Religious Anxieties in Two Marginal Regions

Reformist Debates on Funerary Ritual among Tanzanian and Acehnese Muslims in the Twentieth Century

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This article has grown out of the attempt to contextualize Muslims' debates on funerary practice in contemporary Tanzania within the broader history of Muslim reformism. While funerals became an object of contention very early on in the history of the Muslim Middle East, the topic does not figure prominently in studies of debates provoked by modern reformism.[1] Several observers, though, have reported dissension over funerals from Indonesia.[2] In particular, John Bowen's account on reformism in the Gayo region of Aceh's mountainous interior from the 1920s through the 1980s shows striking similarities to events in Tanzania from 1990–2000s.[3] In both cases, the choice between different regimes of funerary practice became an "unavoidable religious diacritic," in Bowen's terms, of allegiance to one or the other side in a struggle between "traditionalist" and reformist Muslims.[4] In both cases, the reformists insist on paring down funeral rites to make them accord with their understanding of prophetic practice and object particularly to a ritual, known as *telkin* in Aceh and as *talkini* in Tanzania, of "instructing" the dead for their encounter with the angels of death.[5]

While both Tanzania and Aceh have long been open to influences from the Middle East, the recent parallels cannot necessarily be explained by diffusion from a common Middle Eastern core, as evidence on the presence of *telkin* there is lacking.[6] Diffusion from South Asia, meanwhile, is plausible in the case of Aceh but less so in Tanzania, where South Asian Muslims by and large kept a careful distance from their Af-

1. On early Islamic debates on the fate of the dead and funerary ritual, see Leor Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). See also Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981). On twentieth-century reformist movements and political debates there is a vast literature; see, e.g., Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); for Indonesia see n18. Kai Kresse's *Philosophising in Mombasa* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) is the authority on midcentury conversations about reform among notables on the East African coast.

2. See Merle Ricklefs, "Six Centuries of Islamization in Java," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 100–128.

3. I would like to thank John R. Bowen for his comments on an earlier version of this paper. It could not have been written without his published work.

4. John R. Bowen, "Death and the History of Islam in Highland Aceh," *Indonesia* 38 (1984): 35.

5. For the convenience of the reader, I will refer to the rite simply by the term used in Gayo, *telkin*, except where I am dealing directly with the Tanzanian context.

6. On the longer-term history of Aceh, see the relevant passages in Merle Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), esp. 36–40, 184–89, 248–52; for the East African coast, see Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent: Cultural Change and Traditional Islam on the East African Coast, 800–1900* (Cam-

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rican coreligionists.[7] Moreover, although criticism of the *telkin* ritual fits in with the general reformist opposition to ritual innovation and emotional styles of worship, Islamic reform movements are strong in many locations around the Western Indian Ocean without provoking equal debate on the issue of funerals. The focus on funerary practice in these two locations, then, cannot be explained as a function of standard reformist teachings.

The present study discusses likely routes for the *telkin* to have reached both these areas. It also argues that, inasmuch as this ritual is designed to keep the dead safe, it shows the survivors' sense of connectedness to the dead, and the debates over it, in turn, branch out into debates over the shape and cohesion of village society more generally. The similarities between the two sites discussed here, then, lie not only in the general characteristics of reformism and its attitude to local orthodoxies but also in the concerns arising from long-term social change.

The processes at play provide a study of the place of recent reformist movements in the longer-term history of the societies they challenge. In particular, the present case suggests two points. First, it can be misleading to describe the older teachings that Islamic reformists attack as "local" additions—ones based in local culture—to orthodox ritual.[8] The *telkin* exemplifies the long antecedents of ritual innovation and exchange among traditionalist Muslims, and hence the transregional roots of this local practice. Ultimately, the anxieties that fuel the debates between traditionalists and reformists point toward the historical processes—of marginalization, but also subservient integration—whereby the spaces we now call "local" have become defined as such.

Second, the present case highlights the importance of a point that has been made repeatedly in recent years: namely, that despite the similarity of reformists' views across long distances, the dynamics of reformist movements cannot be deduced from a standardized account of Islamic doctrine, whether based on the scriptures or the history of the Islamic heartlands in the Middle East. Rather, the significance of these doctrines needs to be established within specific contexts on a case by case basis.[9] The "Muslim world," in other words, must be recognized as quite as diverse and disparate as the area that could be (but, tellingly, normally is not) called the "Christian world." Recognition of this diversity does not imply that long-standing ritual and doctrinal exchanges within the Muslim world should be considered less important than they have been. Rather, it needs to be recognized that the commonalities thus established do not by themselves produce uniformity or unity between societies inhabited by Muslims because they are not insulated from a host of other—political, economic, even geographic—forces.

Two problems that this study has to deal with need to be signposted at the outset. The first concerns the danger, often pointed out by both cultural historians and scholars of religion, of reducing religious phenomena to political and social factors, as if the latter were more real than the former. This tendency can be traced to the Marxist origins of social history but has bedeviled also writers who do not subscribe to its materialist tenets.[10] The approach here taken to this problem sets out from the observation that social history's focus on the primacy of material interest recreates, with valuations inversed, the tendency of both Islam and Christianity—the culturally dominant religions

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). For a work that deals with many of the concerns the *telkin* ritual addresses, but not with the rite itself, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*.

7. For Southeast Asia, see Thomas Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia: From the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); see also n19. On the presence of South Asians in Tanzania, see John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

8. On the tension between local and universal tenets of Islam, see, e.g., Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, "Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam," *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4 (1999): 1–18; and Talal Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986).

9. For a good general statement of the point, see Bernard Haykel, introduction to *Revival and Reform in Islam: The Legacy of Muhammad al-Shawkani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a discussion of the versatility of the significance of widespread public symbols in the Muslim world, see Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). John R. Bowen makes a version of this claim in the introduction to his *Muslims through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4–11.

10. On this issue see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), chap. 1; for an African perspective, see Wim M J van Binsbergen and Matthew Schoffeleers, *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion* (London: KPI, 1985).

among the actors examined here and among their academic observers, respectively—to play off this world against the next. There is, however, reason to argue that this opposition is less important for the way most believers relate to their religion than theological texts would suggest.

