

Hamid's Travelogue. Mimetic Transformations and Spiritual Connectivities Across Mediterranean Topographies of Grace¹

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Abstract. In their seminal work that helped to re-invent Mediterranean anthropology some 20 years ago, Horden and Purcell argue that the religious landscape reflects both, the fragmented topography of Mediterranean micro-regions and the means by which the fragmentation is overcome. In order to explore how space and time concern the divine along and across Mediterranean shores, this paper examines how social and spiritual borders are crossed in religious practice and how graduated socialities are generated, shaped and negotiated. It argues that connectivities, lateral and vertical, are forged or undone by turning borders into thresholds and vice-versa. Drawing from both, the history of Mediterranean anthropology of religion and ethnographic material from transnational mobile members of trance networks, the paper sketches an anthropology of blessing across nested fields of exteriority and alterity, found within and without the social niches of Mediterranean lifeworlds.

[blessing, liminality, spirit-possession, trance-mediums, Facebook, shrines and sanctuaries in the Mediterranean, mobility, migration]

In the ecology of Moroccan popular Sufi-networks, such as the Ḥamadša and the 'Isāwa, "al-He", or "al-Ḥariġ", the world out there, across the Mediterranean Sea, resembles the Ġarib, the other world of the spirits. The passage to this other world is full of dangers and occupied by spirits. There is 'Aisha Baḥriyya, the 'Aisha from the Sea, who takes possession of both – the ones who leave and the ones who remain at home. Other spirits, in particular so-called Sabbath Spirits, are approached to ease the passage and they may take possession of those who enter this outer space of migration to strive for luck, power and money. In possession rituals at home and in the diaspora trance-mediums address the "other world" (*al-ʿālam al-āḥūr*) of these good-and-evil spirits, the *ġnun* (sg. *ġinn*), to lure them into cooperation and treat their clients suffering from various forms of affliction. If funds are available, migrants return to Morocco to ease their various crises at sacred centres and places, re-connecting themselves to the social and geographical topographies of their origin. Also, ritual experts are flown across the

1 For Erhard Schüttpelz, in friendship and gratitude.

Mediterranean to offer their services and invoke some of the blessing ascribed to saints, spirits and ritual communities at home.

Sacred sites and the religious practices formed around them have long fascinated students of Mediterranean anthropology. They explored their functioning as boundaries and thresholds to other social, religious, and ontological worlds (Hertz 1928) and studied the formation of “collective subjectivities” (Gilsenan 1973:28) in the choreographies of religious rituals and pilgrimage (Turner and Turner 1978). In their seminal study of Mediterranean history Horden and Purcell (2000) argue that the religious landscape reflects both, the fragmented topography of Mediterranean micro-regions and the means by which the fragmentation is overcome. They particularly think of highly sacred places that connect places and people along sacred pathways over vast distances. Pilgrims meet, mingle and negotiate differences and commonalities, goods are brought and animals sacrificed, things are bought and sent to beloved ones, sacred prayers, songs and ritual techniques are encountered, learned and reported home. Attracting and sending out people, things and ideas, these centres of devotion and sacred sites relate localities to one another. By marking inclusion and exclusion in these circuits of circulation they also define boundaries. It is this localized and locating religious practice, Horden and Purcell argue, that provides the “cognitive foundation on which mobility rests” (ibid. 2000:458).

Horden and Purcell refer to a Mediterranean characterized by the scarcity of its most precious or “ultimate” resource, the people (ibid.:377ff). What they call “highly sacred places” are locales for the concentration of sociality, communication and exchange in a landscape otherwise characterized by underpopulation. As I intend to show, sacred places continue to spatialize connectivities and mark boundaries. They remain the thresholds between different ontological worlds, socialities and forms of worship, and continue to serve as cognitive landmarks in Mediterranean landscapes also under current conditions of overpopulation. During migration processes and in the diaspora people refer to these territories of grace during times of crises, but they also produce what Charles Stewart (1991) called “islands of sacrality” in order to connect to and dis-connect from various social ecologies they encounter on the move.

Religious associations organize socialities and activities around these shrines and sacred places and re-connect migrant communities to the landscapes of their origin in the diaspora, as the existence of Gnāwa brotherhoods in Brussels (Dumont and Hermanns 2003), assemblies of female adepts of ‘Isāwa confraternities from Algeria (Andezian 1983) or pilgrimage associations of Tunisian Jews (Peveling 2009) in Southern France, the re-invention of the Mimouna-festival by Moroccan Jews in Israel (Ben Ami 1972) or the erection and maintenance of St. Josef altars by Sicilian migrants in South Germany (Valentin 2011) demonstrate.

