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## **BARAKA: Grace, healing and political legitimacy in the Middle East and North Africa**

### **Summary**

There is a correlation in the Islamic Middle East between the health of the individual and the health of the State. Both are dependent on the endowment of *baraka*—or God's grace. The paper explores the historical relationship between Islamic revivalism, personal healing and political reformulation in the Middle East and North Africa. It compares the scriptural and "popular" Islamic approaches to *baraka*. Scriptural Islam emphasizes the healing power of Qur'anic verse, text, and precept, while "popular" Islam focuses on the curative abilities of Islamic personages—saints, their tombs or shrines, and the living descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. The paper explores a shift in the contemporary manifestation of *baraka*, from an emphasis on personal healing and localized conflict resolution to the legitimization of regimes and resistance movements. Examples are taken from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

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### **Introduction**

Before the Iranian Revolution, there was considered to be an opposition in Islam between two forms of religious life. The first was characterized as having the formalism and legalism of what WEBER has called "traditional authority" which is led by a learned religious élite (WEBER 1947:341-358). This form of Islam emphasizes scripturalism, focusing primarily on the *Qur'an*, which is considered to be the literal word of God. In addition, and to a lesser extent, it is based upon the better documented Hadith—the codified traditions associated with the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. The second tradition in Islam was seen as informal and regionally variable, emphasizing shrines over scriptures, charismatic leadership over scholarship, holy lineages over schools of religious learning, and mysticism over legalism. In this "popular" Islam, the Prophet Muhammad and his line of descent up to the present day are

imbued with *baraka*, the healing power of grace. Before the Iranian Revolution, scriptural Islam appeared to predominate in urban areas, "popular" Islam in rural and outlying areas, primarily among basically illiterate populations. Since that time, however, scripturalism has been both prescribed and proscribed vociferously throughout the Middle East and North Africa, and the concept of *baraka* has taken on some new applications.

The literature demonstrates that perhaps the most important difference between scriptural and "popular" Islam, tended to be neither in the realm of faith nor in the degree of adherence to Qur'anic law, but in the underlying function of each form of religious life. The role of scripturalism has always emphasized binding society together to promote, create, and invigorate the *'umma*, or larger Islamic community—embodied ideally by the Islamic State. "Popular" Islam, on the other hand, has emphasized the personal, providing mechanisms for the healing of individual physical and emotional disorders or traumas as well as for the resolution of interpersonal and inter-lineage conflict. Under ideal conditions, there should be no separation of the two functions: the health of the individual would be a reflection of a thriving and vibrant Islamic State. Integration has always been the goal in Islam—integration of religion, state, family, and individual. Secularism, from the Islamic point of view, cannot achieve this integration and thus cannot induce healing of either personal or political ailments.

Secularism, particularly in North Africa came to be associated with European culture, primarily as a result of the non-Islamic colonial domination of the region. Practices offensive to Islamic sensibilities and notions of purity were imported by the colonizers, especially by the French. A century's worth of enforced European colonial appropriation of government and expropriation of land took place between about 1850 and 1960. Thus, not only the political process but the land itself came to be polluted as the colonizer filled the countryside with vineyards, wineries and pig farms—all forbidden as unclean under Islamic law. Western education and medicine accompanied other forms of domination and a dualism grew, reflecting tremendous ambivalence between the forces of European secularism and Arab religiosity. Secularism and European modes of practice were lucrative during the colonial era; following the precepts of Islam and Arabic culture were denigrated as "unevolved." In rural Tunisia, for example, this binary classification was (and remains) explicit. There are *'arbi* practices and *souri* practices. *'Arbi*, literally "arab," refers to all things considered indigenous and Islamic. *Souri* literally means "Syrian" but is used to denote all things French, and by extension, European and secular. Thus, there are *'arbi* and *souri* sections of town, forms of architecture, language, dress, mannerisms and affectations, animals, foods, courts and healing practices (see Figure One).

The two classifications may be characterized as embodying all the ambivalence and at times tension, between what are seen as opposing paradigms. The fact is, however, that not one individual acts or lives wholly on one side of the classification system or the other. North African culture has long been a repository of both, and every era, region, and locality makes its own re-evaluation of the merit and desirability of both sides of the equation. Further, each individual weaves together *'arbi* and *souri* life ways according to family and tribal proclivities, political leanings, accessibility, personal choice and context. Some vociferously advocate one side of the dichotomy, while practicing its opposite. Most Tunisian families, particularly in the rural sector, may practice both, but do not blend them. Frequently, some members of the family will operate under one set of principles, while others do just the opposite. Or a single individual may change practice on any given day, hour or moment, according to context. Rural women and marabouts have tended to be the repositories of *'arbi* healing practices within the household to a greater extent than do, say urban women and secularized

men. But 'arbi politics and political resistance—the healing of the State—appear in the post-colonial period to transcend all boundaries of class, education, urbanism and gender.

Other variables, such as class and religiosity, also play a role in determining healing and other 'arbi/souri choices. A critical variable tends to be the national and international political climate. Secular administrations oppose traditional healing practices, even those associated with Islamic brotherhoods. In contemporary Tunisia, some traditional healers have told me that their practices had been frowned upon—tantamount to being declared illegal—by President Bourguiba at the dawn of the new independent state. Similarly, it is understood that displays reflecting ardent religious fervor—*i.e.*, displays that offer succor to the politically disabled—are especially met with disaffection by national governments.

