nigerian sheikhs underline, however, the transnational interests of the current South African Muslim elite.<sup>47</sup>

## Identification: From 'Siddhis'/'Zanzibaris' to 'Coloured' to 'Other Asiatics' to 'Makhuwa'

In the historical period of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a South African Muslim community called 'Zanzibari' in the past and 'Makhuwa' more recently, formed itself in proximity and in distinction to the Indian South African Muslims described above.<sup>48</sup> As this paper explores, the story of the 'Zanzibaris,' whose arrival in South Africa dates to the 1870s, squeezes into the narrow gap between the Indian indentured labourers and the (predominantly) Muslim Gujarati passengers. Their relationship with South African Indian Muslims is crucial for their ascriptions and constructions of ethnic and religious group identity. On a larger scale, the case of 'Zanzibari' immigration to Durban highlights the translation of a slave labour model of economic relations into a contract or apprenticeship labour model in the period of colonial modernization.

To avoid from the outset any possible simplification of a conflict between Arab slave traders versus African slaves, it must be mentioned that members of several local societies can be found on both sides of the give and take. As emerges

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<sup>44</sup> Haron 2014; cf. Metcalf 1993.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Hansen 2012.

<sup>46</sup> Sadouni 2011; Haron 2014.

<sup>47</sup> "In front of the Consulate of the Nigerian regime: Muslim protests in Johannesburg, South Africa, against arresting Zakzaky," Qods News Agency 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kaarsholm 2014; Moola-Nernaes 2018.

from the accounts of African freed slaves, Yao, Makua, and Arabs were the main slave trading groups on the African continent. Alpers further indicates the presence of both group identifications, e.g., a “large Makua population of the Kilwa hinterland” and fragmentation, e.g., “dissension among a large number of Makua groups in and around the Meto area” in the African areas affected by the slave trade after 1810.<sup>49</sup> The instance of the Makua, located in the hinterland of the Mozambique coast and involved in slave trade with Brazil, also indicates the presence of global and local dimensions in existing and emergent group identifications.

‘Zanzibaris’ arrived in Durban in relatively small numbers and for a short period of time. Their integration into the South African setting and, vice versa, the maintenance of transnational relationships, is pertinent in comparative terms. Similar to the Indian case, the individuals to become collectively known as ‘Zanzibaris’ adhered to a variety of religious persuasions. Yet, the Muslim component of both had its own flavour, as Gujarati members of the Grey Street Mosque committee in Durban lent patronage to the ‘Zanzibaris’ throughout their history.

The story of the ‘Zanzibaris’ is one of a “chain of chance happenings in history” that instructs anthropologists about the impossibility of purely logical classifications in the face of human behaviour.<sup>50</sup> The former slaves’ and their descendants’ experiences between what are today Mozambique and South Africa were shaped by misunderstandings. In these countries, the political logics also reflect the involvement of various European countries and their respective stakes in the Indian Ocean market. The case of this categorization, ‘Zanzibari,’ and its mishaps highlight the complicated, entangled nature of the relationship between religious and social organization. This is not least of all because ‘Zanzibaris’ were wooed into Catholic and Islamic congregations over the course of time with varying consequences. Whereas the Catholic mission emphasized the assimilation of ‘Zanzibaris’ into the mainstream Black ethnicity surrounding Durban, namely Zulu, the Islamic part of the community is still distinct and visible.

Much of European and African historiography gives comparatively little attention to Islam in South Africa, representing it as secondary to the religiosity of European Protestant settlers and administrators. Equally, what was supposed to be Indian in South Africa was, for a long time, considered in political terms rather than in sociological ones and was represented as a problem.<sup>51</sup> After the end of apartheid in South Africa, however, an intense scholarly activity re-centered

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<sup>49</sup> Alpers 1975, 242–43, 251.

<sup>50</sup> Seedat 1973, 51.

<sup>51</sup> Woods 1954; Kuper 1960.

the South African Indian exceptionalism within the African continent.<sup>52</sup> Ethnographic scholarship on the 'Zanzibaris' is comparatively sparse, too, as they are a tiny minority in a diverse country. However, two distinct phases of scholarship can be identified, which coincide with the changed political realities since the 1990s. Previous publications mainly focused on their relationship with the Indians of Durban, namely corporate as much as informal patron-client relationships with the Trust of the Grey Street Mosque.<sup>53</sup> A liberated South Africa and its observers now stress the coastal routes and relationships that the Makuwa-speaking 'Zanzibaris' maintain with people from their linguistic group in Mozambique.<sup>54</sup> Mozambique demonstrates a history of transformation from being part of the Portuguese Empire, to becoming a communist one-party state, to acting as a member of the British Commonwealth since 1995. In their turn, both South Africa and Mozambique have had and have various ways of administrating religious affairs. Recent scholarship by Preben Kaarsholm underlines the importance of the Sufi networks the 'Zanzibaris' maintained throughout the coastal areas.<sup>55</sup>

It is instructive to first understand the rise and fall of the island of Zanzibar in the Indian Ocean region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century before relating it to the South African context. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Sultanate of Zanzibar had been continuously expanding, which entailed corresponding economic and political transformations.<sup>56</sup> Omani rule over the surrounding islands and parts of the East African coast was established by 1837, backed by a fleet of approximately 70–80 warships. The Omani seat of government, consequently, shifted to Zanzibar in 1840. This shift was the basis of the emergence of a trading empire on the island. When British pressure on the slave trade increased around thirty years later, in the 1870s, Zanzibari rulers came under threat. In addition, a devastating hurricane had destroyed much of the commercial navy and the Zanzibari clove farms in 1872, after which the decline of the trading wealth set in.<sup>57</sup> On the one hand, these developments did not have political ramifications: "British politicians did not seem to have any clear idea as to what kind of rule they wanted to establish in Zanzibar."<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, British affairs in Zanzibar were largely guided by what the British administration in Bombay did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>59</sup> and the Zan-

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52 Hofmeyr and Williams 2009; Hofmeyr, Dhupelia-Mesthrie, and Kaarsholm 2016.

53 Kuper 1960, 29; Seedat 1973; Oosthuizen 1982; Oosthuizen 1985.

54 Kaarsholm 2014; Moola-Naernes 2018.

55 Kaarsholm 2014.

56 Loimeier 2003; Loimeier 2007; Loimeier 2011; Loimeier 2018 [2016], 380.

57 See also Loimeier 2012.

58 Loimeier 2018 [2016], 381.

59 Loimeier 2018 [2016], 383.



zibari trade empire would not have existed without Indians, because especially regarding the coastline, “all banking and mortgage business passe[d] through Indian hands.”<sup>60</sup> In the period between the two world wars and the subsequent Indian independence from the British Empire, nationalism gained a strong foothold in Zanzibar as well. Therefore, in the 1950s questions of race and strategies of exclusion that redefined indigenous Zanzibariness for various groups became increasingly salient, not least of all in terms of anti-Arab polemics. Omani rule came to an end after 130 years during the revolution of 1964. That event led to the subsequent unification of Zanzibar and Tanganyika into what is today Tanzania. Stressing arabicity in Zanzibar became a political disadvantage, as the efforts to establish a new and independent African nation were prioritized.

Analogous to the analysis of the entry conditions of Gujaratis outlined above, the moment of the ‘Zanzibaris’ arrival sets the limits and possibilities for their history of dwelling in South Africa. The programme of Indian indentured labour, which the British colonial government had set up as an answer to labour shortages in its colonies, came to a temporary halt in South Africa between 1866 and around 1873 after the first batch of Indians had returned from Natal at the end of their contracts. The returnees’ reports on the conditions in the British colony of Natal were rather negative. In response, the British Indian administration put a stop to indentured labour programmes, in order to inquire further. This left approximately 18,000 British colonists in Natal concerned about possible labour shortages in their plantations. Meanwhile, in 1873, Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar had encountered the British installing a naval blockade at his port, as he had not yet effectively outlawed slavery so far.<sup>61</sup> For the first time, the export of slaves from the African continent, whether destined for ports in the Sultan’s dominion or for foreign ports, was prohibited through the treaty he finally signed with the British on 5 July 1873.<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, British naval patrols campaigned against the local slave trade by Arabs who were being aided by Portuguese and African

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<sup>60</sup> Metcalf 2007, 166.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Loimeier 2018, 381. As Loimeier highlights in his account of Islamic Reform in Zanzibar, the political changes were closely intertwined with economic and in fact ecological changes, because in 1872 “a devastating hurricane destroyed the Zanzibari commercial navy and a great part of the clove production on the Island of Unguja and, finally, Zanzibari companies had to fight against the competition of European trading companies in addition to political intervention by the European powers.”

<sup>62</sup> Another decree prohibiting “all sales or exchange of slaves” was signed by the next sultan as well, Loimeier 2018, 382. Sultan Ali b. Said (r. 1890–93) “closed down the slave markets and granted slaves the right to purchase their freedom,” Loimeier 2018, 382. However, the total abolition was rejected by the sultan.

slave raiders.<sup>63</sup> Zanzibar became the point of reference for the administration of these activities, irrespective of the mainland origin of most of the slaves traded there.

As a letter dated 26 May 1873 from the British Consul General of Zanzibar, John Kirk, to the Lieutenant Governor of Natal demonstrates, the problem of what to do with slaves who had become beneficiaries of the new abolitionist policies was taken care of by British administrators. Seedat relates how Kirk proposed a temporary arrangement, whereby liberated slaves should be taken in and apprenticed by the settler-colonists in Natal.<sup>64</sup> Once the British had taken active steps against the Sultan of Zanzibar, the former slaves would be re-settled "within the Sultan's dominion."<sup>65</sup> This never materialized, because what was first thought of as a temporary gap-filling strategy left a trail of evidence. The British official by the title Protector of Immigrants, who had previously arranged for the accommodation and distribution of Indian contract labourers who were temporarily not arriving, took over the administration of the freed slaves. The latter were, however, very often destitute minors under the age of twelve. In the face of this reality, colonial British employers were expected to be both teachers and missionaries. From the very beginning, these immigrants were kept apart from local Africans. After the arrival of a first group of people in 1873 and smaller subsequent groups until 1880, the involuntary immigration stopped, leaving around 500 non-local Africans in the colony of Natal, with a large group living subsequently in Durban at Kings Rest just South of the harbour, at a distance from the main city area.<sup>66</sup> This implied spatial proximity to the then newly built large mosque on Grey Street, which was opened 1880.

These immigrants were settled on the Bluff with the help of the Grey Street Mosque Trust, which had acquired the land. 'Zanzibaris' did not have to pay the poll tax that the so-called 'Natives' had to. Although the more popular name for the freed slaves from eastern Africa, who had been or had become Muslims was 'Zanzibari,' there were other categorizations for those who lived with them. Thus, Seedat recounts how:

some Indians began calling them 'Siddhis,' for the Swahili speaking Africans with their centuries-old maritime links with India, were called 'Siddhis' by the Indians in India. This designation of the Muslim freed slaves as 'Zanzibaris' and 'Siddhis' conferred on them a

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<sup>63</sup> Seedat 1973, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Seedat 1973.

<sup>65</sup> Seedat 1973, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Seedat 1973, 23.

collective historical identity to which they were not really entitled, but which contributed to the growth of a sense of ‘community feeling’ among them.<sup>67</sup>

The socio-cultural formation of ‘Siddhis’ in India, their myths of arrival, their transnational links, and their integration into Indian Sufi Islam, particularly the Rifai’ order in Gujarat are well documented, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to detail that.<sup>68</sup> It suffices to say that whereas East Africans became integrated into the Indian social structure and caste system in India, the small group of non-local Africans in South Africa became during apartheid an unwieldy pawn in the affairs of religious as well as social and socio-political classifications. While the Catholic missionaries in Natal, such as Bishop Allard, thought this community to be a possible bridge for the so-far rather uninterested local Zulu people, by intermarriage and assimilation, the Indian Trustees of the Grey Street Mosque encouraged a separate community identity that was a logical conundrum.<sup>69</sup>

It was this identity preservation perspective that received a new impetus when the Afrikaner parties took over the National Government in 1948 and transformed the British outlook of the former colony into a republic by 1961. The key figure in the regime of ethnicity and race that operated through laws and acts of parliament was the Dutch-born Hendrik F. Verwoerd (1901–66), whose political career started as senator and Minister of Bantu Affairs in 1950, before he was appointed Prime Minister in 1958.<sup>70</sup> He drew and enacted regulations, such as the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act in 1950, and thus effectively left an indelible stamp on the South African socio-demographic make-up in the forthcoming decades.<sup>71</sup>

For the ‘Zanzibaris,’ this meant a threat to an ambiguous positionality, which they negotiated in the 1950s with the help of the Mosque’s Indian Trustees, who in turn involved United Party (UP) members of Parliament, in whose constituency the ‘Zanzibaris’ lived.<sup>72</sup> Both opposition politicians from the UP as well as prominent newspaper editors had called for changing the Population Registrar, in order to have ‘Zanzibaris’ categorized as being of “mixed racial origin”<sup>73</sup> and,

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<sup>67</sup> Seedat 1973, 30.

<sup>68</sup> Basu 1998; Basu 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Seedat 1973, 29. There can only be speculation about the religiosity of the ‘Zanzibaris’ in Durban prior to their arrival, but it seems unlikely that the slave trade was conducted amongst co-religionists and likely the faith adhered to would have been ‘traditional African.’

<sup>70</sup> Marx 2011.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Koch 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Seedat 1973, 44.

<sup>73</sup> Seedat 1973, 44.

therefore, coloured. What aided the proposal was their outlook as Muslim and their use of a particular language, which in South Africa was easily confused with Kishwahili, but, in fact, was Makhua. This in the end was a successful attempt for re-classification and was resented by the existing Coloured associations, as it possibly meant sharing not only privileges but also resources. On the 3 February 1961, the government issued a proclamation intended to solve this dispute in what the apartheid government viewed as a logical, but realistically a rather absurd way. It stated that "Zanzibari Arabs" would be classified as "Other Asiatic Group."<sup>74</sup>

In this context, 'Zanzibaris' accomplished their group-level repositioning in South African society, albeit in terms of predominant, legally predefined racial classifications, which simultaneously set them aside from other racial groups:

Through the intervention of the Juma Masjid Trust and Harry Lewis (then United Party M.P. for Umlazi) the Zanzibaris were classified as 'Coloureds.' It was stated that they had been 'nameless' and 'raceless' up to this stage.<sup>75</sup> Those who were against this classification maintained they were not from mixed European descent and neither did they embrace the Christian faith implying that they were basically Africans. The Zanzibaris held a moving ceremony at King's Rest to celebrate their re-classification from Bantu to 'Coloured.' They were now exempt from the numerous regulations and laws governing the lives of Blacks, in such matters as the pass laws, influx control laws, employment restrictions, etc.<sup>76</sup>

Later on in 1961, by inventing another sub-group for the 'Zanzibaris,' 'Other Asiatic,' and adding it as equal to other Coloured sub-groups, such as Cape Coloured, Malay, or Griqua, the Verwoerdian spirit and bureaucratic practice of South African apartheid sought to impose a social order on cultural heterogeneity. However, the individual-level racial classifications were managed arbitrarily, as race-based groups specified by the "Group Areas Act" and other legislation were never completely endogamous. Exogamy led to various possible constellations of group belonging and resulted in cross-group diversity, as Seedat's ethnographic and genealogical study underlines.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the 'Zanzibari' group in Durban incorporated African individuals, those classified as Coloured, and occasionally Indian women as wives. 'Zanzibari' identity was built on the basis of so-called perceived cultural traits, assigned identity categories, and birth certificates as objectified documentary resources for racialized classifications. This exercise of

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<sup>74</sup> Seedat 1973, 48.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *The Daily News*, 9 January 1959.

<sup>76</sup> Oosthuizen 1985, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Seedat 1973.

classification was a prerequisite for large-scale resettlement.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, the contradictory, group-dependent handling of the hierarchically organized racial classifications was not lost on contemporary observers:

While in East Africa Africans emphasize their African identity and many try to prove that they have no Arab blood in their veins, in South Africa many Zanzibaris try to prove that they have Arab blood in them. Nevertheless, it is difficult to see how the Zanzibaris could be classified as 'Other Asiatics.' It is only a matter of expediency, namely to move them to an Indian area, in this case Chatsworth, as was done in 1962. The bureaucratic racial pigeonhole into which they have been put obscures the true facts of their identity. They are basically Africans with Arab blood in their veins and in no way are they Asiatics. This is the classification they hoped for in a system which has certain privileges worked out on a racial scale.<sup>79</sup>

The special circumstances of the 'Zanzibari' community were little known in Pretoria, from where the identity cards were issued and their future dwelling place was decided.<sup>80</sup> They, as much as all other ethnically or racially defined groups, were to be shown their 'proper places' in the territory. On the national level, forced resettlements occurred in the shape of newly built 'homelands' for the majority of the Black South African population, which was legally removed from White South Africa. On the level of town and city-planning, the resettlement implied the clearing of central land areas for Whites and the relegation of non-Whites to the peripheries. In South Africa, Indians living in the city of Durban were assigned to newly built townships, such as Chatsworth.<sup>81</sup> Upon that, the land they had previously purchased in town areas was claimed by various entities of the City Council, such as the Engineer's Department, which needed sewage disposal grounds.<sup>82</sup> By paying money to the City Council, the Mosque trustees arranged for the provision of township houses in Chatsworth to the 'Zanzibaris.' Seedat notes the existence of an added tiny minority of non-local Muslim Africans under the name of 'Zanzibaris,' who, however, came from another area of Durban to Chatsworth and were labeled as 'Malawians' by those who had come from Kings Rest. Supported by other Muslims because of their religiosity, they were regarded with fear by Hindu Indians because of their putative knowledge of 'black magic.'<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> This suggests interrelations between settlement patterns and social relations in Claude Lévi-Strauss' terms, such as via the spatial objectification of classification schemes.

<sup>79</sup> Oosthuizen 1985, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Kuper 1960.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Hansen 2012. He describes the process as one of ethnicity by fiat.

<sup>82</sup> Seedat 1973, 55.

<sup>83</sup> Seedat 1973.

In her recent thesis on the language and cultural reproduction of these 'Zanzibaris', linguist Moola-Nernaes stresses the original linguistic homogeneity of the group, while contrasting this with the heterogeneity observed in most other groups constituted of former slaves. Moola-Nernaes maintains that as a "minority immigrant speech community, they succeeded in maintaining their culture and language for over four generations."<sup>84</sup> The 'Zanzibaris,' thus, are now able to connect to the around eight million speakers of the language, Makhuwa, who mostly live in northern Mozambique and southern Tanzania. The use of Makhuwa, as a language, served as a marker of separation from the local Black African population, namely Zulu-speaking people, while participating in the production and reproduction of cultural distinctions in South Africa.

In the latest turn of the wheel of history, Kaarsholm points out how a post-apartheid documentary, broadcast by the South African Broadcast Corporation in 1996, re-positioned 'Zanzibaris' in terms of the new times.<sup>85</sup> Zubeda Seedat, a South African with Indian ancestors whose honours thesis was a study on 'Zanzibaris' in 1973 (which I quoted extensively in this text), had been the SABC's adviser for the program. The (self-)representation sheds the classification as 'Other Asiatics' and stresses the community's Africanness.<sup>86</sup> It moreover highlights the history of the per se transnational Sufi orders that had maintained links to the eastern African coast throughout the openly anti-religious socialist times in Mozambique and the various phases of religious-political administration in South Africa. In 2022 the topic of 'Zanzibari' identity was taken up for example by the internet news platform *Salaamedia*, which featured Zahid Jadwat, a South African with Indian ancestors, interviewing Halima Giles, a descendant of the 'Zanzibari' community who says "the cultural side does exist" but stresses in turn the Islamicness of the Makhuwa, which the interviewer constantly calls a "tribe."<sup>87</sup> Apparently, no matter what the proper designation of the communities would be, the relationship between the Muslim co-religionist Gujaratis and 'Zanzibaris' is still strong.

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<sup>84</sup> Moola-Nernaes 2018, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Kaarsholm 2014, 206f.

<sup>86</sup> For the comparable case of East Africans, Siddhis, in Southern India, who first achieve a status as Scheduled Tribe in the local classification system and later on turned their self-representation into the direction of Africanicity, see Hofbauer 2022.

<sup>87</sup> <https://salaamedia.com/2022/07/28/durbans-zanzibari-makua-community-struggles-for-identity/>, accessed November 14, 2022.

## South African Specifics: Contortions in Racial Classification

The regulation of religion and the points of intersection between religion and politics are a central theme in this paper, as the two cases of immigration processes and community formation have shown. On the one hand I presented material from my own dissertation research on Sunni Muslim Gujaratis in South Africa and on the other I discussed the journeys and dwellings of an African Muslim group called ‘Zanzibaris.’ The narrative revealed how the South African apartheid state not only sought to authoritatively define what is a ‘religion’ (and what is not) but, moreover, had ideas about which religion was appropriate for whom under its jurisdiction. The State set the various defined religions in relation to one another in what could be called regimes of religious governance, or the management of religious differences. Verwoerd renamed the Department of Native Affairs as the Department of Bantu Affairs. He restructured it to include a second, strong leg of “Bantu Education” in 1958. In 1961, as South Africa turned into a republic and left the British Commonwealth, Indians were declared citizens and no longer threatened with the legal possibility of expulsion, a proposition Afrikaner nationalists had been brandishing from time to time. 100 years after the first labourers of the indenture programme had arrived, and with over 90% of the population being born in South Africa, they were accepted as South African and placed within the racial classification grid of the time.<sup>88</sup>

As Christopher highlights, the classification matrix of the South African census has changed considerably over the years.<sup>89</sup> Indians were featured as ‘Indian’ for the first time in 1946, in contradistinction from the ‘Mixed and Other Coloured’ category. Yet, in the early 1950s, their classificatory term was changed again to ‘Asiatic,’ which neighboured ‘Cape Malay’ and maintained distinction from the broader category of ‘Coloured.’ In 1950, the “classification adopted was the basic threefold division of 1911, although the subdivision of the Coloured category provided for Indian, Chinese, Cape Malay and Griqua sub-groups in addition to the basic Cape Coloured group.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Christopher 2002. Another category continuously shifting between ‘Coloured’ and ‘Native’ was ‘Hottentot.’ Whereas in 1951 the people classed in this category were subsumed under ‘Native’ (Bantu), this did not last because language again became a defining criterion in 1970, Christopher 2002, 405.

<sup>89</sup> Christopher 2002.

<sup>90</sup> Christopher 2002, 405.

This supposed solution of the classification problem, which was the subdivision and simultaneous extension of the category Coloured had a portentous effect on the Indian-‘Zanzibari’ relationships. The race classification of 1950, stipulated in the Population Registration Act Number 30 of 1950, does not specify Indians, let alone ‘Zanzibaris,’ as a separate group. It rather established ‘Coloured’ as the residual category between White and ‘Bantu.’<sup>91</sup> After 1950, sub-divisions with seven new categories were invented ad hoc.<sup>92</sup> As part of this, ‘Zanzibaris’ had come under the administration of the Department of Native Affairs, while being put legally into the same position as local Africans.<sup>93</sup> For example, they were obliged to carry pass books, the most important symbol of White domination in the apartheid era. Despite this, confusion persisted regarding the classification of ‘Zanzibaris’: in local Durban newspapers they were referred to as the “lost tribe,” which they resented as a misclassification.<sup>94</sup>

In this context of confusion, Seedat argues, the varying and arbitrary race classification of some ‘Zanzibaris’ resulted in frail solidarities.<sup>95</sup> Within the seven sub-divisions in the major category ‘Other Asiatic,’ some ‘Zanzibari’ groups could make efforts to be (re-)classified as ‘Other Coloured,’ or ‘Coloured,’ depending on the classification of the legal father or grandfather, as indicated in birth certificate documents, or Indian. Reclassification was possible especially after the Department of Indian Affairs was established in 1961. However, according to Posel, the South African Department of Native Affairs’ racial classification practices themselves made no reference to the issue of descent, while, instead, placing emphasis on the ways race was lived in everyday experience.<sup>96</sup> This opened a grey zone for contestation. In the 1950s and 1960s, classification procedures oftentimes entailed rapid, if not on-the-spot, judgments about a person’s racial type.<sup>97</sup> Not least of all because of the not-so-distant histories of intermarriage across colour lines within the White category,

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**91** Seedat 1973, 42.

**92** According to Seedat of those were Cape Coloured, Malay, Griqua, Chinese, Indian, Other Asiatic and Other Coloured; each supposedly recognized for its “cultural distinctiveness,” Seedat 1973, 42.

**93** Seedat 1973, 43.

**94** Seedat 1973, 43.

**95** Seedat 1973, 49–54.

**96** Posel 2001, 93.

**97** Posel 2001, 93.



investigations into a person's racial lineage, tracking down birth certificates of parents or grandparents (which in many cases were unavailable anyway) would have been wholly at odds with the political imperative of creating mechanisms for the ongoing, on-the-ground regulation of social and economic life in racially differentiated ways.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, a group-specific approach was necessary for the population administration. In 1961, under the premiership of Verwoerd, the Ministry of Interior proclaimed 'Zanzibaris' to constitute a distinct subgroup of the Coloured community, of which six others had previously been established under the heading of 'Other Asiatic Group.' Whereas the category 'Coloured' had long served as a gathering place for hard-to-classify groups, the 'Zanzibari' case remains exceptional in its logical conundrums, as the South African proclamation dated February 1961 indicates:

In Other Asiatic group shall be included any person who in fact is, or is generally accepted as a member of the race or class known as Zanzibari Arabs (also known as Zanzibaris or Kiwes<sup>99</sup>) or any person who in fact is, or is generally accepted as, a member of a race or tribe whose national home is in any country or area in Asia other than China, India or Pakistan.<sup>100</sup>

This quote from the proclamation underlines the ad hoc need and subsequent incoherence behind this classification category. South African classifications defined emergent 'minority' communities, such as 'Zanzibaris' via the Group Areas Act and the whole of apartheid legislation, while having complex effects on existent communities.<sup>101</sup> After the Department of Indian Affairs was established in 1961, only Indians, as a group, were no longer placed under the Coloured category: 'Indian' became a separate legal term. This bureaucratic re-evaluation of who was Indian had consequences for 'Zanzibari' families with Indian ancestors, because, whereas

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**98** Posel 2001, 93.

**99** Kiwes most probably is a local spelling of Kilwa, Kivinje or "Keelwa" along the African coast South of Zanzibar. The town and region were a major port, trading with countries as far as Brazil and France, Alpers 1975, 238. According to Alpers: "The export trade from the mainland was officially abolished during the 1870s, but slaves continued to be driven to Kilwa from the interior of East Africa, and from Kilwa north to the towns of the Mrima coast, whence they could be smuggled more easily to Zanzibar, as Elton discovered during his march behind the Swahili coast in 1873, when he was Vice-Consul at Zanzibar. Thereafter, although the export trade continued from the many smaller ports along the Kilwa coast, the slave trade in East Africa was largely internalized, and slaves brought down to the coast from the interior frequently ended up working on Arab or Indian plantations on the coast itself," Alpers 1975, 238.

**100** Proclamation no. 6620, no. 27 of 1961, vol. CCIII; originally quoted in Seedat 1973, 48.

**101** Freund 1995.

some family members remained Coloured, others were reclassified as Indian. Whereas those classified as Indian could move to Chatsworth, those classified as Coloured faced the prospect of being resettled or forcibly moved to Coloured areas, such as Wentworth, which was around 15 kilometers away.<sup>102</sup>

Apart from the similar effects the classification as Indian or Coloured had in terms of access to jobs, spouses etc., the two categories carry different meanings with regards to values such as 'purity' of descent. This continues to be important for many South African Gujarati Muslims, indicated by the high levels of endogamy and the jingoism of many of the Gujaratis I worked with over the years. Whereas Indian or 'Other Asiatic' positively defines a group as endogamous, the category Coloured connotes mixed descent, as the category was first used for the offspring of local Khoisan women and European settlers.

## Confluences: Bureaucracy, Race and Religiosity

In South Africa, the apartheid government of the National Party (1948–94),<sup>103</sup> which was dominated by Calvinist Afrikaans speakers of European origin, called its overarching leitmotif 'Christian Nationalism.' While purportedly combining Christianity and Nationalism in its schooling institutions and general outlook the aim was to achieve and maintain racial segregation and hierarchy.<sup>104</sup> Race, as Posel's meticulous work has shown, was a common-sense notion in bureaucratic South Africa that left ample space for ambiguity. Power became concentrated in the hands of low-skilled Afrikaans-speaking officials who classified people racially and who were neither Muslim nor Black Africans. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was their common belief that Islam mainly existed outside of South Africa. The very combination, so to speak, of Islam and Africa dropped out of the classification system scope many of the apartheid bureaucrats had. Islam was thought to be something Arabic, and an association with Islam implied the Arabicity of the adherents. In other words, there was no conceptual space for 'African Islam' or 'African Muslims.'

The South African state, however, long since recognized entities of religious representation, such as the various Councils of Muslims in South Africa (Muslim Judicial Council, est. 1945; Jamiat ul-Ulama of Transvaal, est. 1925; Gauteng

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<sup>102</sup> Moola-Nernaes 2018, 54.

<sup>103</sup> See Dubow 2014.

<sup>104</sup> Thompson 1966.

Muslim Shura Council 2018).<sup>105</sup> These entities were and continue to be regularly and strongly tied to ethnic and, indeed, racial identifications of their members,<sup>106</sup> with three prominent groups: Malay/Coloured, Indian, and Black.<sup>107</sup>

The accompanying turbulences in daily life notwithstanding, the basic idea of racial classification was often accepted by those negatively affected. IPCI was an important player in the larger process of identification negotiations. It was a vital force in the ‘Arabization’ of the more affluent layers of the Muslim community in Durban and, by extension, in Johannesburg, where the Muslims of Gujarati origin dominated the religious communities. Sadouni has traced the career of the IPCI founding person, Ahmad Deedat, which involved interrelations with local Durbanites and the Arab merchant class on the Arab peninsula.<sup>108</sup> The local merchants were the main supportive base of Deedat’s propagation movement in the late 1970s when he managed to find sponsorship or rather “un soutien arabe indefectible.”<sup>109</sup> The Arabic language had already become a “nouvel horizon identitaire”<sup>110</sup> for Muslims in Durban since the 1950s, when the idea of reading the Quran together in the original Arabic was promoted by the Arabic Study Circle. From the 1960s, Muslims “began introducing Islam into their lives more systematically,”<sup>111</sup> as the already mentioned Tablighi movement spread in South Africa. This was primarily carried forward by Surtees, i.e., Gujarati Muslims from Surat, in the beginning. The introduction of an inward, propriety- and piety-oriented view of Muslim identity dovetailed with their accommodation in the apartheid system under prime ministers Verwoerd and, later, John Vorster.

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**105** Corporate organization as a mode to engage in political action saw, in 2019, an Islamic political party, Al Jama-Ah, gaining a seat in the National Assembly for the first time in the South African history.

**106** On the different logics of racial and ethnic classification in colonial British African settings, see Mamdani 2013, 46–53.

**107** In the 1960s and 1970s, ‘Black’ was a political category as much as a racialized one. Persons of Indian or Malay origin could identify as Black, too, see Magaziner 2009. It should also be remembered that the ANC, the Natal Indian Congress, and the Transvaal Indian Congress jointly organized the large-scale defiance campaign of 1952, in which organized groups burnt their passes and ignored the “whites only” signboards in public places, Niehaus 2008, 133. The Freedom Charter of 1955, still considered a basic document for the current South African democratic experience, was put forward during a congress in Kliptown, which included among its 3,000 delegates 230 Coloureds and 320 Indians, Niehaus 2008, 133.

**108** Sadouni 2007; Sadouni 2009.

**109** Sadouni 2011, 158f.

**110** Sadouni 2011, 65.

**111** Vahed 2010, 623

Claims of Arab or Middle Eastern ancestry corresponded with processes of social upward mobility within a racial classification scheme, which placed 'Black African' at the lowest rung of the ladder in South African society. This is demonstrated by the formation of the group-level identities of the Gujaratis and the 'Zanzibaris.' The latter have experienced an additional differentiation in terms of the predominant race-related classifications within the political system, as the religious scholar Oosthuizen put it in the mid-1980s:

Politically they feel isolated. Although classified as 'Other Asiatics' Zanzibaris are not allowed to vote for the Indian Council. According to the Department of Indian Affairs, only Indians who have 'Books of Life' (Identity Documents) which start with 05 and identity cards which start with 800 are registered as voters. Zanzibaris have been put under the 06 section, which is known as 'Other Asian.' Zanzibaris are becoming increasingly concerned about where they stand in the political context of South Africa.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, in South Africa the collective identification was being defined both in trans-local and global terms with relation to their religious identity and in terms of locally specific, apartheid-related classifications:

The orthodox Indian Muslims in South Africa (and in East Africa) are Hanafi. The Islam practised by the Zanzibaris is Shafii as is the case with the Islam practised by the East Africans. The Makua culture was influenced by the aggressive Swahili Muslim culture. Assimilation of traditional religious elements took place and the Islam that developed among the Makua became indigenised in accordance with the mentality and mode of life of the new adherent.<sup>113</sup>

The case of Durban 'Zanzibaris' demonstrates the evolution of the social structure in a nutshell, as they have at first repositioned themselves "from the authority of the Protector of Indian Immigrants to that of the Department of Native Affairs"<sup>114</sup> in earlier years. Similarly, from the 1960s to the 1980s race-informed classifications have been at the centre of the struggles of 'Zanzibaris' over religious and geographic belonging, including their resettlement in South Africa. According to Oosthuizen, this tension between the religious and locational, as respectively inclusive and particular, aspects of the 'Zanzibaris' identity have, thus, lastingly affected their positioning in terms of the racial classification categories:

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**112** Oosthuizen 1985, 24.