Working with Egyptian Sufis, Michael Gilsenan has described the activities of such associations beautifully and shrewdly as “shot through” with a “nostalgic expectation, a dream, or a fantasy of grace that has before and may again suddenly strike” (Gilsenan 1990:113) and that manifests as a blessing force, which circulates between the partici-

pants of these rituals and the world around them. This grace, blessing, or, in the Islamic world, *baraka* is an element of “excess and gratuity” (Shyrock and Da Col 2017) with the potential to shatter the world of scarce resources so characteristic for the capricious lifeworlds in Mediterranean settings. It operates beyond the categories of space and time that structure the ordinary, and gives a glimpse into a world of connectivities built upon the free circulation of wealth and social relations, removed from the bequeathed realities of power and unequal access that have been described for societies at both shores of the Mediterranean (see Pine 2012, Schielke 2015). In order to get hold of these forces, to overcome obstacles of all kinds, unblock stagnation and enable circulation, one has to leave the ordinary order. It is at these thresholds, the *heterotopoi* (Foucault 2005) found at sacred places or crafted in rituals, that other forms of connectivity are hoped for, tested and cultivated. The question of grace and space has been a classical topic in the history of Mediterranean anthropology, of course, and relates to an earlier debate on sacrality.

Sacred Rhythms. Turning Borders into Pathways

In his founding work of Mediterranean anthropology Julian Pitt-Rivers famously came up with a structuralist distinction between three nested fields of social relations characterized by shifting margins: “those interior to the household, those exterior to it but interior to the community, and those that extend beyond the bounds of the community” (Pitt-Rivers 2017:190). In this world of graduated socialities, grace, as Shryock and Da Col noted, “is Pitt-Rivers’ floating signifier” as *mana* was for Lévi-Strauss (Shryock and Da Col 2017:xxviii). And indeed, grace is his most radical concept. Described to be “beyond logic”, as a “counter principle” and “opposed to logic ... as community is to alterity” (Pitt-Rivers 2017:88), it is characterized as a force that produces social life by operating across social settings. Grace transcends the ordered world of social niches with its rules and rational calculi of economic interaction. In this sense it resembles the *hau* of Mauss’ gift as a “total performance” by which a community of strangers can be established through feelings of gratitude, mutual enjoyment and pleasure (cf. Pitt-Rivers 2017:50). Grace is linked to exteriority and alterity, it cannot be counted or expected and manifests on its own terms. It is linked to “the sacred as inversion of the secular”, the mythological that sets “the bounds of the mortal world” and that establishes what Pitt-Rivers calls “gradations of proximity to the Divine in space and time” (Pitt-Rivers 2017:171). Shaping connectivities, lateral and vertical, of various kinds and depths, it is of vital importance in Mediterranean religions, establishing territories of grace across social and physical worlds, norms of conduct and theological doctrine. Aware of its Christian specificities, Pitt-Rivers links the notion of grace to the non-Christian equivalents *hesed* (Judaism) and *baraka* (Islam) (ibid.:70, 93), which have been explored in relation to the broader semantic field of “blessing”. To be sure, scholars in the an-

thropology of Islam have pointed out that *baraka* covers a whole range of interconnected ideas specifying, extending and delimiting this basic meaning (cf. Geertz 1986:44). While it may best be described as a whole complex of forces constituting, governing, and affecting the world in positive ways, inhering in persons, places, actions, or things (cf. Gilsenan 1973:33f), it is important to note that its force can also turn into a destructive power. In Morocco, where I did most of my fieldwork, I can think of no tomb of a saint, which is not inhabited by *ǧnūn*, and is thus always associated with both – what, in the heyday of Mediterranean anthropology, has been called a patron saint, embodying the protection of the surroundings and the values of the community (praised as *demān al-balad*, protector of the land), as much as with its other, the *ǧnūn*, good-and-evil spirits that ravage the region but also tie people back to saintly places for healing, sacrifice and worship. They are part of the transcendent world and worshipped as those, who give: *al-ǧwād*. While the former function as broker, patron and mediator at various interfaces of the social and religious world (cf. Cornell 1998:xviii), the latter forge and undo social and religious relations at will. In this, they resemble the *exoticá* in Greece, which merge to interchangeability with Christian saints, forming a “mixture of good and evil components ... not always distinct from another (Stewart 1991:160). Pitt-Rivers was Durkheimian in his interest in this ambivalence of blessing, notably when connected to or enacted by special persons, “for just as cursing is the reverse of blessing, so magical damage is the reverse of magical healing” (Pitt-Rivers 2017:84). Durkheim followed Robertson Smith in claiming that religious forces – connected to places, persons and things – were of two sorts, some beneficial, some evil and impure, generating disorder. For the Durkheimians, the impure joins the profane, forming the negative pole of the spiritual and domesticized world. The division of things into sacred and profane thus structures the real into two distinct regions. One includes the sacred things and makes up the social world providing the symbols for the identity of a group; the other includes everything opposed to the sacred and is defined by its opposition to it – all the profane things that lie outside (or rather in front of) the social world with its temple at the centre (pro-fanum). This binary cognitive ordering of the world – thus spatialized (as interior/exterior) and socialized (insider/outsider) – seems perfectly to describe the increasingly homogenized world of today’s Mediterranean religions. Against this binary thinking of mutually opposed sacralities Marcel Mauss advocated a notion of space and religion that is formed by a “variety of positionings, powers and purities” (Mauss 1933:112–113). In the Maussian Mediterranean blessing then manifests across nested fields of exteriority and alterity, found within and without the social niches of Mediterranean lifeworlds. Charles Stewart’s work on orthodox Greece demonstrates that this classification is far from static but varies according to social topographies, geographical features and context. For example, interiority can be crafted by delimiting a space and marking an interior/exterior realm through the practice of encircling, by which a certain place outside the domesticized realm is set aside with respect to a cardinal place. In the landscape, roadside shrines outside a village or a city thus mark the difference between the sacred and the profane space (Stewart 1991:168ff). The most