Religious leaders deemed “fundamentalist” Muslims, *i.e.* those who in the past would be the ones to turn to for both healing and conflict resolution, are precisely the ones targeted as potential national political threats. They face the possibility of imprisonment for any display of inordinate spiritual power, particularly since the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979, whose example other Middle Eastern and North African governments would not, for the most part, like to follow.

Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, the spiritual healing and conflict resolution attributed to “popular” Islam have long been within the domain of Sufi brotherhoods and individual holy men. Saints, scholars, and politicians could gain legitimacy through acts of grace, or *baraka*, which was acquired either directly through divine favor, indirectly through descent from the line of the Prophet Muhammad, or through both descent and divine favor together. There is a fairly well known anthropological/historical literature on spiritual healing practices in “popular” Islam, beginning with the incomparable two volumes, *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, by WESTERMARCK, (1926) and continuing with the works of GEERTZ (1968), GELLNER (1969), CRAPANZANO (1973, 1980), TRIMINGHAM (1970, 1971), EICHELMAN (1981), LINGS (1961), and others. As will be seen, what these authors emphasize is that the oftentimes magical or mystical rituals and practices of Sufi orders, saint cults, marabouts (Islamic saints and adepts imbued with the healing powers of *baraka*) and other forms of religious brotherhoods are marginal to both the State and to mainstream Islam, and remain unsanctioned and uncodified by scripturalism. At times, however, the legitimacy of central authority *as well as the legitimacy of resistance to it* may be justified in the name of Islam, Qur'anic precept, and claim of descent from the revered line of Muhammad, the messenger of God.

What I would like to do is to give some examples of the pragmatic use of *baraka*, or grace, not only from the literature but also in the interplay between grace, healing and politics today. Cases will be taken primarily from Tunisia, with supplemental examples from Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Afghani refugee camp communities in Pakistan.

### 1. *Baraka*, Healing, and Political Process

It is through understanding the nature of *baraka* that we appreciate the connection between healing and political action, for both restore order to the body, whether that body is organic or political. *Baraka* can be used not only to heal the physical body, but also to establish political legitimacy—or even to foment political resistance to an already established national administration. *Baraka* is a consequential factor in both scriptural and “popular” Islam, and without it Islamic history has no grace.

In both aspects, Islam knows the concepts of the sacred power—*baraka*—... for not only has the holy person *baraka*, but also the black stone of the Kaaba radiates it, and the copy of the Koran is filled with blessing power, as is the sacred Night of Might (cf. Sura 97) in which the first revelation took place. (SCHIMMEL, 1994:XIV)

WESTERMARCK (1926) was perhaps the first anthropologist to document the role of *baraka* in great detail. He devotes about 200 pages to the application of *baraka* in charms, invocations, healings and spells. He does not tie the concept to political process. TRIMINGHAM (1970, 1971), on the other hand, examines the transmission of *baraka* in the evolution of Islamic saint cults, outlining the political relationship of local orders both historically and in terms of practice. In addition, he outlines the formation of Sufi schools of mysticism and documents the pattern by which a brotherhood is formed. The key aspects in the Sufi path, or indeed the path in any Islamic healing, include *baraka*, *silsila*, *tariqa*, and *zawiya*. Both healing and political legitimacy can be evaluated in terms of these four elements.

## 2. The Origins of *Baraka*

Geertz (1968: 43-54) referred to *baraka* as "spiritual electricity." *Baraka* literally means "blessing" or "grace" and has at its root BRK. The verb means "to be made to bend your knee" and includes specifically the way the camel is made to kneel for mounting (LANE, 1984:103-105). The verb is thus receptive—one *receives* blessing on bended knee—and *submits* to patriarchal authority. Built into the root, therefore, is the implicit sexual transmission of *baraka* which is passed patrilineally from generation to generation. As will be seen, the symbolic transmission of *baraka* contains both of these root elements.

Definitions of *baraka* vary little. To TRIMINGHAM (1971) it is holiness transmitted through spiritual descent. To EICHELMAN (1981) it is God's grace and supernatural blessing. To CRAPANZANO (1973) it is a curative force with a strong psychodynamic dimension. To WESTERMARCK (1926) it is blessing, holiness and blessed virtue. GIBB (1972) labeled it magical power, and considered it a marginal concept to the study of Islam. Likewise, HODGESON (1974), in all three volumes of *The Venture of Islam* barely mentions the term. To GOLDBERG (1990) it is saintliness and blessedness which can be transmitted even through dreams. And to GEERTZ (1968) it is religious and supernatural power of which he concludes that it is better to talk about it than to try to define it. From Morocco to Pakistan, *baraka* is a key symbol that can be extolled as the ultimate gift of God, or disparaged as false, ignorant manipulation. Thus, pious Muslims enacting their devotion in "popular" ways may well be condemned as ignorant, hellbound, or even satanic by some scripturalists. Debates even arise regarding the *baraka* of the Prophet Muhammad himself. To detractors of the concept, Muhammad was simply a *recipient* of Qur'anic revelation, imbued with no mystical qualities of his own. Interestingly, the receptive aspect indeed is a feature of the grammatical root of *baraka*—one *receives* the grace of God—in Islam, one cannot grapple for it. To those who are moved by the concept of *baraka*, the Prophet is considered to have received the grace of God even before the revelation of the *Qur'an*. The grace bestowed upon the prophet Muhammad came to be transmitted patrilineally through his line of descendants. There could be considerable debate over this transmission, as the Prophet had no sons survive to childbearing age. Instead, his descendants trace through his daughter Fatima, and his son-in-law, Ali. Fatima's first cousin. Despite the foregoing, it is generally accepted in the Islamic world that women may possess *baraka*, but do not or cannot transmit it to their children. Fatima may well have been the exception. Or, it could be argued, that the Prophet transmitted his God-given grace direct-