To sidestep the opposition of "this-worldly" and "otherworldly," it is helpful to consider religious practices that pursue (otherworldly) worship and (this-worldly) pragmatic problem solving simultaneously. For instance, both Bowen and religious ethnographers in Tanzania report the propitiation of spirits or ancestors as a means of healing the sick.[11] Both Christian and Muslim purists, insisting on believers orienting their lives toward God without consideration of reward, would object to this juxtaposition of purposes. Nevertheless, the focus on healing recurs in Muslim and Christian congregations, e.g., in the form of "book healing" utilizing the Quran and healing by prayer.[12] In the pragmatics of everyday life, this-worldly and otherworldly motives, and religious, societal, and economic concerns, are inextricably mixed—a point long appreciated by sociologists of religion.[13] The definition of religion as a discrete sphere of human thought and activity directed beyond the everyday breaks down in everyday life, even if it has a strong hold over the minds of believers.[14]

Therefore, if it is suggested here that small-town people and villagers who worry about correct ritual practice also worry about social cohesion, it is not to say that when talking about religion they really mean something else, but merely that they mean more than one thing (which is hardly news). If religious doctrine provides a language that also addresses concerns not intrinsically considered religious by academic observers, for instance social ones, it is not therefore any less important or real—if anything, more so. If some uneasiness with the act of interpretation remains, it is due not to any danger of explaining away the religious character of debates on funerary ritual by linking them to societal concerns but to the practical impossibility of discussing the terms of this interpretation with the actors.

The second issue concerns the explanatory reach of those correspondences at the societal level, which are here identified as underlying the more obvious parallels in religious debate. An examination of only two places around the vast Indian Ocean seaboard obviously risks missing both contrasting and concurring cases. There will be regions experiencing similar processes of simultaneous integration and marginalization within wider polities, where no debate over funeral occurred. There will be less marginal locations where similar debates did take place. The comparison presented here therefore does not establish a general rule on causation of dissent over Islamic funerary ritual.

Instead, it enables two things: first, to trace some of the possible ways in which a particular ritual practice could float across different Muslim networks to become local in two places to which it was probably not indigenous; and second, to examine this religious practice and the debate over it as part of the texture of social life and to consider the significance of the similarities in its course in two historically unrelated regions. These similarities lie in the way rural people debate social ties among themselves at a time when they have to work ever harder to manage their precarious yet essential ties to far-away centers. They thereby highlight the way in which rural, apparently quiescent, even isolated areas participate in the experiences of postcolonial politics and the current wave of globalization.

The *Telkin/Talkini* Ritual: Overlapping Networks and Corresponding Beliefs

The funerary ritual so hotly debated in both Highland Aceh (also known as Gayo) and Muslim regions in Tanzania (particularly the southeast)

11. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*; on Tanzania, see Marja-Liisa Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol in Transitional Zaramo Society, with Special Reference to Women* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1986).

12. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 129–50; on Tanzania, see Felicitas Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2008), chap. 5.

13. See, e.g., Max Weber, "Ueber einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie ("Essay on Some Categories of Interpretive Sociology"), in Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsaetze zur Wissenschaftslehre* (Tuebingen: JCB Mohr, 1988), 427–74, esp. 427–38.

14. For a critique of the notion of religion as a separate sphere of human action in African history, see Paul Landau, "'Religion' and Christian Conversion in African History: A New Model," *Journal of Religious History* 23 (1999): 8–30.

derives its name from an Arabic term (*talqin*) denoting "instruction" or "prompting." Its core is the reading of a short Islamic catechism at the freshly filled-in grave.[15] This text focuses on the questions that Muslims expect to be asked by the angels of death shortly after burial: Who is your God (answer: nobody but God), who is his prophet (Muhammad), and what is your religion (Islam). Its aim is to remind the deceased of the correct answers, so as to assure him or her safety in the encounter with the angels of death and a quiet rest in the grave. Omission of the ritual would put the deceased at risk of suffering what is known as the "torture of the grave": a variety of agonizing states foreshadowing the tortures of hell.[16]

The basic elements of the *telkin* address notions that are old and widespread in the Muslim world.[17] The angels of death and their interaction with the recently buried recur in the hadith, the sayings of the prophet. The torture of the grave, too, is a well-known concept from the medieval Middle East. Forms of *telkin* have been mentioned, tantalizingly, in North Africa and various parts of Indonesia. It is likely that the ritual is widespread at least in Indonesia and possibly around the Indian Ocean seaboard, and it is known to have attracted reformist criticism in Indonesia outside Aceh. Unfortunately, detailed information on either the ritual or debates on it in these locations is lacking.[18]

Recent studies of scholarly networks around the Indian Ocean suggest possibilities for the transmission of *telkin*.[19] The most concrete one involves, at the Aceh end, the region's most celebrated seventeenth-century scholars, Nur al Din al-Raniri (died 1658) and Abd al-Rauf al-Sinkili. They worked at the court of the Aceh Sultan during the period when lowland Aceh's hold on Gayo was strengthening, and both of them studied with the Madina-based scholar al-Qushashi, who also taught members of the Yemeni 'Alawi family.[20] The family-cum-scholarly network of the 'Alawiyya, in turn, became important in Islamic education on the East African coast in the late nineteenth century, just as Sufi orders were spreading onto the African mainland. One of its members, Abdalla Ba Kathir, ran a madrassa in Zanzibar that was considered accommodating to relatively recent converts.[21]

If the *telkin* were infused into Tanzanian Sufi networks through the 'Alawiyya, this would explain why Tanzanian Qadiris practice it, even though it has not been reported from Somalia, whence the Qadiriyya reached Tanzania in the 1880s through Sheikh Uways. Members of the Qadiriyya tarika are the most vocal defenders of the *talkini* today.[22] The *talkini* is not alone in posing this kind of puzzle. Tanzanian Qadiris also use banners and drums that are explicitly rejected by Somali Qadiris; the drums instead appear to have

15. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 254–59; and Jumuiya Zawiatul Qadiria, *Mjadala baina ya jamaat Answaru Sunna na Ahl-Sunna wal-Jamaa, waliyowakilishwa na vijana wa Qadiriya, ilifanyika tarehe 11/10/1997 hadi 27/10/97* (*Debate between the Jamaat Ansuaru Sunna and Ahl-Sunna wal-Jamaa, Who Were Represented by the Youth of the Qadiriya, 11 October 1997 to 27 October 1997*) (Dar es Salaam: JZQT Printing Unit, 1997), 111–21.

16. On the torture of the grave, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 218–23.

17. See ibid. See also Smith and Haddad, *Islamic Understanding*.

18. Deliar Noer's *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973) mentions reformist opposition to *telkin*. Other relevant authors at most make brief, if suggestive, references to conflict over funerary ritual. See, e.g., Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Mvda Movement in West Sumatra (1927–33)* (Singapore: Equinox, 2009); Howard M. Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam: Islamic Reform in Twentieth-Century Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University, 1970); Peter Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World* (London: Hurst, 2001); and Ahmad Ibrahim, Sharon Siddique, and Yasmin Hussain, eds., *Readings in Islam in Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1985).

