Islam, Embodied Morality and the Public Sphere in Syria

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The political and social processes unleashed in the Middle East by the unstable power balance created by the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 have given new visibility to the debate about the compatibility between Islam as a religious and cultural tradition, and the liberal values enshrined in democracy and the Human Rights. Neo-orientalist scholars and political analysts were keen in pointing to the absence of democratic political order and the disregard for Human Rights in the Middle Eastern countries, as an expression of the incapacity of the Islamic tradition generating or accepting these political, moral and cultural principles. These analysts concluded that these principles can only

exist and develop in the Muslim societies, if imposed from the outside (Kepel, 2004: 89–98; Sadowski, 1993).

This kind of analysis misses the point in that, since the 1980s most movements inspired by political Islam in the Middle East have incorporated crucial elements of democracy, such as political participation, the rule of law and the protection of Human Rights, as part of their political program[1] (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996: 160–4; Krämer, 1993). While the degree of attachment to these principles, as well as the actual social and political practices connected to them, vary enormously among the various Islamist movements, it is clear that Islamic associations and political movements played a fundamental role in creating more pluralistic and democratic political environments in many Muslim majority countries, such as in post-Suharto Indonesia (Hefner, 2000).

However, in the absence of a shared consensus about the rules of the political game and the rights of the individuals as political and social agents, there is a great possibility that these religiously-framed forms of political association and social solidarity go into the path of radicalization and violence. The spiral of violence, which includes a sectarian confrontation between Sunni and Shi'is, as well as a conflict against the American occupation and its local allies, that took hold of Iraq since 2003 is a good example of this process.

Looking to the broader picture, we can say that there has been a gradual adaptation of Islamist movements to

a more liberal political order in the Middle East. This is exemplified by the success of Islamic-inspired parties in the elections in Turkey in 2002, Egypt in 2005, Iraq in 2005 and Palestine in 2006. Also, the political strength of Hizbollah in Lebanon is related to its ability in presenting itself as the political voice of those not represented by the Lebanese political establishment, as it was recently seen in its capacity of mobilizing large crowds in the protests against Fuad Siniora's government after its military confrontation with the Israeli army in 2006. The electoral success of the Islamic parties and candidates was built on their ability in presenting their political project in terms of "vernacular politics," i.e. through the mobilization of cultural idioms and interpersonal relations connected with the everyday realities of their constituencies (White, 2002: 3–28). In this sense, the political power of the Islamic parties does not reside in their capacity to seize and monopolize the state, but rather in fashioning themselves as "representatives" of religiously framed citizens. In order to effectively mobilize the voters, the political programs of the Islamist parties usually include the respect for Human Rights (*ḥuqūq al-insān*[2]) and take into account the aspirations of the "civil society" within an Islamic framework.

In order to understand the crescent affirmation of Islam as a framework for personal and collective insertion and participation in the public sphere in Muslim majority societies, and how this can articulate with notions of

Human Rights, we must take into account how religious identities, values and practices become embedded in local cultural and political contexts. Thus, instead of focusing exclusively on the ideology. or the political program of the Islamist movements and discussing in abstract their compatibility—or lack of it—with principles of democracy and the Human Rights, we should ask what kind of social subjectivities are being created and shaped by the various interpretations and practices of Islam. This approach allows us to understand how and if public pluralism and morally autonomous social agents, which are fundamental elements for grounding abstract principles of Human Rights into the practices of vernacular politics, are being produced within an Islamic framework.

Since the early 1990s the strategies of affirmation of Islam as public norm in most Middle Eastern societies, shifted from political projects centered on the absolute control of the state towards religious disciplines that aim the gradual construction of an "Islamic society" through the moral reform of the individual. Some researchers talk about the emergence of "post-islamist" forms of inscription of Islamic values and symbols in the public sphere (Roy, 1999; Roy and Khosrokhavar, 1999: 75–116), which is centered in the social practices and the ethical concerns of the individuals and the creation of circuits of solidarity based on shared religious identities and

moral values[3] (Haenni, 1999; Pinto, 2004, 2006; White, 2005).