**113** Oosthuizen 1985, 12.

**114** Kaarsholm 2010, 227.

The Zanzibaris emphasise that their religion is multiracial and excludes no one on the basis of skin colour. Nearly all the respondents were convinced that their religion gives them a sense of security. In all their experiences as slaves, as wanderers on the sea, as new immigrants, as people who had no place of their own (although they stayed at King's Rest for generations), as those who have been relocated, reclassified from liberated slaves to Bantu, to Coloured, to 'Other Asiatics,' and through unemployment, nothing else has given them such a sense of security as their Muslim faith and their Indian fellow Muslims who assisted them faithfully through the years.<sup>115</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

During a period of nationalism and nation-building events in the 1960s the 'Zanzibaris' in South Africa became a spanner in the works of the apartheid administration. In cooperation with the affluent Gujarati Muslim community of the Grey Street Mosque, they maintained their separate identity, which was, however, hard to integrate into the racial grid conceptualized by Afrikaner bureaucrats. Ironically, whereas in Zanzibar in the late 1960s Arabicity was downplayed, the opposite move of stressing the Arab element in Zanzibar's history became an asset in the local 'Zanzibari' efforts for an improved social status in South Africa. Now in the post-apartheid present, however, the Makhua turn away from the previously assigned label 'Other Asiatic' and still maintain a religious profile.

Historically, Muslims have reproduced the ideas and practices of Islam through internal debates, such as on the appropriateness of styles of prayer, ritual, the content and language of sermons, and social norms, e.g., in relation to marital choices. In the context of Muslim or Islamic societies, the anthropological perspective on 'great' and 'small' traditions has evolved since the late 1950s by focusing on the stratified relationships between groups in religious frameworks.<sup>116</sup> While the term tradition has multiple definitions,<sup>117</sup> it was most often used to distinguish between a majority-community religiosity premised on scriptures and a religiosity centering on everyday practices.

Arguing against common representations and in the spirit of Roman Loimeier's meticulous historical reconstructions of Islamic reform in Africa, I have empirically shown how race was not a stable but rather fluid category in the 20<sup>th</sup> century amongst Muslims in South Africa and how it sometimes became interrelated with Arabicity. This contribution thus highlights how race was recurrently negotiated

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**115** Oosthuizen 1985, 23.

**116** Redfield 1956; Geertz 1968.

**117** Asad 1983.

during the rule of imperialists and, later, Afrikaner nationalists. This historical ambiguity of racialized categories, I suggest, can also be understood as informing the later politicization of Black, Malay, and Indian identities.

In South Africa, according to Dangor,<sup>118</sup> local appropriations of race-related discourses found amongst Muslims are likely interrelated with the practices of the apartheid government. On the one hand, Islamic scriptures and early history highlight the value the Prophet gave to the unity of humankind, e.g., the narrative trope of a common lineage from Adam and Eve. Other narratives in the Islamic scriptures, e.g., on *hijra*, or the migration of the first group of Muslims from Mecca to Medina, also transcend racial thinking. These seek to overcome the previously upheld distinction between southern and northern Arab Muslims, laden with racial undertones, through their reference to the monogenetic origin of humankind. This tentatively reinforces the argument that local racial prejudices of Muslims in South Africa are related to the effects of apartheid policies. At the same time, the efforts to build an inclusive South African nation in the post-apartheid period, which were put into legal code and practice after 1994, indicate a more complex picture than that given by Dangor. Despite the multitude of legal anomalies and inconsistencies, the bureaucratic perpetuation of racial classifications has remained relatively uncontroversial and uncontested, which indicates the underlying socio-cultural construction of race.<sup>119</sup> On the one hand, racial classifications can be demonstrated to be unstable both temporally as well as spatially, e.g., in South Africa racial identity could be differentially determined from different legal perspectives or change over time based on internal and external circumstances. The 'Zanzibari' case has shown this in detail. On the other hand, the modern state has historically involved totalizing orders of governance, bureaucracy-imposed social structures, and information-gathering institutions. The issuance of official identity documents enabled the continuous application of arbitrary racial classifications.<sup>120</sup>

My material gathered from the Gujarati employees of the IPCI and the sources on the 'Zanzibaris' demonstrate the hierarchical interrelations between 'Zanzibaris' and Gujaratis. I argue that this is representative of the larger social and cultural structures informing the identity politics in post-apartheid South Africa, despite historical and more recent attempts to reform these.<sup>121</sup> More generally, my comparative study corroborates the proposition that "[r]acialization is an impor-

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**118** Dangor 1997.

**119** Posel 2001, 96.

**120** Posel 2001, 100.

**121** Loimeier 2003; Loimeier 2007; Loimeier 2013; Loimeier 2018 [2016].

tant grid through which to examine the Gujarati experience.”<sup>122</sup> Racialization was instrumental for the formation of group-level Muslim identity in South Africa. My research suggests a structuring effect of the interrelations between the settlement patterns and apartheid policies on the cultural distinctions between ‘Zanzibaris’ and Indians, such as in terms of the trans-local or local associations of languages spoken by these communities and local struggles over bureaucracy-influenced identity classifications in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

I diachronically traced how an idea of African Islam is produced and reproduced by the dominant social order in South Africa. The case study of the ‘Zanzibaris’ brings into focus how identity categories of Africans and Muslims have overlapped and differentiated, while resisting systems of racial oppression.<sup>123</sup> Through this lens the manner in which contestations over religious identities have also shaped the relations between minority groups in South Africa became visible. Following the line of argument of a previous paper,<sup>124</sup> these struggles have also been shown to delineate the class- and race-inflected cleavages between the identifications of various South African Muslim groups. In this respect, the ‘Zanzibari’ case illustrates the centrality of religious identifications for efforts to claim a positioning in the South African social structure.

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122 Vahed 2010, 620.

123 Cf. Jeppie 1991; Sicard 1989.

124 Koch 2017.

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Katja Föllmer

# Social Movements and Collective Identity

## A Cultural Approach

Recently, the voices of Iranian women have become loud, calling for the abolition of mandatory veiling and demanding equal rights and freedom for women. Many are calling the recent protests in Iran a ‘revolution’ in light of these women’s sudden, open, loud, and public rebellion. For a long time, the priority for women activists in the country was the war with Iraq, social and economic problems, unemployment, and domestic violence against women.<sup>1</sup> Only in certain situations was veiling an issue, especially when young women in particular refused to cover their hair completely. Since the 1990s it has become common practice for women to negotiate the practice of veiling as part of their everyday routine. With the rise of social media, they secretly removed their veils and posted photos of themselves.<sup>2</sup> Since about 2014, the number of publications about the meaning and significance of the veil in Iran has increased. The call for the abolition of the veil was first highlighted in the Iranian media by the symbolic act of Vida Movahed in December 2017, when she appeared in public with uncovered hair, silently swinging her headscarf on a stick. She has since found many supporters and imitators. Many of them were arrested or fined. These individual acts went unheard in many cases until Mahsa Amini died suddenly after the so-called morality police arrested her in September 2022 for ‘inappropriate veiling.’ The subsequent protests gave women who refuse to cover their hair a voice, but was this really a ‘revolution’? Or, rather, is it a new kind of protest, a social movement of primarily individual actors? The following article aims to demonstrate the importance of taking a cultural approach in the study of social movements.

The protests that erupted in September 2022 in Iran are the result of societal changes in recent decades, during which women have become a significant economic and social force, and traditional structures such as the family have eroded.<sup>3</sup> The protests against mandatory veiling and the demonstrators’ demands for equality and justice, especially for women and minorities, are juxtaposed against those who cling to traditional values and Islamic principles, and see recent developments in individualization as a threat to the Islamic community and the

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1 Föllmer 2021, 94–96.

2 Bayat 2013, 103; Föllmer 2021.

3 Föllmer 2022b, 86, 94–110.

cause of the spread of corruption. Furthermore, there are women from martyr families, and individuals close to Hezbollah who are redefining their agency on the base of conservative moral formulations. They fight against western forms of liberal feminism and participate in the Islamization projects of the state, while simultaneously promoting women's individual and collective rights, and pushing the boundaries of rights toward greater autonomy and equality.<sup>4</sup>

It has become clear that the recent protests highlight the various neuralgic points of Iran's heterogeneous society. The protests also point to a situation in which social change, processes of individualization, and the country's economic and ecological crisis make reforms unavoidable.<sup>5</sup> Scholars and many young Iranians believe that the system is unwilling or unable to make the necessary reforms.<sup>6</sup> In their opinion, neither a reform-oriented nor a conservative government can implement sufficient reforms and overcome the country's ongoing economic crisis.

In 2009, when protests against the results of the presidential elections began, many experts were certain that civil society could bring about change and reform.<sup>7</sup> However, instead of change and reform, the neoconservative government of Ahmadinejad (2005–13) continued to act in the same way. His successor, President Rouhani (2013–21), took a more moderate course. By adopting the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015 to control Iran's nuclear programme, for a short time, this gave Iranians hope for change and economic development, but again, this hope was destroyed. The situation worsened when the USA withdrew from the treaty. The economic crisis deepened, followed by several demonstrations in 2017/18, and 2019. The last presidential elections in 2021 once again dashed any hopes for reform, continued to deepen the internal social and economic crises, and advanced the disillusionment of the population. The sudden death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022 gave people cause to take to the streets again in protest, and to demand political change.

In retrospect, political scientists argue that the chain of protests in Iran can be viewed as a long revolutionary process that will continue and eventually lead to a regime change.<sup>8</sup> From a social science perspective, one can ask whether the protests are an expression of social change and a new consciousness of people who desire reforms and appropriate laws. In other words, are the protests part

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<sup>4</sup> Saeidi 2022, 187–94.

<sup>5</sup> Föllmer 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Amirpur 2019; Fathollah-Nejad 2023; Talebi 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Jahanbegloo 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Fathollah-Nejad 2023.

of a movement that is the result of social transformation processes that already happened? Or are they a reaction to the government's Islamization programme, which ignores such developments? Can this movement be called a social movement that brings about change within the system, or should it be called a 'revolution,' at the end of which there is a system change? What role does Islam have in this context? Answers can only be found by looking from a long-term perspective, but it can be argued that the recent protests have characteristics of a social movement.

## Social Movement Theories in the Context of Muslim Societies

Theories about social movements are manifold. Dependent on national context, the history or tradition of protests, and the academic tradition of the authors, these theories emphasize very different aspects of social movements, each in their own right. There is no single definition that encompasses all issues concerning a social movement. Classical social movement theories, which are to a great extent influenced by Marxist ideas, differ from new social movement theories. The classical theories mainly focus on events in European and American modern history until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These theories do not apply to contemporary events since World War II. For this reason, new approaches were developed in the 1980s. Some of the new social movement theories focus on the emergence of social movements in particular historical contexts, while others concentrate on questions of common socio-political goals, and still others examine the historical significance of social movements. Although a well-developed field, these theories do not generally refer to social movements in non-Western societies.<sup>9</sup> Social movements are global phenomena, and the contexts in which they emerge are specific.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore necessary to understand the 'civilizational character' of the particular, local context and the actions that take place within it, rather than formulating normative principles and categories.<sup>11</sup> This applies in particular to research on Muslim societies in the Middle East and North Africa and the reform

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<sup>9</sup> Vahabzadeh 2001, 624–25.

<sup>10</sup> Vahabzadeh 2001, 625.

<sup>11</sup> Vahabzadeh 2001, 631; The distinction between society and politics can fail an ultimate referentiality, Vahabzadeh 2001, 627.

processes there. Scholars such as Roman Loimeier in particular have dealt with this topic.<sup>12</sup>

A dominant feature of Roman Loimeier's studies has been his focus on religious reform movements, and on considering the impact of Islam on the political and social spheres. He pragmatically defined such movements on the basis of his empirical analysis as "a conscious and intentional effort to achieve social, religious, cultural, political or economic change."<sup>13</sup> According to him, such movements tend to attack the religious establishment while referring to independent religious sources. From a historical perspective, such conscious and deliberate movements have often involved (religious) intellectuals as leading actors who were able to foster collective unity, and make decisions about necessary (political) reforms. It is pertinent to ask whether such conscious and deliberate efforts are visible in the Iranian case. In this article differences between past and more recent movements are discussed. Via text analysis I will investigate in particular the importance of Islam for past social movements in comparison to more recent ones. I will first take a brief look at the role of literature in the context of a reform movement in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran as a starting point.

## The Constitutional Revolution – A Reform Movement in the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

A common feature of social movements in general is collective action due to changes in the socio-economic structure of a society, which may also entail changes in the political sphere.<sup>14</sup> A central question in this context is not only the emergence of a social movement with shared collective goals, but also how collective identity emerges. This is because the identity of social actors, their differentiation from others, and their recognition as a cohesive group with common goals and interests makes collective action possible and facilitates the mobilization of the group in public space.

In modern Iranian history, the so-called Constitutional Revolution (1905–11) is the result of various socio-political reform movements and a chain of protests.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> E.g., Loimeier 2022a, 2022b.

<sup>13</sup> Loimeier 2003, 240.

<sup>14</sup> D'Anieri et al. 1990, 456.

<sup>15</sup> For details see Afary 1996, 37–60 in particular. Afary does not differentiate between the various kinds of movements.

Its goal was the introduction of a constitution and the creation of a parliament to reduce the arbitrary rule of the Qajar monarch and the influence of foreign powers on Iranian politics and economics. Historiographies on the Constitutional Revolution generally stress the role of intellectuals as leaders of the reform movement. The intellectuals cooperated with reform-oriented clerics who, together with the traders (*bāzārīs*), were the most influential social groups.

Whereas the clerics used conventional means of communication and social networks in the mosques, the intellectuals took a different, new direction.<sup>16</sup> They assembled in secret societies (*anjoman-e makhfi*) where they could develop and exchange their reform ideas on the basis of new knowledge that they gained from European Enlightenment literature. Newly founded publishing houses and Persian newspapers in and outside the country aided the distribution of these ideas and knowledge. Print media thus became the new mass media of the time. Since many people were not yet literate, they heard about these reform ideas on the street, in the bazaar, or in the mosque. New types of prose literature played a crucial role in spreading the new ideas and knowledge.

Reason for such reform initiatives was the growing dependency of the Qajar royal court on foreign capital that caused an economic crisis. People suffered from unemployment, poverty, and corruption. The social crisis was accompanied by religious, ethnic, and tribal conflicts. Lacking the support of the government and the monarch in introducing reforms, intellectuals had to find new ways to overcome the deep social cleavages in Iranian society in creating a reform movement that needed collective unity linked to a common cultural and religious heritage. The intellectuals not only interpreted the heritage in a new way, they also used common emotional schemata to advance their message and new knowledge, as for instance in the *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig*. In the course of time, this strategy created greater awareness among Iranian people, teaching them to identify as compatriots who fought for the same goals: reducing the influence of the foreign powers, ending the arbitrary rule of the Qajar monarch, and improving the living conditions of the people.

The following analysis of an influential text from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century will illustrate these developments. The analysis will also highlight the weaknesses that ultimately led to the defeat of the Constitutional Revolution. I will then explore the question of whether intellectuals are still needed to advance reform in light of the recent protests, and whether an appeal to emotions is sufficient to bring about reform and political change.

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<sup>16</sup> Föllmer 2013.



## Patriotism and Individual Piety in the *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig*

The *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig*, written between 1888 and 1895, is one of the groundbreaking literary works that had an impact on the emergence of the Constitutional Revolution. The text is a popular fictional narration of an Iranian traveller describing the many conflicts and deficiencies of Iranian society he observed, and which contradict his idealized notion of Iran of having a glorious, progressive past. The narrator emphasizes the need for a patriotic awareness of the people as basis for encompassing reforms. The travelogue was written by Zein al-‘Ābedīn Marāghe’ī (1838–1910), an educated Kurdish trader who left Iran because of its worsening economic and legal situation. He had lucrative contacts with Iranians living outside the country who were diplomats, migrants and intellectuals. Marāghe’ī was highly esteemed by his compatriots for his patriotism and (religious) morality. For him, the progress of the country was only realizable through reforms on the basis of the *sharī‘a*. He emphasized that journalists, historians, and travellers are obliged to report truthfully for the sake of their country and the Iranian ‘nation.’<sup>17</sup> Since the Qajar government is the focus of criticism in the travelogue, it was censored very soon after its initial publication around the year 1888. According to a decree from the chief minister Mīrzā Asghar Khān, possession of the book was reason enough to arrest its owner.<sup>18</sup> Despite these restrictions in Iran, the book was printed in several editions in Istanbul, Cairo, and Calcutta and circulated among the Iranian people.<sup>19</sup> The book quickly gained importance in Iran. One of the leading clerics of the Constitutional Revolution, Hojjat al-Eslām Tabātabā’ī, recommended this book to Nāzem al-Eslām Kermānī who was so impressed by it that he founded the first secret society of Tehran.<sup>20</sup>

The ideas in the fictional travelogue are influenced by the discourses on progress and modernization of Muslim societies in the Near and Middle East and North Africa. Intensive contact with European countries, transregional connections and networks with neighbouring Muslim countries, and the mutual exchange of ideas gave rise to critical self-reflection among the Iranians. In comparison to other countries like Egypt or the Ottoman Empire, Iran lagged behind in the region in 19<sup>th</sup> century, because its past individual reform efforts were rela-

<sup>17</sup> Marāghe’ī, *Sīyāhatnāme* vol. 1, 1–2, 212–16.

<sup>18</sup> Marāghe’ī, *Sīyāhatnāme* vol. 3, 8.

<sup>19</sup> For more information about the various editions and reception of the travelogue, see Föllmer 2022a, 169–80.

<sup>20</sup> Kermānī 1346/1967, 5.

tively inefficient, or were blocked by oppositional forces in the government and administration.

One objective among the nascent reform schemes was putting an end to the arbitrary rule and administration of the established authorities, and limiting the influence of foreign powers by introducing a constitution and establishing a parliament. The reorientation of socio-religious moral values to become a strong, progressive, and modern society was a further aim. For realization of such aims and mobilization of the people at the same time, there was the need to create a collective mindset on the basis of a new understanding of history, shared values, and the distribution of new knowledge independent from the traditional authorities. The author of the travelogue responds to these requirements.

The travelogue was a very popular genre of the time when modern Europe was attractive for many Muslims. The Muslim travellers usually reported on Europe's technical, social, and political innovations. In contrast to these travelogues, the *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig* focusses on the own Muslim society and culture through the lenses of an Iranian who was growing up outside Iran. The author perfected the fictional travelogue through the confluence of several traditional genre elements: He used a frame story (known e.g., from the collection of fables titled *Kalila and Dimna*), didactic dialogue (known from advice literature), the interpretation of a dream (*ta'bir al-ru'ya*), classical poems, rhyming prose, legends of former Iranian kings and religious authorities. The author combined this with reform ideas, a notion of a new intellectual authority, and criticism, thus innovating on this genre. The advice in the fictional travelogue is underlined by religious language and reasoning, as well as a certain religious habitus of the fictional narrator: He performed his daily prayers, went on pilgrimage, donated to the poor, hired a preacher for religious ceremonies, respected those who were pious and patriotic in his eyes, and practiced moral behaviour and cleanliness. Such positive connotations associated with individual religious behaviour are accompanied by the narrator's remarkable patriotism demonstrating his unbounded obedience and willingness to sacrifice for his homeland. This allows the narrator to express his anger about those who ignored religious values and who had no patriotic sentiments. This emphasis gives the narrative strong emotional overtones in terms of what the narrator considers good and bad. In this way, the author not only gained the attention, compassion, and acceptance of Iranian recipients, but also created new meanings and values with which people could identify. The text illustrates how the identification with the Muslim community was gradually replaced by a new community consciousness. This new sense of community was characterized by the fact that people lived in the same country under the same monarch, shared the same history and destiny, and considered the Persian language their lingua franca. This gave the text the potential

to successfully mobilize the masses for reform and underscores its importance for the Constitutional Revolution.

What the author could not do – because he could not know it at the time – was to provide the solution to a central point of conflict, which in the end was the reason for the failure of the reform movement and the Constitutional Revolution more than a century ago: While he was relying on the intellectual opinion that a constitution based on the European model was in accordance with the *sharī‘a*, conservative clerics like Sheikh Faḍlollāh Nūrī did not share this opinion. Sheikh Faḍlollāh Nūrī and his followers were afraid that such a constitution would supersede religious law. Even though Sheikh Faḍlollāh was eventually hanged by the constitutionalists, diverging ideas about the religious affiliation of the law continued to be a matter of conflict among religious traditionalists and reformers.

To summarize, the introduction of new print technology, the transregional networking among the intellectual elite, and the influx of new knowledge from Europe led to novel modes of writing and increased self-awareness among Iranian authors. They expressed their reform ideas independently, without support from patrons. In cooperation with reform-minded clerics and while maintaining ‘correct’ religious and moral values, intellectuals were able to reach the masses and to mobilize people for reform. In this process, intellectuals played a central role in the creation of a collective identity. Identification as a ‘national’ entity, and no longer exclusively as a religious community was possible only through explaining reform ideas in religious terms and linking them to religious values and morals of the individual.

## From Nationalism to the Islamic Revolution

As a consequence, the succeeding Pahlavi monarchy (1925–79) practiced a strong nationalism within which Muslim religious identity was no longer of importance. According to the modernization programme of the Shah, Iranian society had to take on a modern look: Men had to wear the so-called Pahlavi hat, and women had to remove their veils by the decree of Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1936. In the decades of Pahlavi rule, the social and religious gaps widened and opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy increased. Intellectuals and religious scholars such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati recognized that Islam was an undeniable part of Iranian identity that seemed to have vanished in favour of a superficial Western lifestyle propagated by the Shah. Not only was the newly developed symbolical language in literature, film, and theatre the mode for criticism of the Shah

regime, Islamic practices and values resurfaced as attractive means to express disobedience and opposition to the Pahlavi regime.

The growing re-identification of Iranians as Muslims ultimately transformed the anti-Shah movement into the Islamic Revolution, which resulted in the foundation of the Islamic Republic in 1979. The following decade was marked by the war with Iraq and significant political, social, and economic changes. Political factions other than Khomeini's Islamic forces, such as the secular left or nationalist parties, could not recreate the revolutionary potential of the anti-Shah movement and win over the masses. Their ideas did not appeal to the majority of the people. They also lacked a charismatic leader with an attractive political programme for the country. Ultimately, it was the Islamic forces with Khomeini at their head who finally laid the foundation for the Islamic Republic.

The effects of the Gulf War (1980–88), and political isolation combined with cultural and educational Islamization led to contradictory developments in the country. Despite the reinforcement of requiring women to be dependent on their male relatives, women had the opportunity to participate in public life. The 1983 law on veiling in public spaces for all women, regardless of religion, was intended to facilitate this. During the war and in the postwar period, women were often the sole breadwinners for their families. However, the dependence on their male relatives and unequal treatment compared to men led to discrepancies between daily practice and ideology. The liberal president Mohammad Khatami (1997–2005) tried to address the problem with significant reforms. Although the reform programme was blocked mainly by conservative forces, the importance of women for Iranian society continued to grow. They became active to improve their situation. After many formal women's organizations and institutions were banned and closed, women developed their own personal networks and supported each other on an individual level. They have become the impetus for change and the leading force of social movements in Iranian society.

## **Social Movement and Information Society Today**

The Constitutional Revolution and the anti-Shah movement were both based on Islam as an identifying factor. In the case of the Constitutional Revolution, the resurgence of 'pure' Islamic principles and values in combination with patriotism was crucial for the acceptance of reform. In the case of the anti-Shah movement, Islamic faith and values were seen as the response of the masses to the Shah's nationalist programme of modernization and secularization, which led to a great

social divide between the rural poor and the wealthy urban dwellers. Both movements made use of new technology for networking and distributing oppositional ideas. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the print media; in the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, cassette tapes were the major means of transmission. The aims of the movements were clear: The aim of the Constitutional Revolution was a political-administrative change regulated by a constitution and the introduction of a parliament; the anti-Shah movement which began as a protest transformed into a movement seeking significant political change, the Islamic Revolution. While the constitutionalists had to fight against a strong opposition supported by foreign powers, the Islamic revolutionaries silenced any opposition once they assumed power.

What has changed in contemporary social movements? Today's societies are characterized by the development of information and communication technologies, which enable global networking and the dissemination of information. These developments generally make social movements more complex than those a hundred years ago. Melucci identified three major dilemmas that reveal the basic constraints of social life: the tension between autonomy and control, the tension between omnipotence and responsibility, and the tension between differentiation and integration.<sup>21</sup> This creates conflicts when determining the meaning (*Deutungshoheit*) of cultural codes and language at both the individual and the collective level, where everyday life and individual identity have an increasing impact on social action. Social conflicts can arise when individual needs are confronted with political pressure. Contemporary social movements that form in response to these factors, not only seek changes in the political system, they are also a challenge at the cultural level.<sup>22</sup> So one must ask how and by whom collective identity is created. Is religion still a major identifying factor for the Iranian people?

In the case of recent protests, this conflict has manifested in regard to women and their role in Iranian society. Back in 2009, when people took to the streets to protest the results of the presidential election (the so-called 'Green Movement'), women were the driving force in the hope that necessary reforms could be implemented with the election of a reform-minded president like Mir-Hossein Mousawi. This included reforms that guaranteed women equal rights, and freedom of self-expression and self-determination. With the confirmation of Ahmadinejad's presidency for another term, the religious-conservative course continued and the hopes for change and reform of many young people and women were destroyed.

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<sup>21</sup> Melucci 1995, 134.

<sup>22</sup> Melucci 1995, 136.

Even though under the next president Hasan Rouhani freedom of expression marginally increased, it was not enough to be considered significant reforms. Instead, a re-Islamization programme was forcibly implemented by the government under president Raisi. This means, among other things, that the morality police were again present on the streets closely monitoring the observance of the Islamic dress code. This reached a breaking point with the sudden death of the young woman Mahsa Amini which caused a wave of nationwide protests.

In contrast to the Green Movement of 2009, in the 2022/23 protests the opposition expressed its discontent by no longer limiting itself to demanding the abolition of veiling, but by accusing the political authorities of injustice and authoritarianism and seeking a regime change. While “*Allāhu akbar*” (God is great) was the slogan of the Green Movement, what has emerged now is a primarily emotional debate that draws on Western feminism and liberal ideas to underscore the universal humanitarian claims of the protest movement. Social media has been used to express people’s individual needs and fears, and to unite with and gain support from the Iranian diaspora and the global community.

In reference to the new social movement theories, recent social movements are generally characterized by a dichotomy between state and civil society. They are created when social conflicts are transformed to political action. Formerly, analysis of these sorts of social movements have stressed the importance of organizations and institutions for the strategic mobilization of the people. Organizational key speeches, public records, and media reports were considered crucial in such cases for the construction of collective identities.<sup>23</sup> Now, institutional framework is no longer in place, public speeches, and media coverage of it are also absent, as are charismatic leaders or intellectuals. The only thing relevant in such cases is that the movement’s supporters usually act as individuals spreading their messages on social media.

While emphasizing the quotidian practices of the individual, Bayat introduced the terms ‘social non-movement’ and ‘quiet encroachment’ effecting social and perhaps political change in society in the form of grassroots initiatives without the formation of a social movement.<sup>24</sup> Power in this context lies with the individuals who have access to social media to express their needs, individual identity, and to criticize the decision makers. A good example of a demand for change on the basis of a ‘quiet encroachment’ in approximately the last 30 years of the Islamic Republic is the importance of women in Iranian society and their increasingly lax

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<sup>23</sup> Johnston and Klandermans 2004, 8.

<sup>24</sup> Bayat 2013.

interpretation of veiling. This means that change is possible even without the formation of a social movement, but it includes some of its characteristics.

A social movement in its formative stage needs individuals who identify themselves as collective entity. They mobilize and act on the basis of emotional schemata. Emotional investment enables the individual participants to recognize themselves in each other, which is important for the movement's collective identity. The individuals recognize that they share certain orientations and decide to act together. They communicate, negotiate, produce meaning, and make decisions within their historically specific (societal) context.<sup>25</sup> The *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig* demonstrates such collective emotional scheme on the basis of shared religious and moral values in the context of the Constitutional Revolution. During the anti-Shah-protests the collective outbreak of anger in response to the politics and repressions of the Shah regime was the uniting force, followed by continuous religious mourning ceremonies for the victims of the protests. These events united the majority of Iranian people independent of their social and political backgrounds.

A similar sort of collective emotion is expressed in the song “*Barāye*” for example. Composed and performed by Shervin Hajipour, who at the time was an unknown singer and songwriter, the song gained public attention not only among Iranians in and outside the country, but also among people all over the world. The song “was posted on Hajipour’s Instagram and was seen more than 40 million times in less than two days.”<sup>26</sup> The song has a Grammy award for the Best Song for Social Change. The award was created for songs that address “a timely social issue, explore a subject impacting a community of people in need, promote awareness, raise consciousness, and build empathy.”<sup>27</sup>

*Barāye* ... (For ...)

1. *Barāye tū-ye kūche raqšīdan* (For dancing in the streets)
2. *Barāye tarsīdan be vaqt-e būsīdan* (For being in fear when kissing)
3. *Barāye kh‘āharam, kh‘āharat, kh‘āharāmūn* (For my sister, your sister, our sisters)
4. *Barāye taghyīr-e maghzhā ke pūsīdan* (For the change of eroded minds)
5. *Barāye sharmandegī, barāye bī-pūlī* (For shame, for poverty)
6. *Barāye hesrat-e yek zendegī-ye ma ‘mūlī* (For yearning for a normal life)

<sup>25</sup> Morris 2000; Buechler 1995.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.grammy.com/news/shervin-hajipour-baraye-winner-best-song-for-social-change-watch-2023-grammys-65th-grammy-awards-acceptance-speech>, accessed February 22, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.grammy.com/news/shervin-hajipour-baraye-winner-best-song-for-social-change-watch-2023-grammys-65th-grammy-awards-acceptance-speech>, accessed February 22, 2023.

7. *Barāye kūdak-e zobāle-gard va ārezūhāyash* (For the waste-picking child and his dreams)
8. *Barāye in eqtešād-e dastūri* (For the regulated economy)
9. *Barāye in havā-ye ālūde* (For the polluted air)
10. *Barāye Vali-‘ašr va derakhtā-ye farsūde* (For the destroyed trees in Vali-‘ašr street)
11. *Barāye Pīrūz va eḥtemāl-e enqerāḏdash* (For [the cheetah] Pīrūz and his probable extinction)
12. *Barāye saghā-ye bī-gonāh-e mamnū‘e* (For the innocent forbidden dogs)
13. *Barāye gerīehāye bī-vaqfe* (For endless weeping)
14. *Barāye tašvīr-e tekrār-e in laḥze* (For the imagination of the recurrence of this moment)
15. *Barāye chehre‘i ke mīkhande* (For the smiling face)
16. *Barāye dāneshāmūzā, barāye āyande* (For the pupils/students, for the future)
17. *Barāye behesht-e ejbārī* (For the forced paradise)
18. *Barāye nokhbehā-ye zendānī* (For the elites in jail)
19. *Barāye kūdakān-e afghānī* (For the Afghan children)
20. *Barāye in hame ‘barāye’ gheir-e tekrārī* (For so many non-recurrent ‘for’)
21. *Barāye in hame sho‘ārḥā-ye tūkhālī* (For the many empty slogans)
22. *Barāye āvār-e khānehā-ye pushālī* (For the ruins of straw houses)
23. *Barāye eḥsās-e ārāmesh* (For the feeling of calmness)
24. *Barāye khorshīd pas az shabā-ye ṭulānī* (For the sun after long nights)
25. *Barāye qorshā-ye a‘šāb va bī-kh‘ābī* (For tranquilizers and sleeplessness)
26. *Barāye mard, mīhan, ābādī* (For men, fatherland, and prosperity)
27. *Barāye dokhtari ke ārezū dāsht pesar būd* (For the girl wishing to be a boy)
28. *Barāye zan, zendegī, āzādī* (For women, life, freedom)
29. *Barāye āzādī* (For freedom)
30. *Barāye āzādī* (For freedom)
31. *Barāye āzādī* (For freedom)<sup>28</sup>

What made the song so special? The text does not contain any particular narrative or references to Iranian cultural heritage, such as *Ebrahim Beig’s travelogue*. The special feature of the song’s lyrics is that it is a snapshot of individual reasons why people chose to participate in the recent protests, which were posted on social media (Twitter, now X). Many of the selected entries, all in Persian, are anonymous or of unknown origin. Some of them were rephrased differently when the song was composed. The song title “*Barāye*” (“For...”) is repeated in

<sup>28</sup> <https://lyricstranslate.com/de/baraye-baraye.html>, accessed February 22, 2023, translated by the author. The music video is available under <https://youtu.be/z8xXi9yfBg0>.



each line of the text. The song addresses primarily the younger generation, and young women in particular (*kh'āharāmūn* (our sisters), line 3; *kūdak* (child), line 7; *dāneshāmūzā* (pupils/students), line 16; *kūdakān* (children), line 19; *dokhtari* (a girl), line 27).

The song lyrics deal with minorities in Iran, such as the children of Afghan migrants (line 19), the poor strata of society (lines 5 and 7), the situation of young women (lines 3 and 27), and the future of the younger generations in general (line 16). With its references to environmental pollution (line 9; line 10), and the loss of biodiversity due to the extinction of species like the cheetah (line 11) the song also picks up on global discourses of the time. The song emphasizes the freedom of the individual (lines 1, 6, and 23) and expresses solidarity with the weak (lines 3, 5, 9, 16, 19, and 27). In addition, it includes criticism of the state's regulations that restrict individual freedom and have psychological consequences (lines 2, 4, 8, 12, 17, and 25). Pressure against keeping the elite in prison (line 18) and the ban on dogs (line 12) are also mentioned. With regard to the homeland of the Iranians (*mīhan*, line 26) the text refers to destroyed houses (line 22), and expresses the wish of prosperity (line 26).

The simple, yet catchy melody is highly emotional and probably the secret to the international success of the song. It unites individual protestors with heterogeneous interests on an emotional basis all subsumed under the slogan "women, life, freedom." Negative emotions are expressed in such words like 'to fear' (*tarsīdan*, line 2), 'shame' (*sharmandegī*, line 5), 'yearning' (*hesrat*, line 6), 'weeping' (*gerīye*, line 13), and 'sleeplessness' (*bī-kh'ābī*, line 25). Positive feelings, wishes, hopes, and empathy for others are not only explicit like in the phrase 'the innocent forbidden dogs' (line 12), and 'the girl that wished' (line 28), they are also implicit such as 'the face that is laughing' (line 15), 'the feeling of calmness' (line 23), and more allegorically like the wish for 'the sun after long nights' (line 24), and the formulation of an additional 'male' iteration of the 'female' slogan of the protest: 'men, fatherland, prosperity' (line 26).