19. For transmission through scholarly and Sufi networks among Mecca, South Asia, and Indonesia, see Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004). See also W. G. Clarence-Smith and Ulrike Freitag, *Hadhrami Traders, Scholars, and Statesmen in the Indian Ocean, 1750s–1960s* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Ulrike Freitag, *Indian Ocean Migrants and State Formation in Hadhramaut: Reforming the Homeland* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Engseng Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860–1925* (London: Routledge, 2003); Itzchak Weismann, *The Naqshbandiyya: Orthodoxy and Activism in a Worldwide Sufi Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2009); Levtzion, ed., *Conversion to Islam*; and Gibson, *Islamic Narrative and Authority in Southeast Asia*.

20. See Azra, *Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 18.

21. See Bang, *Sufis and Scholars*, 147–48.

22. On the spread of the Qadiriyya in Tanzania, see August Nimtz, *Islam and Politics in East Africa: The Sufi Orders in Tanzania* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980); Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Oxford: James Currey, 1996); and Becker, *Becoming Muslim*.

a Persian precedent but were unknown to and initially rejected by the older Shirazi immigrants in the Swahili towns.[23]

These discontinuities in the transmission of ritual forms highlight important features of the networks involved. The plural "networks" is significant; although they connected Muslim scholars from the Maghrib to South Asia and beyond, they did not function as one seamless entity. Thanks to the hajj pilgrimage, Mecca and Medina were connected with every subregion, but connections between different subregions were indirect, through the holy cities or through overlapping relays.[24] Moreover, networks were of different kinds, premised on scholarly, Sufi, or family connections, which overlapped but remained distinct, and all of them were sustained by migration for economic purposes, above all trade. Different individuals within one network, then, rarely shared all their ties and were likely instead to each connect to a different constellation of partly overlapping networks.

The 'Alawiyya in the Western Indian Ocean was one such discrete network that combined family and Sufi characteristics; it was part of a larger "galaxy" of Hadhrami networks that, from their base in Southern Arabia, stretched all the way to Southeast Asia. Al-Raniri, though claimed as Indonesian by today's Indonesian Muslims, was of Hadhrami descent and born in Gujarat. His studies with Hadhrami sheikhs in South Asia would have provided another opportunity to acquire knowledge of the *telkin* through a network also possibly connected—via the Hadhramaut—to Tanzania.[25]

Yet more possibilities can be found; for instance, the Shadhiliyya-Yashrutiyya, which in Tanzania coexists with the Qadiriyya, has its center in Jordan (formerly in Palestine), so that Shadhilis on their way to the Comoros (whence the Shadhiliyya reached the East African mainland) were likely to touch both on the holy cities and Southern Arabia and might have encountered the *telkin* there.[26] Unlike in present-day Tanzania, where membership in a Sufi order is treated as exclusive, well-traveled scholars such as al-Raniri often belonged to several orders, facilitating exchange. Ritual forms such as *telkin*, it appears, could move along these networks on a myriad of different paths, thrive in some places and be ignored or fade in others. As both Gayo and Tanzania are locations outside the mainstream of doctrinal discussion and reform, it is tempting to think that *telkin* perhaps was more widespread in the past and has survived in these locations while fading in others.

In Indonesia, the presence of Sufi orders, here known as *tarekat*, is much older than in Tanzania.[27] Bowen does not elaborate on Sufi practice in Gayo, but he traces the presence of the Shattariyya and Qadiriyya orders back to the seventeenth century.[28] Moreover, he points out that it is sometimes claimed in Gayo that Abdulkadir al Jilani, the founder of the Qadiriyya, was responsible for converting Gayo to Islam, suggesting a well-entrenched presence of the order.[29] While there is little information on the use of rituals like *telkin* among Qadiris even within Indonesia, let alone elsewhere, it is just about conceivable that the Sufi orders spread the ritual.[30]

In comparison, the arrival of the reformist discourse critical of *telkin* in Gayo is somewhat better known. Already active elsewhere in Indonesia, reformists made their presence felt in Gayo from the late 1920s. At this time, the growth of the main town of Takengon intensified trade, and increased mobility facilitated the emergence of local branches of region-wide reformist movements such as the Muhammadiyah. Funerary practice

23. See Christine Choi Ahmed, "God, Anti-Colonialism, and Drums: Sheikh Uways and the Uwaysiyya," *Ufahamu* 17 (1983): 96–117.

24. On Mecca and Medina as centers of teaching, see Azra, *Origins of Islamic Reformism*, chap. 1.

25. On Al-Raniri, see ibid., 54–56.

26. On the Shadhiliyya in East Africa see Jean-Claude Penrad, "La Shadhiliyya Yashrutiyya et la 'Alawiyya dans l'Ocean Indien Occidental: nouveaux materiaux comoriens" ("The Shadhiliyya Yashrutiyya and the 'Alawiyya in the Western Indian Ocean: New Comorian Material"), in Biancamaria Scarcia Amoretti, *Islam in East Africa: New Sources: Archives, Manuscripts, and Written Historical Sources, Oral History, Archaeology: International Colloquium, Rome, 2–4 December* (Rome: Herder, 2001), 253–73.

27. For religious life in Aceh more generally, see James Siegel, *The Rope of God* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

28. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 110–15.

29. See ibid., 124–28.

30. Bowen mentions debates similar to those in Gayo in passing. See ibid., 279–80.

is remembered as the main focus of a pivotal debate between reformist and traditionalist Muslim groups in 1948.[31] According to Bowen, by the 1970s the choice of one or the other regime of funerary practice had become an "unavoidable religious diacritic" separating modernist reformists from traditional Muslims in Highland Aceh.[32]

In Tanzania, concern over burial practices emerged later: it has run high in the towns of the southern coast, particularly Lindi and Mtwara, since the 1990s. In Dar es Salaam, confrontations over funeral can be traced particularly among residents originating from the south. In Lindi, 350 miles south of Dar es Salaam, young Islamic reformists made their name in the early 1990s by asserting a form of funerary ritual stripped of the *talkini* and most other social graces: they became known as *Chimumuna*, a word commonly said to mean "quietly," or "furtively."[33] While established practice is to walk slowly with the bier while chanting "la illaha ila allah," *Chimumuna* walk to the graveyard without chanting and at a speedy pace. The reformist faction involved can be traced to towns further north, including Dar es Salaam and Tanga, and from there to schools in Saudi Arabia that started recruiting Tanzanian students in the 1970s.[34]