This process allowed the traditional religious authorities, such as the *'ulama* (religious scholars) and the Sufi *shaykhs*, who were marginalized and criticized by the Islamist militants during the 1970s and 1980s, to reassert their authority as important players in the process of "Islamization" of the Middle East societies (Houot, 1999; Pinto, 2004, 2006b; Roy, 1992; Zaman, 2002). Their renewed religious authority derived in part from the mastering of religious discourses that approached society through the morality of the individual. Therefore, the analysis of the creation of religious-framed social agents must take into account the power relations and the disciplinary practices[4] that produce and shape their religious identities.

This paper analyzes these issues focusing on the role of Sufism in the constitution of a plural religious arena and religiously-informed social agents in contemporary Syria.[5] While the Syrian public sphere is framed by an authoritarian political order, it also accommodates a gamut of secular and religious discourses, practices and values, which exist beyond the ideological control of the state. The argument presented here is that the forms of moral individuation, circuits of solidarity and shared ideas about debate and dissent that are created by the Islamic practices, discourses and disciplines constitute

some among the various arenas that can serve to negotiate and articulate values connected to the idea of Human Rights into the cultural framework of the Syrian society.

Since the violent confrontation between the Ba'thist regime and the Islamic opposition in Hama in 1982, overtly political forms of Islam have been declining as a factor of popular mobilization in Syria. However, Islam continued to be a source of meaning and identity in the public sphere, expressed through the public display of individual signs of piety, such as the use of beard among men, veiling among women and a high rate of mosque attendance for both genders. It can be said that the affirmation of Islam as a normative framework for the public sphere in Syria shifted from a state-centered project to one focused on the moral reform of the individual.

The social expression of Islam in Syria is marked by a plurality of traditions, interpretations and practices, which range from text-centered Salafi Islam to the mystical rituals of Sufism. Amidst this range, the various expressions of Sufism enjoy considerable prestige and authority as individual and collective piety. While Sufism faces strong competition and, sometimes, criticism from other understandings and practices of Islam, such as Salafi or modernist Islam, as well as from secular Syrians, it continues to enjoy a significant presence as a source of meaning and identity in Syrian society.

In general, it can be said that Sufism in Syria has been on the rise during the last two decades, in response to a

growing demand for Islamic forms of personal piety. It can be said that the affirmation of Islam as a normative framework for the public sphere in Syria shifted from a state-centered project, which was expressed in the confrontation between the Ba'thist regime and the Islamic opposition (Abd-Allah, 1983; Van Dam, 1996: 89–117), to one focused on moral reform of the individual as the mean to achieve the construction of an "Islamic society."

The recent expansion of Sufism in the religious scene of Syria produced new kinds of religiously framed social agents, as well as new forms of personal and collective morality in the public sphere. The impact of the normative framework of Sufism on the social practices and trajectories of its adepts depends on the insertion of the individual in a particular Sufi tradition and the degree of engagement of the self in its disciplinary practices. Also, the normative power of a particular interpretation and practice of Sufism over the practices and ideas of its adepts is shaped and constrained by its interaction with other Islamic traditions, as well as other forms of subjectivity beyond religion, such as ethnicity, social position or family ties.

Sufism in contemporary Syria is marked by the coexistence of centralized Sufi orders and local Sufi communities connected by networks of personal relations linking their *shaykhs*. Most Sufi communities in Syria originate in and coalesce around a collective devotion to the religious persona of the *shaykh*. It is the charis-

matic nature of Sufi communities that has allowed them to attract members across neighborhoods, classes, occupations and families, spreading their influence over a large social spectrum, while retaining a strong popular character.

While Sufism faces strong criticism and competition from other forms of Islam, such as Salafi Islam, modernist Islam, and even secularism, it continues to enjoy a significant presence as a source of meaning and identity in Syrian society. It remained an important framework for the expression and experience of Islam in the rural and popular milieus. Sufism also continued to shape personal piety among various sectors of the urban middle and upper classes, such as women and the members of the traditional merchant families. Furthermore, the connections between Sufism and the religious scholars (*'ulama*) were never completely severed in Syria. Still today, many religious leaders combine the functions of textual scholars with those of mystical leaders, such as Ahmed Kuftaru, the former Grand Mufti of Syria and leader of a branch of the Naqshbandiyya Sufi order, who died in September 2004.