radical thinker of Mediterranean sacralities was perhaps Mauss' and Hubert's student Stefan Czarnowski. Drawing on material from Roman antiquity he complicated and extended the Durkheimian model by thinking of the sacred moving to and from sacred centres and across concentrically arranged boundaries around it (Czarnowski 1925, see Zillinger 2021). The focal point of his relational notion of space is the distinction of a "centralized sacred" from a "free sacred"— of what he calls *sacré concentré*, manifest in all its efficacy and relevance at the centre of a social space, from what he calls *sacré libre* at the other side of the social and religious border. But the relation between these outer and inner spaces is one of exchange. Borders turn into pathways along which sacred powers travel: they are pathways of influence along which humans, spiritual beings, demons, benevolent or malevolent powers move. The forces of the wilderness are thus recursively represented at all units of this graduated social space. The forces of the social, on the other hand, are found not only in different intensities within, but also without, in the outer space of "nature" or the "social other". Czarnowski thus arrives at speaking of space as rhythmic. Moreover, he convincingly demonstrates that spatial fragmentation and centralization are part of techniques and technologies of culture. What is perceived as inside/outside and sacred/profane changes with the person who inscribes these oppositions into space with reference to spiritual beings and their localities. This remains a dynamic process and a task that needs to take into account the foreign gods and spirits at the very place from where a person operates.²

Mediterranean Becomings, Mimetic Transformations

Across Mediterranean topographies of grace, we find institutionalized practices to account for and acknowledge one's own and other nested realities, domestic and foreign spirits. Trance rituals enact the exposure to alterity, often staged as an eruption of the foreign from within or across its (maritime) borders, as Christian and Jewish Sabbath Spirits in Islam (Welte 1990) or the "Moor" in ecstatic dances like "la moresca" or "la fenestrella" in Christianity (Vandenbroeck 1997). With the help of body techniques trance experts bring themselves into the presence of spirits and divinities. To this end they socialize and spatialize alterity, either through ritual practice or by visiting and, as I hope to show, by moulding "islands of sacrality" (Stewart 1991) associated with certain geographical formations, created by divine or demonic intervention, and marked by constructions of shrines, buildings, and ritual practice (cf. Zillinger 2015). Their practices establish and shape *heterotopoi* (Foucault), thresholds to other metaphysical and social worlds, and they provide categories and experiences that help conceptualizing topographies of grace beyond what is easily visible. We therefore need to zoom in

² Czarnowski focuses on the work of land conveyors cum augurs, who parcelised interior and exterior space by means of divination in Roman antiquity.

on how, in their religious practice, people engage with graduated socialities and create various forms of social and spiritual border crossings.

It is here that I need to introduce my long time interlocutor Hamid. We have been working together for more than 15 years, first in Morocco and later across Europe, after he moved there and finally settled in Paris. Hamid has been a member of the 'Isāwa brotherhood in Meknes, and has become an expert (*muqaddim*) of various trance-cults and for the treatment of all kinds of afflictions generated by *ḡnun*, the aforementioned good-and-evil spirits attached to the Islamic *awlia' allah*, or what has been called saints (Cornell 1998). He has been president of various associations for Sacred Music and Folklore in Meknes and established himself as a powerful seer with clients from all over Morocco and the Moroccan diaspora.

Hamid's career started as a boy. His parents found him in their living room breaking and eating glass. He was brought to a *muqaddim* of the 'Isāwa who confirmed his spirit possession. Gradually he learned to convert the destructive powers of the possessing spirit into a benevolent force for himself and others. This force, *baraka*, is regularly established through ritually invoked and ordered trance states during which the *ḡinn* takes form and becomes an image in the body-movement of the entranced. These rituals take place according to the needs of a possessed person, but are also part of an annual ritual cycle – for the 'Isāwa the passing of time is marked by and conceptualised as recurrent events such as the annual pilgrimage at the saint's festival (*mīlūd*), the month of *ša'bān*, during which *ḡnun* particularly demand ritual treatment, or the seasonal activity of harvesting among rural populations, after which grand-scale rituals are organized (if they don't conflict with the Islamic calendar, e.g. during the month of Ramadan). All of these rituals contain spatial practices – assembling in certain homes of adepts, in farmsteads and villages in the country-side, visiting shrines in the vicinity or travelling to a “center out there” (Turner) by embarking on the journey to the saint's sanctuary. Also outside the collective ritual cycles the possessing spirit may demand the visit of shrines in the neighbourhood and at graveyards, sacred places in the surroundings or at greater distance (such as springs or rock formations, dams or mountain tops) or the sanctuary of a saint. *Baraka* is literally carried away from these places by incorporation (by eating blessed bread or drinking from fountains) or by carrying it home in the form of things (e.g. the key of the entrance-port, some bottles or candles bought at the shrine). Such sacred journeys are undertaken to draw *baraka* from these places, to move it around and thereby accumulate spiritual power. Exteriority and divinity, estrangement and blessing, are ritually invoked and sought through movement in space.