The Grammy Awards Committee has ascribed to the song additional importance, meaning, and a voice in international public discourse. This indicates that the content of the song is considered representative for the Iranian people who all feel the same in their opposition to the state. But are these shared emotions enough to inspire people to act and change a protest movement into a reform movement or even into a 'revolution'?<sup>29</sup> Are other identity-forming factors such as

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<sup>29</sup> Hermann and Kempf argue that the inhabitants of Kiribati's islands, for instance, use songs and emotions to articulate cultural knowledge in such a way "that it has significant potential for agency." (Hermann and Kempf 2018, 23–24). They continue: "All these emotions are far more

religion, history, and homeland, which were of great importance for the Constitutional Revolution in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and later for the Islamic Revolution, no longer important today? How representative is the song in terms of the will of the Iranian people as a whole?

## Cultural Aspects of a Protest Movement

Social movement theories by and large pay no particular attention to the distinctions between a social movement and a protest movement.<sup>30</sup> Melucci, for example, considers a protest or a ‘revolt’ the preliminary stage of a social movement. While a protest is more spontaneous, a social movement has to “develop a relatively stable organization and leadership.”<sup>31</sup> His aim in focusing on collective identity is to explain collective action as a dynamic process.<sup>32</sup>

Already in the 1980s, Melucci recognized a new interest in culture in the study of social movements, which raised new questions on identity and the production of meaning.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the value of examining the cultural aspects of a movement in terms of identity and individuality has become evident. Buechler notes with regard to the developing character of new social movements, that “uncertainty over the political status of new social movements is a defining theme” when protest is transferred to the cultural realm and leads to a search for identity and individualism.<sup>34</sup> I would argue that cultural aspects are essential for a social movement, not only in terms of the development of the movement, but also in terms of the concepts, values, symbols, etc. used to form a collective community. Johnston and Klandermans noticed that:

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than mere descriptions of inner states: they are meaningful articulations within the relationships the Islanders maintain with each other and with their land, but also – indeed especially – with those they maintain with people from the outside world. For this reason, expressions of emotions are to be seen as practices that are often articulated with a will to act or, alternatively, with a call on others to act. It is in this capacity that emotions can unfold agency [...] emotions have the potential to propel the Islanders to act and also to bolster their social resilience.” (Hermann and Kempf 2018, 26).

**30** Morris offers a critical view on social movement theory and offers his own suggestions for a social movement’s analysis, Morris 2000. A summary and discussion of new social movement theories is given by Buechler 1995.

**31** Melucci 1996, 313.

**32** Melucci 2004.

**33** Melucci 1996, 68–70.

**34** Buechler 1995, 445.

Culture was a neglected aspect of the study of social movements. This is the more surprising because it is so obvious that social movements are shaped by culture and at the same time they form and transform culture. Symbols, rituals, patterns of affective orientation, values, discourse, and language – to mention only a few key elements of culture – have always been part and parcel of social movements.<sup>35</sup>

This is why the analysis of central texts of social movements can shed light on the cultural dimensions of those movements and their characteristics articulated in social movement theories. While these theories view social movements as part of a subgroup that opposes the dominant culture,<sup>36</sup> this perspective cannot answer the question of how a social movement becomes a mass movement or a revolution, and how collective identity beyond this group is constructed.

Returning to the example of the song “*Barāye*,” there is evidence of a primarily emotional debate that underlines the universal humanitarian claim of a protest movement that arose spontaneously without leadership. Social media aid in expressing and spreading individual needs and fears of the people, which can help to unite them with the Iranian diaspora and the global community. The political goal after the abolition of the existing system remains unclear. The consciousness of a collective community based on common cultural, religious, and social traditions is not clearly represented. But does that mean, for example, that religion is not important to individuals and patriotism does not exist? I assume that religion is still an essential part of individual identity, but people do not want to construct a religious collective identity as part of their protest. Likewise, patriotism has taken individual forms, which makes collective identification difficult. People rather seem to separate both from their collective demands. This was unthinkable in the time of the Constitutional Revolution when religion was considered the essence of human action and being. In the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, collective identity became not only based on shared emotions of anger but was also to a great extent a feeling of alienation (*Entfremdung*) from the own culture and identity as Jalal Al-e Ahmad criticized in his well-known essay *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxification, or Weststruckness). Religion thus became an option for opposition to the Pahlavi regime. That means, in addition to the cultural dimension, religion was in this context also on the political level a unifying element of identification.

Now, after the theocratic regime of the Islamic Republic has instrumentalized religion to legitimize its power, can religion still be a common identifying aspect for opposition? The song mentioned above shows that events in Iran are not con-

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<sup>35</sup> Johnston and Klandermans 2004, 20.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., Johnston and Klandermans 2004.

sidered isolated from the rest of the world. In contrast, the protesters obviously relate local issues to global discourses. Instead of references to religion and patriotism that were crucial in the past, we can observe an individual pluralism, and a lack of clear leadership. According to Melucci, protest movements are characterized by their antagonistic nature based on “conflicts between a system’s logic and the expectations and resources of the social actors” who must identify with their actions.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to former movements, collective identity is no longer considered a given fact and part of a tradition. The country in which people live or the (religious, social, or cultural) traditions they practice are obviously not the basis of “socially stable and circumscribed collectivities” anymore.<sup>38</sup> Instead, people must shape their identity themselves. Maybe the awareness of the individuality of the people, their hopes, their wishes, fears, and needs are now the shared values, but they are also the reason for fragmentation at the same time. As Melucci points out:

In fact, the definition of needs is a system of cultural representations which ramifies through the whole society, and which is appropriated by different social groups even in diametrically opposing ways. [...] It feeds new markets and regulated lifestyles and patterns of consumption; it creates, that is, a new conformity. On the other hand, the social nature of needs becomes the watchword for opposition groups which mobilize themselves against the mechanism of social marginalization, against the individualistic reduction and atomization with which weapons the system encounters social demands.<sup>39</sup>

This means in the case of Iran that the social demands of the protest have an individual basis. In their sum, they express general deficits of society, but the individual demands also impede the construction of collective identity. Melucci comes to the conclusion that:

The symbolic field in complex societies is therefore a system of interweaving opposites, of ambivalences, of multiple meanings which actors seek to bend to their goals so as to lend meaning to their actions.<sup>40</sup> [...] Emergent collective phenomena in complex societies cannot be treated simply as reactions to crises, as mere effects of marginality or deviance [...]; it also concerns social relationships, symbols, identities, and individual needs.<sup>41</sup>

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**37** Melucci 1996, 108–9.

**38** Melucci 1996, 108–9.

**39** Melucci 1996, 95.

**40** Melucci 1996, 95.

**41** Melucci 1996, 99.

The recent protest movement in Iran thus not only has an antagonistic character, it is also more complex in terms of the construction of collective identity, for example.

## Conclusion

Even though more than a century has passed, and society and communication technology have changed tremendously in this period of time, the Constitutional Revolution and the recent protests are both social movements carried out by the activism of the people not only in the form of political activism, but also activism at the cultural level. Analyzing the cultural dimensions in the context of these movements reveals some characteristics of ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements, but also uncovers differences between a reform movement and a protest movement in terms of individuality and collective identity.

The analysis of the song “*Barāye*” has shown that the text expresses individual needs and demands as well as solidarity with others, but there is no evidence of the formation of a collective identity like the *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig* written a century earlier. A case study on the importance of music for articulating collective sentiments demonstrates that, from an empirical perspective, political agency is possible when the people identify with their homeland and cultural past.<sup>42</sup> At the individual level in everyday life, when focusing on ‘quiet encroachments’ (in the liberal sense of civil disobedience and protest) as the only driving forces for change, other voices in society that can also bring about change are not heard because of this focus and are therefore rarely considered. The antagonistic conflicts in social relationships, identities, and individual needs are not clearly visible in a simple song lyric, but it can give us some clues and connections to such conflicts through the use of language, symbols, and expressions. The kind of identity and individuality portrayed in the lyrics of “*Barāye*” reflects some characteristics that differ from those portrayed in the literature of earlier movements such as the *Travelogue of Ebrahim Beig*.

The analysis and comparison of the texts have highlighted the shortcomings and ambivalences of the recent protest movement in terms of individuality and collective identity. While the literature of the Constitutional Revolution describe the self-sacrifice of the individual for a collective patriotic goal – even in a mysti-

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<sup>42</sup> Hermann und Kempf 2018.

cal sense<sup>43</sup> – the lyrics of the contemporary song fail to create a collective identity that is linked to individual demands and goes beyond shared emotions.<sup>44</sup> One can ask how important cultural heritage is for a social movement and protest today, and how can such a movement be successful when it is detached from the past and from religious and cultural heritage, and when it does not have a narrative that generates not only emotion but also community.<sup>45</sup> In summary, the analysis of central texts of social movements reveals the cultural implications of these movements. Such a cultural approach, together with the study of other important issues (political, social, economic, etc.), contributes to a better understanding of the complexity of social movements.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Föllmer 2022, 192.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Melucci 1996, 112–13.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Fine 2004.

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Part III. Society II: **Gendered Agency and Discourses**





Irene Schneider

# ‘Honour’-Crime? Femicide? ‘Just’ Family Violence? Was it the *Jinnī* in the End?

Narratives around a Young Woman’s Death in Palestine in 2019

Indeed, as soon as a femicide migrates across an Arabo-Muslim border, it is repackaged and sold as ‘honour killing’ – a colonial and Eurocentric construct par excellence.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction: The Case of Isrā’ Ghurayyib

In August 2019 news of the death of a young woman in Palestine went viral on social media, as well as in local, transregional, and international media, causing an outcry of anger and dismay.<sup>2</sup> Isrā’ Ghurayyib, a makeup artist from Bayt Sāhūr near Bethlehem, born in 1998, died on August 22, 2019, at the age of 21. Her death was quickly labelled a ‘honour’-crime,<sup>3</sup> or a ‘femicide,’<sup>4</sup> based on information

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1 Allouche 2019 in reference to Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s death.

2 As many media reported around the world, a selection had to be made from local, regional (Arabic) and international media. I focused on those media who covered the case for the longest time and/or reported extensively, if available with interviews and background information. For the social media, which cannot be followed here in detail as their reporting would need a special approach, see “Isrā’\_Ghurayyib\_,” 2021. Some media reported immediately, and others started after the press-conference of the Public Prosecution on September 12, 2019. For the local Palestinian news see especially: Baladunā 2019; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2021; Aḥmad al-‘Ishī’s articles in *Dunyā l-Waṭan* and the articles by *Palestine Chronicle* in the bibliography (see also <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/tag/israa-ghrayeb/>, accessed February 12, 2022). On the transregional level *al-‘Arabiyya* from Dubai covered the story over a longer period of time (see for example the reports by *al-‘Arabiyya* on August 31, September 12, and November 18, 2019, etc. [reports and YouTube], listed in the bibliography); see also *Alaraby*, an Arabic and English media outlet in London. For the international level see Moukalled 2019; Knipp and El Basnaly 2019; Sydow 2019; Minthe 2019; Havari 2019; Adalah Justice Project 2019; Ozmandzikovic and Balousha 2019; *BBC News* 2019a; *BBC News* 2019b; Nabbout 2019; Begum 2019; see also *Wikipedia* (Arab.) 2022.

3 See for example *BBC* 2019a, showing a woman with a banner saying “*lā li-‘unf*” (no to violence); Sydow 2019 “Todesfall Israa Ghrayeb:” “...Verbrechen, das im Westjordan-Land als Ehrenmord bezeichnet wird”, but the banner the women show on the photo asks for better laws; the same appears in Knipp and El Basnaly 2019; Minthe 2019; see also Ozmandzikovic and Balousha 2019; Alghoul 2019. But see more cautiously *Alaraby* 2019b; Begum 2019 referring to the banners wanting new laws; Moukalled 2019 calls it a collective execution.

4 See especially the important Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC, <https://wclac.org/>, accessed February 12, 2022) under the heading

Isrā' Ghurayyib had shared with her friends and followers on social media: a photo of her and her partner, to whom she was not married, in a public restaurant; videos and clips which seemed to reflect a family dispute about this outing during which she allegedly transgressed the social lines of appropriate female behaviour in a conservative society. What stirred up feelings of 'public opinion' (*al-ra'y al-āmm*) was a video clip from Bayt Jālā State Hospital, in which one can hear, but not see Isrā' Ghurayyib being beaten and screaming in pain.<sup>5</sup>

More than two years later (February 2022) Isrā' Ghurayyib's case remains open. This article is not claiming to analyze what 'really' happened to Isrā' Ghurayyib, as this is a task for the courts. It is, rather, an attempt to understand how Isrā' Ghurayyib's death was discussed and labelled: in Palestinian society; in the local, Arabic, and international media; by the family; by social activists; and how it was dealt with by the Palestinian judiciary. From the beginning, narratives emerged which oscillated between a "natural death" – one of the narratives of the family – and a "killing" linked to very different reasons. Labels for this killing are reflected in the media. Of special importance in this context is the Indictment (*lā'ihat ittihām*) No. 3476/2019 of the Public Prosecution of the State of Palestine, dated October 28, 2019, which was sent to the court in Bethlehem. It is based on the police report, and the public prosecution's report of the incident:<sup>6</sup>

Public Prosecutor versus Muḥammad Ṣāfī, brother-in-law, Bahā' Ghurayyib, brother, Ḥāb Ghurayyib, brother of Isrā' Ghurayyib, charged with 'making money and charlatanism'

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of Randa Siniora, which publishes excellent research on the killing of women but explicitly does not label these cases 'honour'-killings but femicide/*qatl al-nisā'*. I am thankful to Randa Siniora for her Zoom interview with me on January 22, 2022, in which she explained that they use femicide as the category to find out what exactly were the reasons a woman was killed for. See the WCLAC publications Duwaykāt 2019; Duwaykāt 2021.

<sup>5</sup> In his press conference of September 12, 2019, the Palestinian Public Prosecutor Akram al-Khaṭīb confirmed that what could be heard on the video clip was Isrā' Ghurayyib's voice and that the video, consisting of two different sequences, had been taken in the hospital. Note that the recording contains physical violence: *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019a; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019d; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019b; *BBC News* 2019b; Moukalled 2019 (report only, no recording).

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to the Chancellor of the General Secretariat of the Palestinian High Judicial Council H.E. Issa Abu Sharar, who confirmed in an email to me on February 10, 2022, that I can use this indictment for my scientific research. I also thank Judge Somoud al-Damiri for her support in this matter. In what follows I paraphrase this indictment only. For a media report trying to reconstruct the whole case and being in many parts very parallel with regard to the Indictment see Baladunā 2019 with long interviews of the family members especially focusing on the 'jinn-narrative.'

(*al-dakhl wa-l-sha‘wadha*) according to Article 471/1, Jordanian Penal Law (JPL) 16 of 1960<sup>7</sup> – for Muḥammad Šāfi only and ‘beating to death’ (*al-ḍarb al-mufḍī ilā l-mawt*) according to Article 330 of the JPL of 1960 and Article 76 for all three accused men.

On August 22, 2019, around 4 pm Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s corpse was brought to the State Hospital al-Ḥusayn in Bayt Jālā, her body showing evidence of violence, triggering an investigation: On August 9, 2019 the deceased had an argument with her family about her engagement to Muḥammad Alqam, who had left her.<sup>8</sup> The matter escalated, Muḥammad Šāfi insulted her and she punched him in the face and kicked him. He and her brothers became angry and followed her while she fled [to her room]. Muḥammad Šāfi kicked the door open and as she was standing behind the door she was thrown to the ground, wounding her right eye. She started to scream and tried to run away. As the men followed, beating and threatening her, she fled and jumped over the landing to her living-room until she felt pain and fell to the ground screaming. She was brought to her room. Muḥammad Abū Ṭāhā started reading the Quran, claiming that she was possessed by ‘loving *jinn* (demons)’ (*jinn ‘āshiq*). She cried in pain from 9 pm to 11 pm. ‘Abdalkarīm Abū Ḥassān,<sup>9</sup> read the Quran to her for several hours and informed the family that she suffered from pain, had broken her spine, and should be brought to a hospital. Around 4 am [August 10] an ambulance brought her to the Hospital of the Arab Society [for Rehabilitation] in Bayt Jālā.<sup>10</sup> The wound on her brow was dealt with but the family stated they could not pay for an operation on her spine. She wrote some messages on her cell phone, saying that she was strong, and to postpone appointments in her makeup studio. She stated that she had been tortured by magic (*ta‘arraḍtu li-l-siḥr*) created by her relatives. On Sunday [August 11] she was brought to the State Hospital Ḥusayn. The people in the ward were informed that she suffered from *jinn* inhabiting her (*tu‘ānī min rukūb jinn*) and were afraid of her so that she remained alone in a room for three days screaming every now and then in pain. The accused<sup>11</sup> – and especially Muḥammad Šāfi made everybody believe that she was possessed by *jinn*. On Tuesday, [August 13], she left the hospital in the care of her family despite her state of health.<sup>12</sup> The three accused men took her in a private car to Jericho, then to Ṭūlkarm to another *shaykh* [pl. *shuyūkh*, learned man] who confirmed that she was possessed by ‘loving *jinn*.’ He claimed to have exorcized the *jinn* and announced that after her healing, she was now fully responsible for her behav-

7 For all legal sources, laws, decree laws etc. please consult Al-Muqtafi of the University of Birzeit. It is easily available and free of charge.

8 He stated in an interview that “she had some family problems, which were the reason for my separation from her.” He had learned about her death through the media, see *Al-‘Arabiyya* September 2019d.

9 See also Al-‘Ishī 2019a, with an interview of Abū Ḥassān in which he said he found the woman possessed (*malbūsa*, lit. vested) by *jinn* and in a “non-natural” condition and only read the Quran to her, that three others had already read the Quran, one of them interacting with the *jinn*. He only mentions Isrā’’s wound on her brow and that he told the family to bring her to the hospital. He himself is named as director of the nursing school in one of the hospitals. One other person who is said to have read the Quran to her is mentioned in the report as Muḥammad Abū Ṭāhā.

10 For both hospitals she was brought to see <http://beitjala-city.org/en/beit-jala-city/major-institutions/health-institutions/hospitals>, accessed January 10, 2022.

11 It should be *muttahaḥmūn* instead of *muttahaḥmīn* in the text.

12 See in the media Al-‘Ishī 2020b.

four and would have to be punished for it.<sup>13</sup> They went back to Jericho in the morning to Muḥammad Šāfi's house and started to beat her, while she was naked, with their hands and with belts; her legs, hands, genitalia and face were full of blue and red marks. On Wednesday [August 14] they returned to her home in Bayt Sāhūr and continued beating her alternately. The beating went on for a week under the accusation that she was undressed and that she practiced masturbation (*al-'āda al-sirriyya*, lit. 'a secret habit').<sup>14</sup> They also put her in the bathtub after having bound her hands and legs with scotch tape. In the morning of Thursday, August 22, 2019, she was not able to speak any longer and died around 3 pm from injuries as a result of the beatings.

According to this Indictment, the initiation of Isrā' Ghurayyib's torture was a discussion in the family about her engagement, but it switched to a story of severe domestic violence, a term which the Public Prosecutor, Akram al-Khaṭīb, used in his press conference on September 12, 2019. He also used the term "charlatanism" (*sha'wadha*) referring to the 'jinn-narrative' and accused, as indicated in the Indictment, the two brothers of Isrā' Ghurayyib as well as her brother-in-law, of torturing her. In the press conference al-Khaṭīb based his accusation on the medical report, which showed that Isrā' Ghurayyib had been tortured not only once, but over a sustained period of time.<sup>15</sup>

Strange, but important in this Indictment, is the crucial role of the 'jinn-narrative.' The defendants and especially Muḥammad Šāfi, the only one accused of "charlatanism," argued that she was possessed and took Isrā' Ghurayyib out of the hospital and to different exorcists.<sup>16</sup>

Because the cause for the eruption of violence was her engagement, according to the Indictment but also according to many (social) media, this led some, and especially international media, to use the term 'honour'-crime in their headlines.<sup>17</sup> Is Allouche correct in her quotation, given above, that femicide migrating to the West is re-packaged as 'honour'-killing? There is, of course, no honour in killing a woman.<sup>18</sup> This is why others prefer to call it femicide, maintaining

**13** In the text of the indictment these sentences are highlighted with exclamation marks.

**14** In the text of the indictment there is a question mark and an exclamation mark behind this 'secret habit.' According to the Indictment there seems to have been a recording according to which her screams were heard.

**15** *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019c shows the medical report but it is impossible to read all of it because the script is blurred. *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019d; Al-'Ishī 2019b; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019b; Baladunā 2019; *Palestine Chronicle* 2019c; *BBC News* 2019b.

**16** See also Baladunā 2019, where long interviews with Muḥammad Šāfi show him as someone believing that Isrā' was possessed by *jinn*.

**17** See fn. 3. For the Palestinian context see also Baroud 2019.

**18** I use the term here in context with killing or murder in inverted commas to indicate this. Here I agree with Havari 2019 and Adalah Justice Project 2019 and many others.

women as the target-group of killings,<sup>19</sup> whereas Allouche extends the category, arguing correctly that not only women but also men are killed for transgressing social gender rules.<sup>20</sup>

Honour, in connection with sexual transgression of social norms, has typically been defined for the Middle East as “the killing of a woman by her father or brother for engaging in, or being suspected in engaging in, sexual practices in or outside marriage.”<sup>21</sup> Family honour is seen as rooted in the reputation of the family in society and can, as Tellenbach states,<sup>22</sup> be lost through what is defined as the unacceptable behaviour of a woman. Female virginity before marriage, as well as the respectable behaviour of women before, in, and after marriage, are thus under constant supervision by male family members. If this family honour is lost or is at stake, or is believed to be at stake, males and sometimes even females of the family may decide to kill the woman to restore the reputation of the family. This would be a conscious decision taken by the family and can be described as murder or killing in ‘cold blood.’ In this chapter, I call this the ‘ideal-type’ of the Middle Eastern<sup>23</sup> version of ‘honour’-crimes.

The World Health Organization includes “murders in the name of ‘honour’ as a sub-category of femicide,<sup>24</sup> which they define as “to involve intentional murder

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**19** See fn. 4.

**20** Allouche 2019.

**21** Abu-Odeh 1996, 141. See also Tellenbach 2007, 703–5. According to Tellenbach there are more than 60 definitions in German legal discourse. An analysis of the terms used in this context would be useful to understand the concept better but cannot be provided here. Murdering under the pretext of honour has been documented and researched widely, see for example more generally by Casimir and Jung 2009, 229–80. For the Middle East see Stewart 1994; Abu-Odeh 1996; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2005, 160–80; Tellenbach 2007; Welchman 2013. For Iran see Schneider 2012, 43–57.

**22** Tellenbach 2007, 705, argues that honour in this definition and especially concerning sexual honour has become strange to us today; see also Berger 1987, 75–85, in what can be seen as a highly interesting dispute about the relation of the concept of honour to modernity.

**23** Besides this Middle East ideal type of honour and ‘honour’-crimes, a European ideal type exists, sharing many aspects of the Middle Eastern type. Again, it is the woman who is accused of, and seen as guilty of, transgressing social lines of sexual behaviour. In both cases the concept of honour is therefore gendered; again, there is a conscious decision to kill, in this case taken by the husband. The target is not the woman herself, but her lover and he is classically challenged in a duel. Women die a social death – they are normally divorced, lose the right to see their children etc. Duels were fought in Europe until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Frevert 1991. Sexual honour as a gendered concept is thus a cross-cultural concept and not, as Allouche 2019 argues, a “Colonial and Eurocentric construct par excellence.”

**24** Garcia-Moreno, Guedess, and Knerr 2012, 2–3. They define ‘honour’-crimes similarly to the definition given above.

of women because they are women.”<sup>25</sup> It might have different causes, such as the husband’s or partner’s jealousy – an emotional feeling – as well as economic reasons, for example, to prevent the woman from inheriting property, or other political and social reasons. Other than in Allouche’s classification, women are considered the target group. This is also the reason the influential NGO, Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), under the heading of Randa Siniora, uses femicide (*qatl al-nisā’*) to differentiate between different reasons of the killing of a woman including ‘honour’-killings but not restricting it to these crimes.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt that femicide in this broader definition is not only a Middle Eastern, but a global, topic.<sup>27</sup> Both classifications represent one important common characteristic: it is the male control and dominance over the female body based on the demand to pursue ‘correct’ behaviour, be it socially, economically, sexually, and the right to punish the woman for any alleged deviation. This analytical focus is critical to patriarchal power-relations, an aspect that is lost when men are included as victims of violence.<sup>28</sup>

Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s case was handed to the responsible First Instance Criminal Court in Bethlehem, which had several sessions and interviewed around forty witnesses. On February 18, 2021, after a surprising turn of events in the court hearings, all three suspects were released from prison on bail. However, the Public Prosecutor stressed that the trial was not finished now, and the file not closed.<sup>29</sup> Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s father turned the tables and accused the Bethlehem Court and the Public Prosecution of having been influenced by the ‘public opinion.’<sup>30</sup>

Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s death was thus categorized differently:<sup>31</sup>

- The “honour’-killing-narrative’ referred to her engagement and outing with her boyfriend.
- The ‘femicide-narrative’ included more broadly the belief that she was killed by her family.
- The ‘domestic-violence-narrative’ is close to the femicide-narrative but the category of ‘femicide’ was used by activists and NGOs but not, as far as I can see, by the Palestinian judiciary, which used the ‘domestic violence’ category.

<sup>25</sup> Garcia-Moreno, Guedess, and Knerr 2012, 1.

<sup>26</sup> See fn. 4

<sup>27</sup> As an example, see Goldenberg 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Allouche 2019 especially points to the undisputable discrimination against gay men.

<sup>29</sup> Al-‘Ishī 2021; Al-‘Arabiyya 2021b; Al-‘Arabiyya 2021a; *Sharīka wa-lākin* 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Al-‘Ishī 2021; *Iram-News* 2021; *Sharīkat wa-lākin* 2021; Al-‘Arabiyya 2020b; Al-‘Arabiyya 2021b; Al-‘Arabiyya 2021a.

<sup>31</sup> Regrettably, it is not possible to investigate the role of all narratives equally in this article because of lack of space.

- The male members of the family used the ‘natural-death-narrative,’ sometimes in combination with the ‘*jinn*-narrative,’ according to which she died of a heart attack or a stroke.
- The ‘*jinn*-narrative,’ according to which she was possessed by *jinn* and the *jinn* caused her to behave strangely. As this does not answer why she died, the family combined it from the beginning with the ‘natural-death-narrative.’
- The ‘mental-illness-narrative,’ which was connected to Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s alleged strange behaviour. This narrative explained her death as a consequence of this illness. It was, as will be shown, used more often later, during the court hearings and seems to have replaced the *jinn*-narrative.

Certain points in the different narratives are highly contradictory and will necessarily be left without explanation until the judiciary takes up the case again and issues a judgment. With regard to the narratives and their roles, the following questions will be asked:

1. What role does the “honour’-crime-narrative’ play, which was pushed by social and mainstream media from the beginning?
2. Which narratives used the family, in its defence and how did they use them?
3. How did the Palestinian judicial system deal with Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s case, and what was its relation to the different narratives?

Sources besides the above quoted Indictment 3476/2029 are media, women’s organizations, and official statements issued by the jurisdiction in Palestine to the media. After this introduction, the next section will briefly summarize the legal background of Palestine. Then I concentrate on the different narratives, focusing especially on the family’s narratives and the way the Public Prosecution and the Bethlehem Criminal Court dealt with them. Finally, there will be a conclusion including some reflections about the terminology and different narratives.

## **The Legal Background in Palestine/West Bank in 2021 with Regard to ‘Honour’-Crimes**

Legally and politically, Palestine’s situation is difficult. Under Israeli occupation since 1967, Palestine can be described as a proto-state with all necessary institutions such as a parliament and ministries in Ramallah since the Oslo Accords of



1994/95.<sup>32</sup> Since the 2006 elections, which were won by Hamas, Gaza has been governed by Hamas, and the West Bank by Fatah.<sup>33</sup> Due to this situation there is no parliament sitting in Ramallah, and President Mahmud Abbas rules through presidential decrees, increasingly in an authoritative way.<sup>34</sup>

In 2005 Shalhoub-Kevorkian argued, based on her field research, that judges, politicians, governors, and police had no awareness of crimes of ‘honour.’ In their perception the relation between perpetrator and victim was often turned around, and the murderer was seen as the real victim of the socially unacceptable behaviour of the woman – for which there was often no proof – whereas the victim, the woman killed or injured, was seen as the guilty party: “[a]nd acts of violence against women become constructed as ‘legitimate’ protective behaviour rather than criminal actions.”<sup>35</sup> In 2014, Judge al-Ashqar confirmed this in his United Nations Human Rights report, “Murder in Palestine under the Pretext of Honour,” stating that the woman’s right to life is ignored as well as her right to not be discriminated against,<sup>36</sup> and that in 2014 an “alarming phenomenon relating to the right to life has recently increased: the phenomenon of killing women under the pretext of so-called family honour.”<sup>37</sup> In 2018 the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women warned again that the number of women killed under the “pretext of protecting honour has increased and criticized that women’s access to justice is difficult, discriminatory practices prevail, and sometimes judges deny women their legal rights.”<sup>38</sup> WCLAC described an increase in femicides, avoiding the classification of ‘honour’-killing, from 15 cases in 2015 to over 20 cases in 2019 and more than 30 cases in 2020.<sup>39</sup>

The Palestinian government has taken steps to improve the legal situation and in 2011 and 2014 amended the applicable and outdated 1960 JPL.<sup>40</sup> However,

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**32** Schneider 2021, 39–40.

**33** Schneider 2021, 85, 294–95.

**34** Schneider 2021, 46; Schneider 2022.

**35** Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2005, 177.

**36** Al-Ashqar 2014, 4.

**37** Al-Ashqar 2014, 3.

**38** United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality (UN Women), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) 2018, 14.

**39** See Duwaykāt 2021.

**40** See fn. 7 for the Palestinian laws; for a detailed analysis of the legislation see Al-Ashqar 2014. Article 340 of the Jordanian Penal Code (JPC), for example, granted extenuating excuses for the murder on the grounds of honour. This Article was cancelled in 2011, Al-Ashqar 2014, 8. The ‘provocation excuse’ in Article 98 was amended in 2014 and the use of this defense “against a

as the abovementioned critique of the UN Special Rapporteur and the numbers of WCLAC show, this did not help. Palestinians, men and women, demonstrating in Ramallah in 2019 demanded the enactment of the Family Protection Law of 2017,<sup>41</sup> the publication of the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),” which President Abbas signed already in 2014, in the Official Gazette,<sup>42</sup> as well as a new penal law and a Palestinian personal status law.<sup>43</sup>

## Different Narratives

The different narratives around Isrā' Ghurayyib's death range from 'natural' death by heart attack or stroke (one of the versions advanced by her family), to Isrā' Ghurayyib as a victim of the crime of murder and will be analyzed in detail below. Some narratives changed over time. The social media focused from the beginning, as stated above, on the alleged problem in the family because of Isrā' Ghurayyib's relationship to her boyfriend; some media started their reporting later, waiting for the first results of the investigation as presented in the press conference on September 12, 2019.<sup>44</sup> Some media pointed explicitly to different “narratives” (*riwāyāt*) or consulted different experts for interviews, thus illuminating different aspects of the case.<sup>45</sup> All agree, however, that in the very beginning Isrā' Ghurayyib's story was spread by social media and that this evoked a 'public opinion.' It pressured the family: not only were women and men demonstrating in front of the Prime Minister's Office, but Muḥammad Ashtayyah himself on August 30, 2019, labelled Isrā' Ghurayyib's case as an “issue of the [whole] society” on his Facebook account.<sup>46</sup> This story is also an example of the enormous influence of social media in cases like this. The Palestinian police spokesperson, Lu'ay Arzīqāt, warned against discussing Isrā'

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female on the grounds of honour” was prohibited. At the same time, Abbas amended Article 99 and prohibited judges from reducing sentences for serious crimes, such as the murder of women and children. He also repealed the “marry-your-rapist”-law see Human Rights Watch 2018.

<sup>41</sup> *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019c; Adalah Justice Project 2019; Begum 2019. For the draft of the family protection law see Schneider 2021, 86, 87, 203.

<sup>42</sup> For the legal status of CEDAW in Palestine see <https://cedaw.ps/>, accessed September 21, 2023; for the debates about CEDAW in Palestine see Schneider 2021, 232–70.

<sup>43</sup> Schneider 2021, 241.

<sup>44</sup> See fn. 2.

<sup>45</sup> See *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019b; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2020b; *BBC News* 2019b; Baladunā 2019.

<sup>46</sup> *Al-'Ayn al-Ikhabariyya* 2019.

Ghurayyib's death based on speculation and rumours, which he called "fake accounts," reminding citizens to wait for the official results which, however, have not yet come.<sup>47</sup>

## The Family's Narratives

The family's narrative was from the beginning fraught with contradictions, surprising developments, and shifts. But it was always, and consistently, based on one clear statement: that no family member can be blamed for Isrā' Ghurayyib's death. In the beginning the family had different narratives: that she jumped off the balcony and injured her spine because she was possessed by *jinn* and mentally ill, also that she died of a heart attack or stroke.<sup>48</sup> When the social media accused the family of having killed her,<sup>49</sup> the family rebuked this claim, especially citing the *jinn*-story, and more precisely the 'loving *jinn*' story. The main person responsible for this narrative was Isrā' Ghurayyib's brother-in-law Muḥammad Šāfi, who, in consequence, alone was accused of "charlatanism."<sup>50</sup> Feeling attacked by social media and by the international attention the case had received, the family gave interviews on August 24, 2019<sup>51</sup> and confirmed this '*jinn*-narrative' in addition to Isrā' Ghurayyib's natural-death-narrative. They admitted that she had been taken to hospital, but had also been taken out of hospital to continue her "healing" with another exorcist.<sup>52</sup> Shortly after Isrā' Ghurayyib's death, 'Abdalkarīm Ḥassān, a so called *shaykh*, gave an interview to *Dunyā l-Waṭan* confirming he had treated

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47 Arzīqāt 2019.