Debating Islam and the Common Good

The religious debate in Syria serves as an important forum for dispute and discussion about the common good and its relation to individual and public forms of morality. This opportunity to express and mediate divergent

opinions in the public sphere takes on an added significance in Syria, where other instances of public debate are tightly controlled by the Ba'thist regime.[6] The rise of Bashar al-Asad to the presidency after the death of his father Hafiz al-Asad, in 2000, unleashed a short-lived wave of liberalization. Political prisoners were released, control of the press was loosened, and discussion forums and clubs (*muntadayyāt*) created to address the social and political issues of a civil society were allowed to function in various contexts, from professional organizations to private homes. The collapse of this liberal experiment, in 2001, in the face of repressive measures taken by the regime against those who publicly expressed their criticisms, reinstated state control over national debate (George, 2003: 47–63; Wieland, 2006: 43–57).

The religious debate is not the only form of public debate in Syria that has some autonomy in relation to state, but it does offer a broader range of possibilities, even if indirect, for public expression of dissent and discontent. Moral commentaries focusing on the Islamic legitimacy of beliefs and practices have clear implications for the definition of the common good, including acceptable or desirable forms of governance (Pinto, 2004). On the other hand, religious debate is a key element in the elaboration and circulation of the interpretations of Islam that are favored by the Ba'thist regime. The production of a set of religious discourses that can be defined as "official Islam" (Böttcher, 2002) comes about less by the imposi-

tion of consensus than by the establishment of limits of debate in which different actors can present competing visions.

Therefore, the "official Islam" fostered by the Syrian government is less a coherent corpus of doctrines and opinions than what Pierre Bourdieu has defined as a "field" or "universe of possible discourses" (Bourdieu, 1997: 167–71), as it disciplines public discourse, by establishing the issues to be debated and the terms of debate. The Ba'thist regime is able to influence the production of public discourses on Islam by giving key religious figures easy access to media (radio, television and internet), or simply by tolerating their public activities. Beneficiaries of this policy do not necessarily have direct links to the regime and may even express their criticisms of it; rather, their role in the production of "official Islam" is played out in their positioning of themselves and in their mutual disagreement.

The main actors in this field of debate have included *'ulamā* connected to Sufism, such as the deceased Aḥmad Kuftārū, long-standing Mufti of Syria, and Muḥammad al-Ḥabash, currently a member of the Syrian parliament. They have also included moderate Salafi figures, such as Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, widely popular for his lectures, writings, and television program; and lay Muslim intellectuals, such as Muḥammad Shaḥrūr, well-known for his modernistic reading of the Islamic tradition (Shaḥrūr, 1990, 1999). All the main participants

in the public religious debate intensely use the modern media, which allows them to give a national and international scope to their discourse and polemics.

Although not all participants in the public religious debate are affiliated with Sufism, it is a constant explicit or implicit presence in the discourse of most of them.[7] For example, *shaykh* Būṭī, who is known for his sympathy for moderate forms of Salafi Islam, accommodates Sufism in his writings as a religious discipline based on moral reflexivity within the limits of the *sharī'a*[8] (Būṭī, 1998). However, not all forms of Sufism are recognized by the public discourses on Islam, as legitimate frameworks for Muslim identities in Syrian society. A consensus exists among those participating in the public religious debate about the higher value of spiritualized and rationalized scriptural Sufism. An example of this were the efforts of the late *shaykh* Aḥmad Kuftārū (d. September 2004), who combined the functions of Mufti of Syria and *shaykh* of the Kuftāriyya Sufi order, to transform Sufism into the moral consciousness of the *sharī'a* by limiting the technical vocabulary of Sufism to quranic concepts (Geoffroy, 1997: 14).

Notwithstanding the importance of public religious debate in shaping shared understandings about Islam and its role in society, the discourse of leading religious figures at a national level must always be locally appropriated if it is to be effective in shaping the religious consciousness and the social practices of individuals.

Therefore, this analysis would be incomplete if it did not take into account the variations between the religious discourse at the national level and the local production of meaning and behavior in the Sufi communities.

The main figures participating in the debate at the national level are also recognized locally, but they do face strong competition from local or unofficial religious leaders and intellectuals. One example of a local reference in the religious debate, as it takes place in Aleppo is the Shādhilī *shaykh* ʻAbd al-Qādir ʻĪsā. His book *Ḥaqā'iq ʻan al-Taṣawwuf* (*Truths about Sufism*), which presents a systematic exposition of the principles of Sufism, is widely read by Sufis and non-Sufis. The readers of ʻĪsā's book are usually literate, middle-class professionals, who seek a modern form of Sufi spirituality in harmony with the Qur'ān, but do not identify with the textual formalism of the dominant views on Sufism that circulate in the religious debate.