The arguments of the opponents of the practice are similar in both cases and show the reformists' intellectual kinship with similar and connected movements in many other places.[35] Thus, in keeping with reformists' general condemnation of post-prophetic "innovations" (*bida*') in ritual, they condemn *talkini* as unfounded in prophetic practice. Moreover, *talkini* is premised on the assumption of sentience and responsiveness on the part of the deceased, and its opponents assert, citing specific Quran verses, that the dead really are dead to the world, have to face whatever the grave holds for them on their own, and must stand or fall on judgment day on the merits they acquired before death. They deny the possibility of the living acting on behalf of the deceased and the capacity of predeceased saints to intercede for them, likening the search for intercession to the sin of polytheism (*shirk*).[36]

This reasoning is in keeping with some widespread characteristics of reformist movements: their emphasis on the purification of ritual from post-prophetic additions, on God's claim to exclusive worship and on the critical examination of prophetic traditions. Yet despite their insistence that the living have no means of reaching the dead, many reformists aver that the dead do remain sentient in the grave and run the risk of experiencing excruciating torture *before* judgment day. Such belief in the torture of the grave is longstanding in the Middle East, and reformists do not treat its scriptural bases with the same mistrust as *telkin* and most Sufi ritual.[37] This inconsistency in the application of their critical principles points to the fact that reformist preoccupations are not simply a logical extension of theological principles. Rather, debates between reformists and (for want of a better word) traditionalists occur at "flash points" that focus not only on explicit ideological principles but also on vaguer aims and anxieties.

This is evident also when considering the defenders of *telkin*. They, in turn, marshal their own hadith. While these are often ones considered weak by reformists—a distinction that traditionalists refute—they thus present justifications for the ritual designed to conform to reformists' insistence on scriptural evidence. But beyond that they emphasize God's mercy and compassion and the compassion that human beings, particularly

31. See ibid., 18–29.

32. Bowen, "Death and the History of Islam," 35.

33. See Becker, *Becoming Muslim*, chap. 8; and Felicitas Becker, "Rural Islamism during the 'War on Terror': A Tanzanian Case Study," *African Affairs* 105 (2006): 583–603.

34. Mwalimu Bafadhili, interview by the author, Imamu Shafii College, Tanga, 26 June 2004. On the colonial precedents see Kresse, *Philosophising in Mombasa*, chap. 4.

35. A classical study of the beginnings of reformism is Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Although the relationship between (theological) reformism and (political) Islamism is complicated, studies focusing on Islamism are also useful, e.g., Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*; and Roxanne Leslie Euben and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Princeton Readings in Islamist Thought: Texts and Contexts from Al-Banna to Bin Laden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

36. See Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*; Jumiatul Qadiria, *Mjadala*; and Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, chap. 11, which is the most comprehensive discussion of theological objections to *telkin*.

37. For a discussion of how the notion of the "torture of the grave" gained purchase soon after Muhammad's death, despite a thin scriptural base, see Halevi, *Muhammad's Grave*, 206–18.

Muslims, owe each other in the face of death. The contrast in tone with reformists' focus on the individual's obligation to avoid or face up to divine wrath is marked. Reformists' dismissal of *telkin* causes anguish and indignation because defenders of the practice read it as denial of the possibility of accessing divine grace. The debate on *telkin* resonates with the concern of the living about how to act on behalf of the dead, and thereby ties into the wider ritual universe that underpins social interaction.[38]

Death and burial are hedged around with anxiety, speculative beliefs, and ritual everywhere, and they are never isolated from the social processes—from attempts at healing to the settling of inheritances—that lead up to and beyond them. In the case of Gayo and Muslim Tanzania, there are not only competing Islamic interpretations at work but also older notions of non-Muslim derivation.[39] Gayo ideas hold that different composite parts of the soul undergo different transitions after death and that the living are called upon to ease these transitions through a series of rituals.[40] In Tanzania, meanwhile, the notion of an afterlife where the individual soul is at the mercy of the angels of death constitutes something of a reversal of the interdependence between the living and their deceased ancestors. If formerly the dead, properly honored, were expected to look after the living, in a Muslim world the living are called upon to enable the dead to face the tests of the grave.[41]

Moreover, the arguments that reformists draw on to challenge *telkin* have implications far beyond this moment at the just filled-in grave. They imperil the legitimacy of a large part of the ritual practices that had circulated among, and kept people circulating within, the networks discussed above: those concerned with Sufi "friends of God" or descendants of the Prophet and the benefits to be derived from honoring and commemorating them.[42] Commemoration typically took the form of visits to their graves, so as to participate in their blessings and obtain their intercession for the dead. Some gravesites were important focal points in the descent networks that sustained networks of religious and scholarly exchange. This entire process becomes suspect in the light of reformist claims.

Closer to home, reformists' insistence on doing only what the Prophet did implies condemnation of the drawn-out ritual and social process following a death. In both locations, the funeral is framed by meals for all attendees, and further ritual meals, called *kenduri* in Gayo and *matanga* in Tanzania, follow at set distances in time. Like funerals themselves, these meals are important social occasions where all open questions pertaining to the death, from the potential involvement of witchcraft in causing it to the disposition of the estate, are addressed. Reformists call for questions of inheritance to be referred to religious authorities and treated as strictly a practical matter, and they offer no alternative for the social function of *kenduri* and *matanga*.

Again, reformists' insistence not only on a particular reading of the scriptures but also on a particular austere style is evident. This emphasis, and traditionalists' strong reaction against it, cannot be derived from their theological points alone. Rather, their significance derives from the way the debate on *telkin* is linked back into both everyday social life and a complex Islamic ritual that has long and diverse antecedents. It probably has been in flux from its inception, but the way in which it has been contested in the later twentieth century is intimately connected to the way people on these rural peripheries experienced colonialism and its aftermath.

38. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*; and Becker, *Becoming Muslim*, chap. 5.

39. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*. For a cognate Javanese perspective, see Merle Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk, CT: Eastbridge, 2006); and Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol in Transitional Zaramo Society*. For the blurred borders of Muslim practice in Tanzania, see Linda L. Giles, "Possession Cults on the Swahili Coast: A Re-examination of Theories of Marginality," *Africa* 57 (1987): 234–58.

40. See Bowen, "Death and the History of Islam."

41. On this point, see Felicitas Becker, "Islamic Reform and Historical Change in the Care of the Dead: Conflicts over Funerary Practice among Tanzanian Muslims," *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute* 79 (2009): 416–34.