48 See fn. 2; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019a; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019a; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019b; *Alaraby* 2019a; *al-'Ishī* 2019a; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019a; Alghoul 2019; Baladunā 2019.

49 See fn. 2: The social media cannot be analyzed here, but in the official media often social media messages and voice messages were shown and commented on, which gives a good idea of how Isrā''s case was discussed there: see for example *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019c; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019d; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2020b. For the reports see Baladunā 2019; *Al-'Ishī* 2019a; *Alaraby* 2019a; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019a, reported that Muḥammad Šāfi attacked the social media threatening those accusing the family to pursue "legal and tribal persecution"; see *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019a and *al-'Arabiyya* 2019b.

50 Baladunā 2019. Interestingly, the terms used are different but do not or only rarely include the classical participle in the passive: *majnūn*. Mostly it is said that a *jinn* "touched her" (*massahā*) or that she was "vested" with a *jinn* (*malbūsa*).

51 Baladunā 2019.

52 See Indictment 3476/2019; *Alaraby* 2019a; Baladunā 2019.

her with Quran recitation and that she had felt better after some hours.<sup>53</sup> This and the family's interviews were all conducted before the press conference<sup>54</sup> at a time when the family members did not know that the '*jinn*-narrative' they wanted to spread would not be accepted by the judiciary. It thus can be concluded that the family, and especially Muḥammad Ṣāfi, were convinced that public opinion and even the Public Prosecution would accept this story, obviously considering *jinn* a part of 'normal' belief.<sup>55</sup> From different perspectives, the *jinn* narrative seems strange and needs explanation – so, who are *jinn*?

#### *Excursus: Jinn*

In official Islam there is no doubt about the existence of *jinn*.<sup>56</sup> *Jinn* are mentioned in the Quran and they are "thought to be 'intermediary' or 'imaginary' beings above our terrestrial realm but below the celestial realm."<sup>57</sup> Their existence is "completely accepted, as it is to this day."<sup>58</sup> Their legal status has been discussed, and love stories between *jinn* and human beings have been reported.<sup>59</sup>

Research on *jinn* focuses on classical Islamic literature; in addition, there is empirical medical research connecting *jinn* to mental illnesses.<sup>60</sup> However, at the time this chapter was written, there was to the best of my knowledge no anthropological or empirical research on the role of *jinn* in court cases or legal cases like this one. Possible curing through exorcism, in combination with beating, is again confirmed in the classical literature; normally a so called *shaykh* or exorcist beats the possessed person.<sup>61</sup> According to Indictment 3476/2019, the *shaykh* in Ṭülkarm, however, claimed to have successfully exorcized the *jinn*, stating that Isrā' Ghurayyib was now fully responsi-

53 Al-'Ishi 2019a.

54 Baladunā 2019, the interviews were conducted on August 23, 2019, see also *BBC News* 2019b; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019b; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019c.

55 It would be of course highly interesting to go into details of these *jinn*-narratives in legal contexts as here.

56 *Jinn* is the collective form. One demon is a *jinnī* (male) and a *jinniyya* (female).

57 Al-Zein 2017, X.

58 MacDonald et al. 2021.

59 MacDonald et al. 2021; Wieland 1994, 32–48; Fatoum 1999, 57–61; Al-Zein 2017, 103–20.

60 Classical literature see Fatoum 1999; Al-Zein 2017. In modern Egypt see Wieland 1994. For empirical medical studies and further articles, see Dein and Illaiee 2013, 290–93.

61 With regard to exorcism MacDonald et al. 2021; Fatoum 1999, 106–13; Wieland 1994, 53–55. For Quran recitation as a means of healing see Fatoum 1999, 113–27; Al-Zein 2017, 78. For exorcism in combination with beating, Fatoum 1999, 122; Al-Zein 2017, 84–85.

ble for her behaviour and her male family should beat her; which they did, for an entire, long, week until she died.

*End of Excursus*

The ‘*jinn*-narrative’ was not only later turned into an accusation by the Public Prosecution, but it also generated surprise and even mockery in the media.<sup>62</sup> *Waṭan al-Dabbūr* (September 8, 2019), a satirical journal, published an article under the title “The Palestinian Jinn admits responsibility for the killing of Isrā’ Ghurayyib after one day in preventive security arrest.”<sup>63</sup> A social media user named Abū Thābit is quoted by the *BBC*, who made the following statement:

They say there is a *jinnī* in her and the *jinn* are their relief; they say that she besmirched their honour (*sharaf*) and their honour is their relief; they say she besmirched their reputation (*sum’a*) and their reputation is their relief. Can you imagine that these accusations come from her brothers?<sup>64</sup>

Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s brother Muḥammad Ghurayyib, a dentist residing in Greece, however, repeated this ‘*jinn*-narrative’ still in the fourth session of the Bethlehem Court, claiming that his sister was “suffering from a mental illness and from the presence of magic” (*min iṣābatihā bi-maraḍ nafsī wa-wujūd siḥr*). He confirmed that the family took her out of the hospital after it turned out that she “needed no healing” – meant was medical treatment in the hospital – and that instead they took her to a *shaykh* where she was “beaten lightly for her treatment” (*ta’arraḍat li-l-ḍarb al-khafif li-ajl i’lājihā*).<sup>65</sup> The ‘light beating’ admitted by her brother, the dentist, was later interpreted by the family’s lawyer Abū Zahra as proof that Isrā’ Ghurayyib did not die from this beating.<sup>66</sup>

Khālid ‘Amr, another lawyer of the family, explained in an interview with *al-‘Arabiyya* on December 14, 2020 that the suspicion of killing Isrā’ Ghurayyib through severe beating has not been substantiated, it “has been the result of the pressure of the ‘public opinion.’”<sup>67</sup> He argued that Isrā’ Ghurayyib did not die

<sup>62</sup> In the social media a user commented: “The *jinn* came out free from Isrā’’s blood,” see *Dunyā l-Waṭan* 2019d; Nabbout 2019 makes fun of the *jinn*; with a perceptible amazement in the host’s voice see *BBC* 2019.

<sup>63</sup> *Waṭan al-Dabbūr* 2019.

<sup>64</sup> *BBC* 2019.

<sup>65</sup> *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020a; see also *Al-‘Ishī* 2020a.

<sup>66</sup> *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2020.

<sup>67</sup> One lawyer was Abū Zahra and another one Khālid ‘Amr, see *Dunyā l-Waṭan* 2020; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020b; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021a. The host of *Al-‘Arabiyya*, Sāra Dandrāwī, subjected Khālid ‘Amr (*Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020b) to vigorous questioning. At that time there had been rumours about a pos-

because of honour (*sharaf*) or a forbidden relationship but because of her mental condition (*ḥāla nafsiyya*) which he named as schizophrenia (*infiṣām shakhṣī*).<sup>68</sup> He asserted that “in the end, the forensic doctor proved in his testimony to the court that Isrā’ was not subjected to any torture at all, contrary to what was previously written.”<sup>69</sup> With this surprising shift a new narrative was born: the ‘public opinion’ had put pressure on the Palestinian judicial system and led to the ‘unjust’ accusation and arrest of Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s brothers and brother-in-law.

The three accused persons were released on bail of 10,000 Jordanian Dinar for each of them on February 18, 2021.<sup>70</sup> The question as to what happened to the first medical forensic report, and what exactly the second one says, and whether there were or were not injuries on Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s body which caused her death remains obscure.

To summarize: the family’s narratives remained firmly rooted in the claim that they were not to blame for Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s death, but it changed from defence in the beginning to offence. Starting with the ‘*jinn*-narrative’ in combination with the ‘natural-death-narrative’ the family, perhaps influenced by a professional lawyer like Khālid ‘Amr, gave up the ‘*jinn*-narrative,’ which obviously nobody wanted to believe and which some of the media made fun of. It was changed into a ‘mental-health-schizophrenia-narrative.’ As this narrative did not answer the question of how she died, the host of *al-‘Arabiyya*<sup>71</sup> kept asking ‘Amr repeatedly, but he merely alluded to the new medical report, according to which Isrā’ Ghurayyib had allegedly not been tortured. The family thus took the offensive and, turning the tables, established a completely different narrative. They also argued that the public opinion had influenced the Public Prosecution, that all proof had been “fabricated” whereas they had told the correct story from the beginning, accusing the Public Prosecution and the Court of Bethlehem of false accusation and arrest. This is, after all, a serious accusation against the Palestinian judiciary.<sup>72</sup>

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sible release of Isrā’'s brothers and brother-in-law but Palestinian judiciary had rejected them at this time. Parts of this interview were broadcasted again on February 18, 2021 (*Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021a). See also *Sharika wa-lākin* 2021; *Iram News* 2021.

68 *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021a; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020b.

69 *Iram News* 2021. See also *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020b; see also *Sharika wa-lākin* 2021.

70 See especially in *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020b; *Sharika wa-lākin* 2021; *Iram News* 2021; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021b; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021a.

71 December 14, 2020.

72 *Al-‘Ishī* 2021; *Iram News* 2021; *Sharika wa-lākin* 2021; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020b; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021b; *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2021a.

## The Investigation by the Judicial Authority of Palestine

The Public Prosecutor al-Khaṭīb explained in the press conference on September 12, 2019, based on the first medical report,<sup>73</sup> that Isrā' Ghurayyib's death was a result of severe respiratory failure directly caused by physical injuries and beating.<sup>74</sup> She had been subjected to violence which led to her death – forming the elements of the crime of killing. He also confirmed that the widely circulated audio recording of her screams in the hospital resulted from the merging of two different recordings, with a time difference of seven hours between them, thus confirming that it is Isrā' Ghurayyib's voice one can hear. Al-Khaṭīb explained:

It has been proven to us, through investigations and evidence, that the late Isrā' Ghurayyib was subjected to a series of psychological pressures and physical violence, and that she was subjected to acts of charlatanism (*sha'wadha*) by some members of her family.<sup>75</sup>

The Public Prosecutor also announced that in the hospital she had been interviewed by the police but regrettably – as he said – did not mention that she had been exposed to violence and did not ask for protection.<sup>76</sup>

Al-Khaṭīb based his accusation of the two brothers and the brother-in-law on Article 330 of the applicable Jordanian Penal Law 17 of 1960, which deals with “unintentional killing” in reference to Article 76 of the same law.<sup>77</sup> He added, for Muḥammad Ṣafī only, the accusation of “charlatanism,” to be punished according to the provisions of Article 471/1.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, al-Khaṭīb rejected the classification as a crime of ‘honour’ (*sharaf*), thus rejecting the “honour’-crime-narrative.”<sup>79</sup> Earlier, the Palestinian Police spokesman Lu'ay Arziqāt had argued that, as in every society, killings have different backgrounds, but that “Murders defined as so-called ‘family honour’ killings no longer exist in our society and we

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73 *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019c.

74 There were reports that three of the medical forensic doctors in the Ministry of Health had resigned after ‘anomalies’ in Isrā' Ghurayyib's autopsy. The Ministry expressly denied any connection to Isrā' Ghurayyib's case, see *Palestine Chronicle* 2019b; *Dunyā l-Waṭan* [Alwatanvoice] 2019b.

75 *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019c; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019b; see also Baladunā 2019; *BBC News* 2019b; *Palestine Chronicle* 2019c.

76 Baladunā 2019.

77 *BBC News* 2019b; *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019c.

78 Article 471/1 of the JPC punishes profit-making by séances, hypnosis etc. It does not mention the belief in *jinn* and/or exorcism rituals and/or making a person believe that he/she is possessed by *jinn*. Whether or not the application of Article 330 of the JPL makes sense is a good question but cannot be dealt with here. See al-'Ishī 2019b.

79 *Al-'Arabiyya* 2019c.

do not recognize this term.” He also added that in recent years there had been “a decline in killing in general and the murder of women in particular.”<sup>80</sup> However, if there is no official category of such crimes they cannot be counted; additionally, WCLAC and the UN have in fact reported a rise in the killing of women in recent years, among them ‘honour’-killings.<sup>81</sup>

On October 28, 2019 the Public Prosecutor approved the indictment, and ordered the reference of the accused to the Bethlehem Court of First Instance.<sup>82</sup> In the fourth session of the Court of Bethlehem, as already mentioned, Muḥammad the dentist residing in Greece, gave what was named in the *al-‘Arabiyya* report as a “strange testimony”: He explained that his sister was suffering from a mental illness and from the presence of magic and had to be beaten lightly.<sup>83</sup> *Dunyā l-Waṭan* published a lengthy summary of the fifth session<sup>84</sup> on February 11, 2020 based on the report of Farīd al-Aṭrash, lawyer of the Independent Commission of Human Rights,<sup>85</sup> who was present during this session. Accordingly, a medical doctor from Bayt Jālā State Hospital admitted that he had leaked the audio with Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s screams, which had been recorded by a nurse, to a social media channel. One of the nurses told the court that the family took Isrā’ Ghurayyib out of the hospital despite the fact that the treatment had not been completed. She also told the police that there was suspicion of criminal action against Isrā’ Ghurayyib. The family’s lawyer, Amīn Abū Zahra, had already complained in the same month that he had demanded the release of the accused men but that this demand had been rejected by the Court and the Public Prosecution because of the gravity of the charges. Abū Zahra pointed to Muḥammad the dentist’s testimony in which he admitted that ‘slight beating’ had taken place to control Isrā’ Ghurayyib, and took this as evidence that there was no serious violence committed against her. Abū Zahra criticized what he considered the court’s exaggerated interest in this case, which differed from other cases with regard to the high number of witnesses. Al-Aṭrash, on the other hand, expressed his great concern, mentioning two further cases of young women, one 16 and one 17 years old, who died in 2019 under similar circumstances. One of them had also been beaten to death after she had been taken to a magician (*mash‘ūdhin*).

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<sup>80</sup> Shalaan and Agencies 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Ashqar 2014; Duwaykāt 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Indictment 3476/2019; Al-‘Ishī 2019b.

<sup>83</sup> *Al-‘Arabiyya* 2020a; Al-‘Ishī, 2020a.

<sup>84</sup> *Dunyā l-Waṭan* 2020.

<sup>85</sup> See <https://www.ichr.ps/en>, accessed September 21, 2023.



A year later, on February 17, 2021, the court finally decided to free the three accused on bail.<sup>86</sup> In a Facebook post, the Public Prosecution declared that it respects all judicial decisions including the last one of the Court in Bethlehem which was responsible for the case of Isrā' Ghurayyib and the decision to set free all three accused persons on bail despite the dissent of the Public Prosecution. The Public Prosecution, as a representative of the public right, submitted a request to reconsider the decision and promised to take the necessary legal measures to ensure their prosecution, and to not let the accused escape their punishment in case they may be declared guilty in a future trial. The decision to set the suspects free “does not mean their relief from the charge against them especially because the trial against the suspects is still ongoing.”<sup>87</sup>

The Public Prosecution accused the three relatives of the victim of ‘unintentional killing’ and ‘charlatanism,’ thus transforming the ‘*jinn*-narrative’ into an accusation and stating that Isrā' Ghurayyib had been subjected to physical as well as psychological violence. These unclear circumstances allowed the family to cling to its main narrative of not having caused Isrā' Ghurayyib's death. As such, the Palestinian judiciary system has not been able so far to continue with investigations but has also not yet decided to close the file.

## Conclusions

To reiterate the questions asked at the beginning with regard to the role of the “‘honour’-crime narrative”, the family’s narrative, and the reaction of the Palestinian judicial system, it must be stated that the “‘honour’-crime-narrative”, based on an ideal-type of this crime, is a complex matter which refers to the killing of a woman in cold blood with the intention of the family, most often the father or brother, to punish the woman for transgressing sexual boundaries and to restore what is described as ‘family honour.’ It was used in the titles, especially of European journals such as *Der Spiegel*, the *BBC*, and *Vogue* even before the Public Prosecutor had presented the results of his investigation. Therefore, these head-lines surely were thought to be ‘eye-catching’ for the European audiences and do not reflect a deeper analysis of the case.<sup>88</sup> The label of femicide, on the other hand, refers to a crime regrettably normal in every country throughout the

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<sup>86</sup> Al-‘Ishī 2021; Al-‘Arabiyya 2021b; Al-‘Arabiyya 2021a.

<sup>87</sup> Al-‘Arabiyya 2021a; *Sharika wa-lākin* 2021.

<sup>88</sup> See fn. 3: *BBC News* 2019b; Knipp and El Basnaly 2019; Sydow 2019; Minthe 2019; Alghoul 2019.

world and would not have attracted the same attention. Therefore, Allouche<sup>89</sup> is right in this case, stating that femicide migrating into Western contexts is re-packaged as 'honour'-crime.<sup>90</sup> But the question arises: is this sufficient to justify the negligence of this ideal typical form of killing of women in conservative societies? For activists it would no longer be possible to approach this distinct category of crimes, as the category of femicide is much broader and includes many different reasons why men decide to kill women.

In Palestine, but also in the Arab world more broadly, it seems that the media focused on the background and reported in a more differentiated manner, presenting several possible narratives and discussing them sometimes intensively: among them family violence, patriarchal family structure and honour but also belief in *jinn*.<sup>91</sup> The "honour'-crime-narrative' was used against Isrā' Ghurayyib's family but not used by the family itself. Muḥammad Šāfi, in particular, as the main spokesperson of the family in the beginning, rejected all such accusations using instead the '*jinn*-narrative' according to which she died because she was possessed by *jinn*, could not control herself and thus hurt herself.

The Public Prosecution accused Isrā' Ghurayyib's two brothers and her brother-in-law, of having tortured her over a certain period of time physically and psychologically to the point of death, turning the '*jinn*-narrative' into an accusation of charlatanism. Perhaps this is why the family felt later – maybe based on the advice of a lawyer – compelled to drop the '*jinn*-narrative' and switch to the 'mentally-ill-narrative.'

Interestingly, the Public Prosecutor – just like the family – rejected the "honour'-crime-narrative' explicitly and did this without further substantiation or explanation. It would have obliged the Public Prosecution to prove that Isrā' Ghurayyib's death was a planned killing, decided by some of the family members and executed in 'cold blood' because they disapproved of her relationship with her boyfriend. Furthermore, the Palestinian Judiciary might not have wanted to exacerbate the outburst of anger in social media and the main-stream media especially in Europe but to ameliorate the public discussion. Lu'ay Arzīqāt's argument that "so-called 'family honour' killings no longer exist in our society"<sup>92</sup> is problematic, as there is evidence that women are still killed and sometimes are killed for the family honour, as WCLAC reports. But the Palestinian judiciary

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<sup>89</sup> See fn. 1.

<sup>90</sup> But see for example the labelling of 'honour'-crime in Baroud 2019.

<sup>91</sup> Baladunā 2019; see the reports in *Dunyā l-Waṭan* and *Al-'Arabiyya*.

<sup>92</sup> Shalaan and Agencies 2019.

obviously tried to avoid any impression that ‘honour’ – considered a backward concept – might have played a role.

The European media, who aimed in their sensational presentation to strengthen the cliché of women being murdered in the Middle East for family honour, have long since stopped reporting on Isrā’ Ghurayyib’s case.<sup>93</sup> Many media in Europe reported only once or twice about her death, many reported immediately after she died and even before the Public Prosecutor had held his press conference on September 12, 2019 and presented the police report. They quickly forgot her, and at the same time overlooked the real tragedy of the story: that Isrā’ Ghurayyib had been labelled as possessed by *jinn* and/or mentally ill. The ‘*jinn*-narrative’ is, from the perspective of the three defendants after all, a version of the story according to which Isrā’ Ghurayyib could be held as alone responsible for her death. What happened in this case, and what might be a dangerous development for women in Palestine, is that it seems her family succeeded in transforming the ‘*jinn*-narrative’ into a ‘mental-illness-narrative.’ After all, the combination of *jinn* and mental illness is obvious in the Arabic language. Even if the classical Arabic term *majnūn* (lit.: possessed by *jinn*), which means ‘mentally ill’ or ‘mad’ in classical Arabic, is not used much in today’s language,<sup>94</sup> women accused of being possessed by *jinn* are in danger because their family members will take them to so-called *shaykhs* who treat them not only with reading the Quran but also with exorcism rituals to expel the *jinn*. They consciously take the risk that the women will die during or after this procedure – just as it happened in this case. The so-called *shaykhs* may, as it also happened in this case, in addition advise the male family members to punish those women after what they consider a successful exorcism – this is what the Indictment 3476/2019 reports for Isrā’’s case. The lawyer al-Aṭrash had pointed to several other similar cases.<sup>95</sup> Whether it is honour or *jinn*, it is always the male part of the family that claims to control the woman’s body up to the point of killing her or beating her to death.

As of February 2022, the state of affairs is not clear and it seems that the file is still open but no other court sessions took place. The accused persons have been set free on bail, and there is no further information available in the media. International media stopped reporting very early on, and now Palestinian media have also stopped reporting. The topic and memory of Isrā’ Ghurayyib have vanished from public debate entirely.

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<sup>93</sup> Neither the *BBC*, nor *Der Spiegel*, nor *Deutsche Welle* nor *Vogue Arabia* published a follow-up.

<sup>94</sup> See above fn. 9 and 46.

<sup>95</sup> *Dunyā l-Waṭan* 2020.

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Katja Werthmann

# Women and the City

Observations on Muslim Women's Lives in Kano (Nigeria) and Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso)

## Introduction

When we aim at “re-thinking the anthropology of Muslim societies,” gender needs to be considered. Being Muslim not only means different things in different historical periods and geographical regions, and in rural and urban areas, it also means different things for men and women in the same society or social milieu. Current controversies about women and Islam in Europe focus on the contradictions between secular and religious norms. In Africa, debates about the compatibility of Islamic norms and local socio-political orders, and about women's place within them, have also taken place in several regions and countries. This article illustrates women's own views of religious norms and their implications for their lives based on examples from two West African cities.

As an urban anthropologist, I am specifically interested in women's everyday lives in cities of Africa. In this article, I discuss empirical approaches to Muslim women in the cities of Kano (Nigeria) and Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso). I do not aim at a comparison in a strict sense but will summarize my own research findings based on my fieldwork about women's views and activities in these two cities. In the following chapter, I will give some background information on Kano and Bobo-Dioulasso. For each city, I will briefly outline the historical and present-day variations of Islam that are relevant for female dwellers in each city. Based on my own and other anthropologists' published works, I will highlight some aspects of women's everyday lives that are characteristic of each respective city.

## Research in Two Cities of West Africa

Kano and Bobo-Dioulasso are two cities with a precolonial history of trade and the concomitant settlement by Muslim and other communities from various West African regions and beyond. During and after the European colonial period, Kano was part of the British Northern Protectorate, which later became Nigeria. Bobo-Dioulasso was part of French Upper Volta, which later became Burkina

Faso. Both cities are now the second largest in their respective countries (after Lagos and Ouagadougou). Both cities are home to heterogeneous populations in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion, and occupation. English and French are the national languages, but the everyday *lingua franca* in Kano is Hausa, and in Bobo-Dioulasso it is Jula.

I have carried out research in Kano and Bobo-Dioulasso, but only in Kano did I have the explicit aim to study women's lives. In Kano, I conducted 17 months of fieldwork for my PhD dissertation between 1992 and 1994. Originally, I was interested in the impact of secular education on Hausa-speaking Muslim women. I started by interviewing female students and lecturers at Bayero University, and some women in public offices.<sup>1</sup> I also observed adult evening classes for women at the Agency for Mass Education. However, this approach did not work out, mostly because the university closed for an unforeseeable time during my fieldwork. In the end, I completed most of my fieldwork among the women in the neighbourhood next to the place where I lived. This was a housing estate for police officers that was built in the 1950s inside the old town of Kano near the gate of Sabuwar Kofa.<sup>2</sup>

In and around Bobo-Dioulasso, I studied the history of Islam and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims during several field stays between 2006 and 2009. I was a member of a research team that studied Muslim saints and sacred places in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Burkina Faso.<sup>3</sup> During that research, I came across the genre of *kurubi* songs by Jula-speaking women. I recorded approximately 400 songs in Bobo-Dioulasso, Darsalamy, and Kotédougou.<sup>4</sup> Another side-product of my work in Bobo-Dioulasso was an international conference and a book about the city, co-edited with a colleague from Burkina Faso.<sup>5</sup> Between 2017 and 2020, I co-directed the research project “Doing the City – Socio-spatial Navigation in Urban Africa.” Two doctoral students worked in Bobo-Dioulasso under my supervision and discovered the gendered nature of public transport, and the diurnal and nocturnal differences in the city.

When I reported to my colleagues during the research project about Muslim saints and sacred spaces that there was a shrine attended by both Muslims and non-Muslims in Bobo-Dioulasso,<sup>6</sup> their comments were along the lines of “ah, of course, this is West Africa!”, thereby reproducing a stereotype according to

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1 Werthmann 2000.

2 Werthmann 1997; Werthmann 2002.

3 Werthmann 2008.

4 Werthmann 2016.

5 Werthmann and Sanogo 2013.

6 Werthmann 2014.

which Islamic practices in West Africa are less orthodox than in other parts of the Muslim world. My response was that Burkina Faso was very different from other West African countries, and hardly comparable with Nigeria, for instance. The differences between Muslim women's lives in Kano and Bobo-Dioulasso are a case in point.

## Kano

Today, Kano city has approximately four million inhabitants.<sup>7</sup> It is the capital of Kano State. The city has been an important centre for trade, crafts, religious erudition, and a seat of political power for a long time. Its history reaches back to the seventh century CE when farmers, traders, and craftspeople built fortified settlements and certain political hierarchies emerged.<sup>8</sup> Kano grew out of blacksmithing sites around Dala hill. Walls and gates were built during several phases from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, and the city became an important node in trans-Saharan trade networks.<sup>9</sup> In the fifteenth century, ruler Muhammad Rumfa reformed the local government according to Islamic principles. He created a central marketplace, built a new Friday Mosque and erected the palace which is still a prominent feature of the old town of Kano. Muhammad Rumfa introduced certain Islamic traditions, such as the celebration of *ʿĪd al-Fiṭr* after the end of Ramadan.<sup>10</sup>

Precolonial Kano society was highly stratified. The basic differences were between the officeholders (*sarauta*), merchants and traders (*attajirai*), religious scholars (*malamai*), and commoners (*talakawa*). At the top of the social hierarchy were the emirs, royal families, and palace officials. The *talakawa* at the bottom were subdivided into various socio-professional groups. Until the colonial period, the lowest stratum were slaves. Patron-client relationships linked the political authorities and the wealthy with members of the poorer strata.

Before the *jihād* under Usman Dan Fodio from 1804 to 1812, during which he accomplished a political unification of the Hausa city states under the umbrella of the Sokoto Caliphate, women held offices in government, palace hierarchy, and market administration such as the Queen Mother (*maidaki*) and other titled

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<sup>7</sup> PopulationStat World Statistical Data, <https://populationstat.com/nigeria/kano>, last accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Last 1985.

<sup>9</sup> Barkindo 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Clarke 1984, 71.

positions such as *iya* and *magajiya*. Concubines played important roles in the palace politics.<sup>11</sup> Female offices were abolished or reduced to symbolical roles after Dan Fodio's *jihād*. Kano became the capital of an emirate. Internal rivalries led to a civil war in Kano that lasted from 1893 to 1903 when the British conquered the city and demised the Emir.<sup>12</sup>

In spatial terms, precolonial Kano was subdivided into a walled town (*birni*) where there were important sites such as the Kurmi market, the Emir's palace and the Friday Mosque. Quarters inside the city walls were based on ethnic, kin and socio-professional groups. Outside the wall were caravan camps and immigrants' quarters. After 1903, the British added an administrative centre and residential areas outside the wall. The British left the local administration largely intact but introduced some new laws and taxes. In 1912, a railway line connected Kano and Lagos. Already before the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates and the creation of Nigeria by Lugard in 1914, people from Southern Nigeria had been recruited for the colonial administration and settled in Sabon Gari (New Town). This was the only quarter where Christian churches and schools were allowed to operate during the colonial period.<sup>13</sup>

As late as the 1960s, many areas inside the Kano city walls were not developed but were left as open fields or used as cemeteries. By the 1990s, the old town had been built up to its outermost limits, just as many areas outside the city walls were now populated. Many old city gates had been demolished and replaced with modern archways through which cars and trucks could pass. The mud homesteads of the old town were gradually replaced by cement buildings as they fell into disrepair.

Interethnic and interreligious violence has broken out in the city several times since the colonial period. Increasing tensions in the run-up to independence culminated in the 1953 'Kano riots' in which 46 people died.<sup>14</sup> Political tensions between Northern and Southern Nigerians led to killings of Southerners in Kano in 1966 and eventually to the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1970.<sup>15</sup> In 1980, the fanatic Muslim preacher Maitatsine and up to 2,000 of his followers entrenched themselves in Kano's Yan Awaki quarter. When police units attempted to arrest some of them, violence erupted there and in other parts of the

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<sup>11</sup> Nast 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Smith 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Becker 1969; Ubah 1982.

<sup>14</sup> Cheta Nwanze, 31 January 2018, Echoes of the 1953 Kano riot. <https://guardian.ng/politics/echoes-of-1953-kano-riot/>, accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony 2002.

city. Eventually the army moved in and according to official sources, 4,177 people died in the ensuing carnage.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of these interethnic and interreligious tensions, Kano has not become subdivided into enemy territories to the same extent as other Nigerian cities, such as Jos.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the division of Kano into city (old town), *waje* (outside) and township (former colonial residential areas) still mirrored not only a functional but also cultural differentiation in the 1990s. City dwellers were cautious when entering unfamiliar quarters or avoided going out during certain periods or events. When I was in Kano in 1991, a visit by evangelist Reinhard Bonnke caused violent clashes between Muslims and Christians that resulted in at least eight deaths according to official sources, and possibly many more.<sup>18</sup> The landlord of the house in the old town where I stayed at the time recommended not leaving the neighbourhood for several days.

## Wife Seclusion, Education, and Work

In contrast with other West African Muslim regions, and even with other Muslim populations in Nigeria, a particular form of gender segregation is common in Hausa-speaking Northern Nigeria: wife seclusion. Married women should be “locked” (*kulle*) in their homes. According to some sources, Muhammad Rumfa introduced seclusion for his wives in the fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Until the end of the nineteenth century, however, it seems to have been practiced mainly by elite families. After the prohibition of the slave trade in 1901, wife seclusion became an important marker of free status. The increase of seclusion even in rural areas was also the result of other factors, including an increasing number of Islamic scholars in the colonial administration who would use their positions for the dissemination of religious ideas. Seclusion thereby became a symbol of anti-colonial attitudes.<sup>20</sup>

Since the colonial period, seclusion has varied according to social status and individual circumstances. In Kano in the 1990s, many married women practiced a version of seclusion according to which they would only go out for specific

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<sup>16</sup> Adesoji 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Trovalla, Adetula and Trovalla 2014.

<sup>18</sup> *New York Times* 17 October 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/17/world/at-least-8-dead-in-nigerian-city-as-muslim-christian-riots-go-on.html>, last accessed 25 September 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Hogben 1967, 101; Clarke 1984, 63.

<sup>20</sup> Imam 1991.

reasons like family visits, celebrations, or healthcare, and only with permission from their husbands. Wives of members of the traditional elites, Islamic scholars, and wealthy businessmen often observed stricter forms of seclusion. Some of them only left their homes after dusk, to see a doctor, or to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. However, there were differences according to social status and educational level. Whereas some wealthy husbands kept their wives in ‘golden cages,’ others permitted their wives and daughters to pursue higher education or a professional career outside their homes.

Seeking knowledge and working outside the home had a precedent in the *jihād* period. Usman Dan Fodio stressed that men were not only obliged to take care of the material needs of their families, but they were also responsible for the education of their wives and children. If they did not fulfil this obligation, women had the right and even the duty to acquire an education outside the home.<sup>21</sup> Usman Dan Fodio practiced what he preached and all the women in his family were highly educated. His daughter Nana Asma’u founded a movement of educated women called ‘*yan taru*’ who travelled from place to place for teaching other women.<sup>22</sup>

Religious teaching was also provided by female members of the two Sufi orders dominant in the area, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya.<sup>23</sup> A number of women held positions of authority in these orders. Alaine Hutson reconstructed how in the 1930s a female North African saint, Arab women, and reforms in the West African Tijaniyya influenced two Kano women, who in turn opened avenues for their and other women’s “religious influence, economic gain, and personal authority”<sup>24</sup> as teachers and initiators. However, Hutson also pointed out that this could not have been achieved without these women’s elite status, the fact that they were divorced, widowed or postmenopausal, and the support of men.<sup>25</sup> Since the 1970s, reformist groups such as the ‘Yan Izala’ opposed the Sufi orders in Kano. They founded “Islamiyya” schools which combined Islamic education with Western subjects and teaching methods and were also open to women.<sup>26</sup>

During the colonial period, European-style forms of education and professions led to the emergence of an urban strata of the population who were employed in colonial administration and in private businesses. Attempts to set up girls’ schools in order to produce “happy, healthy wives of educated natives”

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<sup>21</sup> Kleiner-Bossaller 1993, 115.

<sup>22</sup> Boyd 1989.

<sup>23</sup> Loimeier 1993.

<sup>24</sup> Hutson 1999, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Hutson 2001.

<sup>26</sup> Umar 2011.

met with resistance, as these schools were associated with Christian missionaries.<sup>27</sup> After independence, six years of school attendance (Universal Primary Education) was made mandatory for all children in 1976. However, while many boys went on to higher education, marriage was still seen as the only proper path to adulthood for girls in Northern Nigeria in the 1990s. I vividly remember my shock when I visited a young woman in her early twenties who presented her six children to me, neatly aligned according to age and height. She felt that she had performed her procreative duty and had managed to convince her husband to let her attend an adult literacy class.