While ʻĪsā stressed the importance of having the Qur'ān and the *sharīʻa* as the normative framework for Sufism, he never denied the religious legitimacy or the reality of sainthood (*walāya*), nor miraculous deeds (*karāmāt*, sing. *karāma*) (ʻĪsā, 1993 [1961]: 460–70). In reality, ʻĪsā considered the *sharīʻa* and the ritual rules of Islam as part of the *ẓāhirī* (exoteric/manifest) aspects of the religious truth, while the superior *bāṭinī* (esoteric) divine reality could only be accessed through the engagement in Sufi devotional practices, in order to reach

an experiential connection to God (ʻĪsā, 1993 [1961]: 474). ʻĪsā´s portrait of Sufism as a form of self-discipline and asceticism allows him to generalize it as the moral solution for what he referred to as the "subversion" and "depravation" that threatened the Muslim community (ʻĪsā, 1993 [1961]: 8).

Throughout his book, ʻĪsā elaborated an interpretation of the Sufi tradition engaged in social change for the sake of achieving a just social order, as defined by the principles of Islam. ʻĪsā wanted to guarantee a central social and religious role for Sufi *shaykh*s, saying that "the legalistic scholars (*ʻulamā al-ẓāhir*) are to guard the borders of the sharīʻa and the Sufi scholars (*ʻulamā al-taṣawwuf*) its morals and its soul" (ʻĪsā, 1993 [1961]: 476–7). He thus presented a view of Sufi spirituality as engaged in social action, which is very different from the abstract spirituality fostered in the dominant views in the public religious debate.

Another important reference in the religious debate in Aleppo is Saʻīd Ḥawwā, former leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and a Sufi himself. In his book *Tarbiyyatu-nā al-Rūḥiyya* (*Our Spiritual Education*), he defends a form of Sufi spirituality committed to social change through respect of the principles of the *sharīʻa*, affirming the role of Sufi *shaykh*s as moral and spiritual guides of the Muslim community (Ḥawwā, 1979: 17–8). Ḥawwā accepted the Islamic legitimacy of miraculous

deeds (*karāmāt*), even in their more spectacular and corporeal expressions, such as the *ḍarb al-shīsh*,[9] as proofs of the reality of *baraka* as a form of divine power embodied in the Sufi *shaykhs* (Ḥawwā, 1979: 217–8). Ḥawwā's discourse on *karāmāt* implies that power and authority must be embodied in those who can perform it through miracles or privileged knowledge (Ḥawwā, 1979: 220).

The main point of divergence between the major participants in the public religious debate in Syria, and those who have a local or regional expression is the definition of religious authority and its social roles. The participants in the debate who are linked to the discursive field of "official Islam" tend to define sacred power as something enshrined in the religious texts. To these actors, even those affiliated with Sufism, religious authority derives solely from the capacity in producing legitimate interpretations of the Islamic textual tradition. This view about sacred power and religious authority bodes well with the religious policies of the Ba'thist regime, as it implies that religious sources of power can be tamed through control of the interpretive regimes that produce religious discourses. Indeed, the Ba'thist regime has heavily invested in the control of religious education and public discourse (Böttcher, 2002).

On the other hand, the works of Ḥawwā and 'Īsā presented views that contradicted the "official" consensus about sacred power, by affirming that it can be embodied

in select religious leaders, who can demonstrate the legitimacy of their religious authority through the performance of *karāmāt*. These discourses pose challenges to the authoritarian order of Syrian politics, as they dislocate the sources of authority from discourse to embodied forms of performance. The views expressed by these authors also have greater resonance with local forms of religiosity, which, at least in Aleppo, are shaped by beliefs and practices related to the notion of *baraka*, such as the cult of saints. Therefore, religious discourse can act as a vehicle of public dissent, with potential political effects, not so much by carrying an explicitly political content, as by defining how power is to be legitimately claimed and exercised.