**Figure 1**  
**Sample of 'Arbi/Souri Classifications in Rural Tunisia with Reference to Healing**  
 (Adapted from: M. Zussman, *Development and Disenchantment in Rural Tunisia, 1992: 51-56*)

Trait	'Arbi	Souri
Origins and Direction	Arab, Berber South "good fortune"	French, European North "bad fortune"
Religion	Islam	Christianity
Language	Arabic, Qur'anic Arabic (i.e. sacred language)	French (i.e. secular language)
Education	Qur'anic <i>mekteb</i>	Secular education lack of formal schooling
Causality	<i>Maktoub</i> (fate), <i>Baraka</i> (grace) <i>Kteff</i> (close connections)	<i>Pistons</i> (connections) Machines (technology)
Healer	Trust in Allah. Sacrifice Folk or religious healer Visit to <i>zawiya</i> /tomb/ <i>hadra</i>	Physician, nurse or pharmacist Visit to hospital
Remedies	Herbs, <i>naffa</i> and sand on wound, blood-letting and hot-oil compresses	Injections, ampules, (pharmacy vitamins) and aspirin; surgery
Headache Remedy	Heated olive oil and clove compresses (similar to biblical anointing oils).	Aspirin or vitamin ampules (considered "bad for the blood")
Blood-Pressure Control	<i>Tashlit</i> blood-letting, then rest to increase volume	"Injections, ampules, tablets"
Temperature	Equalize body temperature with environment (e.g. sip cold water to go out in cold)	Retain stable body temperature (e.g. drink hot to go out in cold)
Increase Fertility	Pilgrimage to shrine, leave offering; animal sacrifice	"Injections, ampules, tablets"
Decrease Fertility	Olive-oil soaked cotton vaginal suppositories	Birth control pills "bad for the blood"
Dispute Resolution	Visit to the <i>shaikh</i> or <i>imam</i> well known to both parties	Police or courthouse judge— not from region

ly to his son-in-law through their familial proximity, and that the holy lineage which begins with the Prophet's family originated in this manner. Why does any of this matter? The manner of the transmission of *baraka* is tied to political legitimacy, and is a key factor, for example, in the historical dispute between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims. The Shi'a hold the view that the line of the Prophet is both holy and miraculous, having been shaped not from dust like earthly men, but from light, singing the praises of God. Shi'a Hadith documents the Prophet's words to his daughter on this matter:

Oh daughter, God (praised and exalted be He!) cast a glance on the inhabitants of the earth and chose your father and made him a prophet. He cast a second glance and chose your husband 'Ali, and made a brother and legatee for me. He cast a third glance and chose you and your mother and made you two mistresses of the women of the worlds. He cast a fourth glance and chose your two sons and made them two masters of the youths of paradise ... (*Maqatal Al-Husayn* [NAJAF 1367, I: 67] quoted in SACHEDINA 1981:71)

The Prophet Muhammad was able to take on the difficult role of leading the fledgling community of believers under siege by their opponents and overseeing the initial expansion of Islam precisely because his legitimacy derived from this God-given state of grace. *Baraka*, therefore confers charisma, in the Weberian sense of "uncanny personal power."

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers and qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. In primitive circumstances this peculiar kind of deference is paid to prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, to leaders of the hunt, and heroes in war. It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers. (WEBER 1947: 358-59)

WEBER distinguishes this type of legitimate authority from two other types. The first is based on what he calls "rational grounds," and the second on "traditional grounds" (*ibid.*, p. 328). The Prophet Muhammad, deriving as he did from the Quraish tribe, the prevailing politico-religious elite of Mecca, was clearly in possession of the "traditional grounds" if not the "rational grounds" for legitimate authority—for the prophet Muhammad shifted the legal basis not only of political leadership but also of personal responsibility from the prevailing norms of Meccan society, further meeting WEBER's requisites of charismatic authority: the creation of *new* obligations, rooted in a new form of faith and spiritual duty (*ibid.*, pp. 362-363). The Prophet Muhammad provides the model for all Islamic political legitimacy to this day, whether through emulation or lineage. He is considered to have received divine favor and revelation, provided resistance to the prevailing corrupt political elite, possessed the ability to heal, and had an innate (or God-given) aptitude for conflict resolution. What I am suggesting here, is that the Prophet Muhammad is *the* model for political legitimate authority throughout the Islamic Middle East and North Africa. Further, aspirations to model after the Prophet's example, can lead to unreasonably high expectations of political leaders in the contemporary arena, and result in political resistance based upon the *same* claim, i.e., that one's legitimacy and authority are authentic in contrast to those in power (who have demonstrated, by their failings, their lack of *baraka*). The problem with sole reliance on charismatic authority, however, is that it can lead to political dis-ease rooted in idiosyncratic leadership.