In the 1990s, female Muslim students were a common sight at the Bayero University in Kano, even though very few were to be found in faculties such as technology or science. Many enrolled in subjects like Islamic Studies, Arabic, Hausa or English language studies, Education and Library Sciences. While Muslim women in political parties and the government of the federal state were still rare in the 1990s, there were women like Zainab Sa'id Kabir who had been a member of the Kano State government in 1979 and is still a lecturer in the Sociology department of Bayero University.<sup>28</sup>

Studying or working outside the home entailed the danger of 'mixing' with the opposite sex. The female academics I interviewed in the 1990s justified their working outside the home by referring to the teachings of Usman Dan Fodio and his daughter Nana Asma'u. They defined their aspirations towards higher education and work as a religious duty. They emphasized that only educated women could be good Muslim wives and mothers. Acquiring a Western education did not lead to the adoption of Western models of marriage and family. Every educated woman I talked to responded with "no" to the question whether women should work in order to earn their own living. They all stressed that it was the duty of husbands to provide for them. These Muslim, Western-educated women would not question their religious faith even if they did not agree with all interpretations of Islamic scriptures that had emerged in northern Nigeria. Some explicitly said that the way seclusion was practiced in Kano did not directly relate to any rule in the Quran. They felt that the popular equation of Islam and Hausa culture was problematic and made it more difficult for them to manoeuvre between 'tradition' and 'modernity.' However, they would not utter such opinions publicly, and with good reason. In 1992, Kande Balarabe, then Director-General of the Kano State Commission for Women, said during a televised debate on the occasion of 8

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<sup>27</sup> Werthmann 2000.

<sup>28</sup> For northern Nigerian Muslim women in politics and public roles see Callaway 1987; Coles and Mack 1991; Kleiner-Bossaller and Loimeier 1995.



March (International Women's Day) that marriage was not compulsory according to the Quran. She was instantly removed from office. Some women I talked to at the time agreed with her but said she should not have made such a statement publicly without being a religious authority.

The educated, working women I interviewed would not ask their husbands for permission to go to work, but they had to ask for permission to go elsewhere. Elite women had their own cars or were transported by drivers in their husband's cars and could therefore move about more easily than lower status women (unless there was one of the notorious fuel crises). Among the mostly uneducated women in my neighbourhood, a common practice was to go out for one particular occasion with the husband's permission. They would then select a route for getting to their destination that allowed them to stop and greet relatives and friends along the way; for instance, by getting off a minibus a few stops earlier and proceeding on foot. This tacit extension of the permission to go out was also practiced by some educated women who thereby avoided arguing about their husbands' rights to prohibit social calls, which the women considered their duty. For both categories of women these visits were vital for maintaining their social networks on which they could fall back during crises.

Seclusion never meant that women did not work.<sup>29</sup> In some large compounds that I visited in the old town of Kano, women constantly prepared foodstuffs that were hawked on markets and streets or brought to regular customers' homes by daughters or servants. Women also retailed various products from within their homes with the help of 'children' (their own children or people in clientship relations). When they had permission to attend celebrations, they would bring along items such as shoes, handbags or jewellery and sell them there. Through these activities, they earned cash for their own use, for participating in savings groups, for giving gifts during celebrations, and for assembling their daughters' trousseaus. Apart from women who pursued trade and crafts in their homes, there were also female poets and singers.<sup>30</sup>

However, the work of secluded women depended on the availability of unmarried girls or other helpers for *talla* (hawking), and on the rotation of chores between co-wives so that the woman who was not cooking for the husband would have time for her own activities. This was not the case in all quarters of Kano. The wives of policemen in my neighbourhood found their ambition to work curtailed for several reasons. Economic decline had already accelerated in the 1990s. They could not ask their husbands for money to start a petty trade. All neighbourhood

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<sup>29</sup> Schildkrout 1982.

<sup>30</sup> Mack 2004. For Muslim female preachers in Kano and Jos, see Muazu 2022.

children attended Quranic and government schools, and even most daughters attended secondary school. There were no female relatives with whom to share household chores, and relations between co-wives were often tense. This meant that the women had to prepare three meals per day themselves instead of only one or two, like women in the old town who bought some meals from other women. Most importantly, there were not many outlets for trade or crafts in this housing estate for police officers. Although women tried to pursue occupations such as hair-braiding, dressmaking or selling snacks, drinks, and ice cubes, most of these activities were not profitable and often short-lived. The women complained about having to “sit idly” (*zaman banza*) all day long. To them, being a housewife was not real work. They distinguished between *aiki* (salaried work) and *sana'a* (trade). Domestic work was none of these, but *aikace-aikace*, recurring chores. Nevertheless, the women valued seclusion as a sign of respectability.<sup>31</sup>

Divorcées, widows, postmenopausal and poor women were not necessarily in seclusion. However, there was a strong social pressure on widowed or divorced women of childbearing age to remarry as soon as possible. When they remained unmarried, they were called *karuwai* which is a word with negative connotations (‘courtesanship,’ prostitution). *Karuwai* lived in their own houses or in “houses of women.” Through intermediaries such as men who act and talk like women (*yan daudu*), they could enter short- or long-term relationships with men from whom they received gifts and cash.<sup>32</sup> More than once in the city’s history, unmarried women were rounded up or attacked. For instance, during the 1950s Emir Sanusi forced unmarried women to marry.<sup>33</sup>

Especially for secluded women, media like radio, TV, and video, and more recently the internet, provide access to information and images about the world outside their homes. Women are not only consumers of media. Since the 1980s, a number of Kano women have written *soyayya* (love) books in Hausa. Notions of romantic love in those books were derived from Hollywood and Bollywood movies.<sup>34</sup> However, female authors also pointed to problematic social issues such as forced marriages, jealousy between co-wives, irresponsible husbands, domestic violence, and ‘sugar daddies’ who seduce and impregnate schoolgirls.<sup>35</sup>

With the implementation of *shari'a* in Kano state legislature in 2000, Kano women were pressed to conform to certain ways of dressing, e.g., by wearing the

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31 Werthmann 1997, 92–103; Werthmann 2002.

32 Gaudio 2009.

33 Hutson 1999, 56.

34 Larkin 1997.

35 Aliyu Musa 2019.

*hijāb*; a measure which was made mandatory in public institutions. Prohibitions on the use of public transport together with men restricted their mobility. Until 2000, men and women could use the same minibuses together. The implementation of *sharī'a* led to new regulations such as female-only buses, and an interdiction for women to ride behind men on motorcycle taxis.<sup>36</sup> Actresses and other women who worked on film production sets became targets for public accusations of immorality during the Kano State government's attempts to crush or at least censor the Kannywood film industry.<sup>37</sup>

## Bobo-Dioulasso

Bobo-Dioulasso (formerly Sya) emerged out of precolonial settlements along a crossroads of trade routes. The inhabitants of Bobo-Dioulasso include the Bobo and the Zara who both claim to be the founders of the city. The Zara derive their origin from a Muslim ancestor who entrusted his children to his non-Muslim neighbours when he went on the pilgrimage to Mecca. During his years of absence, however, these children fell away from Islam. In the eighteenth century, Islam experienced a renaissance in Bobo-Dioulasso. Jula-speaking warriors from Kong in present-day Côte d'Ivoire bearing the patronymic Ouattara settled in the city. As in Kong, a complementary division of labour was established between these warriors and Muslim families who specialized in trade and religious erudition: the traders provided the warriors with horses and weapons, and the scholars provided spiritual support in the form of amulets, prayers, blessings, and divinations. Muslim scholars also acted as mediators in cases of conflict among the warriors. In return, the warriors enabled the traders to expand their trading activities, protected the trade routes, and supplied slaves.<sup>38</sup> Through the influence of the Jula-speaking scholars, some local families also converted to Islam. A Zara Muslim named Sakidi Sanou built the mosque that is now an emblem of Bobo-Dioulasso at the end of the nineteenth century. Until the colonial period, however, Islam remained the religion of a minority in the region.

The French conquered the city in 1897 and made it an important hub for commerce, industry, and military recruitment. The arrival of Muslim communities from other West African countries in Bobo-Dioulasso during the colonial period led to

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<sup>36</sup> Adamu 2008; Last 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Krings 2015, 120–49.

<sup>38</sup> Werthmann 2012.

the creation of numerous mosques and Quranic schools.<sup>39</sup> In the 1940s, Bobo-Dioulasso was the second-largest city of colonial French West Africa (AOF) after Dakar in Senegal. However, after independence in 1960, Ouagadougou became the new capital. Today, Bobo-Dioulasso has approximately one million inhabitants.<sup>40</sup>

Although Bobo-Dioulasso has the reputation of being a rather peaceful city, there were violent conflicts, some of which connected with Islam, during and after the colonial period. In 1941, a group of Muslims (who were not from Bobo-Dioulasso) killed five Europeans and injured ten others in a hotel. Although there was no evidence of direct involvement of the Hamalliyya order, its spiritual leader Boubakar Sawadogo and several supporters were deported and imprisoned.<sup>41</sup> In 1973, there were clashes between adherents of the Wahhabiyya and other Muslims.<sup>42</sup> Even though rivalry and competition between various Muslim denominations and movements continue to exist, they have rarely flared up into violent conflicts. Never have there been violent conflicts between Muslims and Christians comparable in scale to those in Kano.<sup>43</sup>

Bobo-Dioulasso has an ancient centre called Dioulassoba which used to be a tourist attraction until the ongoing security crisis severely damaged the tourism sector. During the colonial period, the French destroyed parts of the older quarters and created an administrative and business centre in their place. While the city centre has not changed much since my first visit in 1997, there has been considerable spatial expansion outside the centre. In the city centre, there are important places such as the central market, the railway station, stations for regional bus connections, the central police station, branches of state services and municipal administration, the public hospital, the old mosque, the Catholic cathedral, banks, supermarkets, restaurants, hotels, and nightclubs. Outside of the centre there are the officially zoned and developed residential areas. Beyond these, there are the sprawling, non-zoned and underequipped peri-urban quarters. Only the main traffic arteries like the big boulevards are paved. In 2010, the nation celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Burkina Faso's independence in Bobo-Dioulasso. For this occasion, a new quarter, named Bobo 2010, was built, the airport was renovated, and a modern fruit and vegetable market was constructed. Despite

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**39** Traoré 2013.

**40** INSD 2020.

**41** Traoré 2005.

**42** Kouanda 1998.

**43** Since the beginning of the Malian crisis in 2012 and the popular insurrection in 2014 in Burkina Faso against former president Compaoré, numerous 'jihadist' attacks in the border regions with Mali and Niger as well as in the capital have led to severe political and humanitarian crises. So far, the city of Bobo-Dioulasso has been spared of such incidents.

these profound changes, the inhabitants of some of the older quarters still perceive these as ‘villages.’ It is in these villages that traditional rituals and celebrations take place, such as the performing of sacrifices at shrines, mask dances following the death of a respected elder, and dances of girls and women during Muslim holidays (see below).

Socio-culturally, Bobo-Dioulasso is more similar to areas in the neighbouring countries with Mande-speaking populations such as Mali, Guinea-Conakry, and northern Côte d’Ivoire than to the Mooré-speaking areas of Burkina Faso. These similarities are a heritage of pre-colonial social structures, trade relations and religious networks that continue to the present day. Joking relationships between certain categories of relatives, kin groups, and ethnic groups as well as friendly banter among neighbours, work mates or market traders and their customers characterize many everyday interactions.

## Female Spaces and Activities

Wife seclusion is not common among Muslims in Bobo-Dioulasso, and neither is covering the head and body the standard for all Muslim women. I felt the irony of my attempt to conform by wearing a long skirt, long-sleeved blouse, and headscarf (as I had done during fieldwork in Kano) when I was meeting with the Imam and a group of other men in front of the old mosque in 2006. While we were making introductions, a young woman passed by without a headscarf and with bare arms. None of the men seemed to be bothered. The only Muslim women in Bobo-Dioulasso who are fully veiled (in black abayas) are adherents of the Wahhabi movement.

While social norms for the encounters and relations between men and women are less strict than in Kano, Muslim women in Bobo-Dioulasso are supposed to conform to certain ideals of femininity. Husbands and social seniors should be treated with respect which is expressed in certain terms of address and forms of greeting, and in giving small cash gifts to elders. Female traders and market women have long been a powerful presence in the city. President Thomas Sankara (1983–87) encouraged women’s participation in public affairs. Some Muslim women became prominent female politicians, state functionaries, and representatives of civil society in Bobo-Dioulasso.<sup>44</sup> Today, Muslim women are working in all sorts of public and private employment or as independent businesswomen and traders, and they are members of non-governmental and civil

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<sup>44</sup> Hagberg 2013.

society organizations.<sup>45</sup> With the exception of some Muslim private schools, there is no mandatory gender segregation in educational and other institutions, or in public transport.

One of the most important public holidays in Burkina Faso is International Women's Day on 8 March, when there is a procession of women's groups along the boulevards of Bobo-Dioulasso, and speeches take place in public spaces. Muslim women who can afford it flaunt dresses and headscarves made from expensive fabrics and tailored according to styles imported from Bamako (Mali) during this holiday. Some women's associations have criticized this ostentatious practice and called for more productive uses of women's time.

The economic crises since the 1990s, especially the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002 to 2007, forced many industries to close and interrupted the rail link with Abidjan, which had an adverse effect on many economic activities in the city. During her long-term research in the old quarter of Koko, where courtyards have been inhabited by the same kin groups for generations, Claudia Roth observed the repercussions of these crises at the household level.<sup>46</sup> Due to unemployment and poverty, the social contract between generations, as well as matrimonial obligations had been reversed. Many women had to take care of their adult, unemployed children, and their husbands. The women were *de facto* breadwinners, or they at least concealed their husbands' incapacity to find work and the ensuing shame of this by employing face-saving measures. For instance, they would boil water in a large cooking pot when other women in the same compound were preparing meals. The vapour from the boiling water would disguise the fact that there was no food.<sup>47</sup> The reversal of roles and obligations created more precarity for elderly people who could no longer rely on their children for their support and who became socially marginalized. The poorest had to fall back on strategies such as participating in celebrations in order to receive a small *saraka* ('sacrifice' in the form of money, cola nuts, or meals), waiting for alms at the neighbourhood mosques, or begging. Poverty was also an obstacle for marriage. Poor men had to postpone marriage until well into their 30s. Women therefore accepted several suitors as a way to make ends meet through small gifts of cash and other presents but risked losing their reputation by doing so. Some couples started living

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<sup>45</sup> For women in Muslim associations in Burkina Faso since the 1970s, see Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Roth 1994; Roth 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Roth 2007.

together in other quarters without telling anyone they were not married, and some women remained unmarried and supported themselves.<sup>48</sup>

While most men in Bobo-Dioulasso have their own means of transport such as cars, motorbikes, scooters, or bicycles, many women have to use shared taxis. Both the male drivers of these taxis and their female customers have developed strategies to make the most of a ride, some of which consist of manipulating socio-cultural norms and values. For instance, older women may manage to coax taxi drivers into giving them a free ride. They address the taxi drivers as ‘sons,’ thereby obliging them to pay deference. At least some drivers comply and accept blessings (*duba*) instead of cash for the ride, because the blessings and the curses of ‘mothers’ are believed to be powerful. For some younger women, the taxi becomes a changing room in which they modify their appearance from a pious, veiled woman to a woman who is “sexily” dressed (i.e., showing her neckline and her legs). This is especially the case for women working at night in bars and clubs, many of whom come from neighbouring West African countries.<sup>49</sup>

## Women’s Songs

One particular practice of Muslim women has been both long-lived and controversial in Bobo-Dioulasso and its surrounding region. *Kurubi* encompasses singing, percussion, dance, and a special costume and hairstyle. Jula-speaking women sing *kurubi* songs during certain nights of Ramadan: the night of the full moon from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> day, and the night before the 27<sup>th</sup> day. Dance and songs also accompany other special occasions such as weddings, full moon nights, or the return of pilgrims from Mecca.

Muslim women have a large repertoire that is constantly renewed. Depending on the occasion, women sing songs with religious themes, praise songs, satirical songs, or songs about love, death, marriage, parenthood, jealousy among co-wives, enmity, etc. Even if no one is named or addressed directly in these songs, the listeners usually understand the implicit criticism aimed at a particular person. *Kurubi* songs are also a way for women to express opinions and needs and exert moral pressure on husbands and co-wives.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Roth 2013. Debevec 2012 also gives examples of individual Muslim women’s lives in Bobo-Dioulasso.

<sup>49</sup> Kanazoé 2022; Nabos 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Werthmann 2016.

The fact that girls and women dance during the most important nights of Ramadan was and is unacceptable to many Muslim men. Religious scholars have repeatedly tried to ban the *kurubi*, but so far without success. In 1969, the *kurubi* was the subject of a public controversy in Bobo-Dioulasso. Some scholars claimed that the dancing and drumming, as well as what they perceived as indecent clothing of women during Ramadan, did not correspond to good Islamic customs and had to stop. A few years earlier, the prominent scholar Marhaba Saganogo had been expelled from Ghana, where he had lived and taught for many years, and returned to his country of origin, Upper Volta.<sup>51</sup> In Bobo-Dioulasso, he was recognized as the first (and so far, only) *mufti* (supreme legal scholar). There are contradictory accounts of whether he personally intervened in the conflict or not, but it was probably no coincidence that this confrontation took place at a historical moment in which the long-established Muslim groups in Bobo-Dioulasso were losing importance and had to assert themselves against reformist currents. However, in their attempt to purify local Islam, they met with determined resistance from women. For them, the *kurubi* was inseparable from Islam. The women argued, among other things, that the scholars of earlier times had not forbidden *kurubi*, even though they were good Muslims, which the living scholars could hardly deny without offending their ancestors (interviews in Bobo-Dioulasso).

The spokesperson for the female opposition was Makossara Saganogo. She managed to mobilize influential allies, including the municipal administration, which recognized the *kurubi* as local cultural heritage and thus continued to allow public performances. Some opponents of *kurubi* threatened to kill the musicians and dancers, so police officers had to protect the women, and some men involved in the conflict were imprisoned. In the end, Makossara and her supporters won.<sup>52</sup> Makossara represents a tradition of strong and confident women who had wealth and power in pre-colonial times. One such woman was Guimbi Ouattara (c. 1836–1919). She belonged to one of the leading warrior families and was a successful trader. She stopped the warlord Samori Touré from attacking the city and hosted the first French visitors to Bobo-Dioulasso. Later, she was almost appointed *chef de canton* by the French colonial administration, but her own male relatives opposed this.<sup>53</sup> She was the first woman of Bobo-Dioulasso to ride in an automobile of the colonial administration.

Although Guimbi may have been an exception, there used to be powerful women who were called *dimusɔ* in Jula-speaking families. A *dimusɔ* was the ‘sister’

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<sup>51</sup> Traoré 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Werthmann 2008; Werthmann 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Hagberg 2003; Hébert 1995.



(sister or cousin on the father's or mother's side) of the lineage head. She advised the lineage head and controlled access to him. The *dimuso* coordinated the various economic and household activities and especially the rotation of the various wives in polygynous marriages. A *dimuso* was entitled to a share of the spoils of war of her lineage, which she could choose and use as she saw fit. Even today, in many families a *dimuso* is responsible for ensuring the correct conduct during wedding rituals and for mediating in the case of marital conflicts (interviews in Bobo-Dioulasso). Makossara Saganogo is one of these powerful women whom even male dignitaries respect, whose voice is heard in important matters, whose blessings are sought and after whom kinspeople name their children. After three marriages and a successful career as a well-travelled trader, she lives in the courtyard of her half-brother Fajabi, the Imam of the mosque in the quarter of Kombougou. She was already over seventy years old at the time of our conversations and recordings between 2007 and 2009, and still alive when I last visited in 2020.

Makossara Saganogo persisted in her struggle not in order to be proved right in disputes with Islamic scholars, but because for her, the *kurubi* is simply part of women's lives. She also managed to raise the significance of this custom as to be viewed as cultural heritage. Since the 1980s, the *kurubi* has become an integral element of cultural festivals and national holidays in Bobo-Dioulasso such as the biennial *Semaine nationale de la culture* and Women's Day. The *kurubi* also serves to make Jula people visible in public as a distinct ethnic group which is a recent political project.<sup>54</sup> However, the *kurubi* is increasingly being pushed out of the sacred sphere of Ramadan. In Bobo-Dioulasso today, some Jula families no longer dance the *kurubi* at all; others only dance during *mingari*, the month after Ramadan, and while wearing a different, non-traditional outfit.

## Conclusion

Roman Loimeier has always stressed that there is no such thing as an "African Islam."<sup>55</sup> There are differences not only between but also within African regions, countries, and cities. These differences emerge in specific local and historical circumstances and reflect both internal and external currents and controversies. What is locally understood to be proper Islamic practice has implications for urban women's everyday lives. These include the extent to which women par-

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<sup>54</sup> Werthmann 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Loimeier 2013, 11.

ticipate in such controversies, their own interpretations of religious injunctions, their everyday domestic and public activities, and their movements through cities.

Regarding everyday activities of women, conditions in the two West African cities of Kano and Bobo-Dioulasso differ. In Kano, the custom of wife seclusion often sets limits on women's participation in public affairs and on their everyday mobility, especially since the implementation of *shari'a* in 2000 when gender segregation in public transport and other domains became mandatory. Nevertheless, women continue to pursue extra-domestic activities and livelihoods. Some point to religious scriptures and moral norms in order to justify their activities. Secluded women continue to work or study from home as they have done for a long time. Recently, Muslim female authors have become more outspoken in pointing out hypocritical attitudes and injustices vis-à-vis women in their Hausa-language novels.

In Bobo-Dioulasso, wife seclusion is uncommon. Muslim women's activities and mobilities tend to be curtailed more by economic than by religious circumstances. To be sure, there are wealthy traders, successful businesswomen, academics, politicians, and administrators, but many less well-off women struggle to keep a foothold in the urban economy and to feed their families. Even though the religion-based norms for Muslim women's lives in Bobo-Dioulasso seem to be more liberal than in Kano from a Western perspective, the example of the controversies about the *kurubi* shows that such norms are always contested.

In both cities, women have to balance their individual ambitions for education, livelihoods, and public roles with "religiously mandated respectability."<sup>56</sup> What is conceived of as proper conduct, e.g., forms of gender segregation or dressing, varies not only historically but also according to individual status, education and means. Elite women have more leeway in interpreting norms and justifying their activities than less educated and lower status women.

For both (and other) cities, we need more systematic and empirical in-depth studies about what it means to be a female Muslim and a city dweller from the women's own perspectives. How do women perceive of religious norms for gender roles and relations in domestic and public realms? How do they relate to the cities or city quarters they live in? What kinds of urban spaces are accessible or inaccessible for them, and for what reasons? In which situations, and vis-à-vis whom, do they have to legitimate their ambitions and activities with reference to religious norms? The answers to such questions will contribute to a re-thinking of the anthropology of Muslim societies in Africa.

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<sup>56</sup> Pierce 2007, 545.

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Muriel Gomez-Perez

# Women and the Hajj in Senegal and Burkina Faso since 1980

## Strategies, Initiatives, and Perceptions\*

Senegal had a quota of 5,822 pilgrims in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Burkina Faso's pilgrim quota in the same year was 3,686.<sup>2</sup> In both countries, the Hajj has always been primarily overseen by men. Although poorly represented among the leadership of travel agencies and groups,<sup>3</sup> both Senegalese and Burkinabè women have been involved in Hajj management at key moments, including the period up to the mid-1990s, when the Senegalese state oversaw the pilgrimage;<sup>4</sup> the period from 1995 to 2002, when the Burkinabè state took over control of the Hajj from leading Islamic associations;<sup>5</sup> and the period beginning in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which saw the gradual privatization of the pilgrimage in both countries.

Beyond certain commonalities, contrasts between the two countries provide interesting opportunities for comparison. For instance, whereas multiple Senegalese women have succeeded in becoming major economic players through their international commercial activities, Burkinabè women have found far fewer such opportunities. Meanwhile, Sufi Islam has played a dominant role in shaping Hajj management in both countries. In Senegal, it has come to be treated as the state's

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\* Translated by Steven Watt.

1 Ebang 2022.

2 Sourwema 2022.

3 In a post-2002 context of liberalization, the Senegalese and Burkinabè governments each established a delegation or commission to develop a framework for managing their relationship with private agencies. As private companies began playing a larger role in managing the Hajj following the turn of the millennium, the Senegalese and Burkinabè governments encouraged travel agencies to form groups. According to the Facebook page of the Délégation Générale du Pèlerinage, Dakar had a total of 286 agencies (organized into 46 groups) in 2018, 10 of which were headed by women. Meanwhile, in Ouagadougou, none of the city's 76 agencies (organized into four groups) were led by a woman.

4 For an overview of the State and the Hajj in Senegal, see Jourde, Brossier, and Gomez-Perez 2021, 7.

5 The Communauté Musulmane de Haute-Volta, which later became the Communauté Musulmane du Burkina Faso (CMBF), had overseen the Hajj from 1962 to 1979. Between 1979 and 1995, it shared this responsibility with two other Islamic associations: the Mouvement Sunnite (MS) and the Association Islamique de la Tidjaniyya (AIT), see Oubda 2003, 37–39.

partner of choice,<sup>6</sup> whereas reformist movements have found themselves altogether excluded from the process. By contrast, in Burkina Faso, reformist Islam continues to be involved, a situation that has had a major impact on perceptions of women's activities.

The handful of studies that have addressed the importance and role of West African women in organizing the Hajj have done so without taking a comparative perspective. They have, nevertheless, highlighted the active participation of Senegalese women in the moral economy of the Hajj, a topic where questions of faith, prosperity, and social prestige are intertwined.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, other authors have identified three generations of female Hajj entrepreneurs,<sup>8</sup> thereby demonstrating how the Hajj market does not allow “individuals originating from social peripheries to gain a foothold within dominant social structures;” how “the female founders and directors of travel agencies already enjoyed high social status;”<sup>9</sup> and how these women know how to deal effectively with the state while relying on different networks (family, community, professional, etc.).<sup>10</sup>

Such works build on a large body of literature focused on three processes; women's active involvement in associations since the 1980s (in both countries),<sup>11</sup> Senegalese women's ability to achieve commercial success in a globalized economy,<sup>12</sup> and the emergence of women as authority figures through their participation in the public sphere.<sup>13</sup> These processes allow for assessing dynamics of autonomy, agency, and even emancipation.<sup>14</sup>

This article explores the life courses of female figures who have played a significant role in Hajj management, with the aim to analyze the strategies they have employed when dealing with the state and various religious stakeholders. I draw inspiration from Roman Loimeier's approach to analyzing the lives of “major reformist personalities” as a means of identifying “the features of Islamic reform in Africa.”<sup>15</sup>

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**6** Jourde, Brossier, and Gomez-Perez 2021, 8.

**7** Hardy and Semin 2009, 139–53.

**8** The pioneers since the 1980s, the seniors since the 1990s and 2000s, and the newcomers since the 2010s, in Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 106.

**9** Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 107.

**10** Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 115–17.

**11** Augis 2012, 539–77; Mbow 1997, 148–59; Vitale 2009, 229–43; Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016, 185–209.

**12** Marfaing 2018, 411–43.

**13** Hill 2018; Gomez-Perez and Ba 2015, 175–203; Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016, 185–209.

**14** Saint-Lary 2018, 275–300; Saint-Lary 2019.

**15** Loimeier 2003, 237–62; Loimeier 2005, 29–47.

By looking at the challenges faced by female entrepreneurs, I show how the Hajj has been a source of both opportunities and paradoxes. Indeed, whereas some women have earned universal recognition for their Hajj-related achievements, others have met with varying levels of success as they struggle with power dynamics, competition, and the weight of social norms. Despite facing criticism for some of their activities and their religious affiliations, the diverse strategies employed by these women to resist and persist reflect both great creativity and different forms of agency.

This chapter relies on the notions of resistance agency, instrumental agency, and conscious agency to gain a deeper understanding of these developments. In this context, resistance agency “focuses on the agency of women participating in gender-traditional religions who attempt to challenge or change some aspect of the religion.”<sup>16</sup> For its part, instrumental agency sheds light on how “religion interacts with other factors in women’s lives.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, conscious agency refers to how human beings are endowed with a “reflexive consciousness” that allows them to observe their own actions through the eyes of another. This produces an “experience of acting, before, during, and after the action.”<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the notion of empowerment allows for an appreciation of how the power to act can be maximized, how choices are transformed into action, and how action generates “a creative power that makes it possible to accomplish things [...] and an inner power [...] related to self-confidence.”<sup>19</sup>

This study<sup>20</sup> involved online research in Senegalese and Burkinabè newspapers,<sup>21</sup> as well as semi-structured interviews conducted in Dakar (June–July 2018 and February–March 2022) and Ouagadougou (February–March 2019) with women who had founded or managed travel agencies,<sup>22</sup> representatives of government agencies, and leaders of Islamic associations. The chapter begins by analyzing how women’s strategies for adapting to government policy attest to their agency, before exploring how negative reactions to their activities and prominence has tended to limit their room for maneuver.

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**16** Burke 2012, 123.

**17** Burke 2012, 124.

**18** Haicault 2012, 15.

**19** Calvès 2009, 739; Parpart 2002, 338–42.

**20** The study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) (435-2016-0682, 2016–2023).

**21** I would like to acknowledge the work of my research assistant, Bertin Yameogo.

**22** In accordance with the guidelines issued by my university’s ethics committee, I have maintained the anonymity of interviewees, except in the case of well-known figures and deceased individuals.



## The Hajj, Women's Activities, and Government Policy

Collaboration, confrontation, cunning, and avoidance are some of the key strategies employed by Senegalese and Burkinabè women in dealing with the state since the 1980s. This chapter shows how, keen to link their community/religious interests with their business interests, these women have given a voice to the expectations and demands of various would-be Hajj pilgrims by taking positions on different issues. Furthermore, beyond documenting evidence of cooperation with the state, this chapter demonstrates how women have relied on their creativity in not only resisting government policy but also handling power dynamics involving Islamic associations, economic partners, and the state.

### Cooperation with Government: Serving State Interests or Adapting to State Control

Two women in particular – one in Dakar and one in Ouagadougou – have played central roles in organizing the Hajj in cooperation with their respective national governments. In Dakar, Hajja Dior Diop had been, since 1984, the only woman committed to “working with the state and arranging for pilgrims to travel with the government.”<sup>23</sup> Introduced to the world of business at a young age by Serigne Cheikh Gaindé Fatma Mbacké,<sup>24</sup> Diop has been a prominent trader since the late 1970s. In 1973, she began travelling as a volunteer with groups of pilgrims taking the international route.<sup>25</sup> Such groups were mainly composed of women interested in capitalizing on the strong link between the Hajj and business.<sup>26</sup>

By 1980, pilgrims were facing growing administrative delays at the airport in Dakar, and Diop oversaw cooperation with the government as a necessary means

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<sup>23</sup> Hajja Dior Diop. Interview, Dakar, June 27, 2018.

<sup>24</sup> He was the grandson of the founder of the Mouride *ṭarīqa* (pl. *ṭuruq*), Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba.

<sup>25</sup> This route allowed businesswomen to stop in different African and European cities, where they could buy and sell goods before and during the pilgrimage.

<sup>26</sup> The experiences of successive generations of women involved in Hajj management bear witness to this connection between commerce and the pilgrimage. See Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 108–12.

of minimizing any negative impacts on her business activities.<sup>27</sup> This approach was made all the more necessary when, “in 1980, [the government] began prohibiting people wanting to perform the Hajj from taking the international route.” It also began requiring “large numbers of chaperones.”<sup>28</sup> Diop exercised instrumental agency by weighing the pros and cons of cooperation with the government and by making informed decisions based on the need to reconcile religious imperatives (chaperones) and economic interests.

Diop’s efforts to align her interests with those of the government were solidified by her decision to create the Arafat *fisabilillâh* in 1994,<sup>29</sup> with the aim “of helping large numbers of Muslims who want to perform the Hajj but who lack the means to do so.”<sup>30</sup> She emphasized how, “almost every year, there were between 500 and 600 pilgrims to help fill the government quota” once they started travelling as part of the official state delegation.<sup>31</sup> Her adoption of a long-term strategy, her determined efforts to align her activities with government policy, and her achievement of a measurable result in the form of an increased share of pilgrims provide examples of a conscious agency and, more broadly, reflect an acceptance of the Senegalese social contract.<sup>32</sup>

This convergence of interests highlights the extent to which:

the field of pilgrimage-related activities is driven by a collection of private and public stakeholders who constitute a social network [...] whose reach extends far beyond matters directly related to religious travel [and] that maintains important ties with the world of female associations, which help to invigorate it.<sup>33</sup>

Diop’s close cooperation with the state was even more remarkable given how others were unable to follow her example<sup>34</sup> and how it served to maintain the

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**27** Meanwhile, the Caliph General of the Mouride *ṭariqa* was officially distancing himself from the government as a way of expressing his dissatisfaction with its economic policies.

**28** Hajja Dior Diop. Interview, Dakar, June 27, 2018.

**29** A form of fundraising “based on voluntary subscriptions, proceeds from which are not redistributed. [...] It skillfully sidesteps the principle of shared rotating credit, fundamental to [classic] tontines, relying solely on the shared proceeds from subscriptions.” Hardy and Semin 2009, 143.

**30** In 2018, more than 5,000 people were escorted to Mecca. Hajja Dior Diop. Interview, Dakar, June 27, 2018.

**31** Hajja Dior Diop. Interview, Dakar, June 27, 2018.

**32** Cruise O’Brien, Diop, and Diouf 2002.

**33** Hardy and Semin 2009, 142.

**34** By contrast, the *fisabilillâhs* established in the first decade of the twenty-first century were associated with private travel agencies, in keeping with the general trend toward Hajj privatization. In 2002–2003, Oulimata Dioum created a community-based economic consortium – a type

Mouride *ṭarīqa*'s "social and religious influence," a unique aspect of the Senegalese context.<sup>35</sup>

The situation in Ouagadougou was different but just as unique. It was marked by the selection of a female senior official, Mariam Nikiéma, to lead the official state Hajj delegation in 1996. Announced by Foreign Affairs Minister Ablassé Ouedraogo,<sup>36</sup> this appointment broke with previous government policy in three important ways. To begin with, it was the first time a woman had held the position. Furthermore, it signalled the state's clear intention to take back control of the Hajj, after decades of oversight by Islamic associations. Finally, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MATD) considered appointing a woman a matter of "national interest,"<sup>37</sup> insofar as it would burnish Burkina Faso's image in the eyes of Saudi authorities, who had expressed concern over the failures of the associations previously responsible for organizing the pilgrimage.<sup>38</sup>

Nikiéma played a leading role in developing new Hajj measures introduced by the Burkinabè government, especially by helping draft a set of regulations designed to avoid a repeat of the issues encountered during the 1996 pilgrimage.<sup>39</sup> Between 1997 and 1999, she "fought for women to be included in the delegation so they could see to the needs of older women" participating in the Hajj.<sup>40</sup> By defying the hegemonic voices of male Islamic association leaders, her efforts reflect a form of resistance agency.