Embodied Morality and the Public Sphere

The processes involved in constructing Sufi identities range from participation in the ritual gathering (*ḥaḍra*) to the initiation in the esoteric knowledge of the Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*) under the guidance of the shaykh. The experiential character of Sufi identity is structured in the process of mystical initiation, which includes the acquisition of esoteric knowledge and body techniques[10] through both doctrinal lessons (*dars*) and spiritual exercises. The disciplinary practices that constitute Sufi initiation aim to control and reshape the self (*nafs*), so as to detach it from the exoteric (*ẓāhirī*) universe of worldly appearance and direct it towards the esoteric (*bāṭinī*) realm of divine

reality/truth (*ḥaqīqa*). Thus, the process of constitution of the Sufi identities could be described as a mechanism of "subjectification," for it aims to produce social actors, whose discourses and practices are framed and disciplined by an internalized normative framework.

The normative framework of Sufism influences and shapes the social practices of its adepts according to its form of embodiment, as cognitive, practical and emotional dispositions of those who are socialized through the Sufi initiation and ritual. The acquisition of *adab* (rules of behavior), which is a central element in the Sufi initiation, has to be constantly proven and validated through moral performance in the public sphere. This enactment of embodied moral values creates a framework of individual exemplarity upon which are built social evaluations and expectations about the proper social behavior in the public sphere. It is common that the disciplinary reconfiguration of the self within a Sufi framework also leads to the reorganization of the social relations of the individual and gives a moral character to the individual performance in various social settings.

An example of this kind of "inner conversion" was the case of a young engineer in his 30´s. from a very secular and rich family, who became a disciple of a Shadhili *shaykh* of Aleppo. He not only adopted a very strict moral behavior, growing a beard, stopping to drink and to intermingle freely with women, but also gradually reshaped all his social relations according to the moral

principles preached by his *shaykh*. It is interesting to note that this man presented both his religious practices, such as regular mosque attendance and participation in the Sufi *hadra*, and his "modern asceticism," such as the practice of sports and a strong work ethic, as complementary parts of his moral performance.

Sometimes, this process can create challenges to shared assumptions about the common good and social practices that are culturally legitimate; can be abandoned or changed as a result of the moral performance of individuals grouped together by their affiliation to a Sufi *shaykh*. For example, three disciples of the above mentioned Shadhili *shaykh* from Aleppo, who owned shops in the district of Bab al-Faraj, in Aleppo, decided to abandon the practice of bargaining and haggling over prices in their commercial activities, as they felt that it was contrary to the Sufi principle of *sidq* (correctness). The moral performance of these Sufi merchants created the opportunity for the emergence of new circuits of solidarity and the redistribution of power and prestige in the public sphere within the framework delimited by the Islamic values inscribed in their social practices.

However, the influence of Sufism in the Syrian society extends beyond the Sufi communities via services performed by the Sufi *shaykhs* for a wider audience, such as the dispensation of religious knowledge, religious healing, conflict mediation, and charity. The Sufi *shay*khs are seen by their followers as embodying notions of justice

that are articulated to other elements that compose their charismatic *persona*, such as their knowledge of both the *shari'a* and the esoteric truths of the divine reality. Even non-Sufis in popular milieus tend to accept that the justice of the Sufi *shaykhs* is fairer than the one dispensed by the Syrian legal system, and resort to it in order to settle their disputes. Another feature that attracts people to submit their disputes to the judgment or mediation of the Sufi *shaykhs* is the perception that they take into account the social *persona* of those involved, always trying to prevent or compensate any harm done to the social identity of the parts involved, in particular when it involves issues of honor, rank or modesty.

The role of Sufi *shaykhs* as moral guides and mediators of conflict challenges the regime's monopoly over public order and justice. Besides creating alternative focuses of power, the religious authority of the Sufi *shaykh* rests in their capacity to mobilize their followers in the public sphere. This social power has a significant political dimension, which is often explored, rarely as an act of confrontation to the state, but rather as a way to negotiate the limits of autonomy and compliance *vis-à-vis* their relation to the state. Sometimes, pointed conflict with state agents can escalate into public confrontation, leading to the open politicization of the Sufi presence in the public sphere.