The group which responds to charismatic leadership is based on a form of communal relationship. No administrative bureaucracy exists in the ordinary sense but rather various officials are selected on the basis of their relationship to the charismatic. There is no clear sphere of authority and the leader intervenes in decisions when he deems it necessary ... Formal rules and abstract legal principles have no place and the charismatic follows the dictum "It is written ... but I say unto you ..." Every obligation is a duty on the part of the followers by virtue of the fact

that they emanate from the leader himself. Charismatic authority is thus outside the realm of normal routine. In this sense it is the antithesis of rational-legal and traditional authority. (BOWIE: 1976: 142)

The cyclicity of devotion, disappointment, and new dreams for leadership that can embody all three forms of political authority, are at the root of succession disputes after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the core of Sunni/Shi'i debate over legitimate Islamic authority and jurisdiction.

The problem of legitimacy and jurisdiction arise in contemporary debates over Israeli and Palestinian sovereignty. *Baraka*, or *bracha* in Hebrew, is a kind of holiness that can be transmitted to others once it is acquired. *Bracha* can be conferred in ways that Islamic *baraka* cannot. Biblical notions of *bracha* differ significantly from Islamic notions in that *bracha* can be given irrevocably *even by accident or be sold in a moment of need*, and still be legally binding. It is tied to birthright, and biblical precept makes it quite clear that with *bracha* is conferred all rights to property and territory, and without it, one's lineage falls by the wayside. This is best illustrated by the biblical story of Jacob and Esau. Selectivity, exclusivity, and rightful ownership characterize the biblical conferring of *bracha*. And because of the transmission of *bracha* to the younger son over his elder brother—to Isaac over Ishmael, to Jacob over Esau—according to the Bible, God's gift to Abraham of the Promised Land passes into wholly Israelite hands.

To complicate territorial claims further, grace or blessing (BRK) is distinguished from the root for holiness (QDS) in its ability to be transferred. Objects or places that are QDS, can embody holiness but do not radiate it. Thus Jerusalem in Arabic *El Quds*—is a sacred place that one can enter, but its holiness cannot be transferred elsewhere. For this reason, "any other place" just won't do as the capital of a religiously-based nationstate, whether in Islam or Judaism. This distinction exists in both Hebrew and Arabic and plays its part in the semantics of Israeli/Palestinian debates over sovereignty and legitimacy of each other's territorial aspirations. Examining, if only briefly, Jewish notions of BRK and QDS are important if only to point out their roles in contextualizing the problems of nation-building in the region and issues of political legitimacy.

There is an inherent relationship between the concepts of BRK and QDS. Thus, for example, a society whose spiritual leaders have been stripped of their authority over holy places, and are demoted to serving, at best, as functionaries of the State, and having their activities drastically curtailed, is a society ripe for political resistance in an era of religious revivalism—and this era was ushered in throughout the Islamic world in 1979 in the wake of the Iranian Revolution.

In Islam, the transmission of *baraka* is also selective—but it is not exclusive. In fact, the more of it that is given, the more of it there appears to be. One's ability to confer *baraka* on others is an indication of how much one has. One saint I knew in rural Tunisia was considered to have "just a little bit" of *baraka*—not even enough to transmit to his own children, but enough to do minor healings, whereas, a 10 year old boy at the other end of the valley appeared to have a seemingly limitless amount, despite having none of it transmitted through his ancestors. Being in the presence of this child calmed peoples' passions, while the impoverished saint worked quite hard at his healings. In contrast, another man of the region appeared to have an endless supply of protective *baraka*, which appeared to end at the boundary of his own fields. In rural Tunisia, the expression '*ana 'aliya b'il-barka, w-inti alik b'il-harka*—"it is for me to receive mine through the grace of God [*baraka*] and for you to receive yours through (hard) labor"—is a common way to understand why one man's fields appear to thrive while one's own next door fall short or fail (ZUSSMAN 1992). Thus, grace is an eco-

conomic as well as a political and spiritual commodity. With it, one's health, family, and crops thrive easily. Without it, one struggles.

*Baraka* can be innate, conferred, or transmitted genetically. The child mentioned above was considered to have innate *baraka*, in sharp distinction to his whiskey drinking father, whose crops had failed miserably. The child's mind—or spirit—could help neither his father nor his fields, but was directed outward, toward those who would seek him in his remote rural enclave. The peasant whose fields appeared (to his neighbors) to till themselves was understood to have a kind of conferred *baraka*—in this case, conferred by his unflinching devotion to ablutions, prayers and rituals. The impoverished saint embodied a genetically transmitted *baraka*, though none of his 13 sons appeared to have received a particle of it.

Miraculous *baraka*, or what I am here calling "innate" *baraka*, entails a kind of personal charisma—an individual's ability to perform what are considered to be miracles, to cure, heal, provide safe passage, and also to mediate and arbitrate in dispute settlement. These abilities are attributed to being able to access the power of God—Allah—not as being powers attributed to the individual himself. Like a shaman, he can access spiritual power—he does not create it.