The social, spatial and cosmological engagement with an elsewhere is accomplished if oneself and one's world is successfully geared to the other world, as Taussig once put it, i.e. by transforming in such a way that conviviality with the foreign becomes possible and connectivity is established (Taussig 2016 [1998]). Both, bringing the “free spirits” of exteriority into the domestic realm (under the sign of the the patron saint, cf. Zillinger 2006), and venturing out into their world, requires crafting a human world



Figure 1 Together with Gnāwā Musicians, Hamid awaits a ritual for Sabbath Spirits and ritually transforms into a priest. Photo: Martin Zillinger

that is acceptable to them and mimetically enacting a cosmological order in which relationality can be thought, forged and lived across ontological worlds (cf. Walens 1981). In possession rituals Hamid and other trance-mediums address the “other world” (*al-‘alam al-āhur*) of the *ḡnun* by providing a setting that ties in with the particularities of their existence – and accommodating the constitutive elements of their realities (water, blood, fire), their predilections (colour, taste, smell) and preferred modes of communication (wind-instruments, drums, cassettes). These provisions make the ritual space and the connectivities established accountable to the visitors of a ritual, and the spirits alike. To turn to the epitome of otherness in Moroccan trance cults, i.e. the Sabbath Spirits, the ritual assembly needs to create a space that resembles the other world of the Christian and Jewish spirits. Leaving aside the particularities of the Christian Sabbath Spirits for now, who torment and pauperise their victims, Jewish spirits are often addressed to connect their adepts to the world at the other shore of the Mediterranean.

In elaborate rituals people address these spirits by sharing their (Jewish) food, drinking their (Jewish) beverages, and smoking their (expensive American) cigarettes. These rituals, called Sabbath tables, are characterized by the elaborate display of abundant food, alcohol and cigarettes, around which the trance-ritual evolves. A spirit may rise in a medium to the music and praises of Gnāwā musicians, and address the attendees in a kind of Hebrew.

When Hamid invited me to a *tabla sibtī’in* for the first time, the principals of the ritual, a family divided by migration, asked the spirit-medium for “papers” in order to re-unite husband, wife and children in Europe under conditions of an increasingly restrictive border regime. Hamid, ritually transformed into a priest wearing a cassock with a huge cross on the back, translated the speech of the spirit and the requests of his clients.

These Sabbath tables are organized behind closed door. The transformation into a non-Muslim is not well received in public and dangerous – guardians of the normative order warn that, in the hour of their death, punishment awaits those engaging with and mimetically transforming into the Jewish other in order to trespass religious and social worlds. Hamid knows otherwise. In the context of trance brotherhoods, people constantly engage in “border crossings” that are then ceremonially “regulated and supervised so that society as a whole neither comes into conflict nor suffers damage” (van Gennep 1909:15). Entering states of liminality, famously described by Arnold van Gennep, who worked at the margins of the Durkheimian school, one operates beyond the classificatory system of the ordinary, but deals with features described by Pitt-Rivers as counter-principles and “opposed to logic” as “community is to alterity” (2017:88). The “mind bending implications” (Shyrock and Da Col 2017) of these liminal qualities are well known to ritual experts like Hamid, who have learned to evoke, shape and use the power to undo or transform categories of the ordinary. This power is experienced as monstrous, at once sacred and polluting, creative and destructive, and can only be articulated by recourse to the mysterious, that marks and exceeds the bounds of the social world (cf. Graeber 2001:62–63) and may become manifest as blessing, grace or *baraka*, exceeding all accountability. *Baraka* cannot be guaranteed by venturing out into the ritual space of the other. However, by creating a liminal space, in which the spirits can be lured into an atmosphere of mutual enjoyment and pleasure, ontological worlds can be bridged and new forms of sociality emerge.

Note that before nearly all Jews left Morocco to the newly founded state of Israel, they, too, turned to the religious other during the festival of Mimuna. Goldberg quotes from pre-war sources for the city of Fez:

On the last day of the holiday ... [comes] the night of the Mimuna. The little girls and lasses dress in an *‘ağama* (a feminine garb resembling the Moslem caftan), and go about promenading in the *mellāh* (Jewish quarter). The young men wear Moslem clothing and tour about the streets with mandolins. ... We visit our close relatives. [...] Everywhere, on that night, one can hear religious songs and people singing in Hebrew – And peace may it increase for you. A long life and many years for you. This is then translated into Arabic. (Goldberg 1978:76–77)

These festivities rivalled those of the Jewish canon, Goldberg emphasizes, and were clearly a “celebration of vernal renewal and blessing” (ibid.:75) that fostered ritual connectivity between the Jewish minority population and the Muslim majority.³ In today’s Morocco, and in light of increasingly fading memories of the co-habitation with Jewish neighbours in history (Trevisan-Semi and Sekkat Hatimi 2011), Mimuna is mostly known as a liquor that is found as a ritual offering on Sabbath tables.