For example, once in a village north of Aleppo, one of the disciples of a Rifā'ī *shaykh* was arrested following a

personal dispute with a member of the security services. As soon as he became informed about the incident, the *shaykh*, who had maintained good relations with the state authorities, gathered his disciples and went in procession from his *zāwiyya* to the place of the young man's detainment. They paraded the streets of the village, beating drums and carrying the flags of the Rifā'iyya group, finally stopping in front of the detention house, where they remained, performing the *dhikr* ritual (mystical recitation) throughout the day and night. The sound of the drums and the chanting filled the streets of the village, proclaiming the presence of the Sufi community and the power of its *shaykh* in the public sphere.

Parallel to such confrontational strategies, phone calls were made at the *zāwiyya*, in order to contact friends of the *shaykh* in the political establishment and the Ba'th party who could mediate the situation. Finally, after a long and difficult negotiation, which included government authorities in Aleppo, the man was released. Through the combination of public confrontation and personal mediation, the *shaykh* showed the state agents the political potential of his religious authority. This episode also enhanced the social recognition of his role as a local leader, for many inhabitants of the village told me how they feared and respected this *shaykh* who was powerful and courageous enough to confront even the state—and that despite the fact that some of these villagers had no sympathy for Sufism as a religious tradition.

It is, however, important to keep in mind that the social and political power acquired by Sufi *shaykhs* by mobilizing their communities in the public sphere is rarely used as a political tool to confront the state. While some Sufi *shaykhs* use it to negotiate the limits of their religious and social autonomy in relation to the state, others use it to obtain a privileged place in the networks of clientship that connect the state to local social groups in Syria. The Sufi *shaykhs* entering these networks have to manage a delicate balance, easily broken, as seen in the example above, between worldly subordination to the Ba'thist political rule and the absolute mystical power that constitutes their religious persona.

Conclusions

The present analysis has highlighted ways in which Sufism gives expression to various arenas of power and social participation in contemporary Syria. Sufi public discourses on both religion and society contribute to the constitution of a sphere of public debate, offering channels for the expression of dispute over forms of the common good in Syrian society. The Sufi-framed moral performances create circles of communication, trust, and shared expectations, which demarcate multiple arenas of solidarity and participation in the public sphere. The circuits of debate, pluralism and individual agency made possible by these religiously-framed autonomous arenas constitute social loci, where the values encoded in the

idea of Human Rights can be negotiated and articulated with the moral and cultural meanings created by the various understandings and practices of Islam in the Syrian society.

Notes

1. Of course, these same democratic elements can be found in secular political movements in several Middle Eastern countries, such as the "civil society movement" (*harakat al-mujtam'a al-madani*) that emerged in Syria after the ascension of Bashar al-Asad to the presidency. See George, 2003: 30–46; Wieland, 2006: 114–23.
2. The transliteration of the Arabic words follows the system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).
3. Another circuit of Islamization of the public sphere in contemporary Muslim majority societies is linked to the growing market of religious commodities, which allow the inscription of Islamic meanings and values in the everyday life of the individuals, through the consumption and multiple uses of objects and images of symbolic and iconic character (Haenni, 2005; Pinto, 2007; Starrett, 1995).
4. The concept of "disciplinary practices" was taken from Talal Asad (1993: 125)
5. The ethnographic data analyzed here was collected during several periods of fieldwork research in the Sufi communities of Aleppo and Damascus, in Syria, in 1998, from 1999 to 2001, 2002 and 2006.
6. The concept of public sphere was taken from Habermas (1989 [1962]), taking into account its critical reappraisal for the context of Muslim societies by Eickelman & Salvatore (2004: 10-5).
7. Muḥammad Shaḥrūr is a notable exception to this trend, as he simply dismissed the esoteric interpretations of Sufism as irrelevant to his rational and formalistic approach to the Islamic textual tradition (Interview with the author, Damascus, 1999).

8. Būṭī's relation to both Sufism and the Salafiyya is very complex, as he mobilizes elements of both traditions in order to address specific issues. For an analysis of Būṭī's religious message, see Houot, 2004.
9. The *ḍarb al-shīsh* is the ritual perforation of parts of the body with iron skewers without causing any bleeding or physical harm to the performer. It is seen as a proof of the power of the *shaykh*'s *baraka*. Salafi Muslims and Secularists criticize this ritual practice as either a form of un-Islamic magic (*siḥr*) or just a backward superstition.
10. The concept of body techniques was taken from Marcel Mauss (1995 [1934]).

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