42. See Ho, *Graves of Tarim*; and Mark Sedgwick, *Saints and Sons: The Making and Remaking of the Rashidi Ahmadi Sufi Order, 1799–2000* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

Dependent Integration: Provincial Muslim Congregations in Twentieth-Century Aceh and Tanzania

The shared concern about the *telkin* ritual connects two areas whose places in Islamic history would typically be described very differently. Aceh is considered to have been a Muslim society, and militantly so, for several centuries, while most of Muslim Tanzania became so only in the twentieth century.[43] Even the old Muslim communities on the East African coast have long been described as pacific and very open to continental African cultural influence.[44] Today, the evidence for contests over funerary ritual comes mostly from rural areas that became predominantly Muslim only in the twentieth century, from provincial towns, and from peripheral communities in the capital peopled by immigrants from such rural areas.

Highland Aceh, in turn, is part of that province of Sumatra that is considered the first in the Indonesian archipelago to harbor Muslims: Marco Polo reports their presence in Aceh at the end of the thirteenth century. From the sixteenth century onward, European seafarers (predominantly Portuguese and Dutch) interacted with an Acehnese state normally described as the Sultanate of Aceh. The polity waxed and waned but was perceived on several occasions over the next three centuries as a militant opponent of European encroachment on Sumatra.[45] In the second half of the nineteenth century, between 1873 and ca. 1904, the sultanate succumbed to Dutch conquest in a bloody war. Muslim notables and clerics played an important role as leaders in this war. In the words of political scientist Edward Aspinall, Aceh has "a well-established reputation for the piety of its inhabitants and a long history of Islamic militancy."[46]

But the apparent contrast between the young rural Muslim congregations of Tanzania's and Aceh's long Islamic antecedents soften if we consider Gayo specifically, the highland region in the interior of Aceh from where debates on *telkin* have been reported. Although this area was drawn into the orbit of the Sultanate—and Islamized—in the seventeenth century, the foci of Acehnese history always lay in the port and royal towns of the lowlands; Gayo was not directly involved in conflict with Europeans until the Dutch war of conquest began in 1873. The geographic, linguistic, and societal differences between the lowland and Gayo have led to the highland being treated as an afterthought in the study of Acehnese history.[47] Similarly, many areas where Muslims are the majority in Tanzania, both urban and rural, are easily construed as marginal by both Tanzanian and outside observers.[48]

How both Gayo and parts of rural Tanzania acquired this peripheral status, and how this involved and affected Muslim congregations, needs to be considered next. In Gayo, the marginalization of indigenous leaders and political practices was bound up with political, social, and economic change in the colonial and postcolonial era, of which the introduction of Islamic modernism from the 1920s also formed a part. In Tanzania, the decline of the old Muslim towns during the colonial era paralleled the expansion of Muslim congregations through conversion and a rapprochement between formerly antagonistic social milieus that was mediated through shared Muslim allegiance. From the 1970s, though, the dominant experience here, too, became one of political marginalization and discord between traditionalist and modernist Muslim groups.

From *Edet* to Militarized Rule in Aceh

Although Europeans knew a fair amount about lowland Aceh by the end of the nineteenth century, the inland region of Gayo was barely heard of. It formed a mountainous interior frontier of the Aceh Sultanate. The population of Gayo was small and unevenly distributed; part of the moun-

43. On Aceh, see Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 7–8, 36–40; on Tanzania, see Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanganyika*, 208–15.

44. Kresse's *Philosophising in Mombasa* is the most sophisticated account of East African coastal culture in the mid-twentieth century.

45. For the longer-term historical background, see Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*.

46. Edward Aspinall, "From Islamism to Nationalism in Aceh, Indonesia," *Nations and Nationalism* 13 (2007): 245.

47. See, e.g., Siegel, *The Rope of God*, 14–17, 250.

48. See Roman Loimeier, "Perceptions of Marginalization: Muslims in Contemporary Tanzania," in *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*, ed. Benjamin F. Soares and René Otayek (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 137–56.

tains was nearly empty.[49] Nevertheless, four Gayo rulers or "domain lords" controlled relations with the lowland and held endorsements by the Sultan of Aceh, on whose behalf they raised taxes in Gayo. Routes of exchange with the lowland, albeit laboriously on foot, were well established.[50]

People in precolonial Gayo were essentially rice-farming villagers, their wealth, if any, stored in water buffalo. In everyday interaction the headmen of villages were the most important power holders. In their encounters with the Aceh Sultanate, Gayo had developed two interconnected ways of reckoning with power. Claims to leadership or participation in village affairs could be based either on belonging to an indigenous lineage with a special connection to the land or, conversely, on descent from powerful outsiders often connected to lowland Aceh. In almost any location in Gayo, members of indigenous and of "powerful-immigrant" lineages competed for leadership positions.[51]

Headmen and the local religious leaders called Imem depended on and counterbalanced each other's influence, but they also depended on the goodwill of elders and commoners. This interplay could be described in terms of what Gayo people called *edet*, from the Arabic term '*adat*, "custom, habit, law" (which also forms the root of *ada*, a Swahili term used to mean "customs," or "mores," in Tanzania).[52] Expressed typically in short, widely known maxims and evoked in every situation of conflict, *edet* is to the mind of people in Gayo intrinsically Muslim. The debate over *telkin*, which both defenders and detractors considered part of *edet*, is therefore also a debate over the shape and sources of *edet* and the processes for changing it.

From a village point of view, the massive changes wrought by Dutch colonialism in 1904–42, then Japanese occupation, and subsequent integration into the Indonesian state, can be described as a long process of the marginalization of *edet*, from law of the land to a residual set of rules invoked only for situations that the state takes no interest in.[53] While Dutch colonial intervention contributed most to reducing Gayo's geographic, economic, and cultural isolation, political intervention became the most intense only in independent Indonesia.

Dutch rule, established in 1904 by way of massacres, made itself felt with varying intensity in different parts of Gayo.[54] In more isolated areas, Dutch rule reduced villagers' influence on the choice of domain lord, instituted a new level of colonially appointed local officials, and focused political competition at the level of the village rather than village cluster. In the more accessible areas near the main town of Takengon, though, changes were much more dramatic. Looking for economic gains from an area they had fought over hard, the new rulers introduced a number of cash crops or sought new gains from existing crops. Some of them, damma palm and rubber, were exploited in large estates that imported labor from Java and Western Sumatra. Coffee and vegetables such as cabbage, meanwhile, became peasant cash crops.[55]

With colonial cash-crop production and trade, Takengon acquired a new social milieu in the shape of traders and colonial officials.[56] Islamic reformism first made itself felt within this context. Indonesia's largest reformist network, the Muhammadiyah, established a chapter in 1928 and a school in 1931; another reformist organization, Al-Irshad, opened a school in 1935.[57] To this day,

49. See John R. Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History, 1900–1989* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 11–14.

50. The classical colonial source on Gayo is by the influential Dutch Islamicist-cum-colonialist Snouck Hurgronje. I rely on the revisionist version provided by Bowen's *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*.