### 3. *Silsila* and the Transmission of Grace

From the foregoing, it can be seen that lineage, and the transmission of *baraka* are critical in authenticating the legitimacy of a healer, spiritual guide, or religious leader. Establishing the line of descent—in terms of kinship or spiritual descent—entails documenting one's *silsila*, or links leading ultimately back to the Prophet Muhammad himself. TRIMINGHAM, in his 1971 classic *The Sufi Orders of Islam*, documents the *silsila* of numerous Sufi Orders throughout the Middle East, North Africa and West Africa in terms of the transmission of spiritual teachings or genealogical relationship, or both. LINGS (1961) demonstrates how, when genealogical transmission of *baraka* is lacking, it can be symbolically re-enacted, legitimizing spiritual descent from master to disciple. His example comes from the Islamic Alawiyya brotherhood, centered in Mostaganem, northern Algeria.

Strictly speaking, the rite of transmission from one vessel to another cannot be confined to any particular set of forms. Its form may depend, in exceptional cases, on the inspiration of the moment. For example, in addition to the Shadhili initiation which the Shaikh ad-Darqawi received from his Master Shaikh Ali al-Jamal, he also received one from an aged Saint at the point of death who made him his spiritual heir by the ritually unprecedented yet highly significant act of placing his tongue in the Shaikh ad-Darqawi's mouth, and telling him to suck. (LINGS 1961: 72; see also AD-DARQAWI, 1987)

Here, *baraka* is transferred from mouth to mouth in a gesture that symbolically represents genetic transmission. When the transmission is complete, the individual becomes permanently linked in the *silsila* of the brotherhood, and an intrinsic member of a line of descent (the Prophet's) suited for political action. Later we shall see a different form of transmission of *baraka* suited solely for the purpose of personal healing. While the passing of *baraka* from master to disciple, like that between curer and patient, creates a spiritual bond between them, nevertheless, it must be cemented in a genealogical idiom in order to be politically effective. TRIMINGHAM (1971) shows the effects of this process in the Islamization of the indigenous Berber population of North Africa.

But something more was needed, and this came with the generalized *baraka* movement which, beginning in the West in the early 15th century, spread throughout the Maghrib in such a way that it was able to transform the very consciousness of ordinary people, not merely in the urban



slums but in the countryside of plain, mountain, and desert. This process of social change, also associated with a strong surge to Arabization, except in Morocco, changed the attitude of the Berbers to Islam. The influence of Shaikhs was such that whole tribes came to regard themselves as descendants. All holy men had not to call themselves *sharif*, and *baraka* became, not just a gift, but something that could be passed down and inherited. (TRIMINGHAM 1971: 84)

In contrast, rural women keep track of *silsila* not in terms of descent but in terms of alliances formed through marriage. The wife of a prominent shaikh in a North African village told me,

We, the women, are the keepers of *silsila*. *Silsila* is like a pearl necklace. Each pearl may be valuable on its own, but without the cord holding it together there is no beautiful necklace and what good is one pretty pearl all alone?

The shaikh's wife claimed that her husband's authority in the region came not from his descent line, but through her own, for she came from the line of the prestigious and *baraka*-imbued Andalusian founders of the village. From the female point of view, *silsila*, like society itself, falls apart without marriage and women to bind it together. Another woman of the same village, never having seen pearls or pearl necklaces like those belonging to the wealthy shaikh's wife, reiterated this view. She compared *silsila* to a zipper—if one of the links along the way is broken, the entire thing is useless. Thus, a family that cannot trace its lineage or link themselves through alliance, thoroughly loses the honor, respect and devotion awarded those whose claim is well-documented or accepted as unquestionably sound.

*Silsila* as a mechanism of legitimization can be creatively and strategically advanced. The best example I can think of in the contemporary setting is epitomized by a sight I saw in a small cafe in Baghdad in the spring of 1990, just prior to the Gulf War. Like in so many Middle Eastern and North African countries, the image of the head of government looms large, almost anywhere one is likely to glance. Throughout Iraq, the image of President Saddam Hussein is no exception. His visage could be seen on huge billboards along the highways, in public buildings, on the front page of every newspaper every day, on television, and in every public place indoors or out. But these images, no matter how pervasive do not create legitimacy. Some of the massive billboards showed President Hussein leading Sumerian or Babylonian troops to victory—demonstrating a legacy that reaches far into the pre-Islamic past. Another showed the President, with a Kurdish soldier on his left, and an Arab soldier on his right, all wrapped together in the Iraqi flag, below which were their inextricably entwined roots, visually saying, that despite separate tribal ethnicities, Iraqis are all Mesopotamian, peoples of the Twin Rivers, bringers of the first civilization, agriculture, and law itself. Since the Gulf War, however, this notion of Mesopotamian unity, has had little opportunity to manifest. But if a call for pre-Islamic unity should fail, Islamic unity is also called into play: The last, and perhaps most interesting symbolic bid for legitimacy that I saw in Baghdad was clearly put in terms of *silsila*. In front of many of the holy shrines between Baghdad and the holy Shi'ite city of Karbala in the south, *silsilas* may be purchased. These consist of giant posters with a single Tree, the Tree of Life, depicted on it. At the root is Adam. On the trunk is Noah, and at the largest bifurcation is the Patriarch Abraham. The right-hand side of the Tree winds its way up to a beautiful sunflower, which is the Prophet Muhammad, who is thus linked genealogically to Creation itself. In this cafe in Baghdad, tacked to the wall above my seat, was a Tree poster like so many others—but on this Tree, the sunflower too has branches—the line of the Prophet himself—which culminated in a smaller sunflower, inscribed with the name of Saddam Hussein. Thus, the President linked himself not only to descent from the Prophet Muhammad, but back to Creation, and ultimately to God, the Creator.