3 Goldberg’s argument, that the Mimouna celebrations fostered a ritual connectivity between Jewish minority and the Muslim majority has not remained undisputed (e.g. Schorch 2003, but see Trevisan-Semi and Sekkat Hatimi 2011:160).

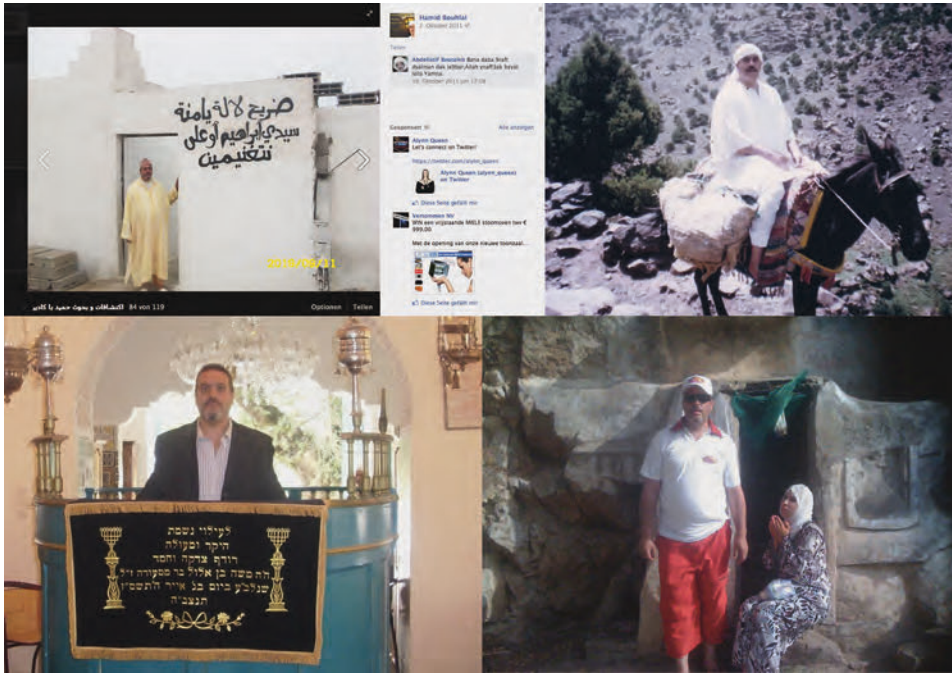


Figure 2 Engaging with sacred places: Hamid paying tribute to Lalla Yamna, travelling to a “centre out there”, visiting a Jewish Sanctuary, and settling claims of a possessed client at the law court of the ḡnun. © Hamid Buhlal

By mastering the affliction of these *sibti'in*, Hamid establishes the competence to help dealing with these capricious spirits. By engaging in the travesty of priesthood, he displays his competency towards this-worldly and otherworldly actors alike and attaches himself to a different order. Both, *ḡnun* and clients need to partake in the ritual, of course, and affirm, trust and comply with his ritual authority. By engaging in this kind of travesty he displays and embodies ritual agency to lure the otherworldly beings into cooperation. For a short time they become accountable through his positioning in liminal space.

But the expertise in liminality significantly is also achieved by travelling through space. Hamid has visited several Jewish sanctuaries in Morocco in order to literally withdraw the spiritual power (“*ntbarak minhum*”) from these places. In van Gennep’s work, the spatial transition is constitutive for his theory of passage rites, relating time and again to “magical-religious aspect(s) of border crossing” (1909:25). “To cross the threshold” thus means “to attach oneself to a new world” (ibid.:29). It is this turning of borders into thresholds by which one attaches oneself to a different order that we need to focus on next by taking into account the well-known characteristics of liminality: apart from the journey to the “center out there”, these are the inversion of agency (cf. Kramer 2005a), status reversal and communitas (but see Sallnow 1981), indeterminacy

and the capacity to transform (cf. Turner 1969), the transgression of gender differences in hetero-normative social orders (cf. Gottowik 2021), including forms of travesty (cf. Livingston 1991), and the experience of marginalization, alienation and savagery (cf. Rouch 1955), which do not only mark these states of transformation but – and this is crucial – can also generate them (cf. Schüttpelz and van Loyen 2016). Liminality can be established by actively seeking these thresholds and the intermediary states of the “betwixt and between”, through travelling, forms of travesty and status change. By thus gearing into the other world beyond one’s own and delivering oneself to the potentially dangerous dynamics of becoming otherwise, liminality can become a source of blessing, turning marginalization, as it were, into charisma.