Furthermore, Nikiéma's struggle was aligned with three significant trends: the growing presence of women among pilgrims departing for Mecca, women whose unique needs require adequate attention; the shared recognition among both French-speaking and Arabic-speaking women that their fellow Muslims lack familiarity with basic rites of Islam;<sup>41</sup> and the emergence of a new wave of

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of organization known as a *groupe d'intérêt économique* or GIE – for women interested in paying into a Hajj fund. Named Tayssiroul Hassir, this GIE later became a travel agency. Interview, Dakar, March 17, 2022.

35 Loimeier 2016, 64.

36 Zabsonré 1996; Yéro 1996.

37 Mariam Nikiéma. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 18, 2019.

38 Sidibé 1996.

39 This document set out the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in organizing the Hajj.

40 Mariam Nikiéma. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 18, 2019.

41 This led to the creation of the Organisation des Femmes Musulmanes du Burkina in 1989 and later the Cercle d'Étude, de Recherche et de Formation Islamique (CERFI), which organized delegations of women to guide their fellow Muslims. Saint-Lary 2019, 247–49. The same concerns led to the creation of a women's section within the Al-Itihad al-Islami association in 1991, Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016; Gomez-Perez 2016, 49.

female activists who have been educated at modern *madrasas*, who preach to broad audiences, and who teach other women about their rights and duties in Islam.<sup>42</sup> In a form of resistance agency, some of these women have adopted alternative discourses, based on new readings of the Quran, in an effort to renegotiate gender relations.<sup>43</sup>

Comparing the two countries also makes it possible to identify a third way, one that involves adapting to state control through either avoidance or negotiation – which ultimately represents two sides of the same coin. Indeed, although some Senegalese women have sought to avoid any situations that might compromise their autonomy, a fluctuating political context has nevertheless strongly influenced their prospects.<sup>44</sup> In practice, avoidance has proved an untenable strategy in the long term. After all, a close relationship must be maintained with state agencies responsible for reviewing the annual reports of private businesses, verifying compliance with regulations, and assigning quotas.

As for Burkina Faso, female entrepreneurs have tended to opt for tacit engagement with the state as a means of expanding their business activities in a Hajj market that, while still competitive, offers fewer opportunities than its Senegalese counterpart. As a result, many women have recognized the benefits of having contacts at government ministries to facilitate the process of growing their businesses. The founder of the Armelle Voyages agency in Ouagadougou provides a perfect example. She has worked in the tourism industry since the 1980s and her contacts within the Ministry of Tourism have helped her obtain a license and open a travel agency. In 2005, she was even able to buy a plot of land in the Zangouettin neighbourhood,<sup>45</sup> where she constructed two buildings that were subsequently rented to the government.<sup>46</sup> All these developments reflect an opportunistic relationship between a leading private operator and the state, a relationship based on shared but contingent interests.

Alongside these strategies based on cooperation with the state or alignment with government policy, other female figures have taken a more oppositional stance.

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<sup>42</sup> Gomez-Perez 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Gomez-Perez 2018a, 216 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 117.

<sup>45</sup> The land was purchased as part of a highly controversial urban development project, called the Zone d'aménagement commerciale et administrative (ZACA), that required widespread evictions.

<sup>46</sup> Licia. Interview, March 21, 2019.

## Women Acting in Defiance of Government Policy: Alternating between Confrontation, Cunning, and Avoidance

At different times, direct conflict with the state has occurred in both Senegal and Burkina Faso. In Dakar, during the 1980s, it arose amid the state monopoly over the organization of the Hajj and the appointment of Rawane Mbaye, a staunch opponent of liberalization, as commissioner (1984–2001). Although women were not at the forefront of the fight for liberalization, some aspects of the life trajectory of a woman named Mina, who jointly ran the Saloum Voyages travel agency, deserve consideration.

When Mina became a sales representative with Air Afrique in the late 1980s, she decided to “join forces with some traders to open an agency in July 1994” and to get involved “in the Hajj by calling on the services of Tonton Yamar Gueye in 1995.”<sup>47</sup>

I sold tickets, I directed pilgrims to Yamar Gueye who arranged their trips through a GIE. [...] Everyone managed their own pilgrims [...] Our government did not recognize us. Rawane Mbaye required us to comply with the accommodation requirements. [...] We kept a low profile, holding passports and visas in the Gambia and Côte d’Ivoire until we were recognized in 2000.<sup>48</sup>

Cooperating with Gueye was a significant act of resistance to the state, since he had been an early proponent of liberalization. After having coordinated the official government delegation in the early 1970s, he began transporting pilgrims himself in 1977. He opted for a competitively priced airline rather than the government-approved carrier and secured his own contracts for accommodations in Saudi Arabia.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, Mina adopted a pragmatic approach to sharing knowhow between her own younger generation of stakeholders and an older one represented by Gueye.<sup>50</sup> Seeking support from Gueye also allowed Mina to benefit from the expertise of an ardent supporter of the international route,<sup>51</sup> favoured by traders interested in buying and selling goods around the time of the Hajj season. Furthermore, Mina had taken care to develop relationships with airlines as well

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<sup>47</sup> Mina. Interview, July 2, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> In 1995, Mina had 54 pilgrims. Mina. Interviews. July 2, 2018 and March 23, 2022.

<sup>49</sup> As a result, Gueye faced various administrative impediments introduced by Mbaye, Yamar Gueye. Interview, March 1, 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Mina was born in 1960 and Yamar Gueye was born in 1935.

<sup>51</sup> Yamar Gueye. Interview, March 5, 2022.

as a bank so she could expand her activities while having access to financial support as needed.<sup>52</sup>

The decision to seek help from Gueye ultimately proved visionary, as the creation of GIEs (see above) allowed for the emergence and establishment of private Hajj operators.<sup>53</sup> Women who fit the profile of “merchants and business leaders” have also been heavily involved in establishing GIEs “to develop travel services for pilgrims.”<sup>54</sup> Through these organizations, many women have been able to contribute to the liberalization of Hajj travel.

When considered over the long term, Mina’s determined efforts highlight her ability to exercise conscious agency. By gradually acquiring the necessary resources and making informed choices, she was able to achieve her business goals (fostering relationships with a Hajj pioneer, traders, airlines, and a bank). Her boldness, cunning, confidence, and her adoption of strategic and sustainable Hajj-related positions all reflected a high level of empowerment in the pursuit of success. Mina’s agency, Saloum Voyages, is located in the affluent Plateau neighbourhood of Dakar.<sup>55</sup> In 2018, she was assigned a quota of 243 pilgrims while also leading a travel agency group responsible for another 357.<sup>56</sup>

By contrast, in Ouagadougou, women have individually and jointly challenged government policy. A turning point came in 2012, when travel agencies (some founded by women) and citizens marched on the MATD to “tell the minister that the Hajj should be entrusted to [private] agencies.”<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, a businesswoman<sup>58</sup> drafted a list of 42 demands for remedying issues with the management of the Hajj. She also launched a newspaper, called *La Voix du pèlerin* (*The Pilgrim’s Voice*).<sup>59</sup>

However, evasive strategies were likely to be used in the pursuit of other economic objectives. For instance, lowering the cost of air travel required ending the “monopoly over transportation and Hajj management enjoyed by STMB Tours

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52 By securing an overdraft in 2000, she was able to “boldly” start offering three classes of service for the Hajj (Classes VIP A+, A and classic categories), Mina. Interviews.

53 Many travel agency groups were created by merging GIEs.

54 Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 106.

55 Currently on the Independence Square.

56 The group’s quota was moderately high (thirteen groups were responsible for fewer than 350 pilgrims, whereas ten were responsible for more than 400).

57 Sava. Interview, Ouagadougou, February 26, 2019.

58 She described herself as “the first woman to open a school and office supplies store in 1983.” Kadia. Interview, Ouagadougou, February 26, 2019.

59 Sawadogo 2012.

between 2008 and 2010.”<sup>60</sup> In defiance of this monopoly, six agencies, two of which had been founded by women, jointly established the Organisation des agences de voyage pour le pèlerinage (OAVP) in 2008. The aim was to secure an aircraft and a contract for accommodations in Saudi Arabia.<sup>61</sup>

Although the government responded to this joint initiative by designating STMB Tours, run by Ahmadou Bangrin, as the country’s sole Hajj transportation provider and signing contracts for accommodations in Saudi Arabia for 3000 pilgrims, contemporaneous media coverage of the OAVP<sup>62</sup> raised awareness of the Hajj as a source of new business opportunities. Despite how closely aligned state interests were with those of the CMBF and STMB Tours,<sup>63</sup> the OAVP succeeded in “transporting more than 600 pilgrims on regular Ethiopian Airlines flights”<sup>64</sup> after Oumarou Kanazoé, a leading Burkinabè financier, bankrolled the upstart alliance’s operations<sup>65</sup> and interceded with government authorities on its behalf.

Under these circumstances, only a few women could assemble the ingredients for success. For example, Saskia had access to Kanazoé through her involvement with the OAVP and as the head of a leading travel agency in Ouagadougou. She had also been the women’s Hajj representative for all the country’s Islamic associations from 1997 to 2006,<sup>66</sup> in addition to being a well-known preacher. Another woman, named Banga, kept her distance from the OAVP (as discussed below), preferring to rely on “business contacts and an acquaintance at RAM [Royal Air Maroc]”<sup>67</sup> to help ensure her transactions were carried out. She also noted how she benefitted from financial and logistical support provided by Kanazoé, who was her father’s friend.

The Hajj has also proven a source of paradoxes. For instance, despite its opposition to government policy and through its relationship with Kanazoé, the

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**60** Bouba. Interview, Ouagadougou, February 19, 2019. Originally a trucking company, it later became involved in chartering flights and operated as a travel agency.

**61** Sita. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 22, 2019.

**62** Bila 2009.

**63** One agency head emphasized how “the government wanted the agencies to do business with STMB.” Ramda. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 11, 2019; Ouédraogo 2008.

**64** Madi. Interview with a former member of the OAVP. Ouagadougou, February 21, 2019.

**65** Caught off guard by the government’s steadfast support of STMB Tours, the OAVP had to reimburse a bank loan taken out to fund its activities. OAVP coordinator Louis Yameogo (Dame 2008) was called upon to approach Kanazoé and convince him to advance the necessary amount. Sita and Licia. Interviews. Ouagadougou, March 21, 2019.

**66** Saskia. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 6, 2019.

**67** Banga. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 15, 2019.

OAVP found itself providing political and financial support to President Blaise Compaoré and his party, the Congress for Democracy and Progress. This turn of events reflects the fact that Kanazoé was a key figure in the public sphere, and the business community, having simultaneously presided over the *Chambre de commerce et d'industrie* (1995–2011), the *Conseil national du patronat Burkinabè* (1997–2011), the leading association such as the CMBF (2004–11) and the *Fédération des Associations Islamiques du Burkina* (2005–11).

The country's largely impenetrable political, economic, and religious landscape was also shaped by the CMBF's control of most mosques, which automatically gave the organization tremendous visibility, not to mention an unrivalled means of sharing its message with potential pilgrims.<sup>68</sup> In this context, the OAVP and especially the women affiliated with it lacked any means of overcoming the "traditional Moaga culture, which is predominant in Ouagadougou, [and] is extremely hierarchical and gerontocratic."<sup>69</sup> Although this private-sector initiative proved short-lived,<sup>70</sup> it was by no means a flash in the pan. Rather, it paved the way for a gradual process of liberalization<sup>71</sup> that brought certain women, including Saskia, to the forefront of Hajj management efforts.

Alongside collective efforts led by the OAVP, some took a more individual approach. The activities of a businesswoman named Banga provide a good example. A typist by profession, she succeeded in founding her own travel agency, albeit after many twists and turns. This is how she described her career path:

We received an offer from a Senegalese lady that [...] was very interesting. She would provide transportation (via a Saudi company), as well as accommodations. We went to see Oumarou Kanazoé at the CMBF [...] but it didn't work out. We had miscalculated. We didn't know that the CMBF had been getting a cut...<sup>72</sup> Those who signed for accommodations. [...] In 2007, I recruited seventeen pilgrims, I reserved with Royal Air Maroc (RAM). We requested visas through the CMBF. In 2008, I arranged for visas through other agencies.<sup>73</sup> The following year, I was summoned before the National Police and told that I was not allowed to provide transportation. I carried on, I had, I think, seventy-five pilgrims and RAM cancelled our

**68** Pilgrims gathered in the Grand Mosque of Ouagadougou, which was managed by the CMBF, to receive instructions before departing for Mecca.

**69** Madore 2020, 631.

**70** Saudi Arabia and the MATD agreed on her suspension following the 2008 Hajj. Afia. Interview with a member of the OAVP. Ouagadougou, February 27, 2019.

**71** STMB Tours was forced to withdraw from the Hajj market in 2011, following years of complaints from pilgrims. Kanazoé 2012.

**72** It was receiving payouts.

**73** Namely, the OAVP. Banga. Interview, Ouagadougou, February 27, 2019.



seats. The airline had received a letter from the MATD. I called one of my cousins in Abidjan to have him request the visas from there. STMB went to the minister and forced me to fly with them. In 2009, I requested official approval to personally transport my pilgrims. I don't use resellers, I choose the guides and I escort the pilgrims myself.<sup>74</sup>

Banga's story underscores the extent to which her efforts were guided by perseverance, tenacity, and flexibility. By capitalizing on every available opportunity to raise her profile in the Hajj market, by drawing the right conclusions regarding what actions to take and how to increase her level of autonomy, and by demonstrating professionalism and an awareness of influence dynamics involving various stakeholders,<sup>75</sup> she exercised both instrumental and conscious agency while also benefitting from financial and logistical support from Kanazocé.<sup>76</sup>

Even if the women in question achieved varying levels of success, they consistently demonstrated the abilities to act, resist, lead, adapt, and network. I will now turn to the question of how their activities were perceived by different Hajj stakeholders.

## Contrasting Opinions on Women's Roles in Organizing the Hajj

Despite being a minority in decision-making bodies responsible for Hajj management, some women have succeeded in reshaping attitudes through their activities, decisions, and initiatives. Sometimes garnering respect, their involvement has also been met with strong criticism. These divergent reactions provide an opportunity to analyze a tight web of interconnected processes, including the interplay between self-affirmation and community-mindedness, the entrenchment and growing visibility of competitive thinking among private travel operators, and the influence of social norms.

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<sup>74</sup> Banga. Interviews. Ouagadougou, February 27, 2019 and March 14, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Her agency, Zahra Voyage, was located near the city's main market.

<sup>76</sup> Banga. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 14, 2019.

## Women Earning Respect and Recognition

Different Senegalese and Burkinabè women have earned recognition and a measure of respect for launching initiatives that promote solidarity within the community of believers and for playing a pioneering role in the organization of the Hajj. Hajja Dior Diop represents the archetypal pioneer, as a woman with close ties to the government who has focused on promoting solidarity. She launched the very first *fisabilillâh* to support women's participation in the pilgrimage, taking a very original approach that relied on subscriptions<sup>77</sup> to organize religious gatherings in Dakar during the first week of Ramadan. In turn, these gatherings were used as an opportunity to raise funds through charitable contributions and raffles.<sup>78</sup> Despite criticism from Salafi fundamentalists,<sup>79</sup> this *fisabilillâh* has been recognized for its longevity (in operation for about three decades), its size (32,000 members in 2018), and its ability to instill a sense of belonging within a large and socially diverse Muslim community.

Three other factors help explain the amount of respect garnered by Diop. First, although she was an influential businesswoman and president of the Réseau africain pour le soutien de l'entrepreneuriat des femmes (African network for the support of women's entrepreneurship [RASEF]),<sup>80</sup> her career success and leading role in creating a *fisabilillâh* were not merely a matter of self-affirmation.<sup>81</sup> Piety and solidarity were both central motivations in her efforts to respond to community needs. Second, by embodying these values through her personal commitment, she acquired a stature of authority that was vastly increased by her determined and highly visible action in the public sphere, as well as her network of contacts within the Mouride *ṭarīqa*. She strengthened a tradition of female authority figures within the Senegalese *ṭuruq* and in other West African contexts,<sup>82</sup> but one that has failed to take hold in Burkina Faso.<sup>83</sup> Finally, Diop has achieved a unique combination of economic success, support from the Mouride *ṭarīqa*, and recognition from successive governing regimes.

She has escaped criticism for her strategy of cooperating with the state for three main reasons. To begin with, many individuals who run private travel agen-

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77 "In the beginning, a subscription was 500 CFA francs; in 2018, it was 5000 CFA francs." Diop. Interview.

78 Hajja Dior Diop. Interview, Dakar, June 27, 2018.

79 Hardy and Semin 2009, 144–46.

80 Dabo 2018.

81 Guilhaumou 2012, 25–34.

82 Frede and Hill 2014, 131–65; Hill 2018; Madore and Gomez-Perez 2016, 187–88.

83 Vitale 2009, 239–40.

cies simply take her unparalleled influence for granted, given how long this relationship has been in place and the fact that the government's quota has declined over the years.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, this relationship with the state supersedes any concerns about competition because of the longstanding influence of Mouridism. The latter's importance has only grown since the election of Abdoulaye Wade as president<sup>85</sup> whose "his erratic style of politics" has also played a critical role.<sup>86</sup> Finally, challenging the relationship would be doubly counterproductive. On the one hand, it would constitute an attack on the very principle of solidarity promoted by the *fisabilillâh* and made possible by donations from influential figures ("wealthy political and religious leaders, popular musicians and sports stars, migrants").<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, it would involve undermining a social consensus supported by the *fisabilillâh* and evident during religious gatherings, a consensus that serves as the basis for an emerging form of community life, one where "new sources of solidarity, identity, and meaning" proliferate.<sup>88</sup> This consensus is also evident at religious conferences. More broadly, it reflects a situation where Islam plays a central role in everyday life, through "forms of established religion (mosques, pictures of saints) as well as 'crossovers' in totally secular contexts such as fashion, rap music, and sports."<sup>89</sup>

Other women have received some degree of recognition for their pioneering roles in organizing the Hajj and for their perceived status as "fighters."<sup>90</sup> Based on discussions with various private Hajj operators, Ada appears to fit this profile. A shorthand typist by training, she seized the opportunity to follow a new career path by pursuing international business opportunities (in the Maghreb, Europe, and Asia) when her employer, the National Development Bank of Senegal, offered early retirement to its older staff members:

In 1989, I wanted to leave. I saw that there was more money to be made in business, so I went into business. [...] I travelled to Morocco, France, Hong Kong, China, Bangkok. [...] My first Hajj was in 1979, with the Senegalese delegation. [Starting] in 1987, I returned with the government every year until 1999, to do business. [...] I thought about opening the agency to organise the Hajj, with female traders, my friends, my husband, my chil-

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**84** Jourde, Brossier, and Gomez-Perez 2021; Seck 2016. The issue of quotas has been a source of tension between the state and the private sector, especially since the national quota was reduced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ndiaye 2022.

**85** Gervasoni and Gueye 2005, 621–39.

**86** Loimeier 2009, 238.

**87** Hardy and Semin 2009, 146.

**88** Marie 2007, 178.

**89** Loimeier 2009, 239.

**90** Binta. Interview, Dakar, June 22, 2018.

dren. But creating the agency was a personal decision. [...] I lead a group of agencies and in 2016, we transported 636 people. Until 2004–2005, I signed contracts on the spot. I've always chosen good hotels.<sup>91</sup>

Ada's years of international business experience have allowed her to engage in networking while acquiring social capital and professional expertise. As a result, she has found herself among the leading female entrepreneurs in Dakar. Furthermore, she is credited with personally founding the As Salam travel agency in 2000 before heading up a major Hajj travel group;<sup>92</sup> an extremely rare accomplishment for a Senegalese woman. These achievements highlight her high levels of autonomy, self-affirmation, and empowerment. This is especially true given how her business activities reflect a flexible mindset and a willingness to take on significant challenges and risks.<sup>93</sup> A long series of informed choices attest to her empowerment: altering her career path to engage in large-scale business activities; establishing a travel agency on her own, while involving family and friends; engaging in activities that mixed business and religion, while avoiding conflicts between the two and maintaining her professional image; and celebrating her achievements by displaying signs of success, without actually uttering the word. These various factors explain not only her rise to success but also her enviable position in the Hajj market. As a result, when seven agencies, including her own, were suspended for having taken on too many pilgrims, they were able to join forces to challenge the decision, which they saw as typical of the "old guard's" mismanagement of the Hajj and the kind of error that should not be repeated.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, other women have faced criticism; a sign that, in Hajj-related matters, religious and social dynamics play out alongside major political considerations.

## Women Facing Criticism, Delegitimization, and Isolation

In Ouagadougou, women playing a prominent role in organizing the Hajj have been attacked based on their gender, amid the continued dominance of Islamic

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<sup>91</sup> Ada. Interview, Dakar, June 29, 2018.

<sup>92</sup> "En 2016, 636 personnes étaient convoyées," Ada. Interview, Dakar, June 29, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> These factors are discussed in relation to the career paths followed by more recent generations of women in Gomez-Perez and Jourde 2021, 102–12.

<sup>94</sup> Mara, an agency manager. Interview, Dakar, March 21, 2022.

associations and their aging leaders.<sup>95</sup> Insofar as “it is the men who take the lead in organizing [the Hajj] and the women come along to help the women reach Mecca,”<sup>96</sup> those female entrepreneurs who have a strong presence in the public sphere, who are recognized for being active in associations and for their religious knowledge, face a complex reality.<sup>97</sup>

Consider the case of Saskia. Despite having a strong presence in the public sphere and playing a prominent role in community associations (see above), she has continued to face barriers:

Through her many interactions, speaking, negotiating in Arabic to find good lodgings, Saskia had to endure criticism because she was a woman. I had to explain to Oumarou Kanazoé that women did not want to take the place of men, but that female pilgrims felt better when they had female delegates.<sup>98</sup>

These remarks are interesting because of how they reveal an intercession strategy that draws on an “ideology of agreement”<sup>99</sup> to achieve social consensus. In the context of the Hajj, such an approach seeks to ensure community unity and promotes the gradual inclusion of women while avoiding direct challenges to gender-based social norms.

Given the strength of prevailing social norms, the appointment of Mariam Nikiéma to lead the Hajj delegation was nothing less than a bombshell. Islamic organizations – and especially the Mouvement Sunnite (MS), which had begun promoting an orthodox agenda calling for the exclusion of women from Hajj-related affairs – saw the decision as adding insult to injury.<sup>100</sup> A representative of this organization described selecting a woman to lead the delegation as “foolishness,”<sup>101</sup> since it was contrary to the founding principles of Islam, based on his patriarchal reading of the Quran.<sup>102</sup> He added: “in certain matters, a woman cannot be a leader, an imam. [...] Upon arrival,<sup>103</sup> she was unable to enter certain places.”<sup>104</sup> Prevalent for years, the normative discourse used to discredit Nikiéma

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**95** Madore 2020, 630.

**96** Aissa, who oversaw women’s activities within the CMBF. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 1, 2019.

**97** Aissa. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 1, 2019.

**98** Aissa. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 1, 2019.

**99** Laurent 2010, 90.

**100** The situation began to change after the turn of the millennium. See Gomez-Perez 2016, 52.

**101** Diapa. Interview, February 25, 2019.

**102** Lussier and Fish 2016, 32–34.

**103** Mecca.

**104** Diapa. Interview, February 25, 2019.

endorsed the “strict spatial segregation of the sexes”<sup>105</sup> in a context where “most women had neither the tools nor the freedom to speak out.”<sup>106</sup> By contrast, “in Senegal, it was already commonplace, outside the religious sphere, for women to speak out.”<sup>107</sup> Also, the remarks of the MS representative contrast with those made by a male CMBF activist who worked closely with Nikiéma and had extensive experience with the Hajj: “Mrs. Nikiéma was not invited to the men’s meetings. [...] She did her job well, [...] had experience.”<sup>108</sup> This view aligns with the opinions expressed by pilgrims who considered the 1996 Hajj a success.<sup>109</sup>

In truth, appeals to orthodoxy were little more than a distraction from the real issue, which lay elsewhere. Crucially, Nikiéma’s appointment was made as part of urgent efforts to address revelations of fraud involving resellers,<sup>110</sup> as well as the poor living and travel conditions encountered by Hajj pilgrims.<sup>111</sup> Her determination to improve the pilgrimage experience and secure more comfortable accommodations<sup>112</sup> therefore posed a very serious threat to the healthy profit margins the associations had allowed resellers to enjoy on bookings.<sup>113</sup> By rejecting the established system, she became a thorn in the side of Islamic associations and resellers alike.

Meanwhile, the Hajj market in Ouagadougou produced its own paradoxes. For instance, controversy surrounded the fact that two Catholic women were among the three female entrepreneurs who headed Hajj travel agencies. One of them, the founder of the Armelle Voyages agency, had been involved with the OAVP. She later claimed to have been the victim of religious discrimination<sup>114</sup> when she was excluded from the Hajj by Saudi Arabia and the Commission Nationale d’Organisation du Pélerinage à La Mecque (CNOPM). By contrast, other OAVP stakeholders interviewed during my fieldwork had been allowed to pursue their operations, with varying levels of success.

Religious discrimination also appears to have limited opportunities for the founder of the other agency in question, Keysias Travel. In addition to “her exclusion from meetings,” she described various forms of pressure: “on the MATD not

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**105** Gomez-Perez 2018a, 214.

**106** Gomez-Perez 2018a, 207.

**107** Gomez-Perez 2018a, 207.

**108** Kara. Interview, Ouagadougou, March 11, 2019.

**109** Zabsonré 1996.

**110** Zabsonré 1996.

**111** Oubda 2003, 37–9; Belem 1994; Kanazoé 1996.

**112** Zabsonré 1996.

**113** Cissé 2012, 141; Zabsonré 1996.

**114** Licia. Interview, Ouagadougou, 21 March 2019.

to grant her a license,” “to have [her] removed from the Al Nasr group,”<sup>115</sup> and “on I. Ouedraogo<sup>116</sup> of Africa Voyages not to join her group, so she would not be allowed to help organize the Hajj.”<sup>117</sup>

The fact remains that, beyond instances of religious discrimination, female entrepreneurs have also had to deal with the extreme competition among travel agencies and Islamic associations. After all, agencies “depended on the associations,”<sup>118</sup> each of which sought to gain visibility among pilgrims and promote the legitimacy of its own branch of Islam. These two women, who led major travel agencies with strategic and central locations in Ouagadougou, found themselves at the very heart of this competition. The latter proved even more costly because of how atypical their religious affiliation was in the context of the Hajj, coupled with the need for each agency head to align themselves with a group to be able to participate in organizing the pilgrimage. As a result, these women had very little room for maneuver, despite being well established in the tourism sector.<sup>119</sup>

## Conclusion

It is often taken for granted that male voices generally hold sway and men not only monopolize key positions within government but also control most travel agencies. However, certain women have nevertheless succeeded in carving out a place for themselves within the Hajj travel market using diverse and innovative strategies. Whereas some have opted to closely cooperate with authorities or even actively serve government interests, others have avoided engaging with the state through cunning or simply by demonstrating agility when required. Such evasive strategies have been employed in three different political contexts: the quasi-state monopoly on organizing the Hajj in Senegal, the government’s efforts to retake control of the pilgrimage in Burkina Faso, and a period of gradual liberalization in both countries.

The women discussed in this chapter demonstrated different forms of agency (Dakar and Ouagadougou) and empowerment (Dakar) while displaying flexibility, tenacity, and boldness. To varying degrees, they were able to capitalize on

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**115** A group of travel agencies with ties to the MS.

**116** A Hajj travel pioneer, I. Ouedraogo belongs to the Conavho Group, which consists of agencies with ties to the “eleven grain” Tijaniyya *ṭariqa* based in Ramatoulaye.

**117** Sava. Interview, Ouagadougou, February 26, 2019.

**118** Kana. Interview, Ouagadougou, February 18, 2019.

**119** The Keysias Travel Agency was created in 2005.

strategic opportunities to pursue individual and collective objectives over the short and long term. Some were able to leverage relationships with dominant stakeholders to achieve greater autonomy – an approach that involved having to skillfully negotiate or even defy established social norms. Others were able to align their community projects with emerging social demands in a manner that combined piety, solidarity, and economic interests.

However, their accomplishments do not necessarily make them self-made women. Rather, they are individuals whose success has depended on their ability to engage in networking; draw on the support of powerful political allies; access financial support; and leverage religious/organizational affiliations, family ties, and influential social and professional connections.

Of course, these women were not always successful in their endeavours, even if some of them founded travel agencies, managed large numbers of pilgrims, led travel agency groups, participated in large-scale community initiatives, became recognized as authority figures, gained prominence in the public sphere, or became influential businesswomen. When they received recognition, it came by way of the prevailing influence of Muslim *ṭuruq* (Mouridism) or out of respect for their seniority – and following sustained and difficult attempts to renegotiate social norms. Meanwhile, their efforts were variously criticized because of the very fact they were women, because they were perceived as having too much influence, or because of their Catholic faith. They were also familiar with the bitter experience of having their efforts thwarted by the alignment of government interests with those of rival religious and economic stakeholders, prevailing ways of thinking in the community, and tensions between different branches of Islam (the Muslim *ṭuruq* and fundamentalist Salafi Islam). Ultimately, these various factors highlight the value of the Hajj as a laboratory for studying complex and evolving societal dynamics, in the context of which women must play their hand, assert themselves, and fight to maintain their legitimacy.

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Ina Khiari-Loch

# Discourse on Women in Tunisia

Between State Feminism, Patriarchy, and Islamic Tendencies

## Introduction

The discourse on women has always been of great significance in the history of the Tunisian republic. The social status of women has been seen as one of the most important indicators of modernity in the sense of development and progress; and of democracy in the sense of commitment to plurality and human rights. Therefore, the discourse on women is located in the tension between Tunisia's desire to develop as a modern and progressive state based on a Western model, and its claim to be part of the Arab-Muslim world with regard to religiosity and application of the sharia.

In my paper I shall investigate the enormous importance that the discourse on women has assumed in Tunisian politics, which can be described as state feminism. According to Anne Françoise Weber who, in my opinion, has developed an applicable definition of state feminism in the Tunisian context, state feminism is defined as the promotion of women, which is an integral part of the political practice and of its discursive representations. In addition, according to Weber, the state derives its legitimacy from this women's policy and defines itself through it, and furthermore, the state pays special attention to the concerns of women and opens up new opportunities for women without striving for a fundamental change in the prevailing gender relations.<sup>1</sup> It is important to point out that in the case of Tunisia, state feminism is characterized by a reformism from above, a kind of state-imposed feminism that often has encountered an opposite social practice.

This paper attempts to identify the political discourse on women and his impact on Tunisian society on the basis of three studies, which I carried out during my dissertation project.<sup>2</sup> These studies looked at this question from different perspectives, namely, historical, individual and discursive. The first of the three studies deals with state feminism and the symbolism of the headscarf

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1 Cf. Weber 2001, 17–18.

2 The PhD research is supervised by Prof. Dr. Roman Loimeier with the working title "Female identity in social transformation – Comparative interpretation of biographical texts from southern Tunisia."

in Tunisia; it is a historical outline of the legal situation of women in the laicist state under Habib Bourguiba and Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, with special attention paid to the consequences for women who decided to wear a headscarf or veil. It also concerns the situation in Tunisia after 2010/11, when both secular and religious camps tried to influence public opinion and argued about the opportunities and limits of individual freedoms. The second study, a sociolinguistic analysis of a selection of paragraphs from a biographical interview focussed on politically-based taboo words and subjects in the authoritarian Tunisian state under Bourguiba and Ben Ali. It showed how speaking as a social practice indirectly reveals political and social taboo topics, such as injustice committed by the state and persecution of political oppositionists and dissidents. The third study, a discourse analysis of the government-related journal *InfoCREDIF* between 1991 and 2010, traces the change in the state discourse under Ben Ali from an initially open discourse with broad contents, to an elitist discourse increasingly focused on scientific, economic, and political topics, up to a discourse of pure regime propaganda.

The question of the first part of the paper is: What similarities and differences exist in the policies of the first two Tunisian presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali and what influences did these respective policies have on society? Therefore, the first part of this chapter discusses the significance attributed to women in the process of nation building and Bourguiba's pursuit of progress and modernization, where the status of women was regarded as an indicator of modernity fighting against obscurantism. The second part tries to determine how Ben Ali legalized and safeguarded his authoritarian regime by claiming that it ensured human rights, constitutionality, democratic procedures, and protection of minorities using the advanced status and the rights of women in Tunisia as guaranty. This allowed him to oppress his (political) opponents without fear of the reactions on the part of his democratic supporter states.

It cannot be denied that the women's policy of the first two Tunisian presidents practically improved the situation of women enormously. It was therefore all the more surprising that in Tunisia, as the Arab-Muslim showcase country for the advancement of women, I spoke in the 2000s and 2010s with so many Tunisians who encountered the women's politics with disapproval and aversion, or rather with distrust and resignation, despite all those achievements. By looking at the three studies in summary, the second part of this paper focuses on the question: How could this negative attitude towards state feminism and women's policy arise in Tunisian society?

The third, closing part of the paper is concerned with the period of transformation after the breakdown of Ben Ali's regime in 2011. It shall briefly summarize how the old struggles between secularism and Islamic conservatism, between

modernity and obscurantism, between progress and traditionalism flared up again during this time. It is not surprising that even the discourse on women was represented in this tense atmosphere.