Legitimization of central authority, through this perhaps magical association with the Prophet, is not at all idiosyncratic of President Saddam Hussein. It is simply a question of

whether a population will accept the association made or not. In many ways, the presidency of Saddam Hussein does indeed parallel the mythological heroes and gods of the Sumerian past. But whether he will be accepted as descended from the Prophet and all the Patriarchs before him back to Adam is very much in question, particularly given the massive efforts to de-legitimize his authority in Iraq. President Hussein considers himself the "good mother" of his nation, attempting against great odds, to keep it whole and vital. His use of poisonous gas along his borders, some Iraqis told me, was what any good mother would do: "If you have cockroaches in the kitchen, does a mother allow them to sicken her children? No! She takes a can of bug spray and she sprays the perimeter of her house and kitchen. That is all Saddam has done—spray the perimeters of our house." Here quite explicitly is the correlation between the health of the individual and the health of the nation being inextricably related—and the methods of maintaining that health are simply writ large along the borders of the State.

#### 4. *Tariqa and Zawiya: The Path and the Place*

Quite literally *tariqa* is the path, and there are *'arbi* paths as well as *souri* paths. *Souri* paths are Western, secular ways—as well as quite literally concrete highways speeding one past the countryside. *'Arbi* paths are the slow, dirt trails through the hills that shepherds walk (*trig 'arbi*), and they are the paths of Islamic spirituality. And while *tariqa* provides the path, *zawiya* is that place the spiritual path leads to: it is the home, lodge, meeting-place or shrine of a particular Islamic Brotherhood—a sacred space (*KDS*) permeated with grace. It is by following a particular *tariqa* and/or entering the *zawiya* that heal the soul and the State, and individual families, at least in the North African countryside, tend to adhere to one brotherhood or another.

Muslim Brotherhoods are prohibited by Islam from magical cures unless they are documented in the *Qur'an* or Hadith.

... Use of amulets, talisman, charmed thread, magic words, hanging sea-shell around the necks, drawing lines on the sand to forecast fortune by watching the stars, to claim to see the unseen, in short all things of this nature are evil or forbidden, against which declaration of war is a duty. However, if there is a verse of the holy Quran or an amulet which can be supported by Sunnah, then it is a different matter. (HAWWA, 1985: 180)

Despite the foregoing warning, however, such practices are very much alive. This is due primarily to the fact that spiritual dis-ease and/or attack is indeed recognized and addressed in the *Qur'an*, thus validating the magical practices of Sufi Brotherhoods and other Islamic practitioners. All of *Sura LXXII* is devoted to the attributes of jinns, or spirits, and their relationship to humanity and to God. It is accepted in Islam that there are hidden spiritual forces that work both for and against the wills of God and human beings, as well as for their own pleasure.

'There were some foolish ones  
Among us, who used  
To utter extravagant lies  
Against God;

'But we do think  
That no man or spirit  
Say aught that is  
Untrue against God.

'True, there were persons  
 Among mankind who took shelter  
 With persons among the Jinns,  
 But they increased them  
 In folly. ...                      QUR'AN, SURA LXXII: 4-6

Given this acknowledgment, protective amulets, charms, and magical practices which include inscriptions or recitations of Qur'anic verses are deemed acceptable by the Alliance of Muslim Brothers, despite their being rejected by other fundamentalist scripturalists.

Villagers say that Islamic Brotherhoods specialize in their use of *baraka*, and so they will go to different Orders based upon their understanding of the etiology of the illness in question. The Hamdushiyya Order of Morocco, for example is known for curing afflictions caused by specific spirits, called *jun* (plural of *jinn*) (CRAPANZANO 1973). Symptoms tend to range from blindness to paralysis, depression, anxiety, obsession, and auditory or visual hallucination—all ailments that Freudian psychoanalytic theory would deem psychologically based. The blindness or paralysis that the Hamdushiyya can cure is what psychoanalysts would call "hysterical," *i.e.*, rooted in psychological disposition or trauma and curable through suggestion, psychotherapy or medication. Moroccans, however, would not go to the Hamdushiyya because of specific symptoms; rather, they would go because an illness had been deemed to emanate from a particular *jinn* that the Hamdushiyya can influence.

Likewise, the visitors to the *zawiya* of Saida Manoubia in northern Tunisia may be afflicted with ailments that the psychiatrists of the adjoining mental hospital deem "ignorant psychosomatic female peasant hysteria." But adherents of the female saint, Saida Manoubia, visit her shrine for assistance in many female-oriented problems which may or may not be specifically related to illness. These can include desire for assistance regarding conflict resolution, protection from the evil eye, pregnancy, health of children, cessation of childbearing or reduction of symptoms, such as sudden paralysis and spirit possession. Followers of Saida Manoubia, however, have no problem seeking the assistance of *souri* physicians in addition to seeking the *baraka* of saints.