On one of his earlier Facebook-accounts, Hamid documented his different pilgrimages to sacred sites (see figure 2). He staged himself as pious pilgrim on a donkey in the Toubkal-mountains on his way to the shrine of the malevolent and dangerous king of the spirits, Šamhāruš, as a visitor to the shrine of Lalla Yamna near Agadir, as a visitor to the above-mentioned Jewish sanctuaries in Morocco, as the medium who settles claims of possessed clients at the law court of the spirits near Sidi Slimane, and time and again as ritual leader at the main shrines of the ‘Isāwa and of the Ḥamadša brotherhood. His movement in the religious geography in Morocco consists of engagement with sacred places and in making this engagement with liminal spaces observable and reportable. If these sites are the cognitive foundation on which mobility rests, he is the moving medium, who masters and thereby connects all these sites and gives directions to his clients.

Ritual Mediations and Spirited Mobilities across Boundaries

Ritual gatherings are indexical occasions (Werbner 1977: xxv). They make social relations picturable and social positionings reportable. They also account for the graduated sociality of insiders and outsiders and for individual and collective proximity to the divine. A similar ritual indexicality is produced by individual and collective pilgrimage and adepts document both forms of engaging the outer realms of the sacred by means of analog and digital media (Zillinger 2014, 2015). Like photo-albums, Facebook accounts and other social media open up a “field of production, circulation and consumption of ... images” which allow “one to relate in a new way to one’s self and to the other” (Behrend 2002:47). Media practices „do accounts“ by communicating, displaying, imagining and rendering observable to oneself and others one’s own positioning in the world and between this world and the next.

Since ten years or so I have been following Hamid on Facebook. Whenever we have come together, travelled together or simply have talked over messenger and WhatsApp we explored what it means to forge connectivities through mobile ritual practices. In our cooperation, his (changing) Facebook accounts were a means to memorize, recollect and discuss the sacred connectivities and spirited mobilities he sought, forged and

shaped over the years. In his life and work as a trance medium and spiritual entrepreneur the Facebook accounts were a means to account to himself and his wide networks of clients, adepts and friends for his spiritual becoming.

In Morocco, Hamid received many clients living in the diaspora and trying to reconnect to the social and geographical topographies of their origin. He also followed his clients into the diaspora, who financed his transfer and lodged and nurtured him in exchange for ritual treatment. Not unlike his journeys to the “centres out there” in Morocco, he documented his journey to Egypt in 2010 and 2011 on Facebook. Here his followers could accompany him arriving in Cairo to treat clients and to cooperate with brotherhoods there. Surprised by the Egyptian revolt, he documented his turning into a Sufi-pilgrim (see figure 3), who left home only with the *tāsbih* (prayer beads) in his hands to die as a martyr if necessary. By wearing a caftan manufactured in the style of the *mahzen*, the Moroccan ruling class, he accounted for his status as a visitor and invoked protection in situations of danger as when threatened by an Egyptian tank. As a representative of Moroccan Sufism he forged bonds to central sacred places in Morocco and could be seen addressing pilgrims in the sanctuary of Sayyida Zeynab, the grandchild of prophet Mohammed; in addition he presented himself, both in Cairo and on Facebook, as a searcher for Islamic wisdom, and as a medium connecting different places of a pan-Islamic religious geography – standing under the banner of the Idrīsiyya brotherhood which traces its spiritual genealogy to the founder of Morocco, Moulay Idris (see figure 3).

Hamid established connectivities along the Southern Shores of the Mediterranean by redefining the scope of his mediumship between specific shrines situated in the local religious topography and pilgrimage centers of national and transnational importance in Morocco and in Egypt. By visiting sacred places in Morocco and connecting his clients to their spiritual qualities through acts of worship he firmly situated his own identity and the identities of his clients in social and sacred spaces in Morocco. In Cairo he used material (banners, garments, essences), discursive (songs, praises, music) and social practices (dance, worship, ritual nurture) referring to these sites to create ritual spaces through which he could re-center his clients in the foreign society of Egypt while at the same time forging connectivities to the central sacralities of the host community, invoking a spiritual kinship of Muslimhood.

Shortly after he returned to Morocco, he was invited to a conference on possession at an Italian university. Crossing the Mediterranean, he decided to overstay his visa and travel further into Europe along networks of trance adepts already living in Belgium, France, and the Netherlands. After his arrival, Hamid concentrated on documenting his foray into Europe on Facebook.