## Women as a Pillar of Society: The Importance of Women in Nation Building

Although in the 1920s, women like Habiba Menchari or Manoubia Ouertani were already protesting against veiling, polygamy and for the presence of more women in the Tunisian public,<sup>3</sup> it is Tahar Haddad (1899–1935) who is considered to be the Tunisian pioneer in the emancipation of women. In his writing “Our women in sharia and society,”<sup>4</sup> published in 1930, he condemned among other practices the veiling of women, forced marriages, polygamy, and the repudiation of women (*ṭalāq*) as misinterpretations of scripture by Islamic scholars that had to be corrected in order to adapt Islam to modern life. As a man and an Islamic scholar, he was heard in the public and he provoked extensive debates about the position of women in Tunisian society. However, the writings of Haddad, as well as the protests of committed women were ahead of their time, and therefore mostly considered as a scandal.<sup>5</sup> This happened because until the end of the confrontation with the French protectorate authority and the beginning of Tunisian independence, the national movement, which unified the political elites and feared the loss of the Tunisian identity and traditional values, assigned to women a sole role; as guardians of the family and traditions. Even Habib Bourguiba (1903–2000), the subsequent President of the Tunisian Republic, opposed unveiling during the struggle for independence, seeing the veil as a symbol of resistance to colonization.<sup>6</sup>

In 1956, Tunisia gained independence and Bourguiba remained the president state until 1987. After independence, the prominent role of women in Tunisian identity was maintained, but its alignment changed: Where women were previously regarded as preservers of traditions, they were now to be given the role of

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3 About veiling and the women’s associations in the time of the Tunisian independence movement, see Bakalti 1996, 69–89.

4 The original Arabic title: *imra’atunā fi l-sharī’a wa-l-mujtama’*.

5 About life and work of Tahar Haddad in detail, see Hajji 2009.

6 Cf. Richter-Dridi 1984, 98.



the transformers in the modernization of the country. Consequently, it was the women's policy that primarily shaped Bourguiba's commitment as president.

The Tunisian Code of Personal Status (CSP)<sup>7</sup> remains to this day the symbol of this policy. It was promulgated in 1956 and put into force in 1957, shortly before the official foundation of the Tunisian Republic.<sup>8</sup> The CSP was applied to all citizens regardless of their gender, origin, or religion. Despite the criticism, the CSP had the potential to change some structures of Tunisian patriarchal society through its gradual adaptation and extension, especially in terms of gender equality. Therefore, the date of the promulgation of the CSP on 13 August 1956 became National Women's Day.<sup>9</sup> On this day, the CSP is celebrated as a gift for all Tunisians. Since the early years of the Tunisian Republic, the promotion of women was an integral part of the political practice and of its discursive representations.

Although the law was regarded as the epitome of equality, it was from the beginning a balancing act between the goals of modernization and concessions to the conservative Islamic attitudes in the country. For example, the abolition of polygamy, the prohibition of child marriage, and the introduction of civil marriage and divorce, all reduced the influence of the religious elites and created modern social structures centred on the ideal of the nuclear family instead of patriarchally organized extended families. In addition, adaptation measures in labour and electoral law aimed at gender equality were implemented,<sup>10</sup> as well as compulsory education for girls and boys, which required huge investments in the education sector. Especially through literacy policy, new opportunities for social participation were opened up for disadvantaged population groups like the rural population and women. On the one hand, the new family planning policy strengthened maternity leave; on the other hand, it effectively combatted the high birth rates in the country by legalizing contraceptives and abortions.<sup>11</sup> All these changes primarily benefited female citizens. Nevertheless, the CSP remained linked to Islamic traditions of patriarchally-organized families as long as the man (father, husband, etc.) remained head of the family. The maintenance and inheritance law in particular was largely taken over by the Islamic jurisdic-

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7 French: Code du Statut Personnel (CSP), Arabic: *majallat al-aḥwāl al-shakḥiyya*.

8 Tunisia achieved its independence on 20 March 1956. The Tunisian Republic was founded on 25 July 1957 and received its constitution in 1959.

9 Bül.-Arās 2015, 697–701.

10 According to the constitution of 1959, women are equal citizens. They are entitled to vote and have the right to work and to equal pay for equal work.

11 Since 1961, contraceptives were freely available in Tunisia. From 1973, abortions were allowed in the first three months without the consent of the husband and/or indication of reasons.

tion sharia.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the CSP is still regarded as the indicator of the balance of power between secularists and Islamists in the country. This illustrates how the Tunisian Republic under Bourguiba paid special attention to the concerns of women and opened up new opportunities for them without making fundamental changes to the prevailing gender relations. In addition to the traditional gender roles, such as caregiver and housewife or father and mother, Bourguiba's politics created alternative and complementary status factors in Tunisian society, like education, employment for women, and the nuclear family. These achievements in the advancement of women as a result of state feminism under Bourguiba remain highly appreciated.

In the course of political power struggles, Bourguiba increasingly became an authoritarian ruler in a one-party-state. From the leadership of the Neo-Destour-Party,<sup>13</sup> a regime emerged which, through its security forces, acted harshly against any form of criticism. Civil society and religious organizations as well as trade unions were taken over by the ruling party or forbidden, and critics and opponents were persecuted and imprisoned. In this atmosphere, nepotism and clientelism flourished.<sup>14</sup>

In 1958, women's organizations were grouped into the Neo-Destour-Party-dominated organization, Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne (UNFT).<sup>15</sup> This organization enabled the implementation of Bourguiba's policies such as literacy, professional training of women, and family planning in state-funded programmes in its *local representative offices* all over the country. Women in rural regions particularly benefited from contact with these offices. Bourguiba thus secured the support of many Tunisian women for himself and his policies, which was indispensable for his project of modernization of the state and also for his rule. Predominantly women from the middle and lower classes worked for the UNFT. Women from the intellectual and economic elite were by comparison distanced from the organization.<sup>16</sup> The proximity of the UNFT to Bourguiba and his unified state party, as well as to its social and educational mission, reveals

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<sup>12</sup> About the development of CSP and women's rights in Tunisia under Bourguiba in more detail, see Richter-Dridi 1984; Chater 1994.

<sup>13</sup> French: Nouveau Parti Liberal Constitutionnel, Arabic: *al-ḥizb al-ḥurr al-dustūrī al-jadīd*; since 1964 Socialist Destourian Party (French: Parti Socialiste Destourien, Arabic: *al-ḥizb al-ishṭirākī al-dustūrī*).

<sup>14</sup> In this context Sigrid Faath speaks of neo-patrimonial structures of power: cf. Faath 1989. About Bourguiba's authoritarian regime, see Ruf 1969.

<sup>15</sup> French: Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne (UNFT), Arabic: *al-itṭihād al-waṭānī li-l-mar'at al-tūnisiyya*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Weber 2001, 27–28.

how the regime tried to create role models for female citizens by direct influence. Thus, women's policy served to legitimize the government of Bourguiba.

The political scientist Renate Kreile appropriately summarized this scenery, arguing that by unification of law and of regulations of gender relations, the centralized state could penetrate into social areas that were previously attributed to the private, family sphere in Tunisia, allowing Bourguiba to assert and secure his supremacy. However, the parts of the population who had to give up their spheres of influence and power, became positioned in opposition to the authoritarian state.<sup>17</sup> This struggle for spheres of influence justified Bourguiba's policy of gradual adjustment and the balancing act that can be observed since independence.

Bourguiba's women's policy can therefore be described as 'state feminism': In order to achieve modernization, the state had to pay special attention to women. The CSP, the Tunisian Constitution, and other gender equality measures offered Tunisian women new perspectives. However, the patriarchal structures at the level of the nuclear family and of the state were preserved.<sup>18</sup> It seems that Bourguiba shifted these structures away from the extended family in order to ensure national unity and to preserve his power. This is most clearly visible in the cult around his personality: Bourguiba ruled as an autocrat and styled himself as the sole patron of women.<sup>19</sup> Thus, his state feminism realized women's labour capacity in favour of the state and insured it against claims on the part of the family. Within their families, women have maintained their traditional roles, yet through state feminism, the roles as trained, working, and active citizens were added.

Bourguiba's state feminism dictated that modern Tunisian women should be neatly, modernly dressed and should not wear headscarves or veils,<sup>20</sup> the symbol of traditionalism or obscurantism. The veil was banned in public institutions. For the young, increasingly well-educated Tunisian women in the Bourguiba era, wearing the veil became taboo in public. Especially when women intended to take a job, it was forbidden to cover one's head, apart from the necessary work

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Kreile 2003, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Weber 2001, 30–31.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Weber 2001, 30–31.

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that there are different types of headscarves and veils in Tunisia. The variations range from loosely bound scarfs (*fīlāra*) and pinned or sewn veils with an under-scarf (*hijāb*) to veils covering mouth and nose or the entire face (*niqāb*). Colours and shapes may also differ depending on the fashion. In addition to religious convictions or political attitudes, a headscarf or veil may also be worn for other reasons, such as its practicality: It can protect against cold, heat and sandstorm, it allows for certain freedoms for women in traditional families, it can disguise poverty etc. For more details: Khiari-Loch 2013, 104–21.

clothes. The veil and even a simple headscarf increasingly became considered obsolete.<sup>21</sup>

Secured by the CSP, as part of the education, family, and labour policies, women were given the opportunity of new freedoms like earning their own income, autonomy in the public sphere, and a greater say in their families, thereby they granting them higher social status. Not infrequently, the income of daughters assured the budget of the family, or assisted with social advancement. In the time of Bourguiba, this strengthening of the individual and the family offered enormous opportunities for the majority of women and their families, which nobody wanted to risk by wearing a veil or a headscarf, even in the more traditional rural areas.

## Women's Rights Are Human Rights: Women as Guaranty of the Democratic State

Ben Ali took over rule in 1987. He wanted to fill the power vacuum created by the medical coup d'état of autocrat Bourguiba and thus tried to forestall the strengthened Islamists.<sup>22</sup> In order to obtain support from the different political camps in Tunisia and abroad, Ben Ali opened the country to more pluralism and democracy: political prisoners from the political left, as well as from political Islam, were amnestied and free elections were announced in 1989. Like Bourguiba in the time after independence, Ben Ali found himself in an awkward situation, required to guarantee the preservation of the CSP as a concession to the secular side, while he met Islamist demands by emphasizing the Arab-Islamic identity of Tunisia. Therefore, he was able to integrate modernist and traditionalist tendencies in his election program. Although the Islamist party Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI) before the 1989 elections changed its name to Ennahda,<sup>23</sup> it was not permitted to participate in the elections as a religious party. However, their supporters who participated as independents unexpectedly received votes.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> About the prohibition on wearing the *hijāb* in Tunisia in the 1980s and 1990s, see Loimeier 2022a, 40.

<sup>22</sup> As prime minister, Ben Ali had declared Bourguiba's inability to rule by medical certificate in 1987.

<sup>23</sup> French: Mouvement de la Tendance Islamique (MTI), Arabic: *ḥarakat al-ittijāh al-islāmī*; since February 1989: (Mouvement) Ennahda, Arabic: *ḥarakat al-naḥḍa*.

<sup>24</sup> About the historical background in detail, see Erdle 2010, 94–101.

After the parliamentary and presidential elections in 1989, Ben Ali gradually reduced pluralization and democratization; he captured or oppressed the opposition and thus increased the sphere of influence of his state party, the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD).<sup>25</sup> In 1988, he pointedly introduced a limitation in the presidential term to three legislative periods, but in 2002 it was repealed, and he ruled Tunisia like Bourguiba, as an autocrat.<sup>26</sup> He also used the progressive women's empowerment as figurehead and legitimation of the regime, which presented itself as Europe- and America-oriented, as well as anti-Islamism and anti-terrorism. Therefore, the promotion and support of women and minorities in the country was seen as a shield against national and international criticism of his authoritarian rule and corrupt regime. Once again, the promotion of women became an integral part of the political practice and of its discursive representations in the authoritarian state under Ben Ali. A significant part of his legitimacy was derived from women's policies and his party defined itself through these. But while Bourguiba was able to legitimize his rule through the achievements of building a modern state, Ben Ali had still to achieve his legitimacy. In response to the various national and international crises and the country's economic weakness, Ben Ali sought to liberalize the country economically, to control Islamism and Leftism and to encourage human rights, symbolically represented by the rights of women, children, and people with disabilities.

In order to emphasize the democratization of the country, to expedite liberalization, and to access financial sources from Europe, various state organizations were converted into NGOs, among them the UNFT.<sup>27</sup> Even under Ben Ali, this association remained responsible for the education and literacy of women.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, independent institutions were established, like the Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF)<sup>29</sup> in 1990. This Centre aims to archive and publish historical and current documents, statistics, and studies on the subject of women on behalf of the Tunisian state. It is internationally networked and receives international financial support from different organizations. Initially founded as a non-governmental centre, it

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**25** RCD is the successor party of the Neo-Destour-Party/Socialist Destourian Party since 1988; French: Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD), Arabic: *al-tajammu' al-dustūri al-dīmuqrāṭī*.

**26** About the historical background in detail, see Erdle 2010, 104–24.

**27** About the crisis and the historical context in detail see Erdle 2010, 104–24.

**28** Cf. Weber 2001, 34–38.

**29** French: Centre de Recherches, d'Etudes, de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme (CREDIF), Arabic: *markaz al-buḥūth wa-l-dirāsāt wa-l-tawthīq wa-l-i'lām ḥawla l-mar'a (krīdīf)*.

became affiliated in 1993 with the ministry of women and family.<sup>30</sup> It also participates in various national commissions on women's affairs.<sup>31</sup> In the sense of a comprehensive state feminist advancement of women, the CREDIF can be regarded as an attempt to supplement the activities of the UNFT. A distinguishing feature of the Ben Ali's state feminism was the appointment of women as responsible officials and decision-makers not only in education and culture, but also in politics and economics. Like Bourguiba before, he tried to open up new opportunities for women without striving for a fundamental change in the prevailing gender relations.

## The Governmental Discourse on Women in *InfoCREDIF*

The developments of this era can be easily traced in the journal *InfoCREDIF*.<sup>32</sup> The earlier discourse analysis of this journal investigated the following questions: Which attributes or interpretation patterns are ascribed by the official constructions to 'the Tunisian woman' in this journal, or in other words; which role attributions were targeted by the state and which transformations and continuities in the discourse on women can be determined in regard to the era of Ben Ali?<sup>33</sup> The results of this analysis are summarized in the following pages.

The first edition of *InfoCREDIF* was published in 1991.<sup>34</sup> Most issues of the journal contain French and Arabic portions, which are mostly equivalent in the number of pages and topics. In 1996 and in 2000, English and Arabic-English special editions were published to mark the occasion of the World Women's Conferences.

According to the objectives of CREDIF,<sup>35</sup> the journal is primarily aimed at national and international stakeholders in the non-governmental, governmental, political, economic, and scientific sectors. It can be assumed that the journal strictly followed the guidelines of the regime and was the voice of state feminism

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**30** In 1992, a state secretariat for women and family was established and in 1993 the ministry of women and family. Between 2001 and 2004 the name changed to the ministry of women, family, and children and between 2004 and 2011 its name was the ministry of women, family, children, and senior citizens.

**31** For more information about CREDIF, see its website: [www.credif.org.tn](http://www.credif.org.tn).

**32** The name of this journal changes after the fall of the regime in 2012 in *Revue du CREDIF*.

**33** The study was published in Khiari-Loch 2019.

**34** In Arabic: *akhbār al-kridif*, since 1994: *majallat al-kridif*.

**35** Cf. website of CREDIF: [www.credif.org.tn](http://www.credif.org.tn).

until 2010. The uniformed and homogenous approach to an ideal image of ‘the Tunisian woman’ is particularly striking. This expression is used in Arabic and French in the name of the Centre and in the contributions of the journal mainly in the singular form, ‘woman.’ Its binary construction of gender should also be pointed out.

The studied issues during the period under review, between 1991 and 2010, can be categorized into four main groups:

The first group of issues from 1991 to 1993 focuses on the foundation and establishment of the CREDIF as a platform for various Tunisian women’s organizations and associations. It presents the image of a woman (in the singular) with multiple burdens due to her involvement in traditional and added social roles. In the discourse it becomes clear how Ben Ali tried to establish his own project of the advancement of women in contrast to Bourguiba. This group of issues focuses on international recognition and the establishment of the new Tunisian government through the implementation of international law, the guarantee of pluralism, democracy, and human rights and the signing and ratifying of international conventions. International holidays have been established, like International Women’s Day on 8 March, in addition to the National Women’s Day on 13 August. Through *InfoCREDIF* it becomes obvious that both holidays were celebrated in memory of the CSP, but without remembering the former president Bourguiba. The advancement of women and the guarantee of women’s rights are also presented as part of the government’s commitment in the fight against the threat of Islamic extremism.

The second group of issues from 1994 to 1996 illustrates the intensive work of CREDIF in the preparation and post-processing for the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The Centre continues to portray itself as an established research institution and affiliated with the ministry of women and family, founded in 1993.<sup>36</sup> The president and the RCD party are not presented as major players, but as supporters of the journal and CREDIF. Different women, organizations, and activities form an image of diversity and plurality in unity, tolerance, and democracy.

After ratifying the international human rights conventions, Tunisian laws had to be transformed. There have been various legislative changes in the CSP and in labour laws but these did not affect the patriarchal structures and the man (husband or father), who remained the head of the family.<sup>37</sup> The need for

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<sup>36</sup> As under Bourguiba in 1983, the ministry of women and family was established in 1993 in preparation for a World Conference on Women, see more details in Weber 2001, 28.

<sup>37</sup> In the context of women’s policy, the following legislative changes should be mentioned: repeal of the obedience of the wife from the CSP without encroachment upon the position of

the advancement of women no longer appeared to be the main focus of interest. Rather, the achievements were presented at the World Conference on Women in Beijing. There, the country was able to establish itself as a pioneer for the promotion of women in the Arab-Muslim world. As a result, an expanded internationalization towards the Mediterranean and Africa was sought.<sup>38</sup>

The term 'women' during this period was used in the plural in Arabic and French. The articles and pictures in *InfoCREDIF* show Tunisian women with different lifestyles and in different life situations. Traditional clothing and face veils can only be found in historical contexts as a counterpoint to the modern Tunisian women as ideal. Religion is only mentioned in one article about abortions.<sup>39</sup>

The third group of issues from 1996 to 2003 reveals an increased politicization and instrumentalization by the regime of Ben Ali, although other players of state feminism were still visible.

The policy since 1995 has been characterized by concessions in preparation for elections or important international events, followed by repressions afterwards, which served the consolidation and expansion of the power of Ben Ali's regime. The regime elites increasingly became composed of businessmen from the entourage of the president and his family, and the difficult-to-control internet communication made criticism by dissidents possible.<sup>40</sup> However, even more women gained access to the RCD leadership, which was also rejuvenated.<sup>41</sup>

In the early 2000s, Ben Ali had to prepare the referendum to extend his term of office. Concurrently, various affairs around the regime were announced in an atmosphere marked by different crises; like the attacks on 11 September 2001, and the Djerba synagogue bombing on 11 April 2002. The Tunisian media at this time was dedicated exclusively the propaganda of the re-election of Ben Ali in 1999 and the referendum extending the term of office of the president in May 2002.<sup>42</sup>

A similar scenario can be observed in the *InfoCREDIF*: The journal presented itself as a governmental institution, praised itself and celebrated itself as an

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the husband as head of the family, establishment of a fund for payments in favour of divorced women, rights for female Tunisians to pass nationality onto their children, punishment of honour killings by the husband as murder in case of adultery of the woman, prosecution of violence in marriage as a crime. Discrimination becomes punishable under labour law and compulsory schooling is extended to the age of 14, see Weber 2001, 37.

**38** CREDIF, ed. 1995. *InfoCREDIF*, Special Beijing Conference Issue (September).

**39** CREDIF, ed. 1994. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 6 (November).

**40** Cf. Erdle 2010, 117–21.

**41** According to Erdle, in 1993 there were 22 female deputies, 48 in 1999 and 66 in 2003. Cf. Erdle 2010, 121.

**42** Cf. Erdle 2010, 122–23.



achievement, or in its own words, a “natural consequence of Ben Ali’s rule of law.”<sup>43</sup> With regard to the elections in 1999 and to the referendum in 2002, the prominent issues of the time placed the president into the tradition of famous Tunisians like the legendary founder of Carthage, queen Elissa, the father of the independence movement, Thaalibi and the reformist Tahar Haddad. By contrast, Bourguiba is mentioned only once as praiseworthy. Keywords that appear in issues of the journal from this time include modernity, progress, globalization, stability, and to a lesser extent security, democracy, and plurality; which, according to the journal, could only be guaranteed by Ben Ali. In terms of women’s politics, the measures in mainstreaming gender are particularly praised. The high proportion of women in his cabinet and the RCD’s Central Committee was seen as proof of tolerance, plurality, and democracy in the country. This also illustrated that the promotion of women was seen as an integral part of the political practice and of its discursive representations, and that the regime not only derived its legitimacy from women’s politics but also defined itself through them. It seems that women’s participation in politics was seen as a compensation for the oppressed political opposition and civil society and the persecuted regime opponents. *InfoCREDIF* presents Tunisia as networked with the whole world, especially Europe and North America and in cooperation with international women’s rights and human rights organizations. The growing involvement of the regime with the journal also became increasingly visible in text and images, in the increased appearance of the president, the mention of his assumption of power on 7 November 1987, and the use of the official purple colour of the presidency. Even the president’s wife Leila appeared progressively more often in the journal. In 1998 she appeared together in a photograph with Hillary Clinton, who praised women’s politics in Tunisia.<sup>44</sup>

As in previous issues of the journal, the topic of religion is only addressed indirectly. After the referendum in 2002, the president’s wife was presented as a supporter of Palestine. Another study explains the Muslim image of a woman as “a vain seductress” as officially overcome in Tunisia.<sup>45</sup> In 2003, the President and his wife are shown on pilgrimage.<sup>46</sup>

This third group of issues, like group two, focused on women’s responsibilities to the family and society. ‘The Tunisian woman,’ again mostly used in the singular, is presented as united in the joint effort for country and nation. Therefore, a new counter-image started being sought abroad, for example in other Arab

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<sup>43</sup> CREDIF, ed. 1996. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 10 (August).

<sup>44</sup> CREDIF, ed. 1998. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 17 (May).

<sup>45</sup> CREDIF, ed. 2002. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 27 (May).

<sup>46</sup> CREDIF, ed. 2003. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 29 (March).

countries. At the same time, the responsibility of a successful Tunisian model for women's politics was passed on to the women themselves, who were expected to assume active and responsible functions in politics and business in order to shape their future, otherwise the loss of all achievements would be threatened.

The fourth group of issues from 2005 to 2010, most of which were not available to me, are marked by the personality cult of the presidential couple. After the referendum in 2002 and the re-election in 2004, a personal autocracy with life-long rule seemed possible. The business elite and family of Ben Ali were increasingly integrated into the RCD party and benefited from privatizations in previously public sectors such as media, communications, education, and aviation. After the birth of her son in 2005, the president's wife appears very prominently and assumes various representative functions, especially in the field of women's policy.<sup>47</sup>

The issues are characterized by large-format images of the president and his wife, whereas other players disappeared. Meaningful content was eclipsed by political phrases: Tunisia thanks, is proud, award, receives prizes, organizes educational conferences in African countries. The issues appear with a new design, dominated by the official colour of the president (a shade of purple). In addition, the Arabic portion is more extensive than the French. Since 2006, the editorial was written by the minister for women, family, children, and senior citizens and no longer by the director of CREDIF. In long texts full of empty phrases and written in very small, narrow letters, the names of the president and his wife, as well as their titles are written in bold font. There seems to be only one Tunisian man and one Tunisian woman left: the president and his wife. Therefore, the discourse on women in *InfoCREDIF* served to directly legitimize the authoritarian rule of the presidential family.

On the occasion of the World Summit of the Information Society 2005 in Tunis, there were again amnesties and concessions made by the president, such as the creation of an advisory chamber and permission for smaller parties to operate.<sup>48</sup> *InfoCREDIF* campaigned for this summit and headlined the municipal election as "A Festival of Democracy" featuring an image of the presidential couple at the ballot box.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time, repressions were intensified. The high unemployment and the rising cost of living, combined with the privatizations in favour of the regime and imprisonments of political dissidents led to repeated demonstrations.

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<sup>47</sup> For more details, see Erdle 2010, 125–28.

<sup>48</sup> Erdle 2010, 125–28.

<sup>49</sup> CREDIF, ed. 2005. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 21 (July).

In 2008, the demonstrations in the mining region of Gafsa coincided with the run up to the presidential elections in 2009. These demonstrations were forcibly suppressed, hidden, or dismissed.<sup>50</sup> Even in 2010, *InfoCREDIF* still presented the successful model of Tunisia and headlined “Ben Ali – The man of the realization of kept promises.”<sup>51</sup>

Compared to the previous groups of issues, it is conspicuous that, in addition to the president as promoter of women, the president’s wife appeared as the ideal image of ‘the Tunisian woman.’ In 2009, Leila Ben Ali became the president of the Arab Women Organization<sup>52</sup> and *InfoCREDIF* praised her as a representative of humanity, development, and commitment.<sup>53</sup>

In summary, it can be concluded that women’s policy in *InfoCREDIF* between 1991 and 2010 was discussed continuously in the sense of a struggle for women’s rights as human rights, equality, and equal opportunities part of the efforts of the governmental women’s policy, and rarely as social achievements of all Tunisian citizens. The transformations in social structures are presented as progress in all social spheres. The ideal image of ‘the Tunisian woman’ appears as a modern, committed and working citizen, supported by the government. The woman is regarded as a pillar of society and responsible for the future of Tunisia, but only the regime can secure and guarantee this future. Plurality and diversity of Tunisian women are emphasized in the founding phase of the journal and before international conferences, such as Beijing 1995. In addition, it should be noted that this journal shows an increasing specialization in discourse: initially, with its broad content the journal appeared open, then became more specialized, including scientific, economic, and political topics, and finally it became regime propaganda. Furthermore, the discourse on women’s policy in *InfoCREDIF* was elitist for two reasons: first, because the CREDIF was founded as a research centre, and secondly, because it was increasingly taken over by officials of the RCD party and the regime’s elite as a consequence of the autocratization.

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<sup>50</sup> For more details, see Erdle 2010, 125–28.

<sup>51</sup> CREDIF, ed. 2010. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 40 (January).

<sup>52</sup> French: Organisation de la Femme Arabe (OFA), Arabic: *munazzamat al-mar’at al-‘arabiyya*.

<sup>53</sup> CREDIF, ed. 2010. *InfoCREDIF*, no. 40 (January).

## Talking about the Unspeakable in Autocratic Tunisia

Analysis of the context and intentions of the speech in a narrative interview demonstrate the autocratic system and the existence of state feminism in Tunisia.<sup>54</sup> In the two passages selected for analysis, it becomes evident how political and social taboo topics have been addressed and communicated in a way that can only be understood in the context of authoritarian Tunisia under Bourguiba and Ben Ali.<sup>55</sup> These are directly linked to political objectives like secular state and state feminism as well as to the injustices perpetrated by the political elites like corruption and nepotism, arbitrariness, and the persecution of political opponents and dissidents.

In the first passage of the interview, the interviewee describes her time at university as well as her unsuccessful participation in a selection procedure for primary school teachers. This first passage deals with the manipulation of the award lists and the nepotism in Tunisia under Bourguiba. The second passage is concerned with the years of her teacher training at a secondary school in the period of transition between the rule of Bourguiba and Ben Ali. The interviewee explained that apparently disagreements with the responsible authorities about her decision to wear a headscarf resulted in the refusal of her civil servant status.

According to Rosenthal, there are unique compulsions within the context of a narrative interview, which may cause the speaker to discuss things that were initially not intended. For example, an interviewee might clarify the context of their speech or explain the background of the narrated event for listeners.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, it is to be assumed that the interviewee communicated these topics to make her narrative more comprehensible.

In the following, the results of this analysis are summarized. In the passages, different verbal expressions were used to communicate the unspeakable. In this paper, I will only give a few examples in a reduced form. They can be differentiated firstly into expressions, which replace problematic words and topics, and secondly into ellipses that omit problematic expressions and topics.

For example, if the interviewee addressed the rigid persecution of the Islamist movement at the end of Bourguiba's rule as "these incidents of Bourguiba"<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The study was published in Khiari-Loch 2018.

<sup>55</sup> Khiari-Loch 2018. This paper includes the original text excerpts in Arabic with German translation.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Rosenthal 2008, 141–142.

<sup>57</sup> Original text (Tunisian dialect): "hāka l-aḥdāth, mtā' l-būrgiba."

or “this pressure of Bourguiba,”<sup>58</sup> the persecution of the dissidents is only indirectly mentioned as ‘incidents’ and ‘pressure,’ whereas the Islamist movement is not mentioned at all.

In the same way, she communicated the corruption and nepotisms of this time indirectly as “those stories”<sup>59</sup> or “those relationships” (literally “those shoulders”)<sup>60</sup> while she described her unsuccessful participation in the selection procedure for primary school teachers. She explained her narrative with “The list [of the selected teachers], they have already prepared it from the outset, it means, there are the teachers they needed written on it,”<sup>61</sup> indirectly describing supporters and beneficiaries of the regime.

The interviewee also implicitly mentioned the arbitrariness of the regime as a “game,”<sup>62</sup> saying: “The director and the inspector played the game with me.”<sup>63</sup> In other words, these two persons managed the refusal of her civil servant status. She explained it afterwards appropriately: “Only heaven knows what they said, maybe she [this one] has activity.”<sup>64</sup> The last word “activity”<sup>65</sup> indicates the strict taboo topic of the Islamist movement. She wanted to express, that the suspicion of sympathizing with the Islamists, for example because a woman wears a headscarf, resulted in the refusal of the civil servant status.

The issue of the ‘veil’ or ‘headscarf’ plays a major role in this paragraph. These expressions are avoided and mostly communicated by ellipses. The interviewee said, “The first year, I taught [and] I didn’t wear – in secondary school, the second year I have worn –, I wore – the second year and that’s it.”<sup>66</sup> In the Tunisian dialect, the verb ‘to wear’ needs an object, and in this case either the object ‘veil’ or ‘headscarf’<sup>67</sup> or a suffixed personal pronoun has to be added. Like the subject of the Islamist movement, the words ‘veil’ or ‘headscarf’ are omitted and referred to only with ellipses, which emphasizes the importance of this issue. As stated above, not only the topic of women wearing the veil or headscarf, but

58 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*hāka l-ḍaḡuṭāt mtā‘ l-būrgība.*”

59 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*hakka l-ḥakāyāt.*”

60 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*hakka l-aktāf.*”

61 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*l-qāyima mḥaḍḍrīnhā ḥāḍra qbal, ma‘nāhā ‘alāhā l-m‘allmīn illī ḥājthum bīhum.*”

62 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*l-la‘ba.*”

63 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*l-la‘ba la‘būhālī l-mudīr ū l-mutfaqqad.*”

64 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*ya‘lamu llah shnuwwa qālū, rubbamā ‘andhā nashāt ḥādhi.*”

65 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*nashāt.*”

66 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*l-‘ām l-awwal qarrīt mish lābsa fī th-thanawī, l-‘ām ath-thānī lbist, l-‘ām ath-thānī lbist ū hakka haw.*”

67 Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*l-ḥijāb/fūlāra.*”

also the topic of religion, are hardly mentioned in the journal *InfoCREDIF*. These expressions demonstrate the prominence of the headscarf ban in times of state feminism and the persecution of political Islam. The following example for emphasis refers to the repressive domestic policies and the headscarf ban simultaneously; the interviewee explained “this means, those they catch wearing – they will immediately.”<sup>68</sup> In addition to the headscarf/veil issue, harsh punitive measures of the regime are addressed in this sentence. But it is not clear what kind of headscarf is meant here: Is it a pinned veil with an under-scarf (*hijāb*) or a loosely bound headscarf (*fūlāra*)?

The last example is the hypocorism “Ezzin”<sup>69</sup> for the president Ben Ali. This nickname refers to the president’s first name Zine el-Abidine and was often used in informal conversations to criticize the president behind closed doors in the form of political jokes. In the interview, this expression was used: “and after a while, well, that one took over, Ezzin.”<sup>70</sup> Both expressions ‘that one’ and ‘Ezzin’ bear little respect and imply a harsh criticism of the president, especially because ‘Ezzin’ includes different connotations related to certain problematic characteristics of Ben Ali and his policies. ‘Ezzin’ also means ‘the beauty’ and therefore, it can ironically refer to the vanity attributed to the president by the Tunisians, but also to the cult around his person. Moreover, this expression as an antiphrasis also addresses the ugly side of the regime, with its ignorance, authoritarianism, despotism, and corruption. The widespread use of this term testifies to the rejection of the president within the population.<sup>71</sup>

Tunisians generally remain tacit about these abovementioned issues. Nevertheless, the interview showed how it was possible to communicate the contradictions between the governmental discourse of human and women’s rights, pluralism, democracy, and rule of law on the one hand, and the reality of concealment of political persecution and oppression, injustice, arbitrariness, corruption, nepotism and lack of free speech on the other hand. The communication of taboo topics through informal verbal expressions allowed a system-immanent criticism, but at the same time expresses an implicit toleration of controversial issues as well.

The interview reveals the taboo nature of certain topics deeply rooted in Tunisian society, demonstrating that they were communicated even in 2011, only shortly after the fall of Ben Ali’s regime. It also indicates the deep aversion of large parts of the

<sup>68</sup> Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*ma’nāhā illi yilqūh lābis tūl li.*”

<sup>69</sup> Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*ez-zīn.*”

<sup>70</sup> Original text (Tunisian dialect): “*ū ba’d mudda ‘ād, shād hadhāka, ez-zīn.*”

<sup>71</sup> Even I as a foreigner learned to interpret this term in the early 2000s very quickly.

population to the regime. As the analysis of the *InfoCREDIF* showed, this unpopular regime, which included the president and his wife taking over the discourse on women by hijacking feminism and using it to legitimize and extend their rule. As a result, discourses on women, feminism, and gender topics became unpopular in Tunisia, because they have been equated with support of the unpopular regime. This could explain why so many Tunisians have met women's politics with disapproval and aversion, or rather with distrust and resignation despite all its achievements.