51. On these lineage narratives and power claims, see ibid., 39–50.

52. See ibid., 23, 37–38.

53. On Japanese rule, see ibid., 102–13. For Aceh as a whole with focus on the lowland, see Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979).

54. See Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 63–66, 68–92. For more on the war of conquest, see Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*.

55. See Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 76–81; on cash crop trade out of Gayo, see also Siegel, *The Rope of God*, 222–42.

56. On the importance of towns as sites of innovation, see Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 32–38.

57. See Reid, *Blood of the People*, 20–21; and Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 97–100, on the arrival of the Muhammadiyah and Al-Irshad in Aceh. On reformism in Indonesia more widely, see Federspiel, *Persatuan Islam*.

reformism, and hence rejection of *telkin*, is most salient in Takengon and villages closely connected to it, and it is associated with those people closest to Takengon's urban characteristics, especially traders. People in Takengon and more widely in Gayo thought of the educational efforts of the new Islamic organizations as intrinsically anti-Dutch, and a number of Imem endorsed reformism. The adoption of reformist stances in Gayo, then, was from the start tied to the experience of a new openness to greater Indonesia, to the centers of Islam but also to European colonial interference.

The domain lords, by contrast, had become dependent on Dutch endorsement.[58] Their reaction to reformism was divided: in one subdivision, Isak, the domain lord drove the reformists out of town; in Takengon, however, he endorsed them. Dutch observers, more concerned about secular nationalist movements and deaf to the anticolonial overtones of reformism, found it politic to tolerate reformism.[59] Among Gayo, anticolonial sentiment obscured the differences between secular nationalists and Muslim activists and ensured both a positive reception.[60]

Under the conditions of independence after 1945, the differences between nationalists and Islamic reformists asserted themselves, and the groups premised on Gayo's Muslim allegiance repeatedly lost out to the nationalists. In the 1950s, participation in the Darul Islam uprising, which fought for an Islamic state, brought the Indonesian military to Gayo; it never left.[61] Since 1965, all permanently appointed district heads in the region have come from the military. In 1965, the massacre of alleged Communists during the introduction of Suharto's New Order did not follow religious lines but drove home to villagers the state's ability to turn them against each other. Subsequently, official threats that any Imem reluctant to join a government-controlled organization could be liquidated as a communist sympathizer, combined with support for pliable Imem—especially in the shape of preaching opportunities in a new government-sponsored mosque at Takengon—ended the Imem's role as potential counterelite.[62]

Since the 1980s, central government has also cultivated its patronage role, elaborating a discourse on development with itself cast as a central character. Since then, and unlike lowland Aceh, where insurgency persists, Gayo has consistently voted for the candidates fielded by Indonesia's state party, Golkar.[63] In the face of a faltering cash crop economy, Gayo producers looked to the central state to help them sidestep lowland Aceh middlemen and began to accord greater importance to their ties with central government than to the historical ties to lowland Aceh.[64] While the central state is no longer foreign-dominated, then, it has become much more dominant in the villages of Aceh than it was in the first half of the twentieth century.

In the local contests that accompanied these transitions, Muslim reformists formed shifting alliances. With their schools providing an alternative to Dutch-run ones, they positioned themselves as implicitly anticolonial under Dutch rule. By the same token, they were subsequently closer than traditionalist officials to the independent government. With tacit official support, they have extended their influence over religious institutions since independence, and while a large majority of funerals still include the performance of *telkin*, traditionalists are under pressure to justify their ways in the terms set by the reformists.[65]

This relatively influential position, though, comes at a price. As with Gayo society at large,

58. See Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 68–92.

59. See ibid., 100–102; on the relationship of nationalism and Islamic reform for Aceh generally, see Reid, *The Blood of the People*.

60. See Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 100–102.

61. See ibid., 122–23. On *Darul Islam*, see Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 326–27.

62. See Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 117–18, 122–25. On mosque politics, see Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, 309–14.

63. On the recent Aceh insurrection, see Anthony Reid, *Verandah of Violence: The Background to the Aceh Problem* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006); Tim Kell, *The Roots of Acehnese Rebellion, 1988–92* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995); Aspinall, "Islamism to Nationalism"; and John F. McCarthy, "The Demonstration Effect: Natural Resources, Ethnonationalism, and the Aceh Conflict," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 28 (2007): 314–33.

64. See Siegel, *Rope of God*, 222–42; and Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 131–35.

65. See Bowen, *Muslims through Discourse*, chaps. 13–14; on the government's concerted effort to corner Muslim audiences, see Aspinall, "Islamism to Nationalism."

reformists' ability to assert or mediate among divergent stances has been compromised by their increasing dependence on government endorsement. Both indigenous paradigms for reckoning with power, the indigenous and the migration-based one, have become largely irrelevant. In the early 1980s, some people from Gayo were complaining to Bowen that "we are not even Gayo any more," and one man remarked to him, sardonically, that "to be Gayo is to follow fashion."[66] While he was referring to the economic choices of cash crop cultivation, Bowen remarks that the comment could be seen to apply more widely to characterize Gayo's dependency on outside influences.

Tanzanian Muslims: From Contested Urban Elites to Second-Class Citizens

Unlike in Gayo, Islam in Tanzania was at the beginning of the twentieth century largely an urban phenomenon. Also unlike Gayo, reformism here began to make itself felt widely only in the postcolonial period, from about 1980.[67] Nevertheless, in parts of Tanzania Islamic allegiance was, or became, an important element of the social fabric under colonialism, and as in Gayo the postcolonial experience was of a further loss of autonomy for local social institutions. Tanzanian Muslims spent the first half of the twentieth century working through a history of sharp social divisions in the nineteenth century. Then, the Muslim towns on the coast had functioned as entrepôts in a booming trade in slaves and ivory, and urban elites increasingly imported slaves for their own use on plantations near the towns.[68] Slaves' oft-stated ignorance of Islam was part of the ideological justification of their subjection.