An American psychiatrist practicing at Hôpital Razi, next door to the shrine of Saida Manoubia, observed gleefully that "you just don't get such psychologically unsophisticated patients like this in the States anymore." Freudian psychotherapy, however, was deemed thoroughly inappropriate by local people. Tunisian psychiatrists at Manoubia (where, incidentally, Frantz Fanon once practiced), tended to treat patients with weak "*souri*" medicine—vitamin ampules—and send them home with their families. Needless to say, neither approach does much to alleviate patient symptoms. It is almost unheard of to see a case addressed or treated psychodynamically. Fathers and husbands of afflicted wives or daughters, however, are concerned that were they to treat their women as physically as opposed to spiritually afflicted (*souri* etiology as opposed to *arbi*) and were they to be wrong, that their entry to Paradise would be prohibited and they would be condemned to eternal damnation. Similar results would afflict them if they wrongly accused a daughter of faking a bout of sudden, spontaneous paralysis.

The American psychiatrist/Freudian psychoanalyst mentioned above accidentally cured a neighbor's suddenly-paralyzed daughter who lived across the lane from me in Medjerda, Tunisia simply by leaning "too close" to her in his attempt to examine her. She jumped up, terrified that he had broached acceptable social distance. The girl's father, a secularist who was running for mayor of the village at the time, was gratified that he would not have to add the additional expense of animal sacrifice at the local shrine to the cost of his campaign. Her ill-



ness was deemed *souri* and psychiatric because it had been cured by a *souri* psychiatrist, and was attributed to her jealousy over her sister's marriage rather than to the original postulated etiology, spirit possession. Other village men, less political and more economically motivated, say simply that Allah is merciful and that they themselves would surely be forgiven, had they been in the candidate's shoes, for not having the wherewithal to indulge an ailing daughter. The 'arbi scripturalist position—in contrast to that of "popular" Islam or *souri* secularist medicine, is that if it is God's will, she will heal of her own accord. Thus, approaches to individual pathology and healing may be based as much upon economic strategies and political motivations, as they are upon the oftentimes more obvious spiritual and physical concerns.

The Hamdushiyya of Morocco see patients like this frequently, however the etiology tends to be attributed to the *jnun* rather than to explicit psychodynamic factors. The *jnun* may be named or unnamed, and they may strike or possess their victim. However, the Hamdushiyya are primarily called in when a patient has been attacked by a named *jinn* because the adepts and descendants of Sidi Ali and Sidi Ahmed (founders of the Brotherhood) have a special relationship with these *jnun*. They are particularly effective with a *jinniyya* named 'Aisha Qandisha ('sacred lady'), and appear to be as devoted to her as they are to their own patron saints. CRAPANZANO (1973) distinguishes between two types of cures for spirit possession—exorcism and symbiosis. Symbiotic cure is by far the more expensive of the two.

The major difference between exorcist cures and symbiotic cures is that exorcistic cures are one-shot affairs and symbiotic cures are continuous. The patient, in the case of symbiotic cure, is incorporated into the cult, and, as a member of that cult must go through a "curing" periodically. The exorcistic cures are much simpler. (CRAPANZANO 1973: 159)

*Jnun* are legitimate concerns of Islamic Brotherhoods because their existence is acknowledged in the *Qur'an*. They represent, therefore, a form of spiritual attack which can be cured—or more usually, put into remission—through an infusion of *baraka*. Curative *baraka*, however, is not transmitted in the same manner as genealogical *baraka*. It is conveyed very much like a vaccine, or booster shot—the recipient patient will require repeated, long-term, or even life-long adherence to the *tariqa* of the brotherhood for the alleviation of symptoms.

The practitioner must be able to transfer his/her *baraka* to the afflicted one for him to be strong enough to maintain a living arrangement with the *jinn* in cases of symbiotic cure. According to CRAPANZANO, the Hamdushiyya effect their cures by going into trances in which they slash their heads with knives, iron clubs or axes. The patient is encouraged to go into trance (perform the *hadra* ritual) and slash his head.

The Hamadsha often smear blood from their head wounds on ailing parts of the patient's body. WESTERMARCK (1926 [I]: 203) reports that they dipped cubes of sugar into the blood and gave it to the sick to eat. I have also heard that they dipped their blood in their wounds and fed it to the ailing (ibid., pp. 201-202).

and

[B]araka may be transferred either directly or indirectly to the patient. In either case, if the patient is the victim of a named-jinn or *jinniyya*, this *baraka* is not usually sufficient to effect a cure, but rather puts the patient in a state of potential cure. The cure is then effected by the patient's following a regime pleasing to the *jinn* or *jinniyya*. One important element in this regime is the *hadra* which permits patient and curers alike to enter trance. Again, the saint's *baraka* is considered the potentializing force behind the *hadra*. (ibid., pp. 167-168)

According to the Muslim Brotherhood, these practices would be deemed permissible because it is God's grace which effects a cure over Qur'anically acknowledged spirits.

In contrast to the Hamdushiyya, the *tariqa* of the Hansaliyya Order mobilize *baraka* by prohibiting blood-shed rather than inducing it. The Hansaliyya have built their village *zawiyas*, or lodges, on the border between competing tribes in the High Atlas Mountains of south-



ern Morocco. They live in a fertile pocket between the Sahara and the highest crags of the often snow-covered Atlas, and receive as many as 50,000 pilgrims from these tribes at one time. The Hansaliyya act as mediators between four major Berber tribes, the Ait Atta, Ait Sochman, Ait Messat, and the Ait Yafelman (GELLNER 1969). The primary conflict lies between the Ait Atta and the more sedentarized tribes of the Central High Atlas. The Atta is the largest of all the region's tribal groups and their annual *transhumant* migration may be seen as a kind of annual invasion upon the tribal territories they traverse. By transforming their migration into a "pilgrimage" to the shrines of the Hansaliyya saint's tombs, the migration appears more ballet than battle.