## **Conclusion: The Old Frontiers Are New Frontiers – The Struggle between Secularism and Islamic Conservatism in Times of Transition**

After 2010/11, the discourses on women's emancipation and feminism initially had a difficult time. As elaborated above, the policies of Ben Ali's regime had occupied these discourses through its state feminism. The regime instrumentalized women, monopolized NGOs, and signed international agreements to secure its power through international support. In Tunisia under Ben Ali, women were granted tolerance and acceptance in a democratic system so as long as they did not represent anti-government attitudes. As a result, promoting and respecting women's rights effectively concealed human rights violations and the lack of democracy. However, issues of great significance for the population, such as injustice, religion, discrimination of women in everyday life, and sexual violence were hardly addressed by the regime or were considered taboo. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Tunisians from different political camps treated state feminism with disapproval or frustration. The regime-critical camp criticized state feminism because of the regime-dominated discourses, and the Islamic-conservative camp rejected secular women's politics as they shirked traditional gender roles. Even apolitical Tunisians were repulsed by the escalation of the regime propaganda.

However, it is also a fact that true social transformation, initiated by state feminism has taken place, which cannot be easily reversed. The awareness of the significance of women and their rights is deeply rooted in the Tunisian society. In the transition period after 2010/11, this awareness was renegotiated, but also successfully defended. It seems that the majority of Tunisian women and men from different political camps and social backgrounds do not want to give up the values of equality enshrined in the CSP.

Despite some difficult times, the issues of women's rights and gender equality remained important during the transition period, especially as part of the negoti-

ation process to realign the country. This period was marked by significant debates about the new constitution of Tunisia. In this context, the draft law of the Ennahda Party in 2012 should also be mentioned. It sought complementarity instead of constitutional equality for all citizens, including gender equality. The debates on gender parity were also prominently represented in public discourse. Today, gender parity is guaranteed by the Tunisian constitution and Tunisian electoral law. These debates were complemented by less prominent issues such as combating sexualized violence, repealing of national-level regulations in the CSP which are a violation of the CEDAW,<sup>72</sup> and there were also demands for the right to wear the veil covering the entire face (*niqāb*) and for the return to polygamy.<sup>73</sup>

In all these debates, the representatives of political Islam, secularism, and laicism opposed each other.<sup>74</sup> Political Islam could use the fact that it suffered under both Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's regimes and also addressed the injustice and powerlessness that broad sectors of the population experienced under both regimes. The secularists pointed out the threats of Islamist terrorism and were able to offer the developments of these threats in numerous Arab countries as warning examples, but they faced the criticism that they were successors to the former autocratic regimes under Bourguiba and Ben Ali.

The debates and renegotiations are ongoing.<sup>75</sup> Looking at the setting optimistically, it is a testament to plurality and democracy, but in regard to the poor economic situation in the country and the various global crises, it remains questionable if this plurality and democracy can be maintained. However, it seems that Tunisian women can nowadays live according to their own preferences instilled by individual freedoms guaranteed by the CSP. For example, they can dress however they deem appropriate, in accordance with their living circumstances and needs.

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<sup>72</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations).

<sup>73</sup> About more details see Antonakis 2019; Grami 2019; and Chekir 2019. For a short overview see Loimeier 2022a, 24–26.

<sup>74</sup> About the debates between the representatives of political Islam and those of secularism see Loimeier 2022a, 27–28.

<sup>75</sup> About the recent debates in Tunisia (2011–21) see Loimeier 2022b, especially in chapter 7.



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Laura Stauth

# Gendered Expectations

## Reflections on Domestic Labour and the Digitalization of Everyday Life in Egypt

The official number of social media users in Egypt more than doubled in the years between 2011 and 2021, increasing from 21% of the population (17 million) in 2011 to 45.4% of the total population in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Users, platforms, apps, and state surveillance of digital media have expanded with the accelerated growth of digital culture.<sup>2</sup> Given this radical increase in digital infrastructure, which multiplied in the aftermath of the 25 January Revolution in 2011, the rise of digital outlets has gone hand in hand with the Sisi regime's effort and investment to regulate, surveil, and control a globalized digital environment.<sup>3</sup> The plurality and immediacy of voices, experiences, and perspectives on the realities of daily life represented on social media platforms continue to complicate notions of what Sisi's regime considers impermissible representation and a challenge to reductive national narratives and moral codes. Television and newspaper formats are simultaneously being reshaped, most visibly in talk shows and other Television formats in response and in reference to social media. TikTok is one of the most prominent short video streaming apps in Egypt, owned by a Chinese company, TikTok. It features video content, lip synching, acting, performing and comedic sketching, which also includes possibilities of adding filters and editing of videos on the app. The app is highly successful in Egypt, and initially targeted a younger age demographic, especially teens.<sup>4</sup> Arguably the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 catalyzed expansion of the app which took place at a time when widespread economic and political disillusionment, and growing pressure on consumers were widely felt across Egypt.

My research with single mothers and domestic workers in and around Cairo coincided with the growing importance of digital outlets in their lives and the crackdown on a group of young female social media influencers. This was followed by an ongoing public debate on influencers and a new generation, generating income through what the state deemed unregulated revenue within the fast-growing digital sector. This resulted in the persecution and arrest of a group

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1 Kemp 2021.

2 Kemp 2021.

3 El-Sayed 2020, 3.

4 Zeng, Abidin, and Schäfer 2021, 3136–62.

of young women who were gaining popularity through their online content.<sup>5</sup> Relating the public debate on moral performances of women on social media with those of domestic workers depending on the so-called informal labour sector came with the intention to analyze the ways in which gendered visibility, informality, and class divides affect public representations of working and middle class women in Egypt. Against this backdrop, which paralleled the intensified role that digital media has played in my own life, I became attentive to the ways in which the digitalization of everyday experiences manifested in the lives of my interlocutors. Managing gendered expectations, social and economic pressures, and the growing role digital media outlets have played in manoeuvring a challenging daily life characterized by single motherhood were key themes at a moment widely defined by a tense economic and political reality.

This chapter explores the effects of growing media accessibility and dependency within an economic, social, and urban context that puts multiple pressures on women in Egypt today. This is taking place at a time when lifestyle changes in Egypt are leading to shifting constituencies of privacy, gender, and consumption. This chapter tries to comprehend how these frictions enter into the everyday lives of my interlocutors. It also marks a starting point for me to further reflect on the impact of heightened access to digital media outlets during a time of widespread political disillusionment. The growing digitalization of life goes hand in hand with a new wave of state-led ‘modernization’ forming rising pressures to keep up with the ‘image’ that comes with it. This coincides with a political climate in which has prompted a widely shared longing for travel and escape in the face of failed social reforms, as Egypt faces possibly the most radical urban and economic interventions by the state since Sadat’s open-door policies. The so-called modernization of state institutions and apparatuses, including the expansion of digital infrastructure, coincides with unprecedented high inflation rates, low salaries, and the criminalization of informal housing, enhancing the already existing massive social disparities defining Egypt’s social fabric. Domestic labour is one sector which highlights social divides and demonstrates massive differences in wealth, and where social hierarchies are perpetuated. Human labour remains cheaply remunerated while prices of exported goods continue to rise at an exponential rate. Entire areas of Cairo have been razed, as their ruins blend into the construction of skyscrapers and mazes of unfinished homes crowding the desert roads, the tokens of a prosperous future in the making. Sisi’s grand modernization campaign, to ‘update,’ renew, and beautify the country, as the regime enjoys expansive international financial support and fuels efforts to rid Egypt of its

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5 *Mada Masr* 2020b.

so-called slums, has identified the erasure of urban informality, in both housing and economic activity, as a political priority.<sup>6</sup> A bleak statement, given that this would entail the displacement and continued impoverishment of approximately more than half of the urban population.

The material for this research is based on semi-formal interviews and extensive participant observation which took place over a six-month period with six women in 2017, and continued conversations and visits until August 2023. The conversations and semi-formal interviews with three of the participants continued over the course of the last six years. All the women interviewed and engaged in the material work as domestic workers and are the sole breadwinners for their families. The women live in different areas of Cairo, most of which are residents to what is defined by the state as ‘informal settlements.’ This chapter concentrates on one of my interlocutors and her family, including sisters and extended family in particular, under the premise of granting them anonymity as names and places have been changed as a condition for permission to directly cite them. Entering the home demanded a new sensitivity to the challenges of that lie in making personal political and vice versa, even more so in times of unprecedented censorship: something that complicated my approach in conducting audio-visual recordings and continues to challenge this text.

My own background as a German-Egyptian researcher from a privileged background, which connotes unequal relationships and social imbalances in the ways people like me access and acquire social power have a direct impact on the research dynamics and outcomes at play. This undoubtedly complicates and challenges this text. Nevertheless, the intention of this long lasting research is to make visible the struggles of women who are confronted with a social context that largely fails to acknowledge their mastery as professionals and individuals. Both gender and class play a crucial role in setting the terms for their employment.

Low pay, unstable labour conditions, a lack of social and professional recognition towards care and housework as time and labour-intensive, all have devastating effects on the lives of the women who occupy these professions.

The lack of social recognition and the invisibility that comes with domestic labour, at a time when hyper-consumerism, status, social media fame, and the pressure to be seen and heard shape contemporary desires prompt the following questions: How enabling are social media outlets to women grappling with unstable living situations, and who work in an undermined labour sector? How does social media content represent and correspond with the real-life battles of women in what the state deems the informal labour sector? What are the con-

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<sup>6</sup> Sharp 2022, 735.

straints imposed by their immediate and broader social environments and how do these women navigate the potential they have to offer?

The usage of digital media is embedded within the daily life and practices of women in the aforementioned context. Digital media is also one aspect of a broader approach that situates and embeds digital research within the field of ethnographic methods and functions both as a research subject and research tool.<sup>7</sup> Tawli-Souri describes the need to understand social media networks within a specific time and place while centering participant observation and simultaneously challenging a dichotomous understanding of online and offline realms.<sup>8</sup>

## Gendered Labour: “I feel like a man”

The intimate employer-employee dynamic where housework is delicately negotiated within the boundaries of a complex, asymmetrical interdependence remains a highly sensitive matter in Egypt. As Diane Singerman puts it, “Modern Cairene life is infused with familial, political and economic power.”<sup>9</sup> Aristocratic homes in Cairo have extensively employed domestic staff over generations, yet little has been said about the histories of servants and domestic labour in upscale neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, this does not defy the fact that the ‘domestic maid’ is widely represented in films, literature, and media. These representations remain infused with two inter-related social constructs: that of the urban poor and the peasant. Both images have taken on a contested, yet pivotal role within national discourse shaped by different historical periods and by interchanging political groups in distinction or according to a colonial and postcolonial outlook.<sup>10</sup>

Modernization theory and its linear constructions of history have created marginal spaces shaped by the interested gaze of governing centres of power.<sup>11</sup> The dichotomies of urban and rural-modern, and traditional prevail, and position places, time periods, and processes in a hierarchical order, and to this day define the political formations of place and identity in Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Such imagery also continues to define the stigma associated with domestic labour; countless rep-

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7 Walthrop 2020, 44–54.

8 Tawli-Souri 2012, 86–95.

9 Singerman 2009, 111–44.

10 Michell 1990, 145, 146; Selim 2004; Saad 1998.

11 Mitchell 2002.

12 Singerman 2009, 111–44.

representations emphasize the rural, working class, and ‘informal’ background of these workers as oppositional to the modern body politic.

Examining domestic labour encourages the reassessment of fictive, gendered boundaries present in the economic and political spheres. The connection between the intimate, paradoxical world of ‘cleaning homes’ and the hidden, inaccessible personal sphere defies the fact that cleaning is, and always has been, an economic and political act.<sup>13</sup> As addressed by numerous feminist works, wage-based domestic labour is central to the reproduction of class structures, and gendered division of labour lies at the very core of the capitalist market economy. Giving, cleaning, and caretaking are considered emotional, intimate, and private tasks that reassert the social construct of femininity. Low pay and the concomitant lack of appreciation for domestic labour are closely related to the feminized cultural construction of giving.<sup>14</sup> In Egypt, the public representation of middle and working class women and the role of the woman as mother, remain crucial constructs in defining the public discourse on femininity and are at the core of the formation of the nation state. While in reality many homes are financially supported by the singular income of women, the roles of housewife and women working in someone else’s home, exteriorizing care work, are often publicly presented as contradictory roles. Concurrently, social class, gender and social power within a patriarchal infrastructure of labour relationships are crucial factors in shaping these public perceptions.<sup>15</sup>

As Shafik points out, for women in Egypt, labour remains a morally charged subject, especially for middle and working class women. The polarization of attitudes is greater for some professions. For instance, informal labour, particularly domestic work, is widely viewed as morally more questionable than other occupations.<sup>16</sup> Condoning care work as paid labour is believed to undermine female emotional integrity, disrupting the “naturalized cultural construction of giving” associated with femininity, which then supposedly questions the role of middle class women.<sup>17</sup>

Historically, care work and domestic labour have been underpaid and lacking recognition as “serious work”<sup>18</sup> for three main reasons. First, this work takes place in the private, invisible, contested, and intricate sphere of the home.

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**13** Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007, ix.

**14** Ozyegin 2000, 29.

**15** Shafiq 2009, 123.

**16** Shafiq 2009, 123.

**17** Ozyegin 2000, 28.

**18** Moores 2003, 387, 386.

Second, these occupations often take place in the informal sector, and are largely carried out by women.<sup>19</sup> In turn, domestic and informal labour have generally been excluded from being considered economic activities, as part of an “arbitrary definition of economic and productive activity [which] works to women’s disadvantage.”<sup>20</sup>

Many jobs associated with the informal labour sector, and dominated by women in Egypt are infused with sexualized connotations. Similar to the accusations made against the “TikTok women” arrested for immoral behaviour over social media, domestic workers are sometimes associated with prostitution. Women entering the private sphere unaccompanied by a male guardian, such as a husband, or the state itself, and acting as individuals, free of direct male supervision, are perceived as outlaws and on the opposite end of prevailing moral codes, challenging ‘honourable’ definitions of femininity. It is this independent labour and existing outside of the controlled, patriarchal framework of an institution, the state, or a husband, which challenges the gendered divisions of the domestic sphere. Not unlike domestic workers, social media influencers are independent actors who pose a challenge to existing patriarchal power dynamics, and social and class structures. While social-media stardom provides a platform to address issues that concern women across classes, influencers’ social status and their target audience play a determinant role in what is perceived as permissible performance. Even in the realm of social media, different levels of social scrutiny are determined and tied to social power and class biases. The crackdown on social media stars took place through the arrest of four such people on charges of “violating the values and principles of the Egyptian family and society” under Article 25 of Egypt’s 2018 cybercrime law. The most prominent of the women, named Haneen Hossan (22), rapidly rose to fame through her online performances, promoting herself on Instagram, TikTok, and another platform called Like.<sup>21</sup> Social media provides avenues, especially for young women, to self-represent, within the vernacular narrative threads of digital life, which are different to the curated, national televised programmes. TV hosts on national television have scrutinized the fact that “girls are streaming live from their bedrooms,” highlighting how the blurring of spheres complicates gendered expectations of what constitutes appropriate public performances for women. This is reminiscent of what the Egyptian journalist Reem Saad identifies as “the ‘guest room mentality’ that controls the minds of the ruling middle class, by virtue of which strangers should not enter

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<sup>19</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Moores 2003, 386.

<sup>20</sup> Hoodfar 1997, 14.

<sup>21</sup> *Mada Masr* 2020b.

the home except into the places they have prepared especially for the guests.” In her article, Saad reflects on the controversies of her documentary which centres on the life of a domestic worker named Wiza.

A technology so close to the body inevitably enables a greater personalization of the economy, which comes with growing possibilities and dependencies as a new wave of privatization and consumption shape consumer desires. While social media allows people to communicate with unparalleled privacy and independence,<sup>22</sup> Doron argues that gendered expectations towards women, and questions of ownership, power, and domination, are challenged, complicated and reinforced through social media.<sup>23</sup> The recent crackdown on female TikTok stars and influencers in Egypt, who are faced with arrest for immoral behaviour, is one example of how bringing the public into the intimate lives of the gendered private sphere challenges state-regulated doctrines of social norms and of moral decency.<sup>24</sup> This form of regulation goes hand in hand with gendered discourse around national honour and reputation, and is not a new topic of debate. An earlier example can be found in Saad’s description of the controversy that followed the airing in Egypt of her documentary *Marriage Egyptian Style*, which revolves around the life of Wiza, a domestic worker. The film was deemed as shameful to the national reputation, “[...] and particularly indicative of the gendered nature of the nationalistic discourse.” Gendered expectations of the public-private divide affect women working in the informal labour sector in ways similar to those that apply to social media influencers with newly arising female visibilities, both of which fall within the realm of what the state deems ‘unregulated income.’<sup>25</sup>

It is important to note that my interlocutor simultaneously undertakes what many Egyptians perceive to be the responsibilities of a father figure; being the breadwinner of the family. Many single mothers in Egypt operate as their family’s sole breadwinners to compensate for the absence of their husbands. Leaving her home for long commutes and navigating asymmetrical labour relations also means stepping onto the open battlefield of an urban infrastructure in which money, masculinity, and social status are important factors that my interlocutors did not possess.

Samira, along with two of her five sisters and her mother, reside in one of Cairo’s so-called informal settlements. Their house is located in a semi-industrial area known for its cement factories, which tower over what was once agricul-

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<sup>22</sup> Doron 2012, 414–43.

<sup>23</sup> Doron 2012, 414–43.

<sup>24</sup> *Mada Masr* 2020a.

<sup>25</sup> Saad 1998, 401–12.



tural land. Most of the land was gradually urbanized starting in the early 1970s.<sup>26</sup> Densely constructed red brick towers on what was once agricultural land are the main markers of agrarian urbanization, and have steadily increased since the early 1970s. For the governing elites, areas like Kafr El-Alw lie at the margins of urban existence, “stripped of a name or meaningful historical time.”<sup>27</sup>

Industry has steadily transformed the surrounding infrastructures. Samira frequently recalls a different landscape, when growing up in the same area, when the homes did not reach as high and there was more open space. In the long hours until Samira returns home tired in the evenings from cleaning houses, her children spend most of their time in the neon lit living room playing games on their phones, their games are interspersed with content from YouTube channels, advertisements, and TV shows. Going back to the early recordings, Samira explains to me how she balances her work and position within her neighbourhood, after noticing that she did not speak openly about her workplace to her neighbours.

I do not tell people that I work as a cleaner. I tell everyone I work in a shop or a nursery. Sometimes I say I work in an office. The kids in the neighbourhood will make insulting comments, tell their parents. I don't want my children to suffer from bullying. What counts is that everyone knows I am more of a man than any of my husbands: I make sure that I am respected. I am both mother and father to my children, I provide what my two husbands failed to provide for us: I bring bread to the table, and I carry the single responsibility that I shoulder no matter how hard it is in time. I feel like a man. I am more of a man than most men here and no one can take advantage of me.<sup>28</sup>

As a second-generation sole breadwinner and single mother to four children, she manages her life without the kind of privileges that allow the middle classes to circumvent ill treatment and endless waiting times in administrative institutions and hospitals in the crumbling, highly bureaucratic public-sector institutions. While housework and cleaning remains a gendered, marginalized occupation, within the social hierarchy of a capitalist social economy Samira claims to represent and occupy the role of father and mother for her family.

While the gendered nature of various spheres continues to prevail on an official level in Egypt, ascribing the private sphere to women and the public to men, a closer look at social interactions indicates a more complex societal reality in which gender, space, and power are not reducible to one another. Within Egypt,

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<sup>26</sup> Fakhouri 1972.

<sup>27</sup> Ghannam cited in Singerman 2009, 111–44.

<sup>28</sup> Audiovisual recording, February 2017.

the role of the woman as mother remains most crucial in defining the public discourse of femininity and generating an income is central to defining masculinity. In a sense, she represents the re-appropriation of power within the patriarchal concept of labour where both are challenged and reinforced simultaneously.

I have nobody but myself, in case something happens to me, if someone chooses to expose me to violence or simply not pay me, I have nothing that can grant me protection except myself and my ability to claim my rights. I have to fight because no one else will do it for me. Not the state, not my family, not my husband.<sup>29</sup>

Providing for the family's needs, engaging with employers in socially and economically significant situations and with public state institutions such as schools, courts, and hospitals as a single mother and divorcee, requires navigating alternating systems of oppression. The skills and ability to persuade, pressure, negotiate, argue, and mobilize are powerful assets. While Samira describes herself as "the man of the house [in] and outside of the house" it becomes clear that making sense of gender and its performance are based on a negotiation with power and its reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm. Performances of gender depend on and contend with power dynamics that are conditioned by intersectional marginalization in terms of class and gender. Relying on her persuasive abilities in obtaining rights in confrontation with socially powerful counterparts, Samira claims these come at both a gain and a cost. In my interpretation, she alternates between pride and regret over such challenges; these experiences come with a diverse set of emotions. The balance of power within the patriarchal concept of labour is situational and experienced moments differently: gendered notions of labour are being reinforced and simultaneously challenged. The same is true for gendered notions of the private and public spheres. As Samira argues:

In general, I do not feel like I want to go back to being a stay-at-home mom again but at the moment I also long for it. I cannot imagine not making decisions for myself and my children anymore, but I also am tired of being in charge all the time. I am proud of who I have become but I wonder who I would be if things were easier.<sup>30</sup>

Only one of the three rooms in Samira's house has a window which offers a view onto a red brick wall of the neighbouring building. Despite the lack of windows, Samira's small home is crowded with moving images, offering other views, presenting references; some close and others more distant from her surroundings.

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<sup>29</sup> Audiovisual recording, September 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Audiovisual recording, Samira, September 2017.

Over the course of six years of continuous visits, media references, lyrics from pop songs, and lines from advertisements are omnipresent and integral to the daily jokes and games of her children. She emphasizes in multiple conversations that smartphones have become crucial for managing and keeping track of her children who spend long hours alone at home:

Sometimes I don't know how to pay rent at the end of the month, but I will find a way to charge my phone. We rely on it, and the kids will drive me crazy if they don't have internet on their phones. Staying home on their phones helps me keep them away from the street. Accidents happen, drugs are sold just down the street, I am constantly worried they might get into trouble once they leave the house.<sup>31</sup>

Leisure spaces in Cairo, especially for women and children, are highly privatized. The options for her children to join extra-curricular classes, or activities in private clubs, depend on Samira's ability to make sufficient income. When I asked her if she thinks the atmosphere in her house has changed since smartphones have become so dominant in the life of her children, she answered:

I can see how addicted they all are to their phones. While we are in touch over the phone when I am at work, we are less present with one another when we are together. They [the children] appreciate the little time we have together less, but sometimes it also brings us together. Salma [my daughter] motivates me to make or watch a video with her [...] but I do not understand why she is so obsessed with this influencer and his community.<sup>32</sup>

Short videos shared amidst daily routines help keep Samira engaged with her daughters. The moments of sociability required for making a TikTok video, seemingly counteract the isolation which is the usual mode of everyone living their private lives through their phones.

Within the last four years Samira and her two sisters, Doa and – who share the same occupation, rely heavily on social media for accessing and acquiring work. Their method is to ask former or existing employers to share or post their contact details and invite them into groups for expatriates who have just arrived in Cairo. Social media outlets thus expand personalized labour relationships, while granting a degree of what Doa describes as accountability: receiving work through recommendations and posts on Facebook via existing networks provides a degree of safety. Google Translate is an effective tool to help overcome language barriers with some of Samira's expatriate employers, many of whom are teachers in private foreign language schools. She rarely meets her employers in person.

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<sup>31</sup> Audio-visual recording, Samira, June 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Audio-visual recording, Samira, July 2023.

She is given a key to most of the apartments and usually cleans while they are not at home.<sup>33</sup> Some of the flats Samira cleans are more than four times the size of her own place. Despite working some days in more than one location, her income barely covers her monthly expenses. The normalization of low salaries offers meagre prospects for social mobility; social disparities in Egypt are on the rise. Prices of essential products are increasing while wages do not keep up with the rapid devaluation of the local currency. The physical absence of Samira's employers, with whom she communicates almost entirely through WhatsApp, contrasts with her involvement in the intimate aspects of their daily lives. Lack of social recognition and approval for her labour are in contrast with the social recognition she has gained through her ability to consult, negotiate, and stand her ground with neighbours and family friends.

During a recent summer visit to Cairo, I joined her at one of her employers' homes, a spacious apartment in Maadi. She tucks her phone between her veil and her face, which she only wears while working to keep her hands free as she relentlessly manages her family life from a distance. Her movements are quick; she jumps between calls. As she vacuums, mops the floors, scrubs surfaces, washes dishes, and changes sheets, she consistently engages in multiple conversations. Her modes of speech and tone fluctuate between making small talk and managing existential crises, fights over debt, arguments between neighbours, crying children and family feuds. She navigates almost seamlessly amongst challenging conflicts, asserting her authority, and reinforcing her position with affirmative and charming banter. She offers advice, passes on orders, demands and negotiates, multitasking with impressive speed. Even at a distance, she maintains her parental authority and her social role as an autonomous and reliable source of advice for family and friends. She spends long periods during her working hours on calls. The pace and diversity of issues covered, deals made, and actions taken while cleaning is dizzying to me, yet while she seems to be managing effortlessly and organizing multiple presents. Workdays last up to ten hours, which does not keep her from being constantly engaged in conversations and navigating social responsibilities at home.

We often sat on Samira's large couch together after long commutes back home. In front of an oversized TV, Samira, myself, and her two daughters, who are all engrossed in their phones and exhausted, I cannot help but wonder aloud, "What do you think is different for them [your children] from how things were for you?" Not yet fully present before she puts her phone aside, she answers:

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33 Audio-visual recording, Samira, September 2017.

I believe my daughters do not have to endure what I had to endure with my own mother. I married to escape home and made the wrong decisions. [...] I want the girls to have a life of their own and not rely on marriage. You cannot rely on that [marriage] they have to be self-reliant. I can see Salma has the potential for a better life in the future: [...] she is quick to see opportunities. She already has seventeen thousand followers on TikTok;<sup>34</sup> [...] She also knows more English. [...] and she is obsessed with leaving Egypt. She dreams bigger than I did when I was her age.<sup>35</sup>

Despite expressing concerns about her daughter's abundant social media presence, she encourages her, while surveilling all of her posts and most of her chats. The significant exposure, and the attention from her favourite Egyptian influencer with an even larger following, who she actively promotes and advertises for, and who sometimes sends her gifts to open, or 'unbox' on camera and post online, brings the promise of glamour and fame. TikTok performances are at times combined with dress-up sessions, which might be followed by a discussion about how to present the most pleasing angle of one's home, which transforms into a public stage. During a conversation about how Samira's daughter makes her own TikToks at home she stated the following: "When my children make videos, I ensure they choose an angle where no laundry is lying around, and less personal stuff is visible."<sup>36</sup> The private sphere is cleared of its associative and personal objects for videos: the notion of what invites intimacy is treated as a very serious matter by Samira.

Most posts use filters that both distort her surroundings and her appearance. Few of her posts convey much of the reality of her everyday life. Her appearance and the landscapes in her background alternate and become even less revealing of her situation and context when filters are applied. While what is performed online seems to a degree dissociated from reality. Nevertheless, Salma speaks of the connections she has made through virtual outlets as emotionally supportive, genuine, and real.

Like Salma's favourite YouTube and TikTok influencers, their posts are apolitical, and concerned with everyday life matters and personal issues. Recurring themes and topics of interest include things such as mental health, love, and family life. Her favourite influencer even published a book that explains his way out of depression and addiction, and how he found purpose in life.

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**34** Audiovisual recording, Samira, April 2022.

**35** Audiovisual recording, Samira, September 2017.

**36** Audiovisual recording, Samira, August 2022.

I feel very connected to him, he's my role model. Me and all others [sic] who love him call ourselves his children. We all feel connected with each other, many of his fans are my friends, as a fan community we talk a lot online, and I am really close with them.

Undoubtedly, social media platforms are avenues through which personalized expression and a new dimension of how social relationships are experienced and made. So-called 'fangirling' allows Salma to connect with her favourite influencer's community of followers, who in turn also follow her account. Many of whom she has never met in person, yet they engage in daily interactions and sustain active channels of communication forming what she refers to as sincere and deeply valued friendships.

Salmas' online persona carries unknown potential and hope of fame. She mimics and lip-syncs songs, and she promotes other influencers with videos and notes dedicated to them through which she regularly gains new followers. She claims to feel more connected to the influencer she is most fond of than anyone else in her direct surroundings and speaks of him as a role model and source of guidance.

She takes her task to promote him very seriously, and appears emotionally and socially invested in her fandom. As part of the fan community, she has access to an extensive social network, many of whom she defines as friends. However, her interactions with them remain virtual encounters; "I know people in Luxor, and Minya and Alexandria, one girl even has a picture of me in her room, but we never met."

Private lessons by their teachers have come to replace school attendance for Doa's children who supposedly all attend public schools. Citing the failure of the public sector, Doa claims that the public school teacher won't pass them if they don't attend private lessons, which is how they enhance their insufficient salaries. In fact, no one expects the children to come to school: private lessons are expensive, and according to Doa, public education is expensive, since it is only through the private payment of the teachers that she can ensure that her children pass their classes. She asserts that "education is expensive even if I send my child to a governmental school. We parents pay for the salaries that are not provided." Samira spends over 200 EGP per child per month for their private classes in 'public' education. This is why her children rarely leave home. In turn, Samira's family is not embedded in a public infrastructure, the eroded public sector immensely affects every aspect of Samira's life: something which is likely to get worse in spite of a new wave of hyper privatization as digital culture is on the rise. Consumption in the form of things like sweets, cosmetics, toys, and smartphones, appears to be important to Samira, and influences her spending patterns. This has prevented her from fulfilling her long-term plan of buying her own home, which would ensure greater stability for her and her children.

## Conclusion

'Internet fame,' among the seemingly endless opportunities of the World Wide Web, to many young women in Egypt is a social and economic resource, and an alternative to the dire economic situation defining Egypt today. However, the internet is not free of national systems of control, through which existing super-structures at the very core of national politics are sustained.<sup>37</sup>

The state's defensive reaction to a younger generation of women who have acquired fame on social media platforms, and who operate across regional and global domains, is one example of how online trends, within a monetized cybersphere, can lead to conflicting interests between two interdependent and deeply entwined systems of power, where the nation-state and cyber-capitalism collide. Yet state owned outlets and TV channels are increasingly adapting to the formats of online feeds; many now engage by posting on platforms such as Instagram and Twitter (now X) and have been part of debates that went viral. National television, as Abu-Lughod points out, "is a key institution for the production of national culture."<sup>38</sup> This poses new questions about the continuities and discrepancies shaping media and national culture in Egypt today, and how these affect public opinion and changing lifestyle models, identities and desires.

Digital outlets, many of which should be investigated more thoroughly, but exceed the scope of this article, present a challenge in their curated images. Social media outlets are fundamentally changing the way people imagine and live their lives and how they represent themselves. Some formats provoke users to look beyond the curtain of the 'guest room,'<sup>39</sup> inviting audiences into the personal realms of everyday life, witnessing the vernacular at a new scope, in which static notions of and national narratives are not upheld and coherent. Live streams represent immediate experiences, changing voices, spontaneity, and immediacy where influence, personal exchange, and concerns are voiced while the reality of what defines social connections are increasingly virtual and self-curated. The formation of social media fame, which engages with audiences on a personal level within the privacy of homes, highlights the multiplicity of lived experiences prevailing across society that reinvent fixed models of representation in new formats: the growing trends of filters that alter looks and backgrounds, thus playing a crucial role in setting the boundaries. The threat of young female actors with large followings and social influence represent a structural obstacle

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<sup>37</sup> *Mada Masr* 2020b.

<sup>38</sup> Abu-Lughod 2005, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Saad 1998, 401–12.

challenging the core of patriarchal, authoritative systems of state control and censorship, despite their claims of political neutrality. With the immediacy of the streaming format, the challenge of what Saad describes as “living room culture” obsessed with “ritualized representation models” makes the question that Saad raises relevant here too; “who is allowed to be represented?” and, “how are these representations changing in the digital age?”<sup>40</sup>

It becomes clear that social media spaces create new gendered performances and visibilities that are often produced and consumed within the private spheres of homes. This opens up an entirely new market for many women. Despite the ‘lightness’ of leisure content, the greater controversies for the state lie in the stark opposition to what state-owned media consider as permissible to a guiding moral code.

As McQuire notes, “globalization of media flows go hand in hand with the reorganization of domestic life.”<sup>41</sup> While digital media remains a source of agency, it also continues to operate at the heart of a neoliberal system with growing social divides enabling a new wave of hyper privatization. In fact, As McQuire argues, the same technological infrastructure has “helped to normalize a degree of industrial, commercial, social and familial separation.”<sup>42</sup> For many it has instilled a desire to see and be in places or acquire things we are not always physically or materially own or experience. What’s more, it has intensified a mode of being in the world that reaches beyond the here and now.

The broadcasting of snippets of daily life and inviting the public eye into private spheres with new modes of vernacular image-making, have resulted in a tightened surveillance of the personalized politics of entertainment, consumption, and leisure, affecting young women. As we experience the increasing personalization of consumption through smart phones we have entered a new age of hyper privatization. Given this context, intersecting themes that lend themselves to looking at the interrelatedness of material, virtual, and visual culture and how they are placed within daily life remain crucial sights of investigation. The growing pressure over how things ‘look’ – meaning being able to keep up with a new age of hyper-fashionability as Egypt’s national image undergoes a violent remaking as part of the Sisi regime’s grand ‘modernization campaign’ – lies at hand. The modernization of state institutions and state apparatuses, along with the expansion of digital infrastructure, high inflation, low salaries, and the criminalization of the informal housing and labour sectors, enhance the already

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<sup>40</sup> Saad 1998, 401–12.

<sup>41</sup> McQuire 2008, 6.

<sup>42</sup> McQuire 2008, 21.



existing massive social disparities defining Egypt's social fabric today. In light of this remodelling of the urban landscape and national image, many Egyptians are faced with increasing socioeconomic hardship and less social mobility, while at the same time, the growing deterioration of experiences increases pressure to live up to consumer trends, many of which are advertised through the vast pool of online platforms.

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