The imposition of colonial rule in 1884 lowered the stakes in these social contests as the power to tax and adjudicate shifted into European hands. Nevertheless, Islam and Sufi devotional practices spread in the colonial period among former slaves and in the countryside.[69] For these converts, Muslim allegiance became a way of claiming equality with the citizens of the old Muslim towns. Coastal urban patricians, in turn, initially chided Sufi innovations but increasingly found it politic to tolerate the ritual practices of recent Muslim converts. In the midst of economic decline, and increasingly sidelined by the colonial authorities in favor of mission-school graduates from Christianizing parts of the country, their political stances were muted.[70] Some well-connected urban notables, above all in Kenya, knew of Muslim reformist movements elsewhere and discussed them among themselves, without however publicizing their stances.[71]

As in Gayo, the shared aim of independence dwarfed religious differences in the independence movement. Moreover, while the movement's leader, Julius Nyerere, was Catholic, his rhetoric of equality and peaceful cooperation chimed with the desire of plebeian Muslims for social equality. Only in the older, urban milieu of the capital Dar es Salaam did some Muslims voice their misgivings with a demand to delay independence until Muslims had caught up with Christians in formal education.[72] These objections were drowned out by euphoria at independence but resurfaced from about 1980, when Muslim intellectuals began to discuss the perceived marginalization of Muslims from higher education and the upper levels of the state apparatus.[73] At about the same time, young Tanzanians began to return from programs of religious study in Saudi Arabia. Animated by a strong reformist agenda, they execrated the established ritual practices of their coreligionists. Thus conflicts among Muslims and between Muslims and Christians developed in tandem; the former pin-

66. Bowen, *Sumatran Politics and Poetics: Gayo History*, 2–3.

67. See Iliffe, *Modern History of Tanzania*.

68. For the classical account of these social divisions, see Glassman, *Feast and Riots*. See also Pouwels, *Horn and Crescent*.

69. On the end of slavery in East Africa, see Jan-Georg Deutsch, *Emancipation without Abolition in German East Africa, c. 1884–1914* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).

70. See Kresse, *Philosophising in Mombasa*, chap. 4; on the relative numerical strength of Muslims and Christians, see Frieder Ludwig, *Church and State in Tanzania: Aspects of Changing Relationships, 1961–1994* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 53–60.

71. See Randall L. Pouwels, "Sheikh Al-Amin Mazrui and Islamic Modernism in East Africa," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (1981): 329–45.

72. See Iliffe, *Modern History*, 537–52; and James Giblin and Gregory Maddox, *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority and Dissidence in Tanzania* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005).

73. For an account of the "honeymoon period" in state-Muslim relations, see David Westerlund, *Ujamaa na dini: A Study of Some Aspects of Religion and Politics in Tanzania, 1961–1977* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1980).

ning reformists against traditionalists and focusing on ritual practice and the latter focusing on political and economic participation.

Behind the emergence of Muslim critics of government in the capital lie less immediately evident but deep changes in the countryside. The forced "villagization" campaign of 1973–77 opened a period during which relations with the center were very important but also unpredictable and precarious for provincial Muslims. Although justified by the aim to deliver better services, the concentration of rural people in larger villagers was deeply unpopular.[74] At best, it meant transient dislocation and disruption; at worst, it entailed the loss of access to land, of dwellings and possessions, in return for services that often failed to arrive or were of short duration and dubious quality.

In recently Islamized parts of the countryside, Muslim notables such as prayer leaders and sheikhs had been important mediators between villagers and party leaders. During villagization, though, government officials rode roughshod over these networks that had kept ordinary people at least notionally connected with the ruling party. In many places villagization involved force, with villagers roughly bundled into trucks and their homes burned. Leadership lay with technocrats from the center; the small rural party notables, some of them doubling as sheikhs, and their informal networks of which Muslim elders had formed part, were helpless to prevent or even mitigate the assault.[75]

Next, the failure of villagization, which became evident swiftly from 1977, catalyzed a retreat of Tanzania's government and ruling party from rural areas. The attempt by the first president, Julius Nyerere, to run his party as both a popular movement and a technocratic vanguard party was unsustainable.[76] Multipartyism, reintroduced in 1992, implied a reduction of the patronage the ruling party had exercised over minor village officials. Simultaneous trade liberalization translated into wildly fluctuating—not necessarily higher—produce prices, poor access to fertilizer, and strained relations with the businessmen who controlled scarce and often extortionately priced transport facilities.[77]

The emergence of Islamic reformism in Tanzanian villages is closely tied to this experience. Its most vocal proponents tend to be landless young men who survive by petty trade between town and countryside, ferrying tomatoes or coconut one way and pocket radios, shoes, and sunglasses the other. Their status is precarious at both ends of their itinerary, and identification with the message of reform allows them to challenge the elders of towns and villages on a ground that those elders considered theirs: that of religious respectability.[78] Their presence is symptomatic of the difficulty rural people face in building a viable livelihood and increasing competition between the generations for land. The elders, in turn, painfully feel their dependence on both commercial intermediaries and government technocrats, and there is growing skepticism among all generations about the ability of villagers to cooperate in building their livelihoods.

Religious Arguments on the Shape of Society

Both the differences and the similarities that emerge from this short account of twentieth-century history in Gayo and Tanzania are telling. One level of difference arguably reflects more on the structure of academic knowledge production than on the regions discussed here. Bowen, the anthropologist, records *edet* as a comprehensive, highly differentiated and explicit set of rules for which there is no equivalent in the much more haphazard colonial ethnography of Muslim Tanzania or the writings of later historians. At the

74. See Dean E. McHenry, *Tanzania's Ujamaa Villages: The Implementation of a Rural Development Strategy* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1979); on the poor treatment of villagers, see Philip Raikes, "Rural Differentiation and Class Formation in Tanzania," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 5 (1978): 285–325; and Donald Vaughn Hassett, "Economic Organization and Political Change in a Village of South East Tanzania" (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1984).

75. See Becker, *Becoming Muslim*, chaps. 7–8.

76. The point about Nyerere's political strategy is taken from Deborah Fahy Bryceson, *Liberalizing Tanzania's Food Trade: Public and Private Faces of Urban Marketing Policy, 1939–1988* (London: UNRISD, 1993).

77. See Seithy L. Chachage and Joyce Nyoni, *Economic Restructuring and the Cashewnut Industry in Tanzania: A Research Report* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Agricultural Situation Analysis [TASA], 2001).

78. See Becker, "Rural Islamism during the 'War on Terror'"; and Deborah Fahy Bryceson, "The Scramble in Africa: Reorienting Rural Livelihoods," *World Development* 30 (2002): 725–39.

same time, he has little to say on the way *edet* was disputed and changed. The historical literature on Tanzanian Islam, by contrast, is arguably at its strongest when concerned with dissent over ritual and the transmission of knowledge.

The core similarity between reformists in both locations lies in the way they represent and depend on outside influences while also seeking to manage and exploit them. In both cases, reformism followed trade, whose expansion, in turn, followed on political change: the imposition of Dutch colonialism in Gayo; the sequence of villagization and IMF-led liberalization in Tanzania. The social profile of reformists is nevertheless different in the two cases, reflecting the difference between the historical moments when it reached the two regions. In Gayo, the association of reformism with trade on one hand and anticolonial sentiment on the other helped make it respectable; the traders were themselves successful innovators in a context of expanding commodity trade. Tanzania's post-villagization petty traders, by contrast, are economically precarious and socially marginal; the reformists vulnerable to dismissal as youthful troublemakers.