To forge connections in the foreign European society of Italy he was able to draw on his expertise as a trance medium, who constantly deals with otherness. During the six years he welcomed me to participate in his journey into a legalized existence in Europe, I never experienced him asking for gifts or almonds, neither did he try to enter into contractual relations; instead he was tuning into the other social world(s) “through



Figure 3 Forging connectivities along and across the Mediterranean: Hamid turning into a Sufi pilgrim in Cairo (below), creating situations of amity in Europe (center left) and turning to the free spirits (top right) and sacred centrality (top left) of the Mediterranean other.
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the perfection of his performance of *beingness*”, as Taussig shrewdly observed in his re-reading of Walen’s account of Kwakwiltl shamanism (2016:470). His task and craft was to “become becoming” (ibid.) beyond the margins of the social and sacred world, and while Taussig is right to emphasize the generic quality of transformation itself, tuning into the other world entails becoming a specific other and entering a state of patienthood that enables blessing to strike. For example, picturing his mimetic transformation into a European, he accounts for his ability to fit into the other order and to master even the encounter with the police (see figure 3). Clandestine migrants usually shy away from the police while trying to become a subject to the laws and institutions of European nation states. Dealing with the representatives of the state is dangerous – being object rather than subject to them during the liminal phase of settling in, one is at their mercy, doomed to passivity. Dealing with the institutions of the state is unavoidable, however, since they administer needed resources and cut across the transnational activities of migrants. Hamid proves to be able to make the agents of the state “accountable” by being pictured in a situation of near-amity.

Creating Thresholds of De- and Resocialization

When Hamid arrived in Paris, one of the first places he approached was the church of Sacré-Coeur. Situated on top of the hill of Montmartre the church overlooks the city of Paris. Hamid loved this crowded, sacred place, which reminded him of sacred shrines in Morocco (see figure 3). The pilgrims who came to receive God's blessing, the flickering candles, the mingling of believers with tourists and showmen on the famous stairway that connects the church with the pulsating street life of Montmartre, all this reminded him of the festivities at the shrines of the Ḥamadša and 'Isāwa-brotherhood in Morocco. The first time he came there, he told me, he hung around this place for six hours. There is something emanating from the sites surrounding the church, he said – be it the rocky wall below a pine tree or the fountain at the bottom of the stairway. Both sites trigger “inner images” (Kramer 2005b) connecting him to the precarious she-demon 'Aiša Qandīša, who takes possession of him at her will and demands ritual sacrifices. Her main shrine next to the tomb of the Muslim Saint Sidi 'Ali is situated under a giant fig tree under which dozens of candles are flickering along a rocky wall.

Quickly Hamid built a network of clients throughout France and beyond, extending into Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain. Going through his travelogue on Facebook he introduced me to a client in southern France, who complained about hearing Christian songs at nights as if Christian spirits approached her. They visited a Christian graveyard and performed rituals there so she could leave her involvement with Christian spirits behind (for the significance of graveyards for “untying magical bonds” cf. Zillinger 2006). He documented the “other” sacrality of the Christian graveyard in detail (see figure 3). After their ritual visit they performed a Sabbath table to appease the Jewish spirit that had approached her.

The problem of Christian spirits intruding into the lives and bodies of his clients and disrupting ties to their families and to their social networks in Morocco became a common theme for his ritual practice. Dissocializing his patients from the dangerous spirits of the wilderness that approached them from the Christian surroundings demanded to re-centre and orient them to the central sacrality of Moroccan territories of grace. One client of his had lost his job in Italy and got divorced from his wife before he made his way to Paris. To define a ritual centrality, he had to strip naked and change into a new suit Hamid had commissioned in Morocco. It had been weaved in the colours of the divine kingdom, with the royal star on the chest. Incense was burned, literally soaking the patient, so to tie him back into the world of Muslim spirits. A chain of Kauri-shells, a token for spiritual force, was rubbed over his shoulders and head, and the Quran was recited to re-center the patient into the Islamic world. Over the night we drunk beer and smoked Marlboro cigarettes to please the Christian and Jewish Sabbath Spirits. Before the ritual the patient had slept and dreamt over dates he had put under his pillow. After the ritual, he had to digest them.

In the morning, Hamid took the stones of the dates and we walked over to a Christian graveyard to scatter them between the graves. As the client had to work, he joined

us via his mobile phone. Hamid directed him to repeat what he said: *Allah is the greater force – in all respect, repeat with me, while I throw a date-stone to the left, to the right, in front of me.* He then ordered his client to ask God the almighty to finally grant what he deserved (*haqqnī* – lit. ‘my right’). The evil Christian and Jewish spirits he had attracted during his life in Europe were thus buried at the cemetery. The patient needed to re-centre and make space in his life only for Allah, God, the merciful. This Islamic re-centring is crucial, of course, re-establishing the boundaries between one’s own religious identity and temptations and failures in Europe, in order to partake of the blessing of one’s own sacred centrality.

Hamid was well aware that re-centring had to include both – forging connectivities and dissociations. Drawing from the much maligned work of I. M. Lewis (1971), one could argue that he turned the spirits of a peripheral cult in Morocco (such as the *ǧinniyya* ‘*Aiša Qandiša*) into a centralizing power, inscribing her connective powers into the sacred space of Sacré-Coeur and linking people on the move to highly sacred places at home as well as casting out the spirits of an ambiguous environment. This dissociation is never absolute; it retains the moment of becoming in a field of interconnected, competing and at times mutually enhancing spiritual positionalities, turning foreign spirits into beneficial powers. Connectivities are thus forged by becoming a liminal person (Park 1928) and transforming the space one inhabits into a threshold to other social and spiritual worlds. Through mimetic becoming one creates a space of possible address for various powers and socialities, lending oneself and the space one inhabits to other agencies. Online and offline Hamid thus carefully created images of himself as a successful European – at symbolic, near-sacred centres like the Eiffel tower, by performing a European identity of leisure and digesting the food and drinking the alcohol of the Mediterranean other. Drinking alcohol is a practice of transgression, of course, that many Moroccans do at home and abroad, and may aspire to do in Europe. At the same time it is dangerous and negates one’s identity as a Muslim.