[T]his inherently indefensible outpost of the northern barriers is not defended: this extremity is inhabited by the saints, who only 'defend' it by their saintly prestige ... The arrangements existing between the permanent inhabitants ... and the annual 'invaders' are complex and unstable. Boundaries are drawn not only spatially but temporally. In general, pastoralists have 'closed pastures' which must not be entered by anyone before a certain date, on pain of heavy fines ... These arrangements, even more than ordinary all-the-year-round tribal frontiers, need mediators and guarantors. From the viewpoint of the permanent northern inhabitants, the exposed promontory inhabited by the saints constitutes an effective general frontier mark, a kind of trip wire and guarantee. But the same is true for the men of the south. For them, too, the arrangements made through the saints are a guarantee that they will not one spring, find their way blocked as they try to move in on the high pastures. (GELLNER 1969: 170)

What gives the Hansaliyya the authority to maintain this delicate balance of migrating populations? It is what GELLNER calls their saintly prestige. *Zawiya Ahansal* itself is said to have a great concentration of *baraka* compared to the surrounding non-saintly villages, and it is this that facilitates the peaceful choreography of tribes.

The Hansaliyya example demonstrates that the *zawiya* provides a safe haven for an otherwise dangerous endeavor, and that it is the *baraka* resident in that place that allows for the extraordinary to take place. This is the case in the compound of an elderly *mullah*, or local Islamic leader, in the Afghan refugee camps of Peshawar, in western Pakistan. The *mullah*, is known for his wisdom, Qur'anic recitation and intercession through prayer, resulting in miraculous cures, pregnancy and safe childbirth. He is trusted by the adult male population of the refugee camp, and renowned for his strict Islamic observance. He is considered to be imbued with *baraka*, and his compound has taken on the qualities of a first generation *zawiya*. In perhaps a unique collaboration of the workings of male and female *baraka*, and *'arbil'souri* integration, an American-educated Afghan woman—a devout, veiled single woman in her 40's hired as project head for a refugee program in Peshawar—joined forces with the *mullah* in order to bring about the education of girls and young women in the refugee camp. Fathers, husbands, and brothers, adamantly opposed the education of girls and women, but favored Qur'anic and religious learning. The devout Muslim woman hired the *mullah* to be principal of the school she was establishing, and turned his compound into a center for both religious and secular learning. Unmarried and childless, she spent years under the scrutiny of the refugee community.

Over an 8 year period, beginning in 1990, this unique *zawiya* grew as a center of Islamic and secular learning from 15 to 250 students—all female. When international funding evaporated up for her project and the director was to leave Pakistan, large demonstrations occurred opposing her departure. By 1997, this woman headed an international Afghan refugee aid foundation, continuing her life-long ascetic Islamic path. There is no doubt that upon her death a shrine will be erected, likely at the *zawiya* itself, and pilgrims will come to her tomb seeking the guidance and succor she provides in life. If I am oblique here in not providing the names of these charismatic figures, it is simply a result of the ongoing nature of the conflict

in the region. Afghanistan's state of war, lasting almost two decades, began against Soviet attempts at colonization, and ended immersed in civil war. The struggle for leadership in the civil war of the 1990s found the devout, charismatic (but unfunded) populist Masoudi *muja-hadin* struggling against the well-funded scripturalist Taliban, who, according to Afghan refugees, simply "put a turban upon their heads," surround themselves with "fake *mullahs* and fake *barakat*" and claim descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Thus, *baraka* can be employed on any side of the political spectrum and can be summoned to legitimize traditional authority as easily as it can be invoked to oppose it.

## 5. Conclusions

While Iran may provide the best contemporary example of the mobilization of spiritual power in the rectification of both the individual and the State, this process pervades the entire range of Middle Eastern society from Morocco to Pakistan. *Baraka* continues to be employed in folkloric healings. It is invoked to restore fertility, and it is called upon to legitimize—as well as to destabilize—authority. *Baraka* provides an idiom for spiritual and political validation and permeates the debate between Christian European mores and Islamic ideals.

As literacy spreads, so too does scripturalism. However, while the folkloric healing practices associated with some "popular" Islamic Brotherhoods are today disdained by both state governments and the Islamic leadership, the mobilization of *baraka* is very much alive. In many ways, the political roles of scriptural and "popular" Islam have merged, while the division between *'arbi* and *souri* practices continues to induce controversy and ambivalence. There no longer are very many localized political arenas in which fairly isolated Islamic Brotherhoods provide mediation by virtue of their saintly prestige. Instead, word of the Iranian Revolution has brought scripturalism to the furthest corners of the Middle East, North Africa, and indeed, the entire Islamic world, reaffirming the healing properties of Qur'anic scripture as well as the revitalizing power of charismatic Islamic leaders in all political arenas, local, national, and international. Islamic spiritual leaders, as well as their opponents, emphasize that the healing of society—on a global scale—leads to the healing of the individual, and not the other way around.

## 6. Literature

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