Thus in both cases reformists represent a different kind of livelihood and of relating to each other, as well as a religious alternative, and this is an intrinsic part of what makes them disconcerting to others. To trace the nexus between reformist claims on funerary ritual and broader anxieties about social cohesion, it is helpful to examine events surrounding a death in a family that contains reformists as a minority (reformists often form part of families that also contain mainstream Muslims). In one case I witnessed in Tanzania, the deceased, a young man, was known to have reformist sympathies, but the majority of the family considered themselves mainstream Muslims. Uneasiness immediately arose over how to proceed with preparations for burial.

The corpse was initially taken to the outbuilding of a religious school with reformist affiliations. Nonreformist members of the family, though, perceived this as a commitment to have the deceased buried "silently," and they pleaded for him to be washed in the home of a family member. They argued, among other things, that washing the corpse in a nonresidential building gave the impression that they did not care much for their deceased. Eventually they recovered the body and the washing was performed by—nonreformist—family members. The back and forth delayed the funeral and even hours before it was to go ahead, it was still not clear which sheikh would preside over it and according to which rite (as both the traditionalist and the reformist associates of the deceased had arranged for a sheikh), or whether the parties would tolerate each other's presence at the funeral.

In the end, the two sides never agreed on a formal compromise. The mainstream sheikh held the rites—apparently because he had the larger numbers behind him—while some reformists tagged along to the funeral, leaving early to distance themselves from those parts of the proceedings they considered inappropriate. Mainstream Muslims in the town spoke of this event as an embarrassment narrowly avoided and a victory for common decency. Conversely, they perceived those funerals that went ahead according to the reformist rite as defeats for common decency—and it is likely that in most cases it took some wrangling, the assertion of the preferences of a dead person's personal network over those of older family members, for reformist funerals to go ahead. Occasionally, there were funerals attended only by reformist young men, who had effectively wrested control of the body from its other connections.

Some people in Tanzania spoke of reformist youth as "lost," and the struggles surrounding this funeral make clearer what is meant by that. From a mainstream perspective, people who are buried in the reformist style are lost from ritual networks, and their loss tears at the networks' very fabric. It also reinforces the perception that reformists, especially the young and assertive ones, are trying to opt out of wider society altogether. Some reformists cultivate this perception, e.g., by quoting a hadith according to which the Prophet commended one of his followers who killed his own father in the Battle of Badr.

Bowen's account of a funeral in a mixed reformist/traditionalist context indicates that in Gayo, some routines for dealing with the divergence have become established: reformists and traditionalists use different rooms and consume different things. This was possible partly because the

reformists here had better resources—their representative in the family network being a successful trader.[79] Nevertheless, here too the division caused strain and heartache. In Gayo as in Tanzania, the interaction between the living and the dead forms a category of relationships with its own rules, like intergenerational relationships or those surrounding a marriage. By challenging *telkin* reformists appear, to the minds of more tradition-minded Muslims, to chip away at essential social bonds.

For mainstream observers, it is particularly disconcerting that the people who are challenging *telkin*, which is so clearly an affirmation of connectedness, are also ones who, as traders, are connected to translocal networks. As discussed above, transregional commercial networks and the official and patronage networks of national politics tie into, but increasingly dominate, the old networks of descent and mutual obligation and have a dramatic impact on villagers' lives. In this context, concern about the proper care of the dead forms part of a more general uneasiness about the viability of shared sociality. The dead, arguably, represent a particularly vulnerable demographic, whose uncertain fate is symptomatic of the dangers faced by villagers in a political environment they cannot control. Here, then, lie some of the sources of the anguish that suffuses the statements of defenders of *telkin*.

Conclusion

The parallels between arguments about the *telkin* in Gayo and Southeast Tanzania highlight aspects of Islamic reformist debates that are easily underplayed in accounts that focus on single instances. The ritual in question is one that academic observers would be tempted to describe as local practice, in contradistinction to the canonical rituals of scriptural Islam that reformists valorize. Its occurrence in these two far-flung locations, though, makes clear that it is not. Conversely, the controversy raised by reformists over this ritual could be considered a function of standard reformist stances or evidence of the consistency of an ideological movement. Yet a close examination reveals that the topic is evocative because of the way it focuses concerns over the coherence of society that arise from conditions specific (albeit not unique) to these two places.

This observation has implications in particular for the construal of Gayo and Southeast Tanzania as local sites of social change and doctrinal debate. The widespread connotations of the term *local*, as communal, closer to the premodern past, and distant from and predating the nation-state, become questionable. The local sphere cannot be presupposed as a stable counterpart of transnational or global ones. Place-specific factors are very much at work in the processes discussed here. But what actors and observers identify as the local arena is itself constituted by its relations with other places: by previous ritual influences, colonial occupation, and the political machinations and military incursions of the postcolonial government.

It should be noted that the term *local* is rarely applied to major cities, which serve as the preeminent site for the analysis of the current wave of globalization.[80] Yet clearly, neither rural Gayo nor provincial Tanzania can be construed as stable rural backdrops to a process of globalization going on in town. Arguably, these places became local only as they became tied into wider religious networks and their respective nation-states. The predicament of being local, moreover, is a somewhat anxious one, tinged with the potential for condemnation and control, whether by better-connected coreligionists or state officials. Perhaps the increasing subordination that here accompanies increasing connectedness is what distinguishes the rural experience of globalization from the better-researched urban counterpart. At any rate, the active participation of rural areas in those processes of exchange readily summarized as globalization needs to be recognized in order to free the concept of globalization from its implicit urban bias.

At the same time, the present study highlights the embeddedness of religious processes in social spheres not necessarily construed as religious. Arguably, recognizing this interdependence

79. See Bowen, "Death and the History."

80. See most prominently Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

is particularly important when discussing Islamic history. Academic observers tend to see societies inhabited by Muslims as "Muslim societies," giving the religious allegiance a preeminent place in the understanding of societal dynamics. From this vantage point, it is tempting to derive the dynamics of religious and social life from the founding texts and most ancient institutions of Middle Eastern Islam: the Quran, hadith, legal texts, and scholarly networks. Yet too strong a focus on these foundational institutions can impoverish analysis of other, quite disparate factors that are equally important in shaping the actions of members of societies identified as Muslim. Arguably, what makes Gayo or Lindi society Muslim is less a distinct—Islamic—set of institutions and doctrines than the convergence of diverse concerns arising from the pragmatics of life around terms derived from the Islamic discursive tradition. ıılıı