Forging connectivity by wandering through space and becoming a patient to the spirits of the wilderness is dangerous – the *ǧinn* Bouhali takes possession of those engaging too strongly with the temptations of other worlds, be it on the move or in the very surroundings of one’s existence. Those who neglect their social obligations potentially shatter social orders and blast normative regimes of classification. Mastering the affliction by the *ǧinn* Bouhali demands to deal with particular forms of disgust and horror, exemplified during a trance ritual by sharing food of unidentifiable content, mixed together from leftovers of starters, main courses and desserts, from the garbage that has remained on the table. At the same time it implies becoming a stranger relying on the good will of others, begging from the (ritual) public. Those who leave into the realm of the Bouhali and return unharmed mark themselves by dressing in a garment made of patches. Said to convey the blessing that manifests at the margins of any imaginable world, they turn exteriority into interiority, affliction into healing.

In the Mediterranean world of fundamentalisms, divisions and terror Hamid decided to invent an artificial figure of the Bouhali, who connects, not divide. He stitched



Figure 4 Regarde et juge – the Bouhali of Paris. © Hamid Buhlal

a garment of patches taken from the different religious worlds he found in Paris – assembling the sacralities and positionings in a spirited ecumene. Ordained with the *baraka* drawn from the different sacred places he has travelled in his career and those he anticipates visiting, he took upon himself images of the church of Sacré-Coeur, the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, but also from Buddhism and Hinduism and connected these with symbols of the Moroccan throne – *allah*, *al-waṭan*, *al-malik* – God, the nation and the king can be read on the wimple attached to his hat. The Bouhali from Paris opened cultural soirées in Paris, appeared at cultural festivals across France and travelled back to Morocco, performing otherness and embodying an inversion of the social order that promises the excess of blessing. This Bouhali is not the *ḡinn* that possesses, he is the ritual persona of a trance medium, who accounts for the blessing he incarnates by the various forms of possible becoming during a ritual night. It redefines the scope of Hamid's mediumship and folds the blessing drawn from shrines and sacred centres, invoked in rituals of possession and in rites of exorcism, into the world of interreligious dialogue and transcultural existence.

Conclusion

As we learned from I.M. Lewis, cults of affliction provide a space for handling liminality and generate power and agency for those operating at the margins of society (Lewis

1971). In the migration process, which I take to be liminal in character, Moroccan trance brotherhoods as other ritual societies provide a protective space for its members, re-connecting people, things, and signs to the social and religious topographies at home. On their way to Europe, for many migrants these brotherhoods turn into tokens of belonging and into a sign of cultural intimacy. For those abroad, they represent family-relations, ancestors and a place of origin. Their ritual invocation of the saints and the prophet relates the intimate bonds of their adepts to a spiritual community of believers. For Hamid, moving through space consists of moving between liminal places; and his self-representation on Facebook is a means to establish accountability – towards the spirits, the clients, and himself. Through cultivating mimetic becoming he made his way through various Euro-Mediterranean worlds. He roamed the foreign worlds by engaging in sacrifices to foreign forces and sacralities, and by not resisting but appropriating their powers he became a marginal man for sacred positionings. Hamid reminds us of an ethics of connectivity that continues to be forged and shaped by people cooperating across social worlds, engaging in this “lingua franca” that circulates beneath the official religious discourse, and that transgresses any religious, social and national border in the Mediterranean (cf. Albera 2012).

Grace, *baraka*, blessing, or however you want to call it, is created on this arduous and difficult path through the sacred landscapes of one’s own and of other societies. It circulates with people travelling the Mediterranean world, who not only leave traces in the landscapes they pass and inhabit, but where the foreign world also inscribes itself into the people on the move. In the myths of Mediterranean peoples, wanderers at some point simply stop and become a person of blessing to the society they choose, or part of a shrine that mediates between territories (cf. Hauschild 1999:110). “Regarde et juge” – Hamid named his new transnational association of trance and folklore. He promises to convey the power of connectivity to people living at the margins of European societies, separated from their beloved ones through national borders and the Mediterranean Sea. Mediterranean connectivities lend themselves to this kind of ethics and ecumene from below, which the founders of European social anthropology knew to be the rock of freedom and happiness, on which our societies rest (Mauss 1925). But as Hamid and his clients are well aware, connectivity is ambiguous, bringing harm as much as blessing by corrupting the social order. *Baraka* cannot be granted, however one carefully crafts and folds one’s world into the worlds of the social